

# Chapter 1 : Land of the Myth

Ghandilva, the elder of Baran Village, was in a dilemma. The village was once a peaceful village in the southern province of Rosenheim Kingdom.

Home to about 500 households, it was invaded by lizardmen, and the villagers had either dispersed or were taken captive.

"I'd like to hear the story of where this seed comes from," Weed said.

Ghandilva's colorless eyes shone with hope.

"W-would you help us when I tell you what I know?"

"Even if you don't tell me, I will still help your people. When innocents are held captive by evil monsters, how can a fellow man leave it alone and go his way?"

"Oh!"

Ghandilva was struck with an urge to shout for joy. While everyone else dismissed his plea for help, here was a good Samaritan who offered his sword for the rescue.

"Darius-nim declined my request... because all I could offer in return was this seed," Ghandilva said.

Certain that Darius was already out of earshot, Weed said carefully:

"Who would weigh the value of a good deed? It is unimaginable to me."

"To think the world still has such a great man left..."

Weed's eyes casually turned to Ghandilva's clenched fist.

"Anyways, about this seed..."

"Oh, this? I don't know what life it bears."

"You don't even know where it came from?"

"The seed has been passed down in my family. My ancestors told me to guard it zealously, for it is invaluable. They have told me to give this only in return for a great favor or to a great warrior."

"I see."

Everything clicked as if two puzzle pieces fit together. Even then, it was still a fifty-fifty risk. Was it the seed to show Weed the way to the City of Heaven, or just a plain seed of some random crop?

Among countless professions in Royal Road, there are gardeners and farmers. Unsurprisingly, they are too few to find anywhere.

"Will you rescue my people?"

Ding!

### The Calamity of Baran Village

Baran was a peaceful and lively village, until the Eastern Border was ravaged by hideous monsters. When the lizardmen raided the village, Ghandilva the Elder didn't have enough time to save all his people.

He escaped, taking only the young. The adults decided to stay behind to stall for time. The wicked lizardmen captured the resisting adults and, instead of beheading them, enslaved them in a stronghold in the Western Valley.

Rescue the parents of the children. If the time runs out, the lizardmen will show no hesitation in killing the villagers one after another.

Difficulty Level: D

Reward: A Nameless Seed

Number of Captives: 55

A quest with D level difficulty. It was equal to the Punitive Force quest. Weed had an A level quest that was to succeed Zahab's will, but it was still far beyond his capabilities.

To his dismay, however, it took up valuable space in the quest window. This quest was more difficult than anything that Weed had ever done, but he read the quest's description over and over, skipping the difficulty level part.

Parents.

The memory of Weed's parents ceased when he was eight years old. Since then, he could summon only the darkest hours of his life, when the loan sharks had bullied him.

'It was the only legacy left to me.'

Still, Weed missed his father and mother. He would pay any price to bring them back to life if possible.

As the would-be savior was deep in thought, Ghandilva fretted and asked:

"I suppose you're not satisfied with the reward?"

"..."

"Once my village is restored, we will pay back your debt over time."

"No, it's fine. It is more than I could ask for. I will finish the quest as soon as possible."

You have accepted the quest.

"Thank you. The lizardmen headed toward the valley in a mountain west of my village. I will await for your good news."

When Ghandilva left, Weed's teammates came over.

"Weed-nim, what did you do?"

"Did you accept the quest?"

Pale and Surka gazed at Weed in disbelief. He had just accepted a new quest that would reward them with a mere seed.

"Don't ask questions and just accept the quest that I got."

Weed was the de facto leader of the party. On Weed's insistence, Surka trusted that there must be a reason, walked over to Ghandilva, and accepted the quest.

"I'm with Weed-nim."

"We also want to join in rescuing the villagers."

Your party accepted the quest.

The rest of Weed's party accepted the quest, but they didn't understand what the reason was. Pale's head tilted to the side in confusion.

"I can't understand why you gave up the punitive force quest and, instead, picked this quest after we came all the way here."

"This quest will present a great opportunity if I'm not mistaken. And even if I'm wrong, it will still be better than participating in the punitive force quest."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Suppose we fight the lizardmen with the punitive force... At our levels, we can't gain much in terms of experience and fame."

They agreed with Weed – their levels were far lower than those of Darius and his group.

They were originally interested in search and destroy missions that would take place after the troops drove the lizardmen out of town, so the large-scale battle meant little to them.

Sandwiched amid two hundred other users at higher levels, Weed's party couldn't really do much.

"I have a hunch that we'd be better off switching to this quest," Weed said.

"But the difficulty level is D... Don't you think it's too difficult for the five of us?" Surka asked.

"Don't worry, I have a plan," Weed said.

"Okay, Weed-nim. We're with you," Pale said.

Weed decided to accept Ghandilva's quest, and, with his party, broke away from the ranks. Soon, two men came to Weed's party. They were Becker and Dale, soldiers of the Rosenheim Army.

"Commander! Where are you going?"

"We are just about to fight the lizardmen."

Weed answered with determination:

"My teammates and I are leaving to liberate the villagers, fathers and mothers of homeless children, from the lizardmen's stronghold."

"That is quite a difficult mission!"

Becker was startled by Weed's statement. Dale looked in disbelief.

"Will the five of you accomplish this mission?"

Dale sized up Weed's party. He concluded that they appeared weaker than he, so he banged his chest and offered his service.

"Commander, we want to support you in this mission," Dale said.

"Yes. Our commander will give us permission to join you if we explain the situation to him," Becker said.

The friendship that Weed had built had showed itself once again. Of course, according to the situation, there are times such as mutiny or the mass killing of innocent villagers which would keep the soldiers from following orders regardless of their loyalty.

Charisma and good relationships cannot motivate soldiers unless it is supported by the leader's fame and status, or a just cause.

In the eyes of the Dale and Becker, it was regarded as a heroic act that Weed volunteered to rescue the villagers.

As it was also largely associated with the original punitive force quest, they felt justified in helping him. After a moment of silence, Weed said:

"I am more than grateful to hear that from you, but that is not possible. You are currently dispatched to help Baran Village under Darius-nim, are you not?"

"But..."

"The fewer the people for this mission, the better! I ask you to do your best in your task. What if we succeed in bringing back the parents, and find there is no place to stay for the families?"

"Aye, Commander."

Becker and Dale were persuaded and gave in. If Weed could get the help of the 200 soldiers of Rosenheim Army, it would make it easier to set the captives free from the stronghold of the lizardmen.

This was especially the case since the decani, at one time, used to serve Weed. The quest would be less burdensome if he had accepted their support.

His high leadership could turn them into a formidable force. The downside was, however, that Darius would take notice of it.

Weed and his teammates deserting from the punitive force of three hundred people could go unnoticed, but the disappearance of a great number of soldiers would surely reach Darius' ears and he would inquire why.



Weed and his teammates headed for the mountain west of Baran Village, as described by Ghandilva. The Western Mountain had a gloomy demeanor.

A humid fog arising from waterfalls in the valley created the best conditions for the lizardmen.

"I think their territory extends to over here."

Pale the ranger, had improved his vision and observation skills to match with his class. For rangers it was an essential skill, since it allowed them to intercept enemies at a distance. It also helped in analyzing diverse landscapes.

He was concentrating on the ranger's passive skills, such as Rapid Fire and Penetration. It was the easiest path up to the second job of the ranger class.

Meanwhile Weed, whose class was a sculptor, was stronger than others on average in sword mastery, thanks to his sculpture mastery and Zahab's Engraving Knife.

"Yes, I think the lizardmen crossed the Eastern border and camped here."

Weed answered shortly, studying the landscape. It was called a valley, but it was larger than most. They were trembling in trepidation that the lizardmen could surprise them from the surrounding forest.

Finally, they encountered the lizardmen warriors. There were 5 lizardmen in a group acting as sentries. The reptiles resembled giant lizards on two feet with slippery, greenish skin. Their level was around sixty.

"Eew, gross," Romuna remarked.

Weed could not disagree with her. Monsters in general were repulsive and unsightly. Yet, they hardly scared him.

'I'll just use the same strategy as I did on the goblins.'

The lizardmen's levels were ten higher than those of the goblins, but they were field monsters. Monsters in dungeons or at night were 50% stronger and give more experience.

The lizardmen's strength was similar to the goblins if you had to compare them. Weed equipped himself with the iron sword, instead of the bow.

He had been so busy with cooking meals and selling statues, and away from the battlefield for so long that his body was itching for blood.

'Now I can try one of the sword techniques.'

Imperial Formless Sword Technique!

The five movements recorded in the skill books were as follows:

The First Form:

Mana Consumption: 300

With splendor, you strike an enemy three times consecutively.

As the skill improves, the number of strikes and damage increases.

The Second Form:

Mana Consumption: 400

You instantly move behind an enemy and strike his back.

The Third Form:

Mana Consumption: 600

You destroy an enemy's weapon by using five times your attack power.

The Fourth Form:

Mana Consumption: 1000

You aim at an enemy's vulnerable spot in a dance-like motion.

The Fifth Form:

You harmonize with your sword. Concentrate all of your mana and explode into a single point.

Mana is consumed to zero, and if the amount of mana is below 2000, your health will be reduced as well.

The one footstep technique was an active combat skill to dodge an enemy attack with seven swift steps. Weed nicknamed each form in the sword technique individually.

The first form was named Triple, and the rest, Backstab, Power Break, Sword Dance, and Sword Kaiser, respectively.

Weed's mana totaled 940 points thanks to the Emperor's Tablets. He could execute the skill Triple three times, Backstab twice, and Power Break only once.

Moves beyond the third form were out of the question because his mana could not sustain them. He could activate the fifth form, Sword Kaiser, without mana, but it was too adventurous to gamble his life on a single attempt.

He labeled the footstep from the skill book as Seven Celestial Step. It alone consumed 100 mana. Fortunately, it lasted at least a minute once it was activated.

'Let's see what I can do.'

Weed had not fought once since he learned the Imperial Formless Sword Technique.

"In broad daylight, they are not as strong as they're supposed to be," Weed said to his teammates in a low voice, "The lizardmen can fight to the best of their abilities in swamps, but they're far weaker in a valley. I'll go first and fight them."

Monsters that are adapted to a dry climate, such as poisonous scorpions and sandworms, are at their strongest in the desert. The lizardmen, whose natural habitats are swamps, were weakened in the open.

Still, his teammates were surprised. Weed had just suggested they assault the stronghold of the lizardmen.

They had been following him to this point, but they counted on him to have a scheme to overwhelm the lizardmen, who outnumbered them.

"Wa—wait a sec. Can we really just walk into their stronghold?" Pale asked.

"Yes, we can," Weed said.

"But this quest has a difficulty level D..." Pale said.

"For the difficulty level D, at least eight hundred lizardmen are encamped over there. Am I correct?" Weed said.

Pale nodded dumbly at Weed.

"Eight hundred, give or take."

"I'm sure that was exactly the case when we accepted Ghandilva's request. But we have Darius helping us out."

"Darius is helping us out?"

While Pale shook his head in puzzlement, Weed distributed tiny flasks to his other teammates.

"What's this? Isn't it a potion?" Romuna asked.

"This is a drink I brewed right before we left the Citadel. I bought empty flasks from a pharmacy at a cheap price," Weed said.

"Why are you giving them out now—" Surka said.

"Drink it first, and you'll see," Weed said.

Weed gulped down the drink.

You drank Brandy of Vitality

Effects:

+100 Health

+10 Strength

+5 Agility

Decreases your sense of pain in case of an injury.

Weed's teammates emptied the flasks and looked stunned.

"Can't believe this brandy did..." Irene said.

Surka had recently reached the legal drinking age, so she was particularly susceptible to alcohol. Drawn to the fragrance of the brandy, though, she drank it to the last drop and found the pleasant sweetness rather tasty.

"It wasn't fermented for a long time, so the effect is limited. The upshot is, though, you can drink it with meals without hangovers," Weed said.

Weed, who had finished drinking the brandy, was already moving toward where he presumed the lizardmen warriors were stationed.



Darius counted himself lucky. If not, he could not have been assigned to such a rare quest of the punitive force.

The punitive force quest bound to Baran Village. It could elevate his fame to a higher level. A high level of fame was accompanied by many benefits, and quests were no exceptions.

He could meet distinguished figures in key positions that he would have been denied otherwise, and easily win high-risk, high-return quests.

With three hundred troops under his thumb, Darius already viewed himself as some sort of an army general. The punitive force led by him finally arrived in the vicinity of Baran Village.

The wooden fences, which had been set up to keep monsters out, had collapsed, and the door of every home was broken.

The troops looked at the scene from over the hill. There wasn't a single monster to be seen in the village, but they couldn't relax. Darius asked one of his comrades.

"Parros, go scout the area."

"Okay. Stay here and wait until I get back."

Parros was a thief. With extremely high agility and observation skills, he swiftly slipped in the village. An hour later, he returned, panting, and reported:

"There are hundreds of lizardmen hidden inside! They're waiting for us to come closer."

"They're aiming for a chaotic battle."



Darius' eyes gleamed icily. Obviously, the lizardmen, outnumbering his troops, were inducing them to a full-scale melee. On the other hand, he also welcomed it.

In the confusion of the moment, Darius and his group at the highest levels among the troops could score the most kills, and as a result, get the most glory.

"An expected ambush is not an ambush. Just charge ahead to Baran Village!"

The troops stormed to the village. Suddenly, the lizardmen hidden in the houses crashed out.

\*Roar\*

"Humans!"

The lizardmen, who were basically muscular reptiles, held a shield in one hand and swung a blade in the other.

Most users were shocked. Darius had not informed them that the lizardmen were hiding there. Beheading a lizardman warrior, Darius grumbled to himself under his breath:

"I don't need the weak. All I want is the strong who are loyal to me. So, why share experience and fame with these weaklings?"

Darius used these tactics on purpose, at great risk of heavy casualties, solely because he was concerned that his share of EXPs and fame would be reduced if they were equally distributed amongst three hundred warriors.

The soldiers in Rosenheim Army followed Darius from behind. Their commander was Sir Jovantes.

When the knight realized they were trapped into a melee, surrounded by lizardmen who were leaping out from all directions, he shouted:

"Stand your ground! Form a circle by platoons, and fight back!"

Platoons of ten soldiers began to build circular human fences, the signature battle formation for Rosenheim Army. The platoon leaders were decani, such as Becker and Hosram.

"Going into defensive formation."

Taking defensive formation."

"Same for us."

Almost all of the decani who had been educated by Weed made the same decision. Defense comes first! Only Becker stood out:

"Let's go get 'em!"

The Rosenheim soldiers who were forming defensive circles distracted and lured lizardmen into a honeycomb formation.

They locked down the enemy, who charged into a maze of endlessly twisting passages.

In and out of the defensive circles, Becker and his ten troops emerged from nowhere and butchered lizardmen who got lost.



When Weed approached the lizardman warriors, they let out their usual aggressive shrieks.

"Human!"

"Foolish humans! You come to die!"

The five lizardmen warriors charged toward him, brandishing their blades. The level of each lizardman was low, but it was compensated by their number.

If Weed was encircled by them, he had to face each of them from all directions putting him in a disadvantageous position.

Weed was confident, though. He had raised forty points for strength, agility and vitality for a month in the Training Hall.

If you heard about it, you would think it was a simple thing to do. Then, you would wonder why no one else did the same thing.

With higher stats, it's much easier to hunt monsters. But think about it carefully. It takes one month.

You have to strike a scarecrow for one whole month. Would you be able to tolerate the boredom and physical hardship?

If you do it for twenty hours a day, it will add up to six hundred hours within a month.

You have to repeat the same action continuously while in pain, which feels as if your muscles are being squeezed, and even professional athletes don't go that far.

Professional athletes in general spend no more than five hours a day in just focusing on exercising. Weed had been through 120 days' worth of exercise that an average athlete would do.

If you look at it from a different perspective, it's equivalent to earnestly working out for an hour every day in a fitness club for two years.

There weren't many people who would sacrifice so much in order to raise forty points of several stats.

The fact that Weed finished the course in only one month exemplifies how persevering he was. He also had the sword technique that he hadn't tried before. He rather welcomed the lizardmen.

Weed and Surka were standing on the front-line to confront the charging lizardmen. Given that their party lacked a warrior or a knight, those two had to take the role of the melee fighter.

"Eh, well, Weed-nim," Surka said.

"Yes?" Weed asked back.

"If I die, please save yourself."

Surka looked pessimistic in the face of the five lizardmen.

"Don't worry, Surka-nim. If any of us goes down, I'll be the first. I will be the one to aggro them," Weed said confidently.

"Weed-nim, you're a sculptor. Oh, by the way, what's your level?" Surka asked.

"It's 68."

Weed briskly plunged into an opening in between the lizardmen.

"Watch out!" Surka said.

His sudden action threw his teammates into utter confusion, but he was composed.

"Seven Celestial Footstep!" Weed cried.

He confidently activated the footstep technique that he had named, a skill to dodge enemy attacks with seven eccentric, unpredictable steps.

Charging forward, he suddenly disappeared right in front of a lizardman, and emerged on the right of it the next second.

"First form, Triple!" Weed cried.

Weed moved dizzily and swung his sword. Three silhouettes struck the lower, middle and top part of the lizardman's body at the same time.

\*Bam Bam Bam!\*

The lizardmen were stronger than goblins. Their body had the flexibility of reptiles, and high speed. Their attack power wasn't impressive, but what was terrifying was their greenish skin.

The thick skin was a defense of its own, and they were even wearing plundered armor that they had looted from other races, which made them difficult to deal with.

\*Kwaak\*

Damaged by Weed's skill, the lizardman cried heavily in pain. It lost 80% of its health to near death. Mana consumption for Power Shot, Pale the ranger's signature skill, was 25 points.

Compared to it, Weed's skills were mana drains. As much as it was a mana drain of 300, its power was just as deadly.

Surka, right beside Weed, watched the whole scene unfolding. She had gone through a number of battles with him.

Since he killed the wolf and saved his teammates selflessly, he had been the leader of their party. Ever since he became a sculptor, he had started cooking.

The whole thing was incomprehensible enough, but it seemed that his combat ability had not vanished.

'I don't know what skill it was, but it was awesome,' Surka thought.

She felt as if three swords pierced the lizardman almost at the same time when Weed used Triple.

'I can't lose to him!'

Surka punched the lizardman that Weed had already attacked. She wanted one of them down for now. The lizardman had fallen, stunned by his Triple, so it could not avoid her punch.

"Quick Shadow Fist!"(Yeon-hwan-kwon)

Since the enemy had a higher level than Surka, she used her best skill to begin with. Clenching her fist, she threw five jabs in a row.

It was a basic –yet the most popular — combat skill for monks. Her expertise rating in Quick Shadow Fist(Yeon-hwan-kwon) was already at 65%.

\*Pabababak!\*

The lizardman that was hit on the chest and the solar plexus turned into a gray flash.

"What the?"

Surka was petrified for a while, though she was in the middle of a fierce battle.

"It was stunned. But why did it die so quickly?"

In stunned mode, a monster is unable to move, and is damaged twice when hit. Still, Surka felt cheated that a lizardman at level sixty was easily knocked out by her punches.

The other lizardmen were not idling away, either. When their comrade was attacked, they roared in fury. Four blades were flying toward Weed almost at the same time, cutting off every possible option for dodging.

His body evaded like a reed in a wind. Three of the blades barely scraped his head, leg and shoulder. The last one that he could not dodge cut into his side, leaving a lengthy wound, but the damage was lessened to one third.

You lost 350 Health Points (-350 Health)

One of many penalties for the sculptor class is that they are not allowed to wear heavy armor made of iron.

Defensive gears made of non-metals are typically weak in defense unless they are made of special materials or enchanted with a permanent spell.

Though Weed was wearing a basic leather jacket that he had bought at a really cheap price from a second-hand store, even a single strike on him would be deadly.

"Sculpting Blade!"

Weed's sword, enveloped in a translucent flash, sailed toward one of the lizardmen once again. It was targeted at the neck that looked pretty sturdy.

\*Pierce\*

It was another one of Weed's signature skills that was aimed at a vital spot with great timing!

Critical hit!

The Sculpting Blade, ignoring the enemy's defense, dealt great damage to the lizardman. The only flaw was that it consumed an enormous amount of mana.

Had it not been the case, he would have used it every time. Along came Romuna's spell.

"Fire strike!"

A pillar of flame split into four fireballs in the air, and struck the lizardmen. The side effect of the spell was to push the enemy back, temporarily giving melee fighters a precious break to catch their breath.

"Fire arrow!"

Pale held the lizardmen in check with arrows. His arrows contained the element of fire that was fatal to them.

"Healing Hand!"

Irene quickly regenerated Weed's diminished health. Then, she cast a spell of holy blessing.

"Goddess Freya, lay your protection of the Holy Spirit upon Weed. Strengthen him against evil powers. Bless!"

Holy blessings empower defense and strength. There are countless types of spells designed to boost various attributes.

A shaman's voodoo art speeds up and increases strength and agility temporarily. A holy knight's aura over an entire party is deemed effective, too.

But it is ultimately a priest or priestess' blessing that beats all in the field of buffs. If you fight for a long time under the influence of a blessing from a priestess, you will feel almost powerless without them.

Once Irene finished what she was originally assigned to do, she pitched into Weed sharply:

"Weed-nim, you were too reckless this time."

Weed nodded apologetically. In truth, he had fought a lizardman unprotected on purpose to experience their strength.

Moreover, he had been interested in figuring out how much damage the Imperial Formless Sword Technique could deal.

The outcome surpassed his expectations. Each and every one of the combat skills that Weed had at that time demanded an unsustainable amount of mana.

He could not afford a prolonged fight because his combat skills simply consumed more mana than he could ever maintain.

But the skills were the most dominant in a small-scale battle. They gave Weed a ridiculous amount of power until his mana ran out.

When the amount of usable mana increased, in accordance with level ups, and the mana consumption for sword-related skills dropped, thanks to his better expertise rating in sword mastery and handicraft skill, the Imperial Formless Sword Techniques would shine.

However, in the eyes of Weed's teammates, he just looked reckless. They didn't know that his level was sixty-eight, and they had a prejudice against the sculptor class, thinking he was weaker than his counterparts.

But, it was true that the defense of a sculptor was pathetic. Except for spell-casting classes, the sculptor class was one of the most vulnerable ones.

Instead, Weed had the Sculpting Blade, and since his conversion, the effect of sculpture mastery had been fully blended into his unrivaled attack power.

A fragile sculptor. Though the future was yet unknown, Weed was more of a damage dealer than a stronger sword warrior for now.

He smiled at Irene's buffs as his strength had risen by twenty percent, and he felt clad in comfort.

You lost 230 Health Points (-230 Health)

Weed let one of the lizardmen strike him again. He was damaged much less due to the holy protection of Irene. It showed that she had raised her expertise rating in the skill meanwhile.

'That's what I love about hunting as a party.'

Priests and priestesses are respected and valued everywhere for their distinct ability. Regardless of their skill level, any party is eager to invite them.

Even though Irene was a bit low in her level, she had sharpened her skills and was the most necessary asset in hunting monsters.

The bandage skill that Weed had learned only worked when he was not in combat. It was incomparable to a priestess's Healing Hand right on the spot. After reproaching him, Irene gave a small smile.

"But it's just like you, Weed-nim, to charge at mobs."

Weed never turned his back on monsters coming to get him – because they were those lovely EXPs! Except for monsters that he found it too difficult to face at his current level, Weed enjoyed jumping into the herd of monsters and slaying them.

While moving his arms and legs like crazy, he felt the wind of freedom. He collected EXPs, leveled up, picked up items and upgraded his skills.

Each step was so much fun, and the result was always worth every drop of his sweat and blood. Previously, in The Continent of Magick, and even now, Weed was always the first man to engage with monsters at the sight of them.

"Triple! Backstab!"

As soon as his mana was regenerated, Weed triggered his combat skills. It was his priority to raise the level of his skills. Consumed mana was being refilled, anyway.

You failed to activate the skill!

Since his skill level in many combat skills was virtually close to zero, he often failed to activate the skill.

When the sword techniques didn't arrive, he was stunned into immobility for some seconds. Weed counted on his teammates and persisted in trying out his combat skills.

He felt comforted to know that someone was always behind his back. His unassailable attacks took care of the lizardmen in the blink of an eye.

"..."

When the battle was over, his teammates looked at Weed in a daze. Their tension had been high at the thought of confronting five lizardmen, but it ended even before Surka or Pale came forth in any serious way.

"Weed-nim, that skill..."

"It's too strong."

Pale and Surka complained almost at the same time.

"Uh, well..." Weed said.

"You leveled up so much. I don't think you need us," Romuna asked.

"That's not true." Weed shook his head. "It drains me of at least three hundred mana points. That's for the weakest movement. So I can't use it more than three times in a row."

"Ehhhhh?"

Weed waited for the shock to sink in.

"I only have two hundred and thirty mana points total. This means I can't even try it once. Then, Weed-nim, can you tell us how much mana you have since you can use it three times?" Pale asked in disbelief.

"A little over 900," Weed said.

"Oh my goodness!"

Pale looked shocked. Romuna the mage and Irene the priestess had around 500 mana points.

Their mana points were rather above their level, but the incredible amount of mana that Weed claimed to have made their jaws drop.

Weed briefed them on what had happened to him. His quest in converting to the Legendary Moonlight Sculptor class was simply beyond any conventional wisdom.

A user selects his primary class by level five on average, and here was a man who converted to the sculptor class, at around level 60 and after weathering numerous trials. Pale sighed:

"You were not just a sculptor, but the Moonlight Sculptor. A hidden class. I didn't know you were the rumored celebrity sculptor in town."

"Rumored?" Weed asked back.

"We heard some guy was making statues and selling them in the Citadel of Serabourg. We wanted to buy some, but we were short of cash," Irene said.

Irene looked at Weed with yearning eyes. It was unmistakable what she wanted from him.

"I wasn't really trying to hide it from you, but, anyway I'll make a statue for each of you later."

"Thank you, Weed-nim!"

"Same here."

"I'd like to have one if you don't mind," Pale said.

Weed promised to make a statue for every teammate in his party.

"Now we have enough rest. Let's go and kill some more lizardmen. This quest has a deadline, so we'd better finish it before it's too late."

"Sure."

Weed continued leading his teammates through lizardmen on the way. In most cases, Weed started with critical damage to the enemy, and Pale and Surka picked up where Weed left and finished them off quickly.

Romuna was responsible for eliminating one or two lizardmen in the distance if there were more than the others could handle.

The rest were taken down by Weed and Surka while the other teammates rested to recover some mana points. Their coordinated combat tactics were well matched.



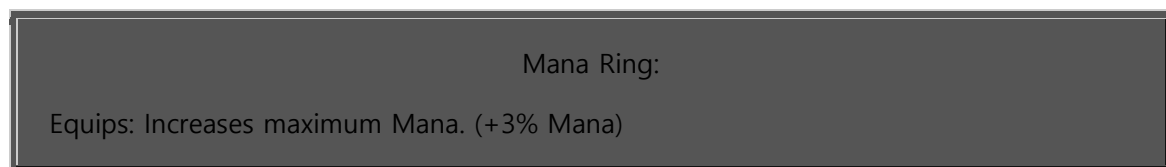
Lots of foxes, wolves and bears had fallen, leaving fur and meat behind, and now the victims had switched to unsuspecting lizardmen.

The pace was much faster than when Weed had hunted on his own, and by contrast with the Clean-up Operations in the Lair of Litvart with Rosenheim soldiers, Weed and his teammates were synchronized in a party system, which meant that earned EXPs were collected and fairly distributed among them.

Weed didn't need to try to give the final blow to a dying enemy. Had he stood idly, he would have received a minimum share of EXPs due to his small contribution, but that wouldn't be like Weed.

"Wow! These reptiles are richer than they look, aren't they?"

Surka exclaimed at the sight of the items dropped by the slain lizardmen. The booty included a steel gauntlet and breast armor. Besides that, they obtained a ring.



It was the first time that the party had ever seen an accessory like a ring.

"Who's going to take this?"

At Surka's words, everyone looked at each other, but the mana ring ended up in Irene's possession since they agreed that the battles would be safer as the priestess had more mana to support the others.

The rule for splitting spoils in the party was whoever picked up an item kept it. A rare item often changed hands according to the general will, but miscellaneous items otherwise destined for the general store were open game.

It sounded like a very unreasonable rule, but they found it acceptable given the nature of their party. Once they began to fight, they went all the way to the end.

Since they decided to penetrate into the stronghold of the lizardmen, the battle would not be over until they killed the last lizardman standing.

If they had chosen someone to take charge of item storage, it would easily exceed the weight limit for how much he could carry. That was why they let anyone gather items up to their weight limit.

Weed and Surka, who were active in battles, were usually the last to pick up an item, aware that when they could not carry anything else, the battle was as good as over.

This was the structure of the party so there really wasn't much of a choice.

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## Chapter 2 : The Statue of the Goddess Freya

As Weed and his teammates came closer to the lizardmen's stronghold, the number of monsters falling in their way increased rapidly.

"We already took down more than forty lizardmen..."

"We're still at the border. How many more do you think are gathered deep inside?"

Irene and Romuna spoke in turn. But Weed only smiled.

"Look, you all know the lizardmen are group-living monsters, don't you?"

"Yes, Weed-nim. They herd together more than Orcs," Irene said.

"That's right. They also protect their own territory jealously. What if someone steps over it?" Weed asked.

"They fight back without exception!" Surka said.

"That's right. That's what makes the lizardmen fearsome among users."

"Doesn't it mean we're in trouble now?"

Weed and his teammates were going through a valley. They often rested in the middle to recharge mana, and wasted no energy.

At this point, he gave away the riddle.

"I'd say we're in danger under normal circumstances, but we can count on Darius now."

Because of Weed's revelation, they realized where his confidence was coming from.

"What do you mean by that—oh, I got it!" Surka said.

"Darius is really helping us out!" Romuna said.

The stronghold of the lizardmen.

Now they should have been fighting viciously against the punitive force who had invaded their territory.

In other words, the base camp would be nearly abandoned, only guarded by a handful of lizardman warriors.

At the sometime, Weed guessed that treasures that the lizardmen had plundered from nearby villages were stacked over there.

He was climbing the western valley in order to accomplish Ghandilva's quest, but his real agenda was hidden.

"We will face a more difficult enemy from this point on. How about baiting them now?" Weed asked.

"Roger!" Surka said.

"We should be careful. We can't allow many lizardmen to take on us at once," Weed said.

Surka did a great job baiting lizardmen one by one. Her outstanding dexterity helped her lure the enemy separately.

"Come on, you ugly reptiles!"

"Kruru!"

"Human, we kill you!" The furious lizardmen chased after Surka. Weed and Pale quickly loaded arrows on their bows, targeted the lizardmen and shot them. \*Sweesh\* While Weed shot one arrow at a time, Pale shot multiple arrows so fast that his hands were almost invisible.

Their skill levels in archery made a fair difference, not to mention the effects of Pale's other skills.

Weed's archery had advanced beyond his overall level as he had sniped at the goblins, yet he could not possibly rival Pale whose hands had never left his bow.

For Pale, even before an arrow hit a target, the next arrow was already loaded and launched.

Since level five, when he converted to the ranger class, he had been upgrading the Chain Shot and Penetration skills, which rendered his arrows more powerful.

Weed shot arrows until the lizardmen got too close to him. The damage was low, yet his expertise rating in archery improved nonetheless.

No, the bottom line was that his temperament didn't allow him to sit back and wait for his enemy.

Why should I wait for EXPs, no, the enemy to come?

Weed loved to fight, never got tired of it. He was unstoppable now.

"Yatz, yatz, yatz!"

Out of his mouth, another battle cry burst forth.

Irene and Romuna giggled. They had once mentioned this to Weed, who had to admit he could not help it.

For him, it was a roar of triumph that came out only when he was overly excited.

Fortunately, there had never yet been a time when monsters had heard him and rushed to get his party, though he was constantly embarrassed by his involuntary habit when he was fighting shoulder to shoulder with other users.

Weed is always composed, but he sometimes goes out of control and becomes childish, Irene thought.

They encountered six lizardmen in a ludicrous battle.

The moment the battle began, two of the lizardmen were slaughtered by Weed's sword, and there were four more to go.

He left those four monsters alone because if he had taken down all of them, Romuna, Pale and Surka would be denied precious EXPs.

Worse still, Weed's mana would run out while Irene's mana remained in excess, which would compel the entire party to take a break in order for him to refill his mana. They would waste valuable time, falling behind the deadline of the quest.

Two lizardmen went after Surka, but the other two in a fury charged at Weed to exact revenge for the loss of their comrades.

Weed's sword was in need of repair, below ten in durability. Given that a powerful sword technique gives an excessive burden to the weapon in use, further lowering the weapon's durability, he had been engaged fiercely without a rest.

"Disarm the iron sword."

Weed returned his sword to the inventory and clenched his fists.

Surka's signature skill!

"Yon-han-kwan!"

Weed's fists lashed out at the enemy incessantly.

He had called out the skill name, not that the skill was actually activated. He had not learned it in the first place, let alone used it.

Instead, he imitated the way Surka had used her fists to the best of his knowledge, and beat the lizardmen.

Wanting to hit monsters with his own hands, he had learned martial arts for a year, waiting for that moment.

Needless to say, his punches were terrific.

Pabababak!

Weed's hands moved at an invisible speed.

In clubbing the lizardmen mercilessly, his intermediate handicraft skill added an extra fifty percent to attack power by fist.

"Ugh!"

"Human fists, they hurt!"

Weed closed on his enemy, punching at every opening. The lizardmen swung their blades in retaliation.

The bottom line was, the lizardmen and Weed were both obsessed with looking to finish off the other before being finished themselves.

Weed's footsteps were light. Any time his body rocked, a punch thrust into a lizardman. His ankles and waist moved at his will and drew strength for the fists, which in turn struck the lizardmen's stomach and chests.

"Kugh!"

"Treacherous human, he hits the same spot over and over!" The lizardmen wailed in pain. "Weed-nim, keep up the pressure!" Irene was busy healing the frontline leaders from behind. Her expertise in healing was acknowledged. Whenever her teammate's life went down below seventy percent, her Healing Hand touched the needy. It is risk-free and effective.

Weed was enjoying the firsthand sense of punching the enemy. He preferred hand-to-hand combat to sword fighting, for he could feel it, and it felt more real.

The lizardmen and Weed were pummeling each other, but it wasn't the same. The lizardmen's faces were filled with pain, but a smile hovered on his.

He was whirling his mighty fists, crying out with excitement.

Meanwhile, Romuna and Pale were casting magic spells and shooting arrows, respectively, to get rid of the other two lizardmen that had fastened on to Surka.

Without a hope in sight, those two lizardmen facing Weed were having the hell beaten out of them, yet were still alive.

#### New Stat: Fighting Spirit

The endurance stat is mostly generated by warriors in the first rounds of their adventure.

When it is developed, it reduces physical damage inflicted by the enemy, and even increases the user's life by a small amount.

You can invest some stat bonus points from a level up in the endurance stat, but the majority chose to let it develop of itself by receiving melee attacks.

After the endurance stat had been newly added to his stats, Weed's movement became more tactical. He checked how much mana Irene had, and intentionally let the lizardmen strike him with their blades.

The stat grows as it is hit.

This is truly the power you can obtain only through pain and suffering.

Weed was a human that gladly accepted the lizardmen's attacks as long as they were acceptable within Irene's mana.

In Royal Road, you actually feel hurt when you are hurt. Weed even enjoyed the pain.

"Kueeek!"

One of the lizardmen finally perished with a death cry.

Weed achieved a stirring feat by punching a lizardman to death in the battle.

The other three lizardmen were sandwiched by Romuna, Pale and Surka and killed.

Weed had killed three of them alone, but it would not have been easy even with the iron sword unless Irene constantly regenerated his life. The victory required all five of them in the party.

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Surka went fishing in a group of lizardmen in the distance when there were two or more groups of lizardmen nearby.

If it had not been the case, Pale would simply shoot an arrow at them, or more often than not, Weed would be the first man to move.

Weed would run right into the ranks of lizardmen and swing his sword freely. His teammates would run after him and help finish the monsters off. Then they would walk away victorious. This was what Weed liked about his teammates most.

They were usually chatty and noisy on the march, but when it came to a battle, they would fall silent and get serious.

They had been thoroughly tamed by Weed.

Since they had hunted foxes in front of the Citadel, they had learned how to hunt monsters rapidly and economically.

When they entered the lizardmen's stronghold after neutralizing a handful of lizardman guards, they found a bunch of straw huts scattered in the forlorn valley.

The captives are over there, Weed thought.

His eyes shone.

The parents of the children were confined in a cage made of woven branches.

Weed studied the situation for a while.

There were ten men and women locked in the wooden cage, and he located eight lizardmen mounting guard over them.

Eight of them!

With little consideration for mana, Weed could finish two, or three at most, in a blitz, but in that case, his teammates would have to deal with the other five remaining guards.

He was certain that they would prevail in the end, but Irene and Romuna, who were low in life and weak in defense, could end up dead. Mages and priestesses could be endangered by only a few wild strikes from a lizardman.

"We'd better rescue the captives first. I'll lead the group away."

Surka knew it was time for action, and moved.

"Human!"

"How she get here..."

"Kill first!"

When Surka approached the lizardmen, five of them began to chase after her. Instead of pursuing her, the other three lizardmen stayed behind to keep an eye on the captives.

They're not as foolish as I thought. Weed made eye contact with Surka on the run. They nodded.

- Weed-nim, I will race in a circle along where we came from, and come back here.

- Thank you, Surka-nim. That will be enough.

Weed and Surka struck a quick deal through whispers.

Assured that she and her pursuers were out of sight, Weed and Pale appeared in front of the remaining lizardmen.

"More humans!"

"Human, come again." The three lizardmen stammered in surprise. "Engraving knife technique!" "Fire arrow!"

"Power shot!"

The guards survived barely a second against the human intruders. Weed and Pale downed them in a split second and opened the gate of the wooden cage. The parents stayed inside, though, scared out of their wits. Weed could sympathize with how terrified they were, having been captured by the lizardmen and waiting for death any second.

"We are here by the request from Ghandilva, the elder of Baran Village,"

Weed said to the villagers.

"The... the elder..."

"Yes, he asked us to rescue you and take back home safely. Is anyone wounded here?"

"This way, please..."

Weed went into the wooden cage and gave first aid to the wounded with herbs and bandages.

That measure alone restored their health greatly.

"Weed-nim, Surka-nim's back," Pale said.

Surka, who had been leading the lizardmen away from the cage, was coming back.

"Stay in the cage for a minute. Get ready to leave now. You want to see your children again, don't you?" Weed said tenderly to the villagers.

Some would have counted the villagers as a liability, and, as a matter of fact, they were right in a sense because his party was responsible for rescuing the captives from the lizardmen and guaranteeing their safety to Baran Village.

But Weed thought one step further.

"These lovely EXP points!"

What Weed was carrying out was a rescue mission.

For each head saved, he would receive extra EXP points as a reward when the mission was completed. He had given up fame and EXPs from the punitive force quest to exterminate the lizardmen, but this one was still a good bargain.

Weed and his teammates finished off the five lizardmen that returned on Surka's heels. They quickly hid the villagers in a safe shelter, and then searched for more captives, who were eventually found and rescued as well.

Their disappointment, though, lay in what the lizardmen had looted and stacked.

Orcs and goblins collect gold and gems. In stark contrast with those crow-like creatures, lizardmen in the class Reptilian hardly gathered anything valuable when they plagued human civilization.

So all that Weed's party found were a mountain of shields, armor and weapons made of iron.

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Weed and his teammates swept the armaments together without leaving anything behind. The maximum weight that a user can carry depends on his strength and stamina. Even Irene and Romuna were stumbling toward the village with heavy loads on their backs.

Of course, it wasn't only his party that carried arms.

"We saved you." Weed said to the rescued. Their faces showed some uneasiness at his words.

"Naturally we are not asking for any compensation for what we have done. All we want is a seed that Ghandilva, the elder of your village, promised. It is because we didn't save you for profit or reward."

Reassured, the villagers looked less anxious than before.

Smiling gently, Weed added, "I understand you've gone through trouble a lot, but would you mind helping as carry those arms down to the village?"

"....."

The villagers' faces underwent another sudden change.

They were extremely weary due to malnutrition. The last thing they wanted to do was anything that might compromise their return to home.



"As you see, this valley is something close to an impenetrable fortress, and I've heard that Orcs often appeared here."

At a mere mention of Orcs, the villagers shuddered in terror. They had barely survived the lizardmen, and if Orcs were the next calamity to deal with, they knew it was going to be a hopeless case.

"Just in case, suppose that the Orcs find this place – they will rejoice over those arms stacked here. They could take up the arms and sweep over Baran Village down in the valley. So I think the arms should be removed from here. Will you please help us?"

Persuaded by Weed, the villagers ended up carrying as heavy loads as they could possibly manage and walking down the valley.

Meanwhile, the lizardmen in Baran Village had been wiped out by Darius and his troops.

The village was devastated, but the rescued villagers wept in delight for their return anyway.

At the front gate of Baran Village, Weed said to them again, "Thank you so much, my friends. We could not make it here safely without your support. I will take over here, so you are free to go back to your children. They're desperately waiting for their mothers and fathers."

The moment Weed finished his speech, the villagers put down the heavy arms and scattered, looking for their sons and daughters.

Ghandilva was waiting with children in a clearing near the gate.

"Mother!"

"Father!"

"Selen, Marron, I'm glad you're alive."

It was a touching reunion between children and parents. Ghandilva walked to Weed, smoothing his white beard.

"You finished the quest, Weed-nim."

"Yes, sir,"

Weed said humbly.

"I am grateful to you that you rescued all of my fellow villagers. Honestly, I did not expect you would accomplish so much... You did a great job. None of us will ever forget what you have done for us."

Quest Complete:

The Calamity of Baran Village

The dispersed families in Baran Village were reunited by the brave heroes who were willing to see justice done.

The village was destroyed by the lizardmen's raid, but the crowing of roosters and the barking of dogs will be heard soon.

The children are relieved to see their parents again. Till the day their eyes fill with tears from their parents' scolding, the children will have gratitude for the brave heroes.

Fame rises 15 point. (+15 Fame)

You leveled up!

Quest Reward:

Nameless Seed

The fame and EXPs were distributed equally to everyone in the party, but the seed was given directly to Weed who was the party leader.

"We in Baran Village owe you."

"No, Sir. We have only done what we were supposed to. We will always do our best to preserve Baran Village's peace and prosperity."

There are many factors involved in receiving a quest.

NPCs beg anyone who runs across them if they want a quest to be done urgently, but most of them will wait for their favorite user, if any, to appear to solve their problems instead of trusting a total stranger.

"Darius, I think you'll regret this."

Weed had won considerable trust from Ghandilva the elder. The villagers who had been rescued by Weed's party would feel indebted to their saviors, and it would work to their advantage for shopping and other services there.

If Darius assumed that he had nothing much to gain from Baran Village, he would not be worried. But he would have to pay for his mistake if he had planned to expand his power over the Southern province based on his status as the commander of the punitive force.

Obviously, this subtle friendship rather than material reward was more likely to turn into the biggest asset in the future.

Darius would not have rejected the quest under normal circumstances, but he had been the commander of the punitive force.

It would have been a tough decision to abandon his mission to lead his troops to defeat the lizardmen for a major credit, and instead, to rescue a handful of villagers from their stronghold.

For that reason, Weed understood Darius, but pitied him at the same time.

Opportunities don't present themselves often. Like an unforeseen accident from nowhere, they come and go.

Ghandilva suddenly clasped Weed's hands.

"I am reminded that I have another favor for you, Weed-nim. You are a trustworthy man. I heard from soldiers in the punitive force that you were a sculptor. Am I mistaken?"

"No, Sir" Weed said calmly.

"We used to have a statue of Freya that we all worshipped in the central square of the village."

Freya was a goddess who was most widely worshipped in Rosenheim. She was known to govern fertility and beauty.

Ghandilva said with a gloomy face, "We always prayed for peace and prosperity to the statue of Freya. But it was smashed in an accident earlier this year. Now I look back on how things turned ugly, I suspect that the absence of the statue caused all of those troubles."

"Do you want to restore the statue of the goddess?"

"Yes, Weed-nim, I want you to carve a new statue of Freya. I originally asked another plausible foreigner to bring a replacement, but I have not since heard from her. It's urgent. Would you please carve a statue of Freya?"

#### The Statue of Goddess Freya

Freya, the goddess of beauty and fertility is the patron goddess in Baran Village. The statue of Goddess Freya stood in the central square, but it was destroyed by a pine tree when a flood knocked the tree down. Though the lizardmen are defeated, the villagers will not live in peace until the statue of Freya is restored.

Build a statue of Freya in the village and bring peace back.

Difficulty Level: Class quest

Requirement: Only available to Sculptors.

It was a class quest reserved to sculptors. The difficulty level and rewards for the quest were undecided because they depended strictly on the outcome.

The rewards for most quests were settled by the same rule.

Except for definite missions such as messengers or couriers of certain objects, the rewards varied to a great degree on the outcomes.

"Please wait here. I need to consult with my teammates."

When Weed said so, his teammates, who had been listening to the conversation vacantly, grinned and congratulated him.

"Congratulations, Weed-nim! Good luck," Surka said.

"I thought we made a mistake when we ditched the punitive force quest, but I am proud now," Romuna said, smiling.

"Ladies Surka and Romuna, thank you," Weed said. "But if I accept this quest, I can't go hunting with you together for a few days."

Weed sought consent from his teammates, and Pale was eager to give it.

"It's fine with us. What's left from the punitive force quest is to sweep up pockets of resistance. Since we already encountered our share of lizardmen, I believe we can do it on our own. To be honest with you, Weed-nim, you have a far higher level than the rest of us, so we really want you to take this quest."

Pale lifted the burden off Weed's shoulder. The truth was, his teammates were a little uneasy at learning up with someone whose level was way above theirs.

As Weed played the role of the main leader and damage dealer in most battles, they felt like accessories to his adventure. For true teammates, everyone had to be put on equal terms, and the party could not work together as long as others were conscious that they were indebted to one person in particular.

"I see. I'll take the quest," Weed said, and walked to Ghandilva. "I will make the statue of Freya, sir."

You have accepted the quest.

"Thank you, Weed-nim. Please get ready and build it as soon as possible,"

Ghandilva said.

When Weed and his teammates left the village, Becker and Hosram approached them along with their subordinates.

"Nice to see you again, Commander," Becker said.

"Where are the others?" Weed asked.

"They are chasing after lizardmen on the run," Hosram said.

Weed thought that the other soldiers were pursuing the remnants of the lizardmen that had been driven out of the village by the troops.

"What about you?" Weed asked.

"Sir Darius ordered all the soldiers from the Rosenheim Army to stay behind," Becker said.

Weed suspected that Darius had assigned the Rosenheim soldiers to defend the village, so he could keep all the credit to himself.

Only the Rosenheim soldiers were left behind on sentry duty in the village.

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Weed led his party to a secluded place. The seed was in his hand.

"Oh, by the way, speaking of the reward that we got after we rescued the villagers, what in the world is the seed for?"

At Surka's question, Weed just looked down at the seed and said,

"To be honest with you, I have a strange book. The book has this story written in it..."

The City of Heaven!

When Weed told them about the book he had received from Volk, even the usually calm Pale could not help but be shocked.

Every adventurer on the Versailles continent has a dream.

A fantasy continent. A land of living legends and mysteries. To leave footprints of his own on an undiscovered territory where no pioneer preceding him has ever been.

To explore in an unknown dungeon and shed light upon secrets.

A man who discovers a new horizon earns many opportunities besides enormous fame. The opportunity to grow, and the opportunity to die.

"The City of Heaven—are you serious there is such a place? I heard of the City Under Earth..." Pale said.

"The City Under Earth?" Weed asked.

"Yes, it's known to be a subterranean city deep down in the earth, the dwarves built it. Their palace is located there."

"Can those users who select the dwarf race in the beginning go to the city?"

"Not really. I heard not every dwarf was allowed to get into the city. There are very few people who know the place. If you get there, you can acquire the expert blacksmith skill, and learn the artisanship skill, too."

The dwarves.

They were headaches to Weed having chosen a sculptor's path.

For a human user to learn the handicraft skill, he needs to select a primary class related to craft skills.

A sculptor can learn the handicraft skill in the stage of basic sculpture mastery.

In Weed's case, he had obtained it even before he chose the class, for he had finished the unique serial quest about Zahab's successor. But not everyone is half as lucky as he was.

Be assured that almost none receives such a windfall.

Cooks and blacksmiths have to advance their skills to at least the intermediate stage to learn the handicraft skill. A tailor can learn it when he raises his skill level to eight in basic tailoring skill.

Unless you choose a craft class, you cannot reach the intermediate stage of any craft skill. So if you want to learn the handicraft skill, the tailoring skill is a must-have.

But dwarves are born with the handicraft skill right after the activation of a new account.

With boundless stamina and imposing strength by nature, dwarves even have superb handicraft!

Weed could not relax his vigilance against the race.

Instead, dwarves are short in height, and penalized in spell casting, horse riding and expert combat skills.

Weed wanted to visit the City Under Earth someday.

"If I get the chance, I'd love to go there," Weed said.

"It won't be easy. I heard they are very hostile to humans. Only good artisans are respected there. Unless you win a certain degree of recognition from them, you'll be denied entry to the city," Pale said.

Sculpture masters such as Zahab and Geihar Von Arpen could have entered the City Under Earth.

I have a hunch that there's probably something related to the sculptural art's mystery down there.

That intuition aside, Weed took out the unidentified seed that he had received from Ghandilva.

"Alright. Let's go for it. If I am wrong, we wasted our time for nothing," Weed said.

"I'm sure your decision was right."

"I have a good feeling about this."

Irene and Romuna cheered Weed up.

"Identify this item," Weed said.

Burdened by his teammates' expectations, Weed used the identification skill carefully.

Seed of Heavenly Tree:

Durability: 1/1

Effect: Guides to the City of Heaven.

Requirement: You must sow it near Baran Village.

Once Weed read through the description window, he closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again.

His teammates were impatiently waiting for him to deliver the good news.

"This is real."

Once Weed gave the confirmation, the rest of the party members cheered. However, there were still matters to discuss.

"I don't want as to be seen sowing the seed and climbing up to the City of Heaven."

Weed was going to take his teammates there, but introducing it to Darius and his minions, or even other members in the punitive force, hardly appealed to him.

Selfishness.

Or you could call him self-centered if you wish.

Still, it was Pale, Surka, Irene and Romuna that had been through the unofficial mission along with Weed to get hold of the seed.

"I agree with you. If there is a City of Heaven, it will be eventually discovered by someone and become available to everyone, but it doesn't need to be us to do that," Pale said, seconding Weed's suggestion.

It wasn't a case of monopolizing the information. It was more than those in the know deserved to be able to use that knowledge.

If everyone learned of the existence of the City of Heaven, the merits of their discovery would be diminished, and what Weed had done so far would not bear any fruit.

Living by kind and righteous morals was a foolish thing to do.

Imagine if they went public with the City of Heaven, who would unveil his own secrets, or share his own quest to who appreciation of their naïveté?

"I think so. It's too early to tell anyone else about this," Irene said.

"Let's go there alone," Surka said.

They soon came to a common agreement on the matter.

Yet leaving for the City of Heaven was put off for the time being.

Weed had to finish his Statue of Goddess quest, and the punitive force quest for the other teammates was still underway.

They decided to head for the City of Heaven once they were all done with the quests.

They were half excited, yet half worried about exploring a new region. If it turned out to be too tough for them, they would possibly end up enjoying the scenery in the sky and coming back in vain. An exploration always held such hazardous possibilities.

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Weed cooked up a good excuse for Darius and his troops, who had been reported to be returning. He was afraid that they might question why his party failed to show up in the battles.

When they returned to Baran Village, however, the battered troops numbered less than a hundred, and they were quarreling with one another intensely.

"You're responsible for this!"

"Why are you making a scapegoat out of me?"

"Your pathetic plan got Collonya killed in action!"

"It is his responsibility to take care of his own life."

"Now you're blaming the dead man!"

While winning back Baran Village, and cleaning up the remnants of the lizardmen, the troops suffered heavy casualties.

To begin with, the group of total strangers was incapable of executing organized tactics, so they ended up losing many clueless users in the middle of dogfights.

As a consequence, there was no love lost between Darius and the ranks in the punitive force.

"It was a battle, part of a war, that we just participated in," Darius said. "Inevitable casualties are always a part of war, aren't they? Get over it."

"A few casualties? Are you calling the death of Collonya inevitable casualties? You don't give crap about it? It's all because of your bad leadership!" the angry user who had lost his friend shouted.

"Wasn't it you who eagerly accepted to obey my bad leadership? I am tired of quarreling with you this way when the battle is decisively won."

"What the hell!"

The quarrel between Darius and his ranks got worse.

With such heavy casualties, nobody cared if Weed and his teammates had run off during the mission.

Weed studied Darius and his minions. None of them looked hurt, all alive and well.

"I bet they took most of the EXPs for the punitive force. They forced the other users into a trap, and only when the lizardmen got weak and tired, jumped in the battle and finished the reptiles off."

In a mid-size battle, it was up to the army leader how to fight, possibly changing the whole outcome of the battle.

Weed later learned that the lizardmen, hidden in a forest, had sent some of them out to bait the hook.

A forest is where they fight best.

A large army is rather immobile in a forest area where defenders are better placed than offenders.

Darius and his minions had engaged with the bait, and the main force had been ordered to penetrate through the forest.

While they were toying with the bait lizardmen, the main force had been trapped in the jaws of death.



When the main force eventually exhausted and wounded most of the lizardmen, Darius and his minions, who had finished off the bait, suddenly appeared, slaughtering them!

To sum it up, Darius and his minions had collected the most fame and EXPs.

"I did my best. I killed the most lizardmen, and my friends rescued you. Show us some respect," Darius said calmly.

"What? Do you think we don't know what you're up to?"

"How can he say something like that? He's not as clever as he thinks."

"Darius is just some second-rate leader."

When the users in the punitive force began to denounce their commander so loudly, Darius and his minions finally revealed their teeth.

"If you have the guts, stop mouthing off and fight a duel with me like a man," Darius said. "You wouldn't be here in the punitive force if I hadn't picked you, women."

Weed looked at Darius and the other users in the punitive force cynically.

You are all fools.

Darius had spread a bad reputation about himself among general users in exchange for a handful of fame and public service points.

He had missed a bigger fish to catch a small one right in front of his eyes.

You have to pick up small ones without making a noise, and catch the big ones boldly. Then, you look around to see if there is something else you missed. That is the right path.

Still, the other users in the punitive force could not be forgiven for their collective folly.

What had they seen in Darius to obey him unquestionably? If they had stopped to throw a little doubt on his intentions, they would not have played to his will.

It was their fault in trusting a stranger too much. If they had been more cautious, their friends would still be alive.

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## Chapter 3 : The Lost Treasure of the Temple

"Good luck, Weed-nim."

"If you make the statue look like me, I'll reward you."

It was decided that while Weed was carving the statue, his teammates would wander, hunting monsters with other users.

A handful of surviving lizardmen still harassed the local population, and there were fine hunting spots around the village.

Weed had already revealed himself as a sculptor, so the other users assumed that his quest was related to his profession, and nobody raised a question about it.

"Godspeed"

Once everyone else left, Weed stood motionless in the central square of the village.

There were several Rosenheim soldiers and returning villagers.

They watched him with hopeful eyes.

"I should find a rock," he said to himself.

Needless to say, the statue had to be made of stone.

Weed was most accustomed to wood carving, and it was the first time that he had ever handled stone.

Fortunately, there were many rocks in the neighborhood that were fit for his purpose. Baran was, after all, a backwater village stuck at the foot of mountains.

From the rocks, he finally chose one so large that a grown man could not embrace it with his arms.

"Let's go."

Weed took out a hammer and a chisel to cleave the rock.

Weed had bought them from the sculpture shop in the Citadel of Serabourg just in case, yet he had never thought he would actually use them on the trip.

Hammer and Chisel for Sculpture:

Durability: 10/10

They are a set of items for stone carving. Relatively cheap, they are dull and easily breakable. Careful handling is recommended.

\*Clang clang clang!\*

"The only difference to wood carving is the material. Sculpture is all about the mental image, about how to shape an object. All I need to do is reproduce the image in my mind. It will bring the best statue, my own statue, out of this stone."

Weed handled the rock carefully. Shaping stone demands more time and energy than you can ever imagine. A little shock on a wrong spot and the crack will spread all over the stone. A statue should have guaranteed longevity. Beads of sweat flooded Weed's forehead.

Day two, the rock was trimmed very little compared to day one, for Weed had so far failed to picture the definite image of a goddess.

Goddess Freya is known only to possess the utmost beauty. No living creatures have even seen her actual appearance. This is why sculptors and painters are often challenged when creating artworks of her.

Artists are dubious how to depict Goddess Freya to realize her beauty to the full extent.

For this reason alone, she has never been portrayed identically in paintings and statues.

The artists have a real headache over this issue. At the same time, it stimulates their pride as artists.

Suppose two rivals carve statues, or paint paintings, of Goddess Freya, and what if the goddess depicted by one is more beautiful than the other?

Painting skills aside, the goddess of beauty is only appreciated as long as she is the most beautiful of all, so the one with the more beautiful artwork will claim all the credit in the end.

"Beauty. I have to carve the most beautiful Goddess Freya on the continent."

That was the only subject filling Weed's head.

That was why Romuna joked that she wanted him to model the statue on her.

\*Claaang! Clang!\*

The speed of the hammer and chisel working on the rock was slowing down, as Weed dug deeper into his thoughts.

Who, and how should I shape the statue after?

Weed's head became a maze.

Though this profession of sculptor was not originally his choice, slacking on an assignment given to him was against his temperament.

If the completed work turned out to be mediocre, it would hurt his pride as a sculptor. Plus, his fame would vanish, which he could not overlook.

"Who should I take, who..."

At that very moment, someone's image dawned on Weed.

"She would be..."

\*Clang! Clang! Clang!\*

The hammer and chisel began to pick up speed at last.

The rock was gradually trimmed off, the outline of the statue surfacing little by little.

As shards from the rock fell to the ground, the statue got into shape. Beauty beyond veiling.

An angel descends from the celestial realm and learns to smile.

Her smile envelopes the world with light.

She is but a single maiden.

Seoyoon.

The statue that Weed was carving was based on Seoyoon. He had looked at her face only once during the barbecue feast in the instructor's house, but he had never seen any beauty comparable to hers.

Even a movie star could not rival her in beauty, where mysterious and noble dignity had combined. Yet there was a decisive flaw in her.

She never smiled, and her face was empty of any known expression.

On the other hand, the statue was smiling a serene smile.

A lady in a traveler's outfit, holding a sword.

To his shame, Weed was enchanted by the statue that none other than he was working on. He had thought he would just try to imitate Seoyoon's pretty face, but as hours passed by, he felt his heart throbbing at the sight of the statue's smile.

The statue that held a mysterious charm to captivate people endlessly was on the way to completion.

"Oh my!"

"Look at that!"

Though only the general outline was roughly drafted, the Rosenheim soldiers were glued to the sight.

Even villagers gathered, laying reconstruction work aside, and appreciated Weed's working on the statue.

#### The Goddess Statue of Freya

Freya, the goddess of beauty and abundance, is the patron goddess in Baran Village. Her statue once stood in the central square, but it was destroyed by a pine tree when a flood swept the village.

Ghandilva the Elder laments over the destruction of the goddess statue, and requests you to find a replacement and bring it back.

A user entered Baran Village through the gate. She was clothed in a traveler's outfit, but her face was hidden behind a robe.

Seoyoon.

She had already removed the scarlet sign of Murderer from her forehead by slaying lots of monsters, and none of fellow users. Her name wasn't cast in red anymore.

There are more people.

It's disturbing.

I just want to fight.

Seoyoon slowly walked away and headed for Ghandilva's house to complete her quest. In an enchanted backpack that could store ten times the weight and volume of its original capacity was a statue of Goddess Freya.

Ghandilva's house, which she had not visited for months, had been largely destroyed by the lizardmen.

The moment she opened the door–

"You are great. Goddess Freya is really beautiful."

"You're flattering me, sir. The statue is only halfway done."

Seoyoon could hear people inside talking.

"I cannot describe how much I appreciate you, Weed-nim. When the statue of the goddess is complete, my village will begin peaceful life once again. I will never forget your kindness. Please help yourself."

\*Munch munch\*

Now Seoyoon could hear someone devouring his meal.

Flattering the instructor back in the Training Hall – Weed had used the same formidable trick on Ghandilva the elder of Baran.

"....."

Seoyoon dropped her hand from the doorknob.

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Two months earlier, Seoyoon had left the instructor's place, and headed south.

She had wandered only in unpopulated hinterlands and backwater villages, fighting monsters all the way.

Either mountains or lairs had suited her as long as there were more monsters. Battle after battle.

Seoyoon could forget everything else in it. In doing so, she had drifted to Baran Village.

The village had been peaceful back then, way before the lizardmen's raid and occupation.

- Whew... What should I do now?

Seoyoon had visited the village to purchase food and dispose of her spoils by sale, and she accidentally overheard Ghandilva sighing.

The elder had been grieving over the destroyed statue of the goddess on the spot where it had once been, and at the sight of Seoyoon who happened to come, he had asked her for a favor.

- You appear to be the right person to find a replacement for the destroyed statue of Goddess Freya to my village. Would you please grant the last wish of a dying man?

Speechless, Seoyoon could not take most of the quests available to other users. She had been unable to build friendship with NPCs, let alone users, and was nearly blind to background information.

All she could do in any given town was selling items she had obtained, and buy items she needed.

She had nodded at Ghandilva who was in grief, and accepted the quest.

The right choice to finish the quest was to go back to the Citadel of Serabourg, buy any female statue there and bring it over, but she had set out to find the real one.

Her destination was the Order of Goddess Freya.

Through Brent Kingdom in the north, and across the Halkos Wilderness in the southwest, it was the Free City of Somren.

The Order of Goddess Freya was located there.

It would be a long journey of three months by the official route, but she could make it within a month if she hiked over the Bark Mountains in the west.

Travelers of a sound mind avoided the route because they had to survive an enormous number of monsters.

Seoyoon had cut her way through the Bark Mountains.

Over the countless corpses of monsters, she had arrived at the Order of Goddess Freya and bought a statue of Goddess Freya, which was even endorsed and blessed by Archbishop Mandolin.

For that, she had spent most of her gold.

"....."

Seoyoon turned away from Ghandilva's house. On the way to the gate, she stumbled on the central square of the village.

There was a statue standing that she had not seen before.

A yet-to-be-completed statue of Goddess Freya.

"Isn't she really the beautiful goddess, traveler?"

A maiden spoke to Seoyoon. But her eyes were transfixed on the statue.

"Weed, a heroic savior of our village, is carving the statue of the Goddess. When it is finished, my village will stay free of monsters and live in peace once again. I cannot imagine if he were not there for us..."

Seoyoon looked at Weed's statue. It was incomplete. Yet it was beautiful. It was dazzling.

The statue of Goddess Freya radiated splendors that relaxed onlookers. It showed a benevolent and comforting smile.

She felt that the smile was transforming the world into something brighter, more positive.

The other statue of Goddess Freya that she had brought was a masterpiece found in the Order. It was of a high aesthetic value, and had an aura of piety.

Now that she looked at the statue carved by Weed, however, she thought that hers was petty, like the glimmer of a firefly in the face of a rising sun.

"....."

Seoyoon looked at the statue for a while and left Baran Village in silence – without noticing that the statue by Weed was modeled after her.

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\*Tremble\*

Even Weed who feared nothing under the sun, felt his fingers shaking at that very moment. He had devoted over ten days to this work.

Since the news of a new statue of Goddess Freya was widespread, a swarm of spectators had visited Baran Village.

Aside from the punitive force and Rosenheim soldiers, people came even from the nearby city of Demeron. With a final touch on the eyes of the goddess by Weed, the statue was completed.

"What a goddess!"

"Goddess Freya is really descending on us in our village!"

Villagers and spectators exclaimed. It was very noisy with chattering, and prayers from the faithful who knelt down before the statue.

Then, a message window visible only to Weed popped up.

Fine Piece: You completed The Statue of Goddess Freya!

Art is not always recognized for the style and skill of the work in question. It is worthy of being called great art as long as it touches many hearts and cleanses many minds.

The statue of Goddess Freya, of outstanding beauty, despite low expertise in Sculpture Mastery, will hold the public eye forever.

Artistic Value:150

Effects:Increases speed of life and mana recovery by 15% for 24 hours.

The effect does not overlap with another statue.

Number of Fine Pieces Created:1

Fine piece!

This title is only granted to artworks recognized by users. Extensive skills alone cannot produce fine pieces, grand pieces, or master pieces in sculpture mastery.

Only when a sculptor devotes himself to create a work of soul and heart that is highly appreciated by other users, only then does it deserve any of the above titles.

In other words, the completed Statue of Goddess Freya was extraordinary by any measure. As the statue earned the title of fine piece, it was given an option, too.

Still in the basic stage of sculpture mastery, Weed wasn't qualified to produce an artwork with options. But combined with Zahab's engraving knife, his fine piece generated an exceptional effect.

A jackpot that over-reached his expectations.

Level up: Sculpture mastery [9]

Enables you to produce more delicate and detailed works.

Fame rises by 50 point. (+50 Fame)

Art rises by 15 point. (+15 Art)

Endurance rises by 10 point. (+10 EDR)

Vitality rises by 5 point. (+5 VIT)

A bunch of stats rose in return for creating a fine piece.

Weed's basic sculpture mastery finally reached the expertise rating of seventy percent at level nine, on the verge of upgrading to the intermediate stage, and his fame shot up as well.

Still, he felt cheated.

"Shoot."

A fine piece didn't come out anytime.

Weed's current skill level in the basic sculpture mastery was nine, but when he was busy carving the statue, it had been only eight.

It had been applied as skill level seven in the intermediate stage, though, thanks to the hammer and Zahab's engraving knife.



Technically speaking, fine pieces were almost impossible below the intermediate stage of sculpture mastery. He was aware that if he had not been empowered by Zahab's engraving knife, he could not have produced such a beautiful statue of the goddess.

His skill level in sculpture mastery was lacking.

Had Weed reached the intermediate stage, or even the expert one, before he carved the statue of the goddess, it could rank among the pantheon of grand pieces, not far from master pieces.

Then, he would have received five stat promotions, one of the few privileges limited to sculptors.

Other sculptors, fewer than a handful on the continent, besides Weed the Legendary Moonlight Sculptor, lack combat ability.

They are denied access to spell casting in the first place, not that their strength and defense are anything other than contemptible.

The handicraft skill compensates low attack power only a little for them.

No party of sound mind would allow them in, so they have to overcome lots of bloodshed single-handedly.

The sculptor class relies on stats that are raised higher than average users at the same level by such a fortune.

It didn't mean, though, that a sculptor can develop his sculpture mastery and produce fine pieces and beyond any time he desired. Even a highly reputable sculptor is incapable of producing fine pieces and grand pieces at his discretion.

A fine piece is created only when a sculptor melts his soul into the mold of an image of the ultimate beauty.

Suppose you go through hell for ten days to carve a statue, and it turns out to be a mediocre work, slightly affecting your stats, how would you feel about it? Worse enough, what if it rather cuts down your hard-earned reputation as a sculptor?

You will be praised if you don't jump off a cliff from it. There are actually many former sculptors who delete their avatars after exactly the same demise.

Sculptor is such a hard and tough profession.

Ghandilva approached Weed and grasped his hand.

"Thank you, Weed-nim. You made such a great statue of Goddess Freya, and we villagers will be blessed forever in her name. Also, tidings of the statue will bring more travelers here. You're the second founder of Baran Village."

Quest Complete: The Statue of Goddess Freya

Ghandilva sincerely appreciates your work!

The statue of Goddess Freya erected in Baran Village will shore the villagers up in hope and courage. They will welcome you anytime in the future.

Fame rises by 30 point. (+30 Fame)

You leveled up!

You leveled up!

You leveled up!

Your influence in Baran Village reaches 60%

1st Weed, 60%

2nd: Darius, 45%

3rd: Seoyoon, 33%

As the work turned out way better than wildest expectations, the rewards for the quest were accordingly unprecedented.

A quest with three level ups could rank amongst the highest in difficulty level D ones.

Plus, his public service to the village shot up his influence to first place.

Public service depends on various factors. If you are recognized for public service, than enlarging your influence in a town, you can purchase items in bulk at a discount there, and you are even eligible for a government position such as an elder or a feudal lord.

Weed had rocketed in public service by collecting credits for the rescue mission on the captive villagers and the production of the Statue of Goddess Freya, as well as selling weapons and gear that his party had looted from the lizardmen's stronghold.

In the case of Darius, needless to say, he was the leader of the punitive force quest to win back the village.

Then, for Seoyoon, she had slaughtered a number of threatening monsters around Baran Village, and sold furs and items to the general store.

Before Weed and Darius came to town, her influence in Baran Village was indisputably number one.

"Seoyoon is in third place? She's been here before?"

Weed heart skipped a beat.

When he modeled her for the statue during its production, he had been confident that she would never come here and take notice of her own image.

The Versailles continent was vast enough.

If she had seen this statue, she might just smile coldly and behead him without question.

She's a murderer, so it isn't a remote possibility at all.

Especially if Seoyoon ever read Weed's writing engraved on the statue, she might kill him over and over, easily beyond a hundred times. No, he'd better brace himself for the worse.

Upon completion of the statue, Weed had been very satisfied with what he had created.

He had yet to know if it would turn out be a great, average or even failed work, but he had still been enchanted by his own artwork.

So, purely out of attachment, he had left a short epitaph on the bottom of the Statue of Goddess Freya with Zahab's engraving knife.

A trait no Korean can get rid of!

Weed asked cautiously, "Excuse me, Elder Ghandilva?"

"What is it, Weed-nim?"

"Was it Seoyoon that you requested to find a replacement for the statue of the goddess?"

"Yes, she is the one. So you know her, too? She is a fine lady. She accepted my strangest request, though she has not come back yet..."

"I see."

Weed was relieved that Seoyoon had not returned by now. If she had come back when he was in the middle of carving the statue, he was afraid what sort of hell would have broken loose.

She might have killed me in revenge for me stealing her quest.

As the job was done, he wanted to leave for the City of Heaven as soon as possible. He wanted to get the hell out of town before he ran across with Seoyoon again. But Ghandilva didn't let go of his hand.

Ghandilva lowered his tone and said "I have something to tell you, the savior of my village, Weed-nim."

"Go on, please."

"Do you believe in destiny? I do not think it is an accident that you came to my village."

"Excuse me?"

"A priest from the Order of Goddess Freya once visited my village and told us that evil was raging. They are expanding their influence in the invisible realm, lower than where we are, and in the dark and cold. The priest from the Order of Goddess Freya declared that only the Courageous One could defeat them! Then, he granted me the power to select the Courageous One."

"....."

"I did not fully comprehend what his words meant, but I now do. I have not revealed this secret to you; the seed that has passed down in my family will serve you as guidance to a new land. The priest told me to find a man named Seagull in order to get back the Lost Treasure from the Temple of Freya. Find him. Become the Courageous One who shall defeat the evil!"

You learned a clue to the Lost Treasure from the Temple of Freya.

This is a follow-on quest to the Statue of Goddess Freya! It doesn't look like it has any downsides. Awesome. To think such an opportunity would come to me.

Weed acknowledged his fortune once again. Part of it was attributed to Seoyoon, who had failed to show up with a new statue, and in turn, opportunity had found him.

"It is my long cherished wish to prevent evil from raging in the world. I will do my best to recover the lost treasure from the Temple of Freya."

"Thank you."

You have accepted the quest.

Weed concluded the conversation with Ghandilva and headed for his teammates who had been waiting for him.

"Great job, Weed-nim. I never thought that a statue could be so beautiful,"

Pale said looking at the statue with fevered eyes, which was very unusual for him. Surka, Irene and Romuna looked intensely moved as well.

They had reached level mid-sixties by hunting monsters with little sleep while Weed was busy carving the statue.

"It's amazing. It looks real. It's the most beautiful statue I've ever seen."

"I bet even Goddess Freya can't rival the statue in beauty."

"How did you create such an image? I can't help but admire your exquisite aesthetic sense and artistic soul..."

Weed felt a little embarrassed by their praise.

Exquisite aesthetic sense? Artistic soul?

Their eyes betrayed that they had been too shamefully blind and dull to recognize a once-in-a-lifetime artist, though he was always there before their eyes.

Who?

You mean, Weed?

Saying that he was power-hungry would be more credible.

Would they believe it if I told them I was clueless until I actually got to work? No, I don't think so.

What's the point of telling them something that they wouldn't believe, anyway?

A good salesman doesn't tell you everything when he knocks on your door to sell something. He hides the flaws and highlights the merits of the product.

What is good for you is the best policy.

"I made this statue as I pictured all of you in my mind, Ladies Irene, Surka and Romuna. Your pure hearts and pretty faces are cherished in the statue, so it looks as beautiful as it is now."

"Oh my!"

Girls are simple creatures, aren't they?

All the girls in Weed's party were happy to hear such a flimsy lie.

"Hey, you're that Weed, right?"

Darius came up to where Weed was.

"You're quite good at sculpture mastery. Is that a grand piece?"

Darius was well versed in many fields of knowledge. At level one-forty, he must have picked up a few pieces of information about sculptors somewhere.

"No," Weed said.

"Then, is it a fine piece?" Darius asked.

"Yes," Weed said.

"Oh, I never believed I'd see a fine piece. I heard there were less than a hundred sculptors who ever created fine pieces..."

Darius showed his surprise with exaggerated gestures. Then, he made a feline smile.

"Congratulations. I guess you earned quite a number of stats for this. At least such good fortune should befall to sculptors who are pitiful in abilities."

Darius made light of Weed, solely based on the fact that he was a sculptor.

In fact, most sculptors are weak. Their combat skills are contemptible if they have higher stats that are raised by the production of fine pieces and whatever else.

Even if they know a powerful combat skill, they don't know how to fight properly.

Why do they choose to be sculptors?

It is because they are poor at fighting in the first place. Many fights beget good fighters.

For most users who belong to non-combative classes, they are simply inept in fighting.

They usually get confused, as they are ignorant of how to respond to enemy attack, and lost to what role they should take in a party.

Elementary combat skills they learn are ineffective in general, and even the expertise rating is low enough to be ridiculed by their teammates.

Plus, they have to practice their sculpture mastery to become a full-fledged sculptor, so they are weaker than their counterparts in everything, including their overall level, provided that the same hours are invested in building their avatars.

Of course, except for Weed!

"Hey, watch your mouth."

Pale, one of Weed's teammates stepped forward in a fit of passion. He could not stand Darius holding his teammate in contempt.

Then, all hell broke loose.

"How can there be someone like this guy?"

His face looks like a skillet covered in grease after cooking sausages in it..."

"Fools never think before they shoot off their mouth. Weed-nim's so good at fighting..."

Surka, Romuna and Irene shot back, respectively.

Young Surka was hot-blooded enough to say that! Romuna, who had her share of anger from time to time, was expected, too. But what really threw Pale and Weed off was that, of all people, Irene, always a calm and gentle soul, had flared up.

Women.

There was no way that the dense Pale and Weed could have known that those three girls together could easily change someone's status into kill-on-sight.

Even if Weed's judgment doubled or tripled, he would never fully comprehend half the aspects of women in his lifetime.

It is foolish to assume that you know a woman just because you can make her happy with a few compliments.

"....."

Weed missed his chance to get angry.

He took his revenge in the thundering denunciations from the girls.

"Wha-what was that?"

Darius' eyes sparked. But neither Irene nor Romuna flinched in the slightest.

"Why, did we say something that wasn't right?"

"How dare you..."

"So what're you going to do? Kill us?"

"Do you think I'll let you get away with this?!"

Darius was about to pull his sword out. If he, Lv. 140 warrior, was resolved to have a bloodbath now, Weed and his teammates could not withstand him.

No, Weed could stand a chance if he succeeded in realizing the best of his potential.

His level was in the seventies.

But, with his inflated stats, he was close to a Lv. 100 warrior.

Considering his cheat-key skills and combat ability, he was certain he could beat Darius.

Utilizing the element of a surprise, and given that Darius was writing off Weed, seizing the moment when he wasn't prepared for it, Weed could beat the hell out of him in a minute.

The only problem was that if the duel lasted longer than a minute, Weed would run out of mana because of pouring it into combat skills, and end up dead for sure.

Weed wasn't fearful of Darius in the sense of stats, but he knew that his weakness lay in the duration.

He was, so to speak, a typical case of premature ejaculation, a man's number one secret fear.

Surely, he was still stronger than average users at his level after he spent his lifetime on mana booster.

"Darius, take it easy!"

"Let me go! I'll teach those bitches some manners!"

"You're the commander of the punitive force. You can't pick a duel with your subordinates. If you do that, do you know how many fame points will drop? Do you really want to give up the quest altogether?"

Parros and other minions from Darius' party held him back. They talked him out of bursting into a rage, and he calmed down at last.

"Okay, I'll forgive you this time."

At Darius' comment, Romuna just poured scorn on him with a sneer.

"Who do you think you are to decide who forgives whom?"

"Everyone makes mistakes, but he acts like he's royalty or something."

Surka's final blow almost ignited the second round of the quarrel, but by then other members of the punitive force had been drawn by the commotion, and gathered around them.

Darius and his minions had already lost respect and credibility. On the other hand, Weed and his teammates were deemed respectable. For one thing, Weed had cooked great meals throughout the march.

He had even repaired weapons and armors when broken, and for unidentified items, his free service of item identification was invaluable.

His other teammates had been kind to other users except for Darius, so their reputations were good enough.

While Weed had been busy carving the statue of the goddess, Pale and the girls joined several parties for hunting, and their steadily upgraded skills and swift hunting tactics made them a favorite for any party.

Weed later learned that Darius and his minions had to hunt alone because no one else bothered inviting them. Under those circumstances, Weed was in a far stronger position.

Parros, one of Darius' few friends, said in an arrogant tone, in the place of Darius whose face was frozen in silence, "We are member of Ica Guild. I'm sure you've heard of it. It's one of the three top guilds in Rosenheim."

Weed had of course heard of Ica Guild. It was notorious for bad behavior, hardly surprising after he saw how Darius had acted.

"We're planning to occupy a city in the near future, so we need a good hanging plate. Would you come visit us later to carve one? We'll pay you well."

In the end, Darius had only visited Weed to request the hanging plate. But he had been in a terrible mood.

He had succeeded in the punitive quest with elation, but what was left in his pocket was much less than predicted.

It was because someone else had already stripped the lizardmen's stronghold of all its items.

In a rage, Darius and his minions had been looking for the culprits, but they could not possibly suspect Weed, the mere sculptor who was carving the statue of Goddess Freya, and his teammates, objectively speaking, whose low level exempted them from the list of usual suspects.

During their private investigation, they had made a series of terrible blunders that caused more friction between them and other users, while Weed had received a solid quest from Ghandilva the elder and completed the Statue of Goddess Freya, as if to rub salt in their wounds.

To put it bluntly, Darius was jealous.

So he had spoken to Weed rudely, and it eventually twisted the whole thing into a more complex knot.

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As soon as they were through with Baran Village, the punitive force led by Darius packed their stuff and headed northward to return to the Citadel.

There were some users who liked nearby hunting fields, but the village itself hardly appealed to them. There was no pub where hunters could gulp down icy cold beer after a day of rich games. A glass of beer after a day's hunting.

Everyone missed the delicate taste sluicing down their throat, and hurried out to leave town.

It was decided that Baran Village would be protected by the Rosenheim soldiers.

Weed and his teammates reported the punitive quest directly to Ghandilva.

"Thank you for your service. We will always remember what you have done for the sake of us villagers."



For the reward of the quest, Ghandilva gave Weed twenty fame points.

Since he was carving the statue while other users were hunting down the remnants of the lizardmen, he had practically given up on it, but it unexpectedly turned out to be a great gain for him.

Other users at level eighties in the punitive force received between ten and fifteen fame points.

Weed thought that rescuing captive villagers and robbing the lizardmen's stronghold had worked a mini-sized miracle.

Weed and his teammates told Darius that they wanted to stay behind to hunt monsters there, with an excuse that they still had low levels.

"Now is the time," Weed said.

At his statement, his teammates smiled expectantly.

"Yes."

"Then, let's go to a dark, quiet place."

"Of course, to a very, very quiet place... To somewhere we're not going to be seen." Romuna covered her mouth with a hand and chuckled coquettishly.

If one heard her, they might misunderstand.

Two men and three girls headed for the Western Mountain out of Baran Village. Once the lizardmen's stronghold, it was now secluded enough to meet their need for quiet.

"La la la."

The girls were humming.

They were walking to a very, very dark, quiet, out-of-the-way place.

Before long, they reached the foot of the Western Mountain where there was no one within a few miles. They were already prepared for a long journey.

"It looks good here."

"Okay everyone, get ready."

Weed carefully dug up the soil and planted the seed in it. Then, he watered it a little.

It showed no reaction for a while, but the soil that blanketed the seed soon began to turn red.

\*Quake\*

"Kyaaa!" Surka cried.

A great earthquake shook the ground!

The seismic center lay where Weed had sowed the seed. The earth split into two, and a thick trunk shot up into the sky.

Thirty feet, sixty feet...

In the blink of an eye, a topless pillar stood before Weed's party. Yet the trunk kept on growing. Watching the trunk rise beyond the clouds, Weed said, "The City of Heaven must be up there. I think this vine will guide us to it."

"Then..."

"Now we've come all the way here, why shrink away? Hold on to this fast. Or we might end up climbing the vine from halfway."

"Shoot! I don't want to do that."

Weed took out a rope from his backpack and tied his teammates to him.

"Together we live, together we die."

"Yeah!"

Weed and Pale decided to hang on to the vine first.

This was so that even if Irene or Romuna, the least muscular, lost their grip, the men up on the vine could prevent them from falling from the sky.

Weed and his teammates clung on to the trunk sprouting from the seed of the Heavenly Tree. Then they shot up into the sky.

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## Chapter 4 : City of Heaven, Lavi

Dr. Cha Eunhee from the Great Society Rehabilitation Centre was a world famous psychologist, who patented a novel method of therapy for the treatment of psychological illnesses. Her relentless work schedule usually left her no time for rest.

She had a constant barrage of patients to attend to and weekly journal articles to submit in a never-ending cycle of monotony.

"Boring. Dull. Tedious."

These were her daily complaints. But despite her desire to escape it all, she simply could not bring herself to just abandon her responsibilities.

Hence, she now found herself in the midst of a counseling session with a middle-aged woman.

"I'm truly sorry about your daughter's circumstances," Dr. Cha said, blinking away the moisture in her eyes.

"I know it's already been 5 years." The woman smiled sorrowfully as she confided in Dr. Cha.

"But ever since that child tried to throw her life away, I haven't been able to concentrate on anything."

"It's time for you to tear your thoughts away from your daughter's well-being and begin searching for your own purpose in life."

"Actually doctor..." the woman asked, grasping Dr. Cha's hand tightly.

"... I believe that she's trapped in there somewhere... She's..."

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The Heavenly Tree randomly extended skyward but soon began shooting towards a specific direction.

Weed and his companions held fast onto the trunk as it sprouted towards its target. The buffeting wind left them battered and the ground below was a distant comfort. Within seconds, Baran village had disappeared from sight.

They passed through the clouds and arrived at a seemingly huge island. An island floating in the sky! Riding the growing tree stalk of the Heavenly Tree, Weed and his companions rose above the fog blurring the area.

"This is the City of Heaven!" the party exclaimed, feasting their eyes on their surroundings.

A maze of buildings sprawled out before them. In the center of the extensive labyrinth rose a massive tower with a myriad of birds perched on top. Beyond the large tower were rolling hills and lush fields.

"Oh! The tree's withering away!" shouted Irene as she glanced back at the tree.

The Heavenly Tree's trunk withered and splintered before their eyes. The fragments disappeared into the clouds, severing the floating island from the distant ground below.

"Our way back has been destroyed. What do we do now?" Surka fretted. Her companions, on the other hand, did not seem particularly concerned.

"The adventure starts here. Since the tree is gone, we'll worry about returning when the time comes."

"But, Pale-nim..." Surka was on the verge of tears, already missing the solid ground.

Weed attempted to cheer her up, "If there's a will, there's a way." But Surka seemed unconvinced by Weed's words of encouragement, at which point Weed nonchalantly said, "Well, if we can't find a way we can always jump right?"

"B-but..."

"Well, you'd surely die once, but you'd definitely end up on the ground."

Surka's face went white. Truth be told, she had always been terrified of heights.

As the Heavenly Tree grew, she had held on for dear life, afraid of plummeting to her death.

Perhaps she would have passed up on this adventure, if she had known it would take her all the way up here.

The party continued on, consoling Surka along the way.

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The City of Heavens was home to a unique species.

"They look like birds..."

Standing on two legs, with their small beady eyes, pointed beak, great wingspan, and rounded cheeks, they resembled sparrows.

The old birds seemed to have white beards around their beak. "Kyaa! So cute!" Surka exclaimed, her affection for the birds overshadowing her acrophobia. She was no longer trembling in fear, but excitement.

The old bird slowly walked towards the group, ignoring Surka's unwelcomed affections.

"Greetings travelers, welcome to Lavias."

The whole party shifted their gaze to Weed.

Based on previous experiences, Weed was deemed to be best suited to lead.

Furthermore, it had become clear to the party that Weed's every move was calculated, since he was the type to sweet-talk any NPC into giving him what he wanted.

"Thank you. We've endured a perilous journey from distant lands before setting our weary feet on this beautiful place. But in the face of such unimaginable splendor, our fatigue has all but dissipated. Is this place Lavias?"

"Indeed! Our city is home to the noble and dignified Avians. Only here will you find the sun so brilliant, and the air so fresh!" The white-bearded bird gushed with pride as he shook his wings. Even his feathers quivered with excitement at the praise.

"The air here is indeed the freshest and the sunlight most impressive. No doubt the passing clouds paint a beautiful picture. But what are the specialties here in Lavias?"

Weed jumped at the chance to learn about the city's specialties. If there were items exclusively found in Lavias, he would make a lot of money by purchasing them in bulk and reselling in Rosenheim Kingdom.

"We are not on familiar terms yet to permit you to ask such an impertinent question. You need to get better acquainted with me. It would help if you could bring me some delicious treats. In fact, I would like that very much."

The bearded bird flapped his wings and hobbled away from them.

Weed tried to chase after the bird but soon gave up and returned to his party.

"Okay, let's split up to explore the city from here on."

If all five of them explored the city together, it would have been too time-consuming. Therefore, they decided to split up in order to cover more ground.

"The city seems to be safe since there are no hostile zones."

"Still, Lavias seems to be too big a city to explore alone. Let's all meet back here in 2 hours."

"If you come across a good quest during your exploration, just come back for the time being, and share it with the rest of the party. We'll decide together as to which quest is best. Now, let's get started."

"Okay, got it."

And thus they set off to explore the city.

To begin with, Weed proceeded towards the bustling city center to see if there were any shops.

Merchants were waddling like ducks through the streets, hawking their wares to the pedestrians.

As the name suggested, the residents of Avian City possessed traits common to birds and although chubby torsos and stumpy legs were the norm, their heads ranged from those of owls to hawks.

'To think there's a city like this, amazing,' Weed thought.

Opening a chicken restaurant here would definitely be the wrong move, since the locals could misinterpret it to be cannibalism.

Unlike human cities, carriages did not exist since the birds themselves were big enough to carry the horses. If the roads were blocked, all they had to do was spread their wings and fly away.

From all the stares he received, Weed felt like a monkey at the zoo as he walked amongst the Avians.

Weed entered a weapons store.

"Good day."

"A human traveler! Is there something you need?"

"There are many things I need. However, I'm not familiar with the items on display. I'd like a closer look."

"As you wish"

Weed inspected some of the items.

Baravo's Steel Beak:

Durability – 90/90.

Damage – 23.

Additional effects:

Ability to grasp food items that grant bonuses.

The long length makes it easy to reach buried worms.

Price: 100 gold

Weed sighed and turned his attention to a different item.

Silver Pitchfork of Saigon:

Durability – 30/30.

Damage – 17~19.

Part of a set.

Low durability since it is made of silver.

Good for snatching the heads of the undead while flying low.

Price: 70 gold

Feathers of the Goddess:

Durability – 15/15.

Additional effect: Enchantment.

The brilliant and sparkling multi-colored feathers grant relief from enemy attacks when equipped.

Light enough that you can't even feel it. Allows for unrivaled gliding, guaranteed to prevent a fall.

Restriction: Females only!

Price: 45 gold

The items ranged from pitchforks and telescopes to peculiar, hollow weapons that were conical and tapered towards the tip. These seemed to be the Avians' weapon of choice.

"Do you have any weapons suitable for humans?" Weed asked the shopkeeper, who greatly resembled a badger.

"Of course I do! Just wait a moment. Since human customers are so rare, I had to put them in the warehouse."

As Weed waited, he felt intense stares from outside.

One by one, the passing Avians stopped in their tracks to watch Weed as if he was a monkey in a zoo.

"I hear this guy is a human."

"How odd. Must be difficult to eat with a flat beak"

"Look at that. No feathers, either. He must freeze during the winter, poor thing."

No normal bird could ever enjoy the cold. From their perspective, Weed seemed like he would easily freeze to death.

An Avian in Rosenheim, or any city in the Continent below, would draw a staring crowd as well. But in Lavias, the Avian City, Weed the human was the spectacle.

"Here are the things you asked for."

The shop owner set out some armor, a shield, two hammers and five different blades. Weed had no use for the shield, so he immediately moved on to the blades and armor. After all, he only had 70 gold from selling the items looted from the Lizardmen.

Clay Sword:

Durability – 90/90.

Damage – 23~25.

A magic sword imbued with the spirit of ice.

Does 2~5 bonus damage to armored target and decreases movement.

Requires: Level 60. STR 200.

Equip: Grants additional 2-5 Ice Elemental damage.

Price: 188 gold.

Sword of the Dusk Wraith:

Durability – 200/200.

Damage – 14.

Status effect: Cursed Item

Work of the Dwarf Theodore. Forged from steel mined from the Forest of Death.

Lowers vitality, has small chance of dealing triple damage on a critical hit.

Requires: Level 70. STR 250.

Equip: Rare chance of dealing a deadly attack.

Price: 160 gold.

Weed stopped browsing at that point and shook his head.

The prices were ridiculously exorbitant but it was not completely unexpected since this was an Avian city after all. Even though the Clay Sword and the Sword of the Dusk Wraith were evidently rare items, they would only sell for half the price at the Citadel of Serabourg.

"I don't have enough money right now, so I won't be buying anything."

"In that case, come back again, except these might already be sold, so you better earn money as quickly as you can," said the badger-like shop owner, sounding disappointed.

Weed's party was the only human travelers here, and for the most part, doing business was his main focus.

Weed left the shop and slowly made his way to the east side of the city.

Beyond the city's periphery lay an endless expanse of fields and patches of nothingness here and there.

"Chirp Chirp!"

"Cheep!"

"Tweet tweet!"

Cute Avian children were singing, perched on top of clotheslines. Amongst them the yellow chicks were particularly adorable.

"Hiya?" Weed said to them, walking over to look. But they merely giggled and gave no other response.

"Good day." Weed greeted every Avian he came across.

One of the Avians, who had been in front of the weapons store, excitedly asked him,

"You're a traveler I haven't seen before. Are you part of the strong group from the land below?"

"I am not strong yet. Though I love peace and admire the sky, I also respect the military arts. For strength is required to ensure peace."

"I feel the same way. I happen to have a request that you may be able to fulfill. Truthfully, Lavias isn't as peaceful as it seems. This is an ancient land and there are great evils lying underground, gathering their powers to destroy us. Will you help me?"

\*TING!\*

The Undead of Lavias

Undead lurk in the depths of the City of Heaven, Lavias.

The Avian residents cannot sleep for the nightly wailing of the undead.

If you return after killing at least 30 Skeleton Soldiers in the Underground Passage, good things may happen.

Difficulty Level: D

Reward: Unknown

Quest Requirements: Failure will decrease friendship level with Crows.

Weed and his party had not expected the City of Heaven to be more than a regular, undiscovered city and had only hoped to buy or attain unique items that could not be found in the Citadel of Serabourg.

They had assumed that a quest related to the Rosenheim Kingdom was the best they could get.



Surprisingly, there were hunting grounds in the City of Heaven. Not to mention, it was a rare undead hunting ground. Skeleton Soldiers were known to be around level 80 or so.

Weed thought for a second, and shook his head.

"I understand that defeating the undead is my quest, but I am here with companions. I will return once I've consulted them."

Weed continued touring the area and spoke to Avians he passed.

For some, it was their first time seeing a human traveler and so they made certain requests. They were mostly related to the undead.

Through the various conversations, Weed gathered information about the undergrounds in Lavias and the paths leading there. However, the place was practically a war zone. The majority of its inhabitants were skeletons, as well as Death Knights, Demonic Wardens, Dullahans, Liches, Specters and Shades.

Dullahans were powerful and exhaustive undead, who carried their own heads. Not only were they level 140, they were fast and had excellent combat ability, making them very difficult to defeat.

Liches specialized in black magic and due to their high intelligence, they were known to flee if they found themselves in danger.

Needless to say, the Death Knights were the harbingers of death. They rode on horseback just like the Ringwraiths from the movie, *The Lord of the Rings*. They were the stuff of nightmares! In terms of level, they were nearly 200.

To think that such powerful undead were residing underground, Weed's heart began to race.

'Ah, lovely EXP.'

While wandering through the city, Weed discovered a large signboard. In large letters, it read "Beginners Class Training". Weed entered as if driven by some mystical force.

"Welcome. I see you are a human," greeted the Instructor, who looked just like a rooster. His hair, which resembled a rooster's comb, was particularly noticeable.

"I was just passing by and wished to offer my greetings. I've completed the Beginners Class Training in Rosenheim Kingdom."

All Instructors in Training Halls had high regard for those who respected the military arts and despised evil. Completing training also gave some reputation. Weed had entered the Training Hall expecting to build an instant rapport with the Instructor and gain some useful information. But the reaction he received fell far from his expectations.

"Mmph?" The Avian Instructor smothered a laugh. His eyes showed his amusement even as his beak remained still.

"That can't be. It's hardly possible for you to have completed the Beginner Class Training. You don't have that look about you."

"Huh? But I completed the Beginner Class Training at the Citadel of Serabourg."

"They only have a Basic Training Hall there."

Weed's eyes lit up with flames of desire.

'Basic Training Hall! So then this place is the next phase!'

"Can I attempt the Beginner's Training once?"

"Looks like it. Those who completed Basic Training are eligible. However, this here is different from your Basic Training Hall. There's a high possibility of danger so don't push yourself."

"I want to try it."

"You mean the Training?"

"That's what I said."

"Your spirit is admirable. Well then, follow me."

Weed followed the instructor accordingly.

He led Weed to a structure at the rear of the training hall. Its entrance was a yawning, pitch-black, beak, within which lay a dark passageway.

"All you need to do is go through this passage and exit safe and sound on the opposite end. It's simple right? However, combat skills will be unavailable. And a word of advice, don't light a fire, that would make it too easy, no, too convenient."

"Understood" Weed's response was brief. With long strides, he entered into the passage.

At first, there was nothing that could dismay Weed. However, as he progressed through the passage, his resolution slowly began to fade.

He began using his hands and feet to blindly feel his way through the passage. He did not know what could emerge from the eerily calm passage. It was then...

\*PYIING!\*

Weed reflexively ducked his head under the onslaught of slashes. As strands of hair flew off, he realized that the calm was now over.

'An attack? Great' His body moved as soon as this registered.

Weed had already drawn his sword and thrust it forward. Though he could not see, he could sense something approaching.

\*CLANG!\*

The Iron Sword clashed against something metallic. Judging by the impact, the blow was neither blocked by a shield nor parried. The enemy's body had felt as hard as stone.

'From the right!' Weed sensed the attack just as it sliced through the air. Now he was certain that the next one would also come from the right. Since he could not see, he had no choice but to rely on his other senses. Weed had faith in his instincts.

At that moment Weed's sword moved as if it had a mind of its own. It smoothly swung to deflect the oncoming attack in the pitch darkness. Someone who had no real life experience with a sword would never be able to do this.

'Ten, maybe more!' thought Weed.

The relentless attacks gave him no respite.

"Yatz!" Weed shouted a battle-cry as he launched into the air. As he rolled onto the ground, he firmly held the sword sideways, aiming to slash at the ankles. Sparks flew as his sword scraped against something made of iron. In that instant, the area was briefly illuminated.

There were dozens of Barbarians clad completely in steel. They held swords, batons, sledgehammers, axes, clubs, hammers, and maces.

A chill ran up Weed's spine as his burning will was snuffed like a candle in the wind. But attacks from the Steel Barbarians were not over.

He was able to parry several of the attacks, but in the lightless passage it was impossible to deal with all the attacks at once. A blow landed on his back, smashing him into the ground. The Barbarians descended upon him from all directions.

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"You failed." Hearing the Instructor's voice, Weed slowly sat up. His whole body felt sore.

'What is this place?'

He looked about and noticed he was back at the entrance to the Training Hall. The Instructor must have carried him back here. His health bar had decreased. He had been attacked to the point that his HP was now less than 30; even a light tap could kill him. Fortunately, he wasn't bleeding, so his HP was no longer decreasing.

"This is what happens when those without sufficient skill challenge this place. I saved you this time, but if you try again, you will die."

Weed shook his head to regain his wits and asked,

"Do I need to be at a higher level in order to succeed?"

"That's not it. The Infinite Steel Men adjust to the challenger's level."

"Then that means my true skills aren't up to par."

"Apparently so"

"How long has it been since I entered?"

"About 4 hours."

"My companions must all be waiting for me. I'll be sure to come back again." Weed left the Training Hall and proceeded to the designated meeting place.

\*\*\*

Weed ran quickly! At the rendezvous point, he found the rest of the party, their faces glowing with excitement. "I'm sorry I'm late..." "Weed-nim!" Surka exclaimed, quickly running up to him. "We found a great quest!" "We were waiting for you to return, Weed-nim, so we could all decide if we should take it." While Weed was gone, the rest of the party had zealously explored Lavias in order to gather information.

First, how to get back to the ground below. The Feathers of Lightness, sold at the supermarket, would slow the descent of a falling object. Using the feather to leap off of Lavias might be exhilarating for Weed, but it would be a terrifying experience for someone with acrophobia like Surka.

The second was the slightly disappointing news that Weed's party was not the first to discover Lavias. They had been expecting it to some extent since their fame had not increased when they first set foot on the City of Heaven.

Next were the quests.

Irene had found a quest to slay 20 Skeleton Knights. The reward was a Ring that increases Mana regeneration rate by 10%.

Skeleton Knights were, of course, tough opponents to face with their levels ranging in the 100s. But the party was bewitched by the reward. After all, a ring that increased Mana regeneration rate was very rare. Its value in any of the big cities of the Versailles Continent was priceless!

"Where is the place?" Weed asked, also amazed by the reward.

Just like that, they accepted the quest to slay Skeleton Knights.

DUNGEON: You are the very first players to discover Memphis Hall.

Reward: Fame +100.

Every day for one week, double EXP and double item drops. The rarest items will drop from killing the first monster of each type. Subsequent kills will drop common items.

The words floated in a message window the instant Weed and his companions entered the underground passage. They immediately froze on the spot.

"This is..."

"We're the first visitors!" Surka and Romuna exclaimed joyfully.

Pale had a large grin on his face as well. Hunting grounds that grant double EXP were worth entering, no matter how dangerous they were. It was a waste to leave and lose all that potential EXP.

'Others may have come to Lavias first, but they didn't come to this hunting ground. No, perhaps they weren't able to discover it. Let's not get our hopes too high.'

Weed tried very hard to maintain his composure, but his excitement was undeniable.

"For the time being, let's take our time looking around. Our primary goal is to defeat the Skeleton Knights, however, since we need to know if we can even do that, we should hunt everything we pass first. Irene-nim"

"Yes!"

"Please take care of us, especially with your healing."

"Yeah, and since this place is infested with the undead, I will definitely provide my Blessings as well."

Priestly Blessings and Holy Magic were fatal to the undead. The Blessings served to increase damage by 1.5 times against different enemies, and inflicted additional damage if the opponents were undead.

"Let's go."

Everyone in Weed's party got every available buff, increasing their Strength and Vitality. Defensive buffs were focused mainly on Weed and Surka. They then began moving out.

"Hu...man? There...are I-living humans." Four to five skeletons had gathered in the underground passage.

The small, diverse group of undead consisted of two Skeleton Mages, one Skeleton Soldier and a Skeleton Archer.

"Hu...man." The Skeleton's empty eye sockets flashed. A murderous red aura exploded as they ran to the party, their bones rattling as they jostled in time to their movements.

"Get ready to fight."

\*CLANG\*

Weed was the first to spring forward, blocking the Skeleton Soldier's sword. Instead of stopping at a simple block, Weed smoothly parried the attack aside and dealt a counterattack.

It was not an in-game skill. Weed had naturally executed the art of sword fighting by using appropriate movements of the wrist.

"Triple!"

\*POP\* \*SNAP\* \*CRACK\*

He dealt three consecutive attacks. By nature, Triple was a very difficult skill to follow with the eyes. It thrust forward, then slashed diagonally, and as the sword draws back it utilized the entire body's momentum to slash once more in a continuous attack! Mastery of the skill gave the potential for additional slash attacks, but even then, it would still be called Triple since the name was derived from the three original attacks.

In the midst of the intense melee, Weed executed the skill without shouting 'Triple'.

Even a split second could determine the difference between life and death. Especially if one was capable of utilizing that moment to aim for the enemy's weaknesses.

If all three continuous strikes were somehow blocked, there could be a chance for a fourth slash to be executed. In case this was deflected too, there was always the minute possibility for an impressive fifth.

"Triple" was originally meant to be three swift slashes, which took advantage of the enemy's weaknesses to deliver a successful attack. On top of this, Weed was able to maneuver his sword using his innate abilities to create openings in his opponent's defense. Unsurprisingly, the Skeleton Soldier's ribs completely shattered under the onslaught of Weed's sword.

Only someone like Weed could think to use such an overpowered and cruel method to kill his enemies.

At that point, the Skeleton Mages in the rear began chanting spells aimed at Weed. However, Romuna's spell was the first to be cast.

"Fire Strike!"

Due to high proficiency in the skill, six fireballs were fired in succession at the Skeleton Mages. This served to interrupt and effectively cancel the spells they were about to cast.

"You're mine!"

Pale was focused on the lone Skeleton Archer. The two were furiously firing arrows at each other.

"Eat this! Blessed Arrow!" Pale let loose an arrow which emitted a blinding flash of light.

By nature, the undead hated light, and skeletons such as these were particularly weak to it. Higher level undead, however, could walk around in broad daylight without any issues.

Pale's arrows lodged themselves into the Skeleton and shone brilliantly.

Meanwhile, Surka delivered punches to the Skeleton Mages at close range with Romuna supporting her. Since this was their first time fighting a formidable opponent, they were all putting their lives on the line.

Weed only had to deal with the Skeleton Soldier.

"Dieeee..."

The bones of the Skeleton Soldier rattled as it leaped into the air and executed a powerful strike as it descended. Although its sword was riddled with chips and cracks, the strength behind the strike was too great to ignore.

'Even so, the moves are too obvious.'

Weed activated a skill.

"Backstab!"

By the time the skeleton's sword reached its target, only Weed's afterimage remained. Weed, who was already behind his enemy, sliced into the Skeleton's neck.

You have dealt a critical hit!

Critical Hit!

Such precise timing was required that even a thousandth of a second mattered in the delivery of a successful critical hit.

Aiming for one had its risks, therefore, succeeding in it was all the more satisfying.

Having sustained damage from both Triple and Backstab, the Skeleton's bones fell apart into a lifeless heap.

"Weed-nim, over here!" Surka cried, fatigue evident in her voice.

Fighting two Skeleton Mages was too much for her, and she was gradually losing ground.

As a monk, she had high Agility so her movements should have been quite fast. But at the moment this was not the case.

Strength decrease.

Speed decrease.

Both resulted from poisoned wounds and curses that left her bleeding continuously. Suffering from the Skeleton Mages' curses, Surka was engulfed in dark smoke. The curses were both stronger and faster than Irene's Cleanse spell.

"....."

Weed hastily rushed over to save her.

"Sculpting Blade!"

Each time Weed recovered enough mana to utilize the Sculpting Blade skill, a Skeleton Mage with low health disappeared with a flash of grey. They were dying faster than expected since Romuna had bombarded them with spells till all her mana ran out. The remaining Skeleton Archer was quickly finished off by a well-timed combo from Pale and Romuna, who had since recovered her mana.

"Wow! We won!" Surka let out a cry of joy as soon as the battle was over.

"Even our levels rose," Pale said, grinning.

The level 80 Skeletons, who were more than 15 levels higher, coupled with the doubled EXP gain, gave an incredible amount of EXP to the party. They were already close to leveling up just from killing a single group.

Having used all their mana on removing the curses, Romuna and Irene sat down to recover mana through Meditation.

Meditation doubled the speed of mana recovery. Unfortunately, it was a skill exclusive to Mage and Priest classes, meaning Weed could not learn it.

"Shall we see what items we got?"

Normally they would just grab whatever they wanted, but this time, just one battle had felt as if they had been walking on thin ice. So the party gathered around the items the skeletons had dropped.

Worn Bloodstained Gloves:

Durability 7/40.

Defense: 6.

An item filled with the hatred and desire of the dead.

Although they strengthen the wearer, they seem to be best avoided.

Restrictions: Level 50. Strength 100.

Equip: Raises Strength by 20. Raises Attack Power by 10%. Lowers Health by 200.

Boots of the Cold Ones:

Durability 9/50.

Defense 5.

Shoes made to resist the embrace of the earth.

Since they are made from the hide of water buffaloes, they give great feeling when worn.

Restrictions: level 60.

Equip: Raises Ice Magic Resistance by 15%

Items like these were not bad at all. They could be sold to the merchants, but wearing them was much better. The gloves might lower health but the defense was high enough that wearing them was worthwhile.

At the moment, as part of the effect of discovering the dungeon, the item drop rates were doubled and the best items had not even been identified. So Weed and his party walked towards the sword dropped by the Skeleton Soldier.

Clay Sword:

Durability 12/65.

Attack 23~25.

A magic sword imbued with the spirit of ice.

Does 2~5 bonus damage to armored target and decreases movement.



Requires: Level 60. STR 200.

Equip: Grants additional 2-5 Ice Elemental damage.

A grin spread across Weed's face.

'Jackpot!'

A sword that the store sold for over 100 gold was also attainable as an item drop. Of course, compared to a Clay Sword purchased at a store, the item drop was much lower in durability. In addition, the maximum durability of the sword would decrease little by little if the sword breaks and remains in an unrepaired state.

"This is..."

Pale looked over the items for a while.

He felt greed sinking in. He was human after all, so why shouldn't he feel it? However, Weed slowly walked to the center of the group. All he wore was a simple, hardened leather outfit. Neither armor nor boots. Weed spoke, addressing Pale.

"That bastard's attack power was really something. If there were two of them, there might have been trouble."

"....."

Pale bit back tears as he stood aside, allowing Weed to claim all three items. If Weed, their meat shield, did not have good equipment then who would replace him?

"These kinds of items should belong to Pale-nim..." said by Weed's disappointed voice.

"....."

"Still, as I'm the one who has to fight them directly, it would be a bonus to be well-equipped. But the next item drops should definitely go to Surka-nim and Pale-nim." This was classic example of 'giving the disease and then offering the remedy'.

Weed was the one who would benefit most from the items, so this could be called a group decision. Weed would finally be free of the Hard Iron Sword that he'd received from the Training Hall Instructor. Suddenly, a voice called out.

"Humans... the beloved soldiers of the undead..."

A Skeleton Knight had appeared without warning.

Everyone made mistakes, but this one was potentially fatal. Until now, the enemies in the hunting grounds they had explored stayed mostly within their designated territories. Skeleton Knights, on the other hand, wandered wherever they pleased. Oblivious to this fact, the party had been resting without a worry when it suddenly appeared.

A Skeleton Knight, with its eerie, glowing eyes, wearing scale mail over its body of bones, was an undead over level 100. This formidable creature now charged at the party.

"Kyaa!"

The Skeleton Knight swung its sword in a wide arc, cutting Surka's hip. Fortunately, she did not die, but her health dropped by over 35%.

"Run!"

Weed leapt in between Surka and the Skeleton Knight, holding the Clay Sword he had just picked up. His quick thinking was a great help in the midst of such a crisis.

A monster of over level 100!

Weed's knees began to shake. But not for fear of his enemy since he considered anyone within 30 levels of him a fair fight. Weed's concern was for the Clay Sword with its pitiful durability. If it were to break during this fight... Unfortunately, nobody could swap weapons with an enemy right before their eyes.

'Please, God...'

"Be careful, Weed-nim!"

"Romuna, Irene, wake up! A Skeleton Knight appeared!"

The party members quickly got ready for combat. However, that gave the Skeleton Knight time enough to begin its first attack: A powerful charge followed by another attack! For the first time, Weed felt that his brittle sword was needed.

'I can't lose this sword!'

It was already too late to run, but Weed trusted his movements and defense. Rather than blocking, he attempted to dodge. A minor injury was unavoidable, but he felt that a flesh wound was a worthwhile sacrifice to protect his bone... the "bone" this time was obviously the sword.

'Wait, did I repair the gloves and boots?'

Crap!

The durability of the gloves and boots were nearly depleted.

A weapon like the Clay Sword would not lose much durability unless it made physical contact, but other equipment, like the gloves and boots, lose durability simply if the wearer is hit by an attack. Durability was a strange attribute; when near maximum, it would decrease slowly, but when low, a single attack could be enough to break the item.

'Why now...'

Weed quickly rolled on the ground.

Clank!

The sword of the Skeleton Knight swung down, just barely missing him.

Such skills oftentimes appeared in martial arts novels. This one in particular involved rolling on the ground in an attempt to evade attacks. What about pride? Something like that had no place in this situation.

The thought of his gloves, boots and new sword breaking was much more painful. While Weed was stalling, his party finished their battle preparations: Pale sent arrows flying, while Irene cast Divine Protection and Blessings. Romuna cast powerful spells, not hesitating to start off with the strongest ones.

"Fire Field!"

In order to catch the fast-moving Skeleton Knight, she used an area-of-effect spell.

VOOOOSH!

Flames began to spread from the spot where the Skeleton Knight stood. Weed and Surka had to move quickly to escape the fire. In that spare moment, Weed put away the Clay Sword, boots and gloves and equipped the Iron Sword. He wished he could use the Repair skill on them, but the dire situation only allowed him enough time to unequipped the item.

"I doubt it'd die from just this," said Romuna confidently. Fire Field simultaneously dealt heavy damage to a large number of enemies. Besides Weed's sword skills, the biggest source of power in the party was Romuna's Fire Mastery.

Out of all the skills that improve the power of fire spells and effects, Fire Mastery was the 8th most effective. Nevertheless, nobody believed that this was enough to kill an enemy over level 100 like the Skeleton Knight.

Soon the flames dissipated, revealing the Skeleton Knight still standing where it had been before. Its blade was glowing red-hot, and fire poured from its empty eye sockets and ribs, giving it the appearance of a Flaming Skeleton Knight. Though it had taken quite a bit of damage, it was still very much alive.

"These... humans..."

The Skeleton Knight ran forward to attack. Weed confronted the creature, confident this time. He had nothing to fear now that he was using the Iron Sword instead of the Clay Sword.

"Sculpting Blade!"

Weed's sword danced gracefully as it tore into the Skeleton Knight. Romuna's magic, Surka's fists and Pale's arrows also hit their mark in quick succession.

"Grr...."

The Skeleton Knight was still going strong, and the fight began to take a dangerous turn. Weed's mana had not recovered since the last battle; he could not even execute a single sword skill. So far, Weed had dodged the Skeleton Knight's attacks with just his nimble movements, but had not been able to deal any significant damage. The other party members were in similar situations.

Having spent all their mana, they were just barely surviving. Within minutes, the situation got worse.

"I'm completely out of mana. I'm afraid I can't heal anymore... I'm sorry." Irene's words drove everyone to despair. Though Weed and Surka could still fight, once they died, the others would be sitting ducks.

'In that case...' Weed decided to use the most powerful finishing move he knew.

"Sword Kaiser!"

Sword Kaiser is the Imperial Formless Sword Techniques' final form. However, this was just a nickname that Weed had created. He would have to wait and see if it was powerful enough to truly deserve the title "Kaiser of Swords."

\*Nnnng...\*

Thin blue lines of light began to emit from the Iron Sword and surround Weed's body. Weed instantly drew the Skeleton Knight's full attention, however, its focus was the Iron Sword itself, which seemed to have grown big enough to reach the sky.

\*Shoom!\*

The sword compressed the air gathering explosive power. As Weed prepared to stab, most of Weed's sword skills usually involved slashing. Stabs, on the other hand, were more powerful, but had their own set of problems. If the stab missed, there was a huge risk of leaving an opening for an attack.

However, swinging is added weight to the blade, subtly changing the balance between the wielder's waist, wrist and footsteps. Weed knew how to use this change to his advantage to dodge enemy attacks, and counter them by integrating offense and defense.

This was how Weed managed to fight stronger monsters, despite having lower health and defense compared to other players. If not for this strategy, even the fight against the Skeleton Soldier would have been a struggle.

Even though it was only a step or two away, Weed could feel all his health and mana draining out of his body and flowing into the tip of his sword. The Skeleton Knight's jaw dropped in awe of Weed's power.

'Done'

Just that momentary glimpse of the skill's power was enough to satisfy Weed. However, even before the attack hit the Skeleton Knight, Weed felt the shock of the impact.

\*Boom!\*

Dirt and dust flew everywhere along with the deafening sound of an explosion.

Soon the dust cleared to reveal Weed standing his ground, battered.

'How's this possible?'

Sword Kaiser was a monstrous skill that consumed 2000 mana. If there was not enough, the difference was paid in health points. Executing it had left Weed with less than 50 HP.

"Wh-where is it?"

Weed began heading towards the Skeleton Knight.

Skeleton Knight!

The Iron Sword was jammed into its abdomen. Cracks spread from that spot until the entire body fell to pieces. In no time at all, the party rushed over.

"We worked so hard to beat this guy..."

Surka lowered her head, exhausted. They went through so much to defeat the Skeleton Knight, but the bastard only dropped an Iron Ore, a few silvers and a single Bone. Though the party had risked their lives on plenty of occasions, the first time for anything was always the hardest. Not to mention they had entered this fight in poor conditions.

Just like Weed, everyone had fought while being nearly out of mana. From then on, Romuna cast her Alarm spell when fighting skeletons, to check if a Skeleton Knight was approaching. When they were in decent condition, they would fight it. If not, they would avoid it.

In another dungeon or cave, they may have felt pressure to fight in unfavorable conditions due to competition for kills. But luckily, Weed and his party were the only players in this dungeon.

This, however, meant danger, because there was a surplus of monsters!

It was these kinds of situations that Weed liked best.

The moment they entered the dungeon, the unique ability of Moonlight Sculptors had been activated. In the sunlight, Weed's skills were not at their fullest. In the shadow of the night, or in the depths of dungeons, the true power of his class manifested, increasing his abilities by about 30%.

In addition, Weed had already read the Skeleton Knights' fighting patterns using his innate combat ability. The bastards were no longer much of a threat now that he knew exactly when to dodge. This knowledge alone halved the damage he took. Pale and Surka had Romuna's support, as well as Irene's Bless spell, therefore, solo Skeleton Knights could do nothing but quietly hand over their bones and disappear.

"Hahaha."

Weed grinned as he watched the skeletons walking about. He could not help but smile since all he could see was potential EXP points and items!

"Kekeke."

"Hehe"

"Hahaha."

The whole party began to laugh.

To think that the sight of walking skeletons could make them so happy! The swords that Skeleton Soldiers carried, though not all Clay Swords, could be sold at a better price than the Iron Sword. One just had to repair it and then sell it for instant money. It was a fantastic hunting ground since the drops included shields, gloves and sometimes even breastplates. And since the drop rate was doubled, it was no surprise that Weed's inventory was soon full. Solo Skeleton Knights, despite their high level, were no longer a concern to Weed and his party. However, Death Knights, which sometimes wandered past, were their biggest concern.

"Hu...man. A... human's... scent... from here..."

A Death Knight, clad in dark grey armor, appeared on horseback. Weed and his party, who had just been killing skeletons and looting items, nervously hid behind a stone.

No matter what they did, there was no way they could defeat a Death Knight, known to be over level 200. The difference in levels was so great that their attacks would be considered misses even if they hit their mark.

In Royal Road, not only users, but NPCs as well, could grow stronger. A Death Knight that reached its second advancement had formidable skills.

This Death Knight, called Royan, had dark energy pouring out of his helm. Death Knights were named monsters and so each of them had a name of their own.

"The... scent... of a human... Oh... I... don't have a nose."

Death Knight Royan looked around for a bit, then slowly left to search a different area. Even after the Death Knight left, the sound of its horse's hoof beats could be heard for some time.

"Whew."

"It's gone."

Weed and his party breathed a sigh of relief. Nothing else could strike as much fear in them as the presence of the Death Knights that sometimes came around.

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## Chapter 5 : The One Who Does the Worst

Weed and his party members managed to safely gather the Skeleton Knight bones from the first floor of Memphis Hall and complete their quest.

However, there was bad news as well. Apparently, Pale, Romuna and Irene were real life friends who lived in the same neighborhood. In fact, Surka was Romuna's younger sister. They had not mentioned anything so as not to make Weed feel awkward. But now, they had to reveal the truth.

"Sorry... our parents..."

"It seems we won't be able to get online for a while."

They had already become addicted to Royal Road and played continuously to the point of even skipping school but their parents, who had been on vacation, soon found out. Obviously, they were all grounded.

"You guys... are playing games instead of doing homework?"

"GO TO SCHOOL RIGHT NOW!"

The log-in licenses to the expensive capsules were thus confiscated, and their requests for extended leave from school were cancelled. But luckily they had learnt their lesson from watching Weed that success depended on the ability to find profit even in an unfavorable situation! They simply made their parents log onto Royal Road asking them to just experience it for themselves.

A new player could go outside the castle in four weeks. Their parents, however, were completely satisfied with staying confined. After all, it was a perfect rendition of a fantasy world.

The parents had grown up playing games and reading fantasy novels. But when they got jobs and started raising children, they were no longer able to do these things. This here, however, was a whole new universe. The paradise they've been dreaming of.

This game is like a whole new world where they can escape from their work and business without going to faraway country.

"Games are not all that bad."

"It's certainly fun."

"By the way, Jungee's mom, I heard you got a 'quest' at the Weapons Shop?"

"Yes, it's really more of a chore. I have to buy five Whetstones for the shop..."

"Do you have enough money?"

"Yep. I got 3 silvers to buy them. Whetstones are 50 coppers, so I'll be left with 50 coppers to spare."

"Share with us!"

The parents started at Serabourg Castle all together. They wandered around together, doing quests and befriending the NPCs.

Like that, four in-game weeks went by but in the real world only a week had passed. Now the parents were free to go in and out of the castle. When Pale and Surka had told them they could now leave the castle their parents just laughed.

"Come on... how can we hunt monsters?"

"Hunting is for you youngsters."

"We like staying in the castle and helping people, doing chores for money, which we can then use to buy good food."

But upon leaving the castle out of curiosity, the parents' attitudes changed dramatically. The following was the conversation that transpired between Romuna and her parents.

"Bastard Swords deal more damage than Long Swords... Why is that?"

"Because it's a two-handed sword. It's big and heavy, so you can't swing it as fast."

"So you mean instead of several small hits, it's one strong hit?"

"Yep."

"That's the kind of weapon I want... But the Bastard Sword costs over 10 gold from the shop..."

"Should I buy one for you?"

"Well... I'll only say this now... But how much do you think we went through raising you? When you were just a baby, we provided you the best food and covered you in the best clothes. Since we care so much about you, we don't really want to force you to..."

Pale's situation was quite similar. His parents were schoolteachers and thus very strict. When he was young, he could not so much as breathe loudly in front of his parents. His father, who had been an Army Ranger in his youth, had developed significant charisma from his years in the military. On the night he left the castle for a short time, Pale had the following discussion with his father over dinner:

"Hmm, it seems those damn foxes are very strong."

"...?"

Pale, whose real name was Oh Dongman, was thinking hard to figure out what his father was saying.

His father hinted once again. "Damn foxes. They're too strong."

Only then did it occur to Oh Dongman.

"They're a bit challenging at first. If you don't have any equipment, that is."

"I do have some..."

"You didn't try to fight them on your own, did you?"

"I did..."

"Well of course it's hard if you try to fight the foxes alone. At your level, Dad, it's almost impossible"

"Th-then you mean you can beat them? Foxes?"

"Of course."

Oh Dongman's father grasped his son's hands."Avenge your father!"



Like that, the parents were also sucked into the world of Royal Road. Since neighboring families were also playing the game together, Royal Road became hot topic at town meetings and family gatherings.

Now, instead of discussing real estate and finance, parents chatted about Royal Road over drinks. Apparently, there were many people their age that played the game. They had, in fact, been late to discover the joy of Royal Road.

Hyun had long since predicted that a day like this would come. In most games, the value of items dropped over time. Same for currency like gold or silver. This was natural since the average levels of users rises over time. However, if the users are not confined to 10 to 20 year olds, and if adults who are set for life become addicted to Royal Road, the value of the game's currency would not diminish.

When there was a great item, people started a bidding war. They bought weapons, armor and accessories the same way they bought good cars.

This actually had more merit than in the real world. If one went into battle wearing good equipment, then they could actually feel themselves becoming stronger and taste the sweetness of victory.

As time went by, more middle-aged users appeared, buying items at increasingly high prices as if they were buying race cars. This was also how the parents were lured into playing Royal Road.

Due to this, Pale and the party were no longer able to train in Lavias.

"Sorry, but we have to help our parents. At least until they adjust to the game..."

Pale spoke without hiding his disappointment. Weed understood why they had to go. It was unavoidable since they were doing it for their parents. However, Weed still had things to do, so he stayed behind alone in Lavias.

"328,200 won spent on food this month. I heard the price of rice is increasing. But we should still avoid imported rice..."

Hyun was writing on his accounts ledger.

He did not want Hayan or his grandmother to eat American rice, which might be genetically modified. Regardless of how cheap it was, it just simply could not be trusted.

"We've been spending too much. I should stop using the recipes I had learnt online. Next is the heating... but there's no way to save money on that because of grandma."

Hyun checked all the expenses of the month. He had shopped for groceries, cooked food, cleaned the house and handled the money all on his own.

Only a meager 90 million remained of his family's entire fortune after the loan sharks seized 3 billion. At one stage, his anger had led to many sleepless nights but in the end he was able to calm himself. That was all in the past. He even felt somewhat relieved knowing it was all over. He would have continued to suffer had the debts not been paid off.

They hounded Hyun for eight years, waiting for Hyun to become an adult so they could force him into dangerous work like drug dealing or worse – murdering members of rival groups. If Hyun was caught, they could just bribe the police and frame him for all their crimes. That was how they avoided most of their troubles with law enforcers.

Hyun had lived such a troubled childhood that the press and public would simply assume it was only natural for him to have committed these crimes.

One might even say such people deserved to be punished since there was no hope of salvation for them. But the wiser would understand the dangers these people had endured. Surely they too were afraid of going to jail? After all, what would happen to their families if they were arrested?

He only had his grandmother and his little sister.

The thought of them waiting for Hayan to become an adult was truly frightening. Or perhaps they would not even bother to wait that long. Young women sold for better prices, after all. In Hyun's case, a young man dealing drugs and murdering other gang members would undoubtedly draw attention.

Most people cannot fathom why a young boy would go as far as to deal drugs and assassinate gang members. Perhaps they're forced into it, or perhaps they're being framed.

If Hyun had gone to jail in such a manner, leaving his baby sister to live a hard and cruel life, he might have gone insane. Clearing the debt prevented all that from happening.

"90 million won. Plus another nine million if we add the five that we got from selling the old house and the four million we saved for emergencies."

However, they had spent 50 million on a new house. They were able to buy a house for that little because it was in a less desirable neighborhood. Though they had 49 million won remaining after that, they had spent around 20 million over the last year. Looking back, it was an incredible loss. To begin with, the capsule for playing Royal Road cost 10 million, and the monthly subscription fee was 300,000. The rest had gone to basic living expenses and Hayan's school fees.

"29 million won... Just about enough to last around 2 more years."

Hyun, dressed in a uniform, fell to despair. It was time to start living an even thriftier lifestyle.

"Oppa, I'm home!"

At that moment, Hayan opened the door and entered the room. Surprised, Hyun quickly hid his accounts book and bank book inside his uniform.

"You're early. Your grades come in today, right?"

"Yeah, here it is."

"Let's see..."

Hyun impatiently opened the report card. This was an important moment for Hayan, who was in her second year of high school.

"3rd place in your class, 14th place in your grade... Your rank went up a bit since last time."

"Of course! Whose sister do you think I am?"

"Well, let's leave it at that."

"What's with that tone?"

Hayan pouted.

Hyun then looked at the list of prospective colleges at the bottom of the report. Korea University was at the top of the list, with a 98% chance of her being accepted. Until a short time ago, she would hang out with kids who might have been a bad influence, but Hayan still had a good brain. Once she returned to being his gentle little sister, her grades improved rapidly. Eventually, it became almost certain that she would be able to get into university.

'Still...'

One could spend over 10 million won a week going to college. Not just paying for classes, but transportation, food and books, so that she can keep up with her peers.

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"These test results are very good. Eyesight isn't bad, and the liver and kidneys are very healthy."

"How is the marrow?"

"Great. Though for a bone marrow transplant, there needs to be a matching recipient. But I'm sure a buyer will appear soon. The reactions of the intestines are very good, and the bloodstream is also free from infections."

Hyun listened to each and every word spoken by the doctor.

"Then the tests are over?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Please send me the documents. I will sell whatever makes me the most money fast. But let me wait 1 year and 4 months. If I still need the money then, I'll get the surgery."

"I will send the documents."

Coming out of the hospital, Hyun didn't feel any better hearing he was physically healthy.

Selling organs.

He had discovered this hospital through the black market. 50 million won for a single eyeball, 30 million for a kidney. Though livers and bone marrow needed a compatible recipient, they could be sold for about 20 million won each. He had only about 1 year and 4 months left.

Royal Road would become money, he was certain of that. However, he needed to consider the alternate possibilities. If Hayan needed more money to go to college, Hyun was prepared to sell his body parts.

Royal Road, a game to be enjoyed.

But Hyun could not afford the luxury of being so carefree. He had to force himself to work harder to earn more money and become Royal Road's richest man.

'Lee Hayan, you must succeed my unfulfilled dreams. I will make sure you won't have to make the sacrifices that I have had to make.'

Hyun, wearing worn-out clothes, came back home muttering like a possessed man. He did not care what happened to him. Losing one eye would not affect his life much, not when it came to earning money.

He wanted to make sure that at least his sister would grow up cheerfully away from the harshness of life.

If one went through too much hardship, a shadow would appear across the face. It is inevitable since they would be different from those who grew up in a good environment. The mind would weaken, giving way to fear which in turn erodes self-confidence. Out of greed, Hyun had tried hard even at a young age to attain the confidence and intellect attributed to rich kids.

Even if he himself could not eat or be clothed properly, he would make sure his little sister would never need to be jealous of others. There aren't many men who would do this for their younger sister. Maybe not all older brothers are like this, but Hyun's feelings for his little sister were unrivaled. She wasn't just his little sister.

Hayan had lost her parents at a young age. Since then, the one who cared for her and raised her was not the busy grandmother, but Hyun himself.

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Now, there was no Irene's holy magic, nor Romuna's AOE spells or alarms. Surka's relentless punches were nowhere to be found, nor were Pale's lightning-fast range attacks. Nevertheless, Weed still had himself.

Hunting in a party was fine, but with more people arguments were inevitable, wasting time. In the worst case, the hunt ended before it could even begin.

In comparison, hunting solo had the benefit of simplicity. There was no pointless wasting of time and proved great for raising skill points. It was better to fight solo to improve Sword Mastery and other combat techniques.

"Grr, human!"

A Skeleton Knight, radiating battle aura, swung its sword. The armored Skeleton Knight's with its quick moves were undoubtedly intimidating, but Weed's moves were also unique. Gliding smoothly, he dodged the Skeleton Knight's attacks as he slowly whittled away his opponent's health. As a result, the Skeleton Knight's movements began to slow.

"Sculpting Blade!"

Finally, Weed's sword shattered the Skeleton Knight's ribcage. The light faded from the hollow eyes, an affirmation of death. Fights in Royal Road were very realistic. The special effects for things getting broken or smashed were flawless.

A solo player had great opportunities to boost the Strength stat. This particular stat determined the power behind attacks, just like in the real world. A player used that power when fighting monsters. Maximum damage was not dealt if attacks did not employ strength. For example, a punch thrown while running away had much lower destructive power as opposed to a punch thrown at a close range. Therefore, damage was determined by how much one could control his own power. Posture, muscle use, proximity, and explosion of power.

Royal Road was a virtual reality game that allowed players to exploit an enemy's weakness. Players of Royal Road, like veteran warriors, were keenly aware of their own strength. Not just via numbers on their stat window, but by actually experiencing their own destructive power. There was such joy in destruction! Of course, Weed was no exception.

He dedicated himself to practicing swordsmanship for a year in order to master accuracy, dodging and the basics of battle. Through his many practice matches, he became unafraid of battles to the point of actually enjoying fights against strong opponents.

The sword became his way and his tool. The sword was the best tool to use to understand the basics of movement and fighting. Of course, a person who started Royal Road without learning swordsmanship or martial arts could still become familiar with fighting skills. Actually, that was how most players did it, thinking of it as just another part of the game to get used to. But their perspective was different.

The tree whose roots run deep will grow taller. A player who fought monsters without a foundation in swordsmanship could only grow up deformed. Weed had practiced swordsmanship for a year before ever facing a monster! And by fighting progressively stronger monsters, his skills improved. This was the reason Weed was even stronger than his stats suggested.

"Hmm... With this, I have all the items I need to complete the quest."

"Whew... I should just replenish the mana." Weed's mana was half depleted, so he decided to take a brief break.

Since Weed was doing the work of many people on his own, he was always on the alert, never truly relaxing. While he waited for his mana to replenish, he sat and sculpted with enthusiasm. The sculpture he was making was in the shape of a crow.

Making a sculpture for the first time significantly raises both the Art stat and Sculpture Mastery. Since Weed had decided to make each new sculpture unique, his Art stat and Sculpture Mastery were rising quickly. His goal was to make sculptures for each Avian tribe in Lavia.

Weed returned to Lavia and distributed the sculptures he had made to the Avians.

"This sculpture is the only one of its kind in the entire world. I sculpted all your appearances with my own hands!"

"Thanks."

Each Avian received a sculpture that resembles them. As they took them, they said, "I can't take this for free."

"How much do you want me to give you?"

Each time they asked, Weed gave the same reply. "Let's not complicate our relationship by getting money involved. But I'm very interested in Lavias. Could you tell me something about this city?"

"Mmm... Then I'll tell you about the Northern Nest..."

"I'll tell you about the habits of the undead in the underground."

The Avians' stories became an important source of information. Though they were mostly just useless gossip, sometimes there was information about quests or hunting grounds.

Weed went to the Crow, who stood in front of the armor shop.

"What is this?"

"I made this sculpture for Crow-nim."

"Hoh, thank you," Crow said, flapping his wings in appreciation. Then he spoke up, as if a thought had just occurred to him. "Have you ever gone to the Dead Warrior's Cave?"

"The Dead Warrior's Cave?"

"Yes, if you come out of Memphis Hall and walk north for thirty minutes, you can see the entrance. Careful, though, there are Ghouls, Skeleton Mercenaries and Dullahan there. You won't survive if you go in without proper preparations."

In Royal Road, levels rose faster when fighting monsters above your own level. Skeleton Soldiers and Mages were no longer a match for Weed, and he was getting bored of the Skeleton Knights that only wandered around alone.

Weed prepared his bag with an abundance of medicinal herbs, food and fresh water. On the Continent, Weed would only need things like condiments and spices, since he could find edible plants or catch and cook animals with his Cooking Skills. But since Memphis Hall had only the Undead, he had to pack food.

On his way to the grocery store he met an Avian resembling a parrot. "Oh, a human traveler. Come, come!"

"Nice to meet you," replied Weed with a sigh.

'What a bird-brain.'

Weed had met this Avian resembling a parrot a while ago, and of course given him a sculpture as a token of friendship. He had liked it very much at the time. But a few days later, Weed visited him again and he had forgotten all about Weed.

When Weed tried to remind him about the sculpture, he angrily told Weed not to talk nonsense. He then called Weed a thief and threw him out. Frustrated, Weed visited him yet again and was greeted warmly as a customer. That was when Weed realized something about the Avians.

'They have terrible memory!'

Don't people say that a goldfish can't remember anything beyond three seconds?

These Avians were better than goldfish, but the fact remained that they possessed the undersized brains of birds. They forgot Weed's existence even after he had introduced himself multiple times. Because of this, Weed's strategy to make friends with them wasn't working.

He ended up having to get everything he could out of them right then while they were still being friendly. "I came to buy beans, sesame seeds, corn, walnuts, fish, leeks, pork, peanuts and spinach."

"Oh, is that so?"

The parrot-looking avian took out foods one by one as Weed ordered them and checked them several times before saying, "That'll be 19 gold."

"Here it is. Ah, but I only have 18 gold and 50 silver. Can I give you the rest the next time I come?"

The Avian merchant took a long look at Weed.

"You are not a merchant. I couldn't give you a discount because you're not experienced in bartering. You are a somewhat famous adventurer, but not that famous. But you have artistic talent. I can't deny someone who may be the next famous artist. I'll trust you and take that 50 silver next time."

Weed left with his goods, having paid 50 silver less.

The foods he bought could raise mana temporarily, so of course the price would be high. Now the question was whether or not the parrot-like Avian would remember to ask for the 50 silver. Seeing as he had forgotten the 40 silvers weed had promised him last time, it seemed unlikely.

With that, the first step of his preparations ended. Next he had to hone his fighting skills.

"Stat window!"

Status Window	
Avatar: Weed	Type: Neutral
Level: 109	Job: Legendary Moonlight Sculptor
Title: None	Fame: 365

Health: 5260	Mana: 1521
Strength: 335+20	Agility: 305+20
Vitality: 89+20	Wisdom: 16+20
Intellect: 24+20	Fighting Spirit: 143+20
Stamina: 174+20	Endurance: 55+20
Art: 84+100	Leadership: 74+20
Luck: 5+20	Offence: 231
Defense: 76	
Magic Resistance: None+ 20 points added to All Stats	
+ 80 points added Art.	
+ 30% increase to Stats on Moonlit Nights.	
+ Gained ability to equip class specific items.	
+ Gained ability to learn all craft skills to the stage of a master. Crafting skills are optional. Advanced skills available.	
+ Decrease in Mana Consumption for the Sculpting Blade technique based on level of Sculpting Mastery.	
+ Gained ability to learn secret skills based on your level in Sculpture Mastery.	
+ Fame increase upon creation of unique sculptures of artistic value.	

Weed's Level was over 100. When Weed and his party discovered Memphis Hall and received double experience points, they had concentrated on hunting the whole time.

They decreased their sleep time by two hours, and even stayed connected while they slept. This way, Weed had gotten to level 95. Hunting solo, he had raised it to 109.

His stats had been greatly boosted thanks to the level gains. His Mana was now high enough to allow him to use the 4th Imperial Formless Sword Technique, Sword Dance; though only once.



The only unsatisfying part was that there had been no increase in Leadership. This skill rose not only when giving orders to NPCs, but also when one was a party leader. However, since he had been hunting alone, there had been no way to improve his Leadership skills. Certain other skills had also increased by very little.

Cooking: Level 8 — 45%
Sculpting: Level 9 — 99%
Repair: Level 7 — 25%
Intermediate Handcraft: Level 2 — 6%
Swordsmanship: Level 8 — 88%
Archery: Level 5 — 98%
Sculpting Blade: Level 7 — 49%
Imperial Formless Sword: Comprehension — 5%
First Aid: Level 7 — 11%
Item Identification: Level 5 — 14%

Sculpting was about to rise to mid-level. As for Sculpting Blade, the mana cost had significantly decreased after reaching level 7.

He had used Sword Kaiser a few times lately but for hunting solo, it was more effective to use the Sculpting Blade, due to its ability to cut through the unseen. This was critical when fighting the Undead as it effectively severed the soul. This sword technique was, therefore, akin to holy magic in its ability to destroy the Undead.

"Not bad."

Weed smiled as he headed toward the market to buy antidotes, medicinal herbs and bandages.

His eyes grew sad at the thought of spending money again. Truthfully, he had never bought items before. He made his own food, and sometimes even sold it.

Sculptures carved from cheap materials could be sold for a gold or two. Naturally, this was not a small sum.

When he was with Pale and the others, he always told them he had only 30 gold, even after taking his portion of the loot. But his profit from selling sculptures and food was 200 gold! He had accumulated 650 gold through hunting, selling loot and collecting quest rewards.

But to be in position to spend money was greater agony than being penniless. Weed's shoulders drooped and his face looked like one facing death whenever he went into a store.

Especially when paying, he seemed like a person having a near death experience. Therefore, no one could comprehend why his heart ached so, or why he was always short a few silvers.

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## Chapter 6 : The Meaning Behind Royal Road

Weed now knew the first floor of Memphis Hall like his own home. He knew perfectly well where the dangerous Death Knights patrolled, and the best spots to hunt Skeleton Knights.

Being a solo hunter without a party, what Weed dreaded the most was an ambush right when he had low health and mana. For this reason, Weed prepared a few hideouts where he stashed plenty of bandages and herbs.

He had figured out safe spots to rest and places where he could most effectively target his enemies. Bandages and herbs were easily obtained, however the knowledge of the hideouts was priceless. He had selected these locations after countless trial and error. But afterwards, without regrets, he had cleared out those spots.

"It's here, huh." After going through the Northern area, Weed finished exploring the entire region.

You have completed Memphis Hall B1 Floor Map for the first time.  
Your Fame has increased by 20 (+20 Fame)

When Weed first came to the City of Heaven, he had bought a map. Later the places he traveled to were added to this map. The Map of Memphis Hall's basement was now an item which could be sold for quite a high price at the General Store or to other users. There was no way he would pass up this opportunity to get easy money.

Weed left Memphis Hall and headed for the Cave of Dead Warriors. It wasn't a difficult place to find. The moment he descended into the cave, he heard eerie noises.

'What is this?' he could sense a light draft and the low growl of something dangerous. Murky darkness filled his vision and the noises were getting louder.

'I don't feel so good about this.'

Weed moved cautiously keeping his right hand on his sword just in case something popped up out of the shadows.

'So I'm not the first one to discover this place. I suppose the people, who first discovered Lavi's also discovered this dungeon.'

A short distance away, Weed came upon an undead blocking his path.

"Human! Are you a knight?"

It was a huge, muscular knight with a body much bigger than a Skeleton Knight or a Lizard Man. He had broad shoulders and dangerous looking arms, but above the neck, there was nothing. The

missing head was instead carried by his left arm. He was the most unique monster among all the undead – a knight that carried around his own head. It was this head that had spoken.

'A Dullahan, huh.'

Weed recognized his opponent – an undead around level 140!

"I am not a knight." Weed replied.

"Then what are you?"

"I am a Sculptor."

"Scul-Sculptor?"

Incredible disappointment filled the Dullahan's face. Dullahans loved to improve their skills through combat. They were a type of knight that made the Skeleton Knights pale in comparison.

"You're a Sculptor? What a disappointment," the Dullahan mumbled.

Weed was used to being underestimated because of his class. A Sculptor must look so pathetic that even the undead ignored them!

The creator of Royal Road was Unicorn Corporations. There was much controversy when they released the game. It was the first ever virtual reality game. A reality that was 100% based off of fantasy. But why was it named Royal Road? There had been so many names to choose from. Even though Royal Road received worldwide attention, its title was somewhat disappointing. It wasn't a name that stuck with you when you heard it.

But there was a reason Unicorn Corporation chose the name Royal Road. No one on earth had been able to conquer and rule over every continent and ocean. This game was the road to that great empire. The unified empire that not even Genghis Khan, Napoleon, or Alexander the Great could achieve. The game paved the way for people to achieve that dream.

It was a hope for something never before seen in the history of mankind; an Emperor who would conquer every single continent. It taught people to dream, to hope to be whatever they want to be, and this hope would drive them towards their goal. This was the true meaning behind "Royal Road".

The first to conquer the entire land would be given prize money: 10% of Unicorn Corporations sales for one month. This was an enormous sum. In Korea alone, millions played the game.

Globally, Japan, Europe and America combined; the users amounted to over 100 million. Royal Road cost \$300 a month to play. It was difficult to calculate such a huge amount of money. 10% of that would make someone instantly rich.

That was why most players in Royal Road chose fighting-type classes. Most users chose to advance from Swordsman to Knight, seeing battle-related classes as the fastest path to becoming the Emperor. Blacksmiths and other trade classes were looked down upon. There was no need to even mention Artists, Chefs, or Sculptors who couldn't even fit in with the trade classes. It was their fate to be belittled and ignored.

'Just like my own life,' Weed thought.

Without a word, Weed drew his Clay Sword. An icy blue aura emanated from it. The Clay Sword had a special ability to slow down an enemy's movements upon a direct hit.

"Uurrrg!" The Dullahan charged, swinging his axe fast. Weed raised his Clay Sword, parrying the attacks.

\*Slam!\*

Clay Sword's durability has decreased.

The message was accompanied by the shock of the impact that made Weed's arms shudder. He had just finished repairing that sword, but this one attack was able to lower its durability. It seemed that the Dullahan's specialty was his brute strength.

"I can't lose. Sculpting Blade!" Weed attacked relentlessly.

The two exchanged blows rapidly. Weed, charged with the intent to kill, aimed for the vital points. Battles had to be finished as quickly and simply as possible. That was the only way to minimize the risk of enemy reinforcements showing up.

For Weed, who hunted alone, another Dullahan or monster appearing would mean nothing but trouble. Besides Weed could sculpt as a side job while he rested. This meant that he had to reduce the time spent fighting as much as possible.

\*Bash!\* The Dullahan used a skill with his axe swing, pushing Weed back a great distance.

"Devil's Strike!" The Dullahan roared, initiating a chain attack.

The axe, now launched into the air, and spun violently as it came flying. Although Weed ducked to avoid the blow, his HP dropped by 300 just from the wind pressure.

If he had used the Seven Celestial Footsteps, he could have dodged completely, however he chose to get hit.

The point was to raise his level of Defense while working on his Endurance.

Now it was Weed's turn.

"Triple!" The first strike missed, while the second, more destructive strike came from the opposite direction. The enemy managed to dodge both attacks, causing Weed to execute a powerful swing from the bottom-up.

By then the throwing axe had boomeranged back to its owner and the Dullahan thrust it forward to block Weed's third attack. At that instant, Weed's sword crisscrossed through the Dullahan's chest, making a total of five consecutive attacks. Triple had evolved as Weed's mastery of the skill increased.

The Dullahan had somehow blocked the first three attacks, but the next two lowered his HP by more than 20%. He went into a frenzy trying to push Weed back by repeatedly using his Bash

ability. But by now Weed had already worked out the skill's timing, and swiftly carved into the Dullahan's side.

"Aren't you dead yet? Sculpting Blade!" Milky white light surrounded Weed's blade.

Then came the merciless strikes!

The Dullahan's health points were decreasing rapidly as the strikes sounded.

He tried attacking, but Weed dodged them all.

Weed could anticipate the Dullahan's skills by watching his footsteps, and then dodge them by moving his upper body. Ultimately, the Dullahan wasn't a difficult enemy for him. The gap in levels might have been wide, but through jobs and training, Weed was above the Dullahan in terms of stats. Weed's Endurance stat was at the same level as the Dullahan's. Thanks to that, he had no disadvantage. Level 80 Skeleton Mages were actually more annoying.

Mages were troublesome to fight because they cast countless curses. When Irene the Priest was there, the curses were easily dispelled, but now Weed could only dispel the curses with potions after the battle was over. Each Curse Dispelling Potion cost three silvers. This sometimes took the profit out of hunting, so Weed hated Skeleton Mages the most.

"Uwwaggggh..." Sometime later the Dullahan's body disappeared in a gray light as his horse neighed shrilly.

"Phew... that was easier than I expected. But one of them can take down 40% of my Health, it would be dangerous if two of them challenged me at once."

Weed headed to a hidden corner to level his sculpting after he picked up the greaves the Dullahan dropped.

"Let's try sculpting a Dullahan."

Weed's mastery didn't increase as much by making sculptures he had made before. But making a sculpture for the first time increased Handicraft and Art skills significantly.

Weed took out Zahab's Sculpting Knife and a piece of wood and started to sculpt the figure of the Dullahan he just saw. He was so used to sculpting now that if he simply pictured it in his mind, he could carve it. The cave was silent save for the echo of Weed's sculpting.

"It would be great if my Sculpting level would rise to Intermediate..." Weed thought.

His current Sculpting skill was 99% to level 10. He had also made five sculptures of Avians, so he thought it was possible to level up.

"Please let me achieve Intermediate level!"

Weed wished as he finished the Dullahan's head.

The Dullahan sculpture was complete: A knight with a buff body, menacing eyes and a huge blade.

\*Ding!\*

Your Sculpting Skill has reached level 10, Intermediate.

You can now craft using special metals and gemstones (Pearl, diamond, ruby, etc.).

For your class, Moonlight Sculptor, the current skills and stats will be affected:

- Effect of Sculpting Blade has increased by +50%.
- Additional effects have been added to Sculpting blade's skill.
- Mana cost for Sculpting Blade has been halved.
- All stats have increased by 10.
- Your Fame has increased by 20.
- Art Stat has increased by 20.
- You have learned Skill: Power Break.

Weed shook with happiness. Words couldn't describe Weed's feelings at that moment.

The sadness and loneliness he was made to feel as he learned sculpting!

The humiliation and scorn he had to suffer because of his job as a Sculptor! Weed felt his rage vanish into thin air.

Finally, he had achieved Intermediate level Sculpting.

The job of Sculptor, which he had wanted to quit so badly at first, felt like the job he was destined for.

The Sculpting Blade skill had proven to have the greatest efficiency so far! Every time Weed used Sculpting Blade, his sculpting skill increased ever so slightly and since it was closely tied to Sculpting, the skill was enhanced as his Sculpting advanced to Intermediate.

"Hmm, an additional ability? Information. Skill. Sculpting Blade!"

Sculpting Blade Level 7 (50%): Zahab's visionary sword skill, carried on by those destined to carve the invisible or intangible.

Defends against magic of lower mastery than Sculpting Blade. When spells are absorbed, the caster only incurs 50% of original mana cost.

Cost: Sustained – 25 mana per second.

Weed could only laugh. For knights, mages were the most difficult opponents. Long-range magic attacks were very hard to dodge. But now Sculpting Blade was able to absorb this magic. Even if the opponent only used half the mana they had, it was hundreds of times better than getting hit.

"Since the mana cost for Sculpting Blade is reduced, maybe I could use it when executing Triple or Backstab."

Sculpting Blade was more of a buff than an attack. Combining Sculpting Blade with the Imperial Formless Sword Technique would cost an enormous amount of mana, but Weed believed the result would be unparalleled. Besides, there was always Sculpture Destruction.

"Information: Sculpture Destruction!"

Sculpture Destruction: Sculptor's skill

The anger involved in destroying a self-made sculpture is converted to strength for one day. Art stat will temporarily serve as a battle related stat. Warning: Fame will drop and the corresponding points will be deducted from Art stat.

Destruction of ordinary statue: Art stat x2 and conversion to STR. Art stat -1, Fame -20.

Destruction of fine statue: Art stat x4 and conversion to STR. Art stat -5, Fame -100.

Destruction of great statue: Art stat x6 and conversion to STR. Art stat -10, Fame -200

Destruction of masterpiece: Art stat x20 and conversion to STR. Art stat -30, Fame -1000.

The amount of Art stat converted to Strength depended on the quality of the sculpture destroyed.

Destroying a normal statue converted double the amount of Art stat into strength or dexterity for a day while destroying a fine or great statue would convert four or six times the Art stat into strength or dexterity.

This would be a commonly used skill for sculptors with low strength. Sculptors who only sculpt statues in the game would have a high Art stat, but it would be hard for them to hunt because of their battle stats. This skill allowed those Sculptors to change their Art stat to other stats but the problem lay in the Fame and Art stat penalty that accompanied its use.

The Art stat was hard to increase, meaning the skill had to be used cautiously. There was such an extreme penalty for destroying a statue that it felt very difficult and unsettling to use the skill.

In other words, the skill was a double-edged sword. Weed decided to stow it away and not use it if he could help it. Temporary strength was not true power. Even without Sculpting Destruction, Weed had become strong once his Sculpting skills reached Intermediate. All his stats had risen by 10 and Sculpting Blade's power had doubled as well.

Weed wasn't the only one to enjoy this advantage. Any trade skill such as cooking, tailoring, smithing, fishing, farming, held advantages such as stat, skill or Fame bonuses when proficiency went up. When it reached Intermediate, all stats gained 5 points; when proficiency reached Advanced, all stats gained an additional 10 points.

None yet knew how many points would be gained upon gaining Mastery in a skill. Any skill's proficiency rose based on the user. In Weed's case, he got 10 stat points; twice the amount gained by normal players, due to the secret class – Moonlight Sculptor – and thanks to his quest related to Zahab, Sculpting Blade had improved particularly well...

No one had ever mastered any of the production skills before because the path was too difficult. It had taken a Weed a lot of time and effort just to reach the intermediate level. It would be even more difficult to progress from Intermediate to Master. However, at that moment, Weed firmly decided that he would become Master in all trade skills.

Delicate aesthetic senses and burning passion for art had little to do with Weed, but he had a talent that no one else had: the talent of hard work.

The Cave of Dead Warriors was a hunting ground where Dullahan and Skeleton Mercenaries around level 120, and Ghouls around level 110 frequently appeared. Ghouls were lower level, but they always appeared in groups of four or five, and there were many kinds of ghouls. Upgraded or Named Ghouls sometimes had levels over 130.

Dullahans and Skeleton Mercenaries had great swordsmanship, so the battles were thrilling. But Ghouls usually just charged in, trusting their clumsy but strong defense.

Weed had to learn how to attack while dodging their vicious attacks.

"Good. This place is perfect."

Weed had chosen the Cave of Dead Warriors as his new hunting ground. Named monsters, whether they are Dullahan, Skeleton Mercenaries, or Ghouls, were a bit more dangerous, but fighting them had great advantages.

It was perfect for Weed, who fought mainly with fists or swords.

There was the odd Skeleton Mage here and there, but their magic was no longer effective. Blocking with Sculpting Blade nullified their magic; sometimes the spells would rebound, putting the mages in a difficult situation.

It seemed the rate of reflecting the magic depended on the mastery of Sculpting Blade. He needed to practice sculpting in order to raise it. Leveling his sculpting was now as important as gaining experience points and levels.

Weed, who was doing very well so far, still had one opponent he had to be wary of: the Death Knight. These monsters were over level 200 and appeared much more often in the Cave of Dead Warriors. They wandered about, never staying in any specific area. Weed had to hold his breath and move stealthily to hide from them. Death Knights had bad eyesight, so Weed could relax when he hid in a corner. He went so far as to dig some ditches and hide in them whenever a Death Knight approached.

"When did I become like this..."

When he had played Continent of Magick, every monster was weak against his max level character, but now he had to hide from Death Knights.

Nevertheless, Weed felt some satisfaction. With his high mana recovery rate and mastery in First Aid, Weed's down time was much lower.



Thanks to this, Weed was able to gain levels much faster. Plus there were much better item drops here compared to the first floor. So what if he had to do some lame things, Weed had come this far already, so going a little farther wouldn't hurt.

"Dullahan are the best monsters for hunting. But is there anything better? It'd be nice if there was something weaker than Death Knights but strong enough to give a lot of experience points..."

Weed moved cautiously not forgetting to make his hiding places in key areas. He didn't need anyone to teach him this, he simply persisted to adapt and survive like a cockroach.

After going through many Ghouls and Skeleton Mercenaries, Weed came upon a wide cavern where an underground river flowed gently.

Flowers and even some herbs were blooming all over. It was about time to rest since he had just been in a fierce battle against Skeleton Mercenaries. Weed refilled his water bottle and was just about to sit when he saw a silhouette. Upon further inspection, he found a woman sleeping in the middle of the dungeon, with nobody else around.

"Who are you?" she asked. Weed, who had been waiting for her to wake up, was startled.

"I'm Weed. Wh.. What about you?"

It was unpolished speech, not like him at all. Weed had never imagined that someone other than himself would be there.

And the look on her eyes as she woke... was exactly Weed's type.

"My name is Da'in," she said, smiling an aloof smile.

Hyun hadn't met many girls before. Of course, he had taken classes with girls, but he'd never spent time with one personally. It wasn't that he was unpopular. There were some girls who approached Hyun, saying that his downcast and detached aura was attractive. He found them foolish.

"You think this is cool? Try experiencing poverty yourself and you'll change your mind."

He hadn't gone on dates with girls either. Dining out, even just coffee cost money. Hyun found food samples from the grocery stores and home-cooked meals much more economical. What he really couldn't understand was why dating a girl involved spending enormous amounts of money every time there was some sort of anniversary.

Plus, when others went to the drive-in to watch movies, Weed climbed up a nearby telephone pole. The only time he watched TV was when somebody else had one. Of course, he'd picked up a TV that someone had thrown away, but he didn't watch it because it would run up the electricity bill. He only ever watched it around midnight when the electricity charges were much lower. The cheapskate Hyun, and therefore Weed, had almost no experience with girls.

Da'in. That name was deeply engraved into Weed's mind. Every man had a dream girl. Weed was no exception.

The woman of his dreams had long natural hair, a young, intelligent face, and a kind, attractive smile. But these were nothing but details.

If a girl could make him fall in love at first sight, then she was his dream girl. Weed developed a small crush on Da'in. That was it.

I don't trust anyone.

He hadn't completely trusted Pale or Surka either even though they had trained together. Humans changed.

They might appear to be friends at the moment but he highly doubted that they would take a bullet for him.

'Give as much as you take, no more and no less.' That was Weed's philosophy. He could not trust anyone except his family.

Weed's gaze sharpened.

"Da'in. How did you come here?"

Only Avians lived in the City of Heaven. Humans could not climb up there and judging by her clothing, she was an adventurer.

"Here? I've been here for three months already?"

Three months. A thought flashed into Weed's mind.

"By any chance, are you one of the adventurers who discovered the City of Heaven?"

"Yes, I was part of that group, but I don't want to talk about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm the only one left here."

"I see."

Da'in yawned gracefully and stretched.

"I am level 134 and a Shaman."

Her level was lower than Weed had guessed. He assumed she would be at least level 170 since she was alone in the Cave of Dead Warriors. Weed being there at only level 109 was also an anomaly. A regular player wouldn't have dared.

"What are you trying to say?"

"I mean if you are alone, let's form a party. What, you don't want to?"

"No, that sounds great."

Weed accepted, not just because Da'in looked somewhat like the girl of his dreams, or because he trusted her.

Weed, ever suspicious, couldn't trust a girl whom he just met just because she asked him to train in a party. But Weed liked to keep his enemies close.

The girl was suspicious. Besides, Weed had stored many items in his various hideouts within the dungeon so he couldn't just leave Da'in alone.

Shamans could use white magic to cast buffs that increased Strength, Agility and Speed, and black magic to decrease enemy stats. They could use offensive spells and healing spells, counteract poison and dispel curses. They could also wield swords and maces, meaning they had some physical combat skills.

In essence, they were the jack-of-all-trades! However, the shaman class was unpopular since they had a few skills in every aspect, but weren't outstanding in any of them. Their healing ability was weaker than a Cleric's, and the curses they cast were weaker than a Black Mage's. Their melee skills were comparable to that of an Archer with a sword instead of a bow.

Low HP, low Vitality and magic weaker than a Mage's. Stats couldn't be invested in just one area, but had to be equally distributed, so this was a class that couldn't do much. Weed had no expectations from Da'in. He just hoped she wouldn't hold him back! Maybe he could just ditch her after retrieving all the items from his hideouts.

"Grr!"

Skeleton Mercenaries appeared and Weed tensed. So far he had faced no more than three Skeleton Mercenaries at once.

No matter how great Weed's combat skills were, it was difficult to face five at once.

With his back turned, even one or two blows could add up to considerable damage, and he couldn't use first aid until the battle was over, so it would have been dangerous.

At that moment, Da'in raised her right hand and cast a spell.

"Light of courage descended from the ancients; give this hero the power to fight his enemy! Power up!"

Weed's body glowed with bright light and his strength was raised by nearly 100. Da'in then graciously raised her arms, as though she was awaiting an embrace.

"A breeze drifts past. Fight the enemy with a light heart. Light will be your steps. Up, spirit, Wolf"

Weed's Agility and Speed increased significantly. He took just one step towards the enemy and he felt as if he was running.

"You, fated to bring death, blood and carnage, the battlefield shall be your home! Bloodlust!"

Da'in's various Shaman buffs boosted Weed's stats, now he could easily take on five Skeleton Mercenaries. But at that moment Da'in cast curses on the Skeleton Mercenaries: Their speed and strength decreased, they could no longer heal their wounds and they lost their will to fight.

'No way can a Shaman's magic be this strong.'

Weed didn't understand the situation. After easily killing the five Skeleton Mercenaries, he didn't even pause to pick up the item drops before turning to question Da'in.

"Your magic is unbelievable for a level 134. How is that possible? If I don't understand the reason, we can't be in a party together."

He ran the risk of hurting her feelings, but she answered back with a happy smile.

"It's because of my hobbies."

"Hobbies?"

"Yes, please don't think I'm crazy. I don't like killing monsters, I just..." she spoke shyly.

"I use curses on monsters, holy magic, and sometimes ranged attack spells. After that when their HP drops, I cast Healing Hand on them..."

"On monsters?"

"Yeah, I just played around like that."

What Da'in was saying was shocking. She was level 134 but her magic was very advanced. So Da'in played around by cursing, then healing the Skeleton Mercenaries, Dullahan and Ghouls in the dungeon...

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## Chapter 7 : Nameless Statue of Lavi

Weed and Da'in.

Da'in's Bless spell raised Weed's abilities by an incredible amount, and at the same time weakened monsters. It was as if she had put wings on Weed, who was already incredible. Their teamwork increased their potential by near-impossible amounts.

Even so, Da'in did not kill monsters. This was no loss for Weed, since he could increase his skills in Swordsmanship when she did not take part in the fights.

Even so, I can't trust a person I met in a place like this.'

Weed was constantly worried that she might betray him, even as he fought. Having spent so much time there, Da'in knew a lot of things about Lavi. According to her, until just recently she had been going around Lavi gathering information. She had gone into the dungeon just around the time Weed's party arrived.

'Pretty unbelievable story,' Weed thought. But it was true that he had never encountered her in Lavi, so it must have also been true that she had stayed in the dungeon that long. Nevertheless, that was not reason enough to believe everything else she said.

"How about we change training grounds? I happen to know of a few undiscovered dungeons, though I haven't been to them yet." According to Da'in's investigations, there were at least eight undiscovered dungeons.

"When you say undiscovered dungeons, do you mean nobody has entered them yet?"

"Yes."

Weed cocked his head in confusion. "I don't understand."

Da'in was a member of the first party to ever enter the City of Heaven, and yet there were dungeons they hadn't visited? It was very hard to believe.

"There was no reason to, since everyone other than me was over level 200."

"So they didn't bother to enter the lower-level dungeons? Even so, I don't think anyone would purposely ignore a dungeon."

There were multiple benefits to discovering a dungeon, but the one that couldn't be ignored was the increase in Fame. A considerable amount of Fame was gained for discovering a dungeon, and exploring the whole map of it awarded even more Fame, and even money. Even if their levels were so high that there was nothing worth hunting, who would pass on that Fame? Da'in was hiding something about the party she had been part of.

"If you don't tell me, then I won't move from here."

"I can't tell you what they did..."

"Is it a secret?"

"Yes, I promised not to tell anyone... It's hard to explain, but I am telling the truth. You have to trust me."

Weed decided to let it go. There was nothing he could do to convince her to reveal the secret. Words that seemed frail had a higher chance of being true. Plus, they had just left the Cave of Dead Warriors to explore other dungeons. So at least she was being truthful about that.

- Mirkan Tower.
- Secret Area of Pan Lake.
- Baravall Coal Mine.
- Segmail Vista.
- Gaet Altar.
- Parrot Nest.
- Barlog Ruins.
- Sealed Cave of Margres the Destroyer.

These areas had been left unexplored. Weed and Da'in arrived at the region, out of sight from the city. Mirkan Tower seemed as if it had risen up from the clouds. As expected, Weed and Da'in became the first to discover the place. They were mainly up against flying monsters. Weed had Archery as his long-range attack skill. He used a tough strung bow that made good use of his stats to deal heavy damage.

For just 10 gold coins, users could buy special feathers near the tower and use them to fly for a whole month. Plus, Dungeon discovery meant double the experience points and double the item drops! Weed and Da'in explored and trained in Mirkan Tower, the Secret Area of Pan Lake and Baravall Coal Mine one by one. At the Barlog Ruins, Gaet Altar and Segmail Vista, the weakest

monsters were Death Knights. Nobody dared enter those areas and they had been sealed off. Nevertheless, with Da'in's help Weed made good progress and gained incredible amount of experience and items.

'Now, if I can just make this...'

Weed was glaring at two lobsters at that moment. Next to him, Da'in also stared down at the lobsters and gulped. Weed's Cooking Skill was 99% to reaching level 10, so he chose a special dish for the final 1%. The best a Beginner level Cook could dish out was seafood, that is, the famous lobster!

Of course, Hyun had never eaten lobster in his whole life. It was simply too expensive. One of the reasons he was so diligent in practicing his Cooking Skills was so he could taste food such as these.

The lobsters struggled, but they were no match for Weed's cold glare. Ultimately, they could only drop their antennae in defeat. Weed, however, was not trying to stare them down to death; he was trying to visualize that expensive lobster meat. Weed's hands shivered. Even in the game lobsters were rare and expensive. In Laviass they could be purchased for the hefty price of one gold each. If he had not explored the dungeons with double the item drop rate, he wouldn't have even have considered buying them.

'After I cook these suckers, I will be at Intermediate level Cooking.'

Weed's willful hands moved like lightning as he grabbed the lobsters' heads with his left hand and used Zahab's Engraving Knife in his right to slash them from head to tail. The lobsters' bodies split in half and Weed quickly rinsed off the sand and took out the eggs. Right away, he began to stir-fry it in a frying pan, along with the sauces and spices he had previously prepared. Soon steam was seen rising and the lobster was cooked to perfection. Finally, the lobster dish was done!

\*Ding!\*

Your Cooking Skill has reached Level 10, Intermediate

You can now cook a greater variety of entrees, and while satiated, various abilities are raised depending on the type of entree and ingredients used. (Example: Drake's egg, various herbs).

All Stats have increased by 5.

Your Fame has increased by 10.

You have learned Craft Skill: Wine-brewing.

Your Affinity with Earth has increased by 30.

Earth-based magic resistance has increased by +20%. Fire and Water-based magic resistance has increased by +10%.

His desire to reach Intermediate level Cooking Skill finally came true and the rewards were very satisfying. Equipment for raising magic resistance was quite expensive, but he could raise his magic resistance through his Cooking Skill.

"Wow that looks delicious."

Da'in, who had been waiting patiently for the food to be cooked, rolled back her sleeves and rushed towards it. Weed also hurried to eat his portion of the lobster.

Weed fought while Da'in assisted. The two dominated the dungeons. Da'in worked so hard at healing and casting buffs that Weed didn't regret forming a party with her. Da'in was a woman who became more mysterious the better he got to know her. When she spotted a monster, she cursed them multiple times all while looking at them with sorrowful eyes. Plus she was not careless with money or items. Whenever Weed tried to get a few more silvers, or even coppers, she noticed and pointed it out.

Near the Secret Area of Pan Lake, there were many places where herbs bloomed. There she bent down with no hesitation and dug up the herbs. A formidable survival instinct! Sometimes she would write a poem or sing a song. Her clear, refreshing voice rang out beautifully. Thanks to that, Weed could hunt joyfully.

'To think that it could be this much fun not being alone...'

No one else visited Laviyas. Pale and Surka messaged him, saying they had settled in a hunting ground at the Citadel of Serabourg. Since their parents were still new players, it was hard for them to leave.

At all times they were alone together. Plus, she was a woman who looked like the one in his dreams. As a man, it would be a lie to say his eyes never strayed toward her. At first, Da'in was all smiles, but sometimes a shadow crossed her face. However, it lit up again as she hunted and had her meals with Weed.

One day, Weed decided he wanted to become her friend. "Um... Do you want to hunt together from now on?" he asked.

But Da'in fell silent.

"I'm sorry, Weed-nim,"

She said after a while, with a serious expression on her face.

"What do you mean?"

"Once, I made a bad decision. I thought nobody loved me... I couldn't trust anybody."

"... Is that, by any chance, why you were left alone in Laviyas?"

"It's hard to explain the whole story, but yes, it's somewhat related. Anyway, I was encouraged by spending time with you, Weed-nim. Perhaps, I might find my place once again..."

"So?"

Weed was a bit frustrated.

It was good to hear that spending time with him helped her regain her courage, but hearing that she would go back made him feel like he had been used.

No one liked being used.

"I didn't mean it like that. After meeting you, I feel as if I can live on."

"No way. Do you..."

"Yes, I...am ill. Even though I can get an operation, it's not certain that it will make me better. I was postponing the surgery, but it's time to take the chance."

"....."

"Please don't look at me like that. I'll be fine. Destiny and coincidence are so similar it's sometimes hard to decide which it is. I don't want our meeting to be a coincidence. If it was destiny for us to meet, then we will meet again. I really hope I can meet Weed-nim again."

Da'in logged out. Weed felt empty after Da'in left him. He hadn't really spent much time with her because he was suspicious of her and concentrated on hunting. Maybe she never tried to hide her sickness. Weed was always busy. As soon as she logged on, he would drag her somewhere to hunt.

For over a month, they had barely conversed and just hunted. He felt regret. Maybe Da'in could never come back.

'If she never comes back, there won't be many people who would remember her. She was in Laviar alone and nobody came to look for her. I guess that's the reason why she spent her time cursing and buffing monsters.'

Loneliness and fear of death can only be understood by those who had experienced it.

Weed hunted, waiting for Da'in, but she did not come back even after three months passed in the game. In the real world, it had been three weeks. If it was a life-threatening surgery, it might take her months to recover.

'She will come back even if it takes her a year or two years. She promised me.'

Weed began to sculpt deep inside the dungeon.

'Even if she never returns, I will leave my memory here. To show that at least one person remembers her...'

After his Sculpting Skill had reached Intermediate level, he could use Zahab's Engraving Knife to cut boulders. Of course, that was only possible using Sculpting Blade. The engraving knife danced and two human figures were etched onto the rocky walls.

Weed moved boulders to the places where they had shared their meals and rested, and made pairs of sculptures out of them. Sometimes he etched drawings on the walls. Monsters would occasionally pester him, but Weed sculpted persistently.



His last piece was in the Cave of Dead Warriors where they had met each other for the first time: the cavern with the underground river flowing through it. The sleeping Da'in, and Weed finding her. A sculpture of them stood where they had shared their first memories.

You have completed Nameless Sculptures of Lavias.

Mysterious sculptures have appeared in Lavias!

These sculptures of treasured memories will become sanctuaries and guides in these dangerous dungeons.

The mysterious statues were made by an anonymous sculptor.

Artistic value: 300

Effect:

The calm aura around these sculptures will increase players' Vitality and Mana by 25%.

Movement Speed increases by 10%.

Monsters' Attacks have a 5% penalty.

The effects do not stack with other statues.

Number of Fine Pieces created: 2

Your Sculpting Skill has reached level 2. Your sculptures will become more detailed and delicate.

- Your Fame has increased by 20
- Art Stat has increased by 20
- Endurance has increased by 20
- Stamina has increased by 10

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## Chapter 8 : The Lost Treasure of Freya

"Huhuhuhu."

Weed perched atop a hill overlooking all of Lavias, and laughed in satisfaction as his cape danced in the wind. Hunting had raised his level to 175.

Gray Cape of the Dead:

Durability: 20/20.

Defense: 12.

The tattered cape of a skeletal warrior. Still provides some protection despite its poor condition.

Requires:

Level 150

150 Strength.

Effects: Increases speed when traveling long distances.

Graham's Steel Belt:

Durability: 25/25.

Defense: 7.

Has 10 quick slots for small items such as daggers, potions, antidotes, etc.

Requires:

Level 110.

200 Strength .

Effects: Quick slots for potions and antidotes automatically refill from inventory.

Graham's Leather Armor:

Durability: 30/30.

Defense: 25.

Light and hard, yet sturdy, armor infused with the soul of the Skeleton Knight Graham.

Requires:

Level 130.

300 Strength.

Effects:

+20% chance to evade magical or ranged attacks.

+20 Strength.

+5 Dexterity.

From fighting the undead, Weed received boots, gloves, and even rings. For every 30 Skeleton Knights he killed, he received Farrot's Ring, which improved mana regeneration by 10%.

Since Royal Road allowed players to equip rings on 8 fingers, and even allowed multiple on the same hand so long as they did not have opposing attributes. Weed had persevered until he had a copy of the ring on each finger.

The rings now increased his mana recovery rate by 80%, showing how many Skeleton Knights he had killed.

Weed camped spawns and mercilessly slaughtered any monsters that gave significant rewards in experience or items.

The powerful Skeleton Knights of Memphis Hall were simply no match for Weed.

With his new rings, he could use the Imperial Formless Sword Technique nearly twice as often, and his other equipment further improved his effectiveness. Thanks to the new sword, rings, and other equipment, Weed finally looked like a respectable adventurer.

'I feel like I'm flying with the wind. This freedom. This solitude.'

With his arms spread wide, Weed enjoyed the gusts of wind playing across his cape. But the world didn't let him relax.

The durability of your cape has been reduced.

Undead. None of their drops were normal. The items degraded quickly, even when not in use, and tended to have low maximum durability. Thus, although Weed looked great wearing all his items, appearances were deceiving.

Weed quietly untied his cape and put it down before him, then struck it saying, "Repair!" This action was sufficient for the task. After he tied his cape, Weed felt the wind once more, as if nothing had happened...

He had enjoyed this feeling in Continent of Magick. The aftertaste of clearing a dungeon; savoring the results of his own artistry. Now it was time to leave it all behind and continue onwards...

...Then a sudden gust pelted his armor with small pebbles.

The durability of your armor has been reduced.

It was the rare leather armor obtained from the Skeleton Knight called Graham. An item incomparable with newbie armor! Even better, it hadn't cost him a single coin!

"Repair!"

Weed was forced to constantly use his Repair skill as he returned to Lavias. Equipment with low durability was very fragile; so he might have looked quite dashing when fighting monsters, but in truth he was paranoid about damaging his items. Due to his inherent need to recycle, Weed persistently used these items, which others would have discarded or sold at a cheap price.

Indeed, it was the greatest sign of poverty. However, this kind of life would end soon: Once he attained Intermediate Repair skill, he would be able to restore any losses to maximum durability. Then he could pose without feeling restless.

'Do you believe in destiny? It doesn't seem like your saving our town and us along with it was a mere coincidence.'

"Huh?"

"A while back, a priest of the Order of Freya came to warn of evil armies on the rise. They exert their influence in places in the lower, colder, and darker reaches of this world. The priest told me that only a truly courageous champion can stop them! Then he gave me the authority to choose that champion."

"....."

"I didn't understand what he meant at the time, but now I do. There is a secret I didn't tell you: the seed that has been passed down in our family serves to guide one to a new place.

"The priest said that to find Freya's lost treasure, one should seek out Seagull. Please become a hero who defeats evil!"

Obtained information regarding the Lost Treasure of Freya.

Weed did not forget the clue from the Elder of Baran Village, Ghandilva.

'I need to find Seagull and discover the Lost Treasure of Freya!'

This was definitely a chain quest and smelled of large rewards. Most quests from temples were difficult to obtain but were very rewarding, since temples and palaces could only be entered by those with fame over ten thousand.

'I will find Seagull!'

Although Weed knew every area in Lavias, he had never encountered anyone named Seagull. He tried asking everyone he met for information, but received no response. Only when he talked about the Lost Treasure of Freya did he finally get some answers.

"Seagull? Of course I know him. He's an Herbalist who goes into dangerous dungeons without a second thought and has courage enough to face the undead."

"You didn't know? All the herbs sold in the shops are from Seagull."

Each Avian provided some information about Seagull, but not his location. Weed headed to the market and inquired further.

"You want to know where Seagull is? He might be in Barecan's Crypt."

"Barecan's Crypt?"

"That place always echoes with the screams of ghosts. We tried to subdue them, but failed, since they have no physical bodies. I wouldn't recommend going there, but I won't stop you either. The entrance to the crypt is on the mountain behind the city. Look for a patch of blue flowers near the fifteenth large boulder."

Once prepared, Weed enthusiastically departed the city, in search of Barecan's Crypt.

'Great. Such helpful directions'

Weed sighed at the ridiculous situation. Avians could fly, so when outside the city, they took to the skies.

Their eyesight was remarkably good; they could even see the bugs crawling on the ground.

The Avian's directions, therefore, made no sense from a human perspective. The fifteenth large boulder on the mountain...

What did that even mean?

He couldn't see all the boulders at once, since he was on his feet. In the end, he simply searched around every suitably large rock.

To make matters worse, the blue flowers he was supposed to find were hidden by tall grasses.

Nonetheless, he finally managed to find the entrance after a long and persistent search. There was a small building accessed by a steel gate. That was all. The rest was underground. A crooked, poorly maintained sign bore the following message:

The dead.

Those whose blood and flesh has rotten away,

Those whose mortal bodies exist no longer,

This grave be for them.

After taking a quick glance, Weed pushed open the steel gate and entered with an emotionless face.

DUNGEON: You are the first to discover Barecan's Crypt!

Rewards:

+100 Fame

Every day for one week, double EXP and double item drops.

The rarest items will drop from killing the first monster of each type.

Subsequent kills will drop common items.

Before coming here, he had gathered some information from Avians about this place. He only knew that Barecan's Crypt contained Spirits, Ghosts, and Specters of level 130. Spirits were souls bound to the world with wicked desires. Ghosts were just blurry apparitions.

'This place is weaker than I expected.'

Weed slowly looked around the graveyard.

Ghosts and Specters came out sometimes, but he simply ignored them, and they left without bothering him. The cause was the killing intent emanating from Weed, an effect of the Fighting Spirit stat.

Fighting Spirit

Enables bursts of extraordinary strength and crows weaker monsters.

Points cannot be distributed into this stat. It changes as a result of a character's actions.  
Increases faster when fighting powerful monsters or during prolonged combat.

Fighting Spirit for most warrior-type players was usually about 20 to 30. Close-quarters fighters like Monks or Assassins might have had a bit more, but it was rare to see anyone with over 50 in the stat.

Though there were numerous comments and analyses regarding the Fighting Spirit stat, most concluded it was useless. Unlike Strength or Dexterity, increases to Fighting Spirit didn't show any obvious effects.

Many intelligence-based characters like Mages didn't possess the stat at all, yet had no more difficulty in hunting.

Although some players worked to achieve a high Fighting Spirit stat, they all had to raise their characters with that goal from the beginning. In other words, it didn't have much effect.

Though Fighting Spirit increased automatically, it wasn't easy to improve. Even killing tough opponents with every ounce of strength was often insufficient to raise the stat by a single point. Additionally, the stat decreased whenever one died or fled from combat. Thus, there were very few people who possessed a high Fighting Spirit stat.

Weed's Fighting Spirit stat, however, was 193; addition of the 35 bonus points from the L. Moonlight Sculptor class made it 228. Since he fought against stronger opponents like crazy, the stat grew immensely. Monsters of the same level no longer tried to fight him. If Weed engaged first, the monster would fight, but in a severely weakened state due to the force of the killing intent.

Weed wandered through the maze-like crypt, warding away monsters with a mere glance. After searching extensively, he spotted a wounded Avian.

"Damn..."

Weed hurriedly approached the Avian, whose body was covered with scars and feverish from poison.

"First Aid!"

He put some herbs over the wounds and bandaged them. If it was very near death, he would have needed a potion, but for normal injuries, the Bandage skill was sufficient. After attending to its injuries, Weed gave the Avian a potion.

"Uhh..."

After a while, the Avian woke up, shaking its head.

"I... I passed out. I was so injured that I couldn't do anything and almost died here. Anyhow, who might you be?"

"I'm Weed."

"Weed? You must be the human who came to Lavias. My name is Seagull."

Seagull! Finally, Weed had found Seagull. "Yes. I've noticed. But where is the Lost Treasure of Freya?"

"The Treasure of Freya? How did you learn of it?"

"Well, in truth..."

Seagull listened with a pained expression as Weed told him what had transpired in Baran Village.

\*cough\*

"You've done great work. May Freya be with you. The Lost Treasure of Freya is here, in Barecan's Crypt."

Weed nodded. He had read something similar in the history of the Versailles Continent on Royal Road's homepage. 'Barecan referred to him, didn't it.' Barecan Demoff was a dark mage who mastered necromancy. He sought immortality and kidnapped many children for experimentation. Although his search for immortality ended in failure, he plotted a conquest with an army of undead.

His army seemed invincible. Barecan's necromancy allowed him to constantly expand his army as the battle progressed, providing an obvious advantage. His undead horde consisted of several thousand Zombies, Skeletons, and Dullahans led by Death Knights and fouler creations that could only be the stuff of nightmares.

Only after kingdoms from all over the world united their strength were they successful in putting an end to Barecan's menace. Weed learned of this after coming to Lavias. Indeed, the City of Heaven had been built to isolate the undead.

"Would you retrieve the Lost Treasure of Freya from Barecan's servants?"

#### Stolen Treasure of Freya

In the time of chaos, when dark magicians made contracts with demons and killed thousands, the continent was soaked with blood in a war between mad kings.

Holy influence declined and the world descended into anarchy. Those with strength flaunted it while fools who held swords upside down and those with light lips gained power.

The deceased could not gain eternal peace, and the living writhed in pain and despair. It was at this time that the Treasure of Freya was stolen.

Difficulty: C

Penalty if Refused:

-100 Fame.

Relationship with the Order of Freya becomes sour.

Weed paused for a moment, and then nodded.

"I will retrieve the Lost Treasure of Freya."

You have accepted the quest.

"Thank you. According to what I've heard, the Holy Grail will be guarded by a Death Knight. I will wait here while I recover from my injuries. Please return the treasure to its rightful owner."

"I will."

Weed passed Seagull and ventured deep into the crypts.

Even against Death Knights, Weed couldn't feel much tension anymore. After Dullahans became too easy for him, he stopped avoiding Death Knights and fought them instead.

In his first battle against a Death Knight, he failed to block its attack, and died. The penalty was a 24-hour ban on logging in. Additionally, his level decreased and his Skill Mastery was reduced by 5% on all skills. Raising his level again would be easy enough, but the lost Skill Mastery was fatal. Crafting skills like Sculpting or Cooking were difficult to improve. Thankfully, there was no one around to steal his items.

In this matter, however, Weed was very stubborn. He actively avoided Death Knights, but when he met one accidentally, he stayed and fought. In the end... he died five times. Five days banned from Royal Road, decreased levels, and 25% reduction in skills!

After that, he increased his level and gained experience until he was able to fight Death Knights equally. Of course, the level gain was important, but he thought the experience of fighting stronger monsters was more valuable. If he didn't think like that, he would have gone crazy with regret over his losses. If not for the Death Knights, he could have had 10 more levels. He felt miserable about the days he couldn't log in during the double experience and item window.

With his uniquely high stats, Weed could fight against Death Knights at level 115. He always enjoyed fighting stronger opponents. Normally, the Sculptor class was a support class, for which it would be normal to be weaker than warrior classes, but the Moonlight Sculptor provided many strong advantages for combat. Craftsmanship, strengthened abilities, additional stats, and Sculpting Blade! It was an ideal job with nothing to complain about. In dungeons or on dark nights, it strengthened abilities by a further 30%, so monsters of equivalent level were easy prey.

Ghosts and Specters wandered around, tempting him with experience points and items. However, he ignored them and concentrated on finding Death Knights. This was very unlike Weed, who normally cleared out any dungeons he encountered without exception. Weed had double the experience point and item drop rate, but he just let Spirits and Specters leave.



'No need to fight them now.'

Weed was waiting for tougher prey: Death Knights.

However, they rarely dropped useful items, and the few remaining Death Knights were difficult to find. The one guarding the Lost Treasure would undoubtedly be stronger than any others, so he was Weed's target.

Weed was the first discoverer of the dungeon. On the first kill, the best item that a monster could drop would come out. Now, Weed could afford the luxury to exploit such an advantage. Ghosts, Specters, and Spirits trailed behind him as he searched Barecan's Crypt, creating an eerie sight. It was deep underground that Weed finally encountered the Death Knight.

"Kuku, Si...silly human. Di...did you come here to di...die?"

Weed stared at the Death Knight expressionlessly. The Death Knight wore a cape, sword, and helmet over his bony body. His shining silver helmet seemed like a very rare item.

'Th...That'll be a very big catch!'

Weed smiled. Incidentally, he had no helmet of his own, and could finally get one.

Helain's Grail, which was evidently the Lost Treasure of Freya, was enshrined behind the Death Knight. It was definitely unique, for it shone with a bright light even in the depths of the dark dungeon.

"Hyaaa!" Weed charged toward the Death Knight without warning. At such an opportune time when experience points and item drop rates were doubled, he didn't have time to spare.

"Sculpting Blade!"

Weed started off with his signature move, known to be lethal to the undead.

The Death Knight raised his sword, now writhing with a dark aura, and attacked. Sculpting Blade clashed against the Death Knight's strike, sending shocks through both combatants.

Just as he felt the impact, Weed jumped while holding his sword against the Death Knight's, and landed a kick to his skull.

"Kuk!"

While the Death Knight staggered back a step, Weed quickly took two steps toward him.

Between enemies, there was no need to exchange pleasantries, only attacks with killing intent. With only an arm's length between them, they fought. This was an advantageous distance for Weed: although the danger increased with proximity, for Weed, who could react only by reading the Death Knight's shoulder movements, this was safer. If the Death Knight, at a level of over 200, used his attack skills, things would get difficult.

"Die, human!"

The Death Knight swung his sword in excitement.

Weed welcomed the attack while keeping it away from his vitals. Pain rushed through him, and filled him with the ecstasy of battle! He could feel the tension in the atmosphere, the killer intent and enmity emitting from Death Knight. He endured the attacks from the enemy, fought head-on, in order to crush him. A lion would never underestimate its prey, even if it's a rabbit. It would bide its time, the second the rabbit moves, it would pounce.

Endurance has increased by 1.

The reward for taking the enemy's attack, and enduring all the pain, was this. Weed took hits in almost all his battles; the result was tremendous defense from amazing Endurance. When he fought enemies of higher levels, the stat rose even faster. While increasing his level was important, improving his stats was more so.

After each battle, his Bandage skill improved quickly. If one thought of investment as a waste, he could not gain anything in his entire life. The lower the level, the more an investment in Bandage is necessary. When Weed had 205 health points left, he started to attack seriously. He dodged the Death Knight's attack in close quarters, confusing the enemy by moving left and right. Then, with fierce attacks, he defeated the Death Knight.

"Ku...uk."

The Death Knight who had been fighting with excitement now felt the pressure of Weed's amazing Fighting Spirit, and thanks to his fabulous sword skill, the Death Knight was easily defeated.

"Now Death Knights are getting boring,"

Weed muttered as he sheathed his Clay Sword. He had defeated Death Knights at level 125, so by now it felt a bit boring to fight them.

The one he just fought was about twice as strong as most of the others, perhaps because he was Barecan's servant. Otherwise, Weed would have taken a few more hits before starting to fight seriously.

Even so he couldn't feel much threat to his life. Many people thought fighting in close quarters was dangerous, but looking the enemy in the eyes and feeling his killing intent during battle was invigorating.

The enemy's breath had to be felt. Although Weed was holding a sword, he fought at a much closer distance than normal. If one acclimated to fighting in close proximity, fighting at longer distances became a walk in the park.

Even if the Death Knight had used its skills and fought with all its might, there would have been very little difference. However, if Weed allowed huge blows, there was a risk of having his armor broken and his Endurance wouldn't rise as quickly, therefore, he fought up close.

"Repair!"

Weed took off his equipment and struck them with a hammer. Armor and other equipment that had been about to break was quickly restored to maximum condition.

Unfortunately, his Repair skill was only level 8, so it only looked as good as new: the durability of each item was at its minimum. If other people wore this kind of equipment and fought, it would have broken even before the duel ended. Wearing such equipment would have been impossible without painstaking care, akin to handling a very old car.

The Repair skill increased in level quicker than Sculpting or Cooking because it was a sub-skill, not a main skill. It was a sub-skill related to Blacksmith, so it had a fast growth rate. On the other hand, he could do Sculpting anywhere, Cooking increased due to the Art stat and hard work, but Repair could not be improved without broken weapons or equipment. To Weed who hunted alone in Lavias, Repair was something that couldn't be improved easily.

Weed checked the loot from the Death Knight.

Van Hawk's Magic Helm:

Durability: 90/90.

Defense: 25.

- Helmet worn by a Death Knight.
- Dome-shaped and covers the head completely; offers great defense.
- Van Hawk's strength is contained within.

Restrictions:

Level 200.

400 Strength.

Effects:

+30 Strength.

+10 Agility.

+15 Vitality.

+10 Intelligence.

- Resistance to dark magic +15
- Affinity with undead +10
- Allows you to command undead of up to level 50. The rank and number of undead commanded will depend on Leadership.

Kalamorian Sword:

Durability: 65/65.

Damage: 35-40.

- Used by a knight of the Kalmor Empire – Van Hawk.

- Personally presented by Emperor Theodore to honor Van Hawk on the 651st year of the empire.
- Conveys a fierce spirit and an air of nobility.

Restrictions:

Level 200,

300 Strength.

May only be wielded by Knights.

Effects:

+20 Strength.

+10 Nobility.

+10 Elegance.

+10 Loyalty.

- When equipped, +30 Fame

Crimson Necklace of Life. Durability: 50/50.

- Manufactured with ancient dark magic. Contains mysterious strength.
- Created by undead ruler Barecan for his servants.

Restrictions: Unknown

Effects: Unknown

Weed took a huge breath.

"This... this is a big catch."

In the first hunt, he received the best items the monster could give. But they were too good. Van Hawk's Magic Helm— Van Hawk was most likely the Death Knight's name.

The items, with their excellent defense and effects, exceeded his expectations. Kalamor's Sword had way better attack than his Clay Sword.

There was no additional frost damage, but it was a great sword used mainly by knights.

Right that was the problem: this sword was a Knight's sword. Weed, who was a Sculptor, couldn't use it. Of course, if he truly wanted to, there was an easy way to equip it: he could go to an empire or a kingdom, pass a test, pay a fee, and become a certified knight.

Unlike swordsmen, who had to undergo a second trial to be a Knight, he merely had to go get a license. If he did that, he could use this sword. However, he couldn't use these items now anyway because of the level limitation.

"Identify Item!"

Failed to Identify the Item.

"Identify Item!"

Failed to Identify the Item.

The Crimson Necklace of Life couldn't be identified despite several tries to identify it; his Identification skill level was simply too low.

"Well, I can't do anything if this is my luck."

He collected all the loot and went for the Grail, which rested on an altar. It was made of gold, and when Weed's hand touched it, it shone brightly.

'It's hot.'

Weed's hand felt as if it was on fire. He could feel the Holy power wrapping around him strongly. His scars from battling the Death Knight a few moments ago were healed completely; his fatigue vanished as well...

Acquired Freya's Treasure, Helain's Grail.

The light from Helain's Grail slowly dimmed, leaving behind a pure, clean feeling. Weed examined the grail, full of curiosity.

"Identify Item!"

Helain's Grail:

Durability: Infinite.

- One of the three holy items bestowed by the Goddess Freya.
- A symbol of the goddess' beauty and abundance.
- Gives infinite strength to those with strong belief. Turns water into Holy Water after a day.
- Holy Water is lethal to the undead. If spread on soil, will bring a plentiful harvest.

Restrictions:

Faith: 900.

Class related to clergy, or those accepted by the Order of Freya.

Effects:

+100 Faith.

+300 Fame.

- Generates Holy Water.

An item that infinitely generates Holy Water... as expected of a holy item of the Freya religion, it was a priceless treasure. When the Holy Water was used on soil, that year's harvest increased by tenfold. To the undead, it was the most lethal of weapons. Only classes related to the clergy could use it, leaving Weed disappointed.

"Not bad."

Weed repaired his sword, ready to continue to hunt the Spirits and Ghosts he had simply passed without a second thought.

The double experience point and item drop rate would last exactly one week in Barecan's Crypt; he couldn't miss such a golden opportunity.

Just then, he heard a voice...

"Hurry. Wake up, Oppa."

The only one who would refer to Weed as "Oppa", was his younger sister, Hayan. She was calling Weed through the microphone attached to the game capsule.

'Hah... Now of all times...'

Weed looked around and logged out.

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## Chapter 9 : Princess' Knight

"Yes. The next segment of our program is about the famous player in Tor Kingdom who's all a buzz amongst users these days. Mr. Oh, I hear there's now a blacksmith who can enhance the defense of your equipment?"

"Yes, that's right. A fighter will always have some regrets and aspirations. Equipping gear with high defense will increase your chance of survival and the Blacksmith of Tor can increase this defense by smelting it with enhancing minerals."

There were many television programs related to Royal Road, drawing on the many wonders and legends of the Versailles Continent. Viewership increased in parallel with the influx of players, leading to enormous advertising revenues.

"Hmm, a Blacksmith?"

Lee Hyun was sitting in his room, watching a TV show on Royal Road. A female host and a male host were talking to each other in turns, and Lee Hyun hoped to hear new information about the game. Although he could not be certain, many other viewers likely shared his objective.

The Versailles continent had no distinction between night and day; every hour was training hour. But when programs related to Royal Road aired, training grounds were less busy.

"Yes, that is amazing. Perhaps I should request an enhancement too. But wouldn't the price be extremely high?"

"Yes. He charges anywhere from 10 to 100 gold depending on the effect or function. Isn't that unbelievable?"

Shin Hye Min frowned. "100 gold? I wouldn't be able to afford that even after gathering all of the money I have collected so far."

"Haha, but that price is only for very, very good items, so he would probably enhance your items for around 10 gold."

"That Blacksmith user will be filthy rich really soon."

"That's not exactly true. The prices of the materials needed for enhancing are pretty expensive, so he wouldn't be able to get 20% profit for each enhancement. The reason for Tor's Blacksmith becoming a hot topic is probably due to him being the first player ever to achieve intermediate level in the blacksmithing."

"The achievement makes me jealous. A skilled sculptor appeared in Rosenheim Kingdom before, right?"

"Yes. Sculptors are very rare. It's a rare job simply for what they do. The sculptures he made are said to be very beautiful."

Rosenheim Kingdom's sculptor was, of course, Lee Hyun's game character, Weed.

"After I heard the rumor, I visited Rosenheim Kingdom to interview and purchase a sculpture to give it as a gift to you, Hye Min, but he had already left. I'm worried that he deleted his character after going through the difficult path of a sculptor."

"Wow, that's too bad. I lost my chance to receive a nice gift. I think artisans are starting to take their places."

"Yes. The next news item is the one you've all been waiting for – the British Confederacy's civil war! Finally, Fort Odein, widely known to have been unconquerable, was invaded! Balkan guild is now in big, big trouble."

The feed cut to an in-game video of Royal Road, showing a bird's eye view of a grand brown castle, surrounded by 35 towers that could hold archers and mages in the case of war. The moat was filled with water and spanned multiple drawbridges. The castle walls, built with 3 layers of bricks, seemed impenetrable.

"Wow, amazing. It's as if I am looking at a medieval castle."

"Yes, this is Fort Odein which was owned by the Balkan guild. A fierce battle took place here last night."

Fort Odein, drenched in the blood of countless users, has a very dark reputation. It levied exorbitant taxes and entrance fees! Nearby villages paid 60% tax on every sale, which is more than twice the rate in other municipalities. This applied to all items including medicine, potions, and herbs.

The anger of the users had reached its limit. To make matters worse, merchants traveling through the fort were charged 40% of their profits as customs tax. Fort Odein exploited its strategic location between the British Confederacy and Iedern Kingdom to monopolize the international trade.

The money all went to Balkan guild, the owner of the castle. It was obvious why they were hated by others!

"But Fort Odein has never been taken over before, right?"

"Yes, that's right. But this battle was just splendid. Watch this."

The TV showed Fort Odein on a night with the moon hanging silently in the sky. In the field nearby, a horde of players were gathering. Standing next to their respective guild flags, they were waiting for the morning to come.

'Just how many people were there?' Lee Hyun was too astonished to speak.

He'd heard that the number of users playing Royal Road was increasing greatly, but this was just too much. Rivers of people covered the field in front of Fort Odein.

"The number of users gathered to conquer Fort Odein was over 30,000." The male MC, Oh Joo Wan continued on as if he had read the viewers' thoughts.

"30,000? That is the greatest number of people that has participated in a siege so far!"

"That's correct. The desire to conquer Fort Odein was widespread. About 150 guilds united, and around 5,000 mercenaries had participated in this battle. We'll view the scene now."

Finally, the sun rose above Fort Odein. Some of the attackers gave long speeches about how they were righteous, and how they would deal with Fort Odein after they conquered it. With courage filling the air, the battle began.

It was a wondrous sight to behold: 30,000 soldiers attacking Fort Odein simultaneously. Arrows flew everywhere, and magic struck the fortress. Catapults constantly spewed boulders, and summoned golems attacked the stronghold. But the opposition still fought back, relying on the castle wall's defensive capabilities.

Balkan guild had pulled their allied guilds into the war. There were also NPC soldiers in Fort Odein, further bolstering their defenses.

But the tide turned when the Special Forces, prepared for the worst, snuck in through the back. Each guild's master and elites provided a diversion by assaulting the front, while the Special Forces infiltrated the castle through the sewers.

Grand sword auras rose and magic exploded everywhere.

"About half of the British Confederacy's Top 100 players are known to have participated in this battle. In the end, Fort Odein couldn't resist any longer, and fell into the hands of the invaders."

Balkan's guild members, who resisted to the end, were all killed. Their allied guilds had surrendered when the situation turned against them, ending the fierce battle. The invading guilds exulted in the overwhelming joy of victory.

"Mr. Oh, will peace come to Fort Odein now?"



"I don't think so. First of all, Balkan, who owned the fort, is unlikely to simply back off. They will be gathering their strength to take back what was theirs."

"Another war will commence."

"Yes, but even if Balkan's attacks fail, Fort Odein seems like it won't settle down for a while. Division of profits between the victorious guilds will not be settled easily. And considering the other advantages that Fort Odein grants, they'll all be hungry for it. That's how much value the land has. Balkan had invested a lot of money to stabilize the economy and the land. But they had to collect a lot of taxes for soldiers and fortifications, since other forces wanted the place.

"That's a bad cycle to be stuck in."

"Yes. Fort Odein, which stands in the middle of the two empires and functions as a relaying station, will continue to be in chaos."

Lee Hyun smirked; a smirk that could make the most heinous villain envious.

'The attackers had 30,000... At least 15,000 should have died. And about 10,000 from the defenders...' Imagining the skills and levels that decreased was simply exhilarating to Hyun. While others' stats dropped, Lee Hyun was growing stronger.

Suddenly the phone rang, and he hurried to answer.

"Hello?"

"You ready?"

The person asking the question without any greeting was his sister, Lee Hayan.

"Yeah. I'm all dressed, and I washed my face."

"Hair?"

"Of course I washed it."

"It's starting soon so you have to hurry."

"Alright Hayan, I'm coming." Lee Hyun turned off the television and rose from his seat.

He sighed. Lee Hyun was discontent. 'What the hell am I doing...'

Dein High school. Even though he swore to himself that he would never return when he quit the school...

"Brother, you have to come!"

If Hayan hadn't nagged in the morning, he never would've gone. He was threatened that if he didn't go today, he shouldn't dare to even think about going into the capsule for a while.

'Does she even realize who I am trying to make money for...'

A high school festival. Others went with their parents, but Lee Hayan called her older brother.

"Ugh. Just what am I doing" Lee Hyun complained constantly. Even though he really didn't want to go, when he thought of his disappointed sister, he had no choice. He felt like a cow being

dragged to the butchers. Lee Hyun carelessly sat at the festival's stands when he arrived. Students were divided into clubs or grades, and were selling goods at shops but Lee Hyun ignored them.

"Hey, are you Lee Hyun by any chance?"

Lee Hyun turned to look towards the voice. A slim and pretty female university student wearing a purple skirt was standing there.

"Who are you?"

Her face showed disappointment at Lee Hyun's words.

"Ah, I was right. It's me, Junghee."

"Oh."

Her name and face were all that Hyun could remember.

Her pretty face had made her the object of many boys' affections in high school.

'She became more stylish, and her intelligent appearance probably makes her popular even now. University must be treating her well.'

That was all Hyun could remember. There weren't any special memories remaining.

"Was it Yoon Junghee? Long time no see. Why are you here when you've already graduated from this school?"

"Mmhm. My little sister goes to this school so I came. You?"

"Same."

"You have a little sister. Can I sit beside you?"

"It's an empty seat so do whatever you want," Lee Hyun said grumpily and continued to watch the festival. A parody of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves was being performed.

An apple seller came out, danced, sung foolishly, and then spoke. "Oh!! Dear most beautiful queen. Here are some delicious apples. They are freshly picked from the apple farm so it is cheap and fresh! Only 2 thousand won for 5 apples!

The scrawny queen yawned and replied,

"Why is it so expensive!"

"Because they're ripe apples, my Queen!"

"Really? Then we can use these to kill Snow White, right?"

"I believe I didn't say such a thing yet?"

"CAN THEY KILL, OR NOT?"

"If one tastes it, one won't be able to escape its deliciousness, my queen."

Nevertheless, the queen bought the apples. She walked up to Snow White, did some more useless dancing, and handed over the apple.

"Why didn't you come to the Alumni celebration?" Yoon Junghee asked Lee Hyun, who was watching the musical with a cold expression.

Lee Hyun tersely replied without turning his head. "I didn't feel like going."

"Really? We hoped that we'd be able to see you there... After you quit school, we couldn't contact you. Sanghoon said he would call you so we thought you'd be there."

"Thanks for the kind lies."

"No, really, I wanted to meet you again. Remember when you saved me before?"

"I saved you? Ah... right."

When Lee Hyun was in grade 10, he delivered newspapers in the morning. Once he saw a girl being picked on by a few thugs at the park. Lee Hyun tried to just pass by. It wasn't any of his business, so he decided to ignore it. But hearing the girl's terrified screams, Lee Hyun ran back.

He beat up the thugs and saved the girl. Later on, he found out that she was Yoon Junghee that went to the same school as he did. He didn't know about her because she wasn't in his class, but they had ended up in the same class in 11th grade.

While they conversed, the musical had gone into a crazy direction. There was a bug in the apple that the merchant sold to the queen, so Snow White was beating him mercilessly. After she accidentally took a bite of the apple which had the bug inside, she fell to the ground. The dwarves discovered her, kidnapped her, and brought her to their house.

They were plotting to make Snow White cook their meals, wash their clothes, and clean the house! Snow White who soon woke up was at a loss. Why would a princess know how to do housework? When they told her to do the dishes she shattered them into pieces, and when they told her to clean, she broke apart the furniture and decorations.

Finally, when a prince came to take the princess, the seven dwarves cried in happiness, finally rid of the incompetent maid. It was a boring musical.

"... How disappointing" Lee Hyun thought that he had wasted his time. But Yoon Junghee who sat beside him was laughing endlessly.

"Hehehe. Look at that, Hyun. It's really funny."

He had no clue why she was calling him in such a friendly manner when he rarely saw her. As they spent their time like that, Hyun's sister came. Lee Hayan was dressed in jeans and a white t-shirt instead of the school uniform. At that moment, Lee Hyun felt sparks of rivalry igniting between Hayan and Junghee.

"Why are you sitting beside my brother, old lady?" Hayan's pre-emptive strike was sharp and filled with envy. A killer aura emanated from her.

At that moment, Lee Hyun felt that his sister was scarier than a death knight. But, a Dullahan was sitting right next to him.

"Old lady? Such a foul mouth you have for a child."

"I'm not that much younger than you!"

"I am your brother's classmate. I'd watch my mouth if I were you." Junghee slowly put her hand on Lee Hyun's shoulder.

"Hmph!"

Hayan walked over to Hyun, ignoring Junghee. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean what am I doing here? I am watching the festival."

"Ugh, just hurry over here!" Hayan forcibly dragged Hyun up from the seat.

"Why?"

"There something I want to do with you!"

"What is it?"

"Just come here."

Lee Hyun had to stand up. As he rose from his seat, Lee Hayan gave a nasty, victorious smile to Yoon Junghee. She took Hyun towards the school field, where there were many events and challenges set up.

Apparently, KMC Media had brought them for the school. They were broadcasting video of students avoiding various traps and clearing the missions. It was chaotic with a crowd of cameramen maneuvering around the mess of students rolling and jumping around.

Hayan took Lee Hyun and stood in front of one of the easiest challenges.

People had to tie one of their legs with that of another and run to the finish line at the signal of the referee.

"Why are we here?"

"You and I should run together. I really wanted to try the 3 legged race"

"Why would I do such a thing? Do it yourself."

"I can't do it unless it's with you! I already told all my friends that I'll be running with you. So you have to do this with me."

Lee Hyun winced, but he couldn't win against his sister's obstinacy.

'This probably won't be televised.'

Lee Hyun glanced at the cameras with fearless eyes. Even though they were filming everywhere, not every single shot would be broadcast. Only the most epic failures would be edited to be aired.

Anyway, when KMC media broadcasts a school festival, the actual filming began at night when celebrities were visiting. Celebrities going through tough obstacles were extremely popular amongst viewers. Students and normal people were nothing but bridesmaids for them. From Lee Hyun's twisted view, they were just beta testers for the safety of the celebrities.

Sexy female helpers in miniskirts were accepting the entry applications.

"Sigh. We'll participate."

"It costs 10 thousand won to play."

Lee Hyun shuddered, but reluctantly forked over the money out of his pocket. Even though this was a festival, the fee was way too much; it felt like a scam.

'I guess I'm eating spinach and soy sauce for dinner tonight.'

Of course, for Hayan or grandma, he would cook up other delicious food, but he still had a tiny hope that his sister would eat a lot at the festival and come home stuffed.

"Now, get ready... Go!"

Twelve pairs raced at the same time.

At the bang of the gunshot, Lee Hyun and Lee Hayan began to run. Because it was a 3 legged race, they were getting tangled in each other's feet and started to slow down. By the time they completed a third of the race, they were one of the slowest groups.

"Brother, try harder!"

"I am trying my best."

"I'm telling you, do better!"

"Yeah, yeah."

Because he was forced to participate, Lee Hyun wasn't taking it seriously. As he watched the groups pass them, Hyun asked, "What's so good about these games? All you get when you win first is a back full of sweat."

"You didn't know? First place gets a shopping mall gift card."

"H-how much?"

"A 100 thousand won."

Lee Hyun's movement suddenly changed. He grabbed onto his sister, Hayan, and started to sprint. Lee Hyun zoomed through at an incredible speed.

A perfect motivation!

Originally, a 3 legged race requires both of the players' teamwork. Lee Hyun and Hayan cleared all obstacles at a blinding speed, passing all the competitors and took first place.

"Congratulations for winning."

They won a 100 thousand won gift card from the hosts. Hyun could earn a few thousand won if he sold it online. Unfortunately, a team could not participate in an event again, so they couldn't make more money from the same race. Lee Hyun quickly searched for other games with prizes. His eyes were lit with life unlike a moment ago.

"Should we go try those?"

He pointed towards a set of facilities installed in the middle of the field.

It was called the Princess Set. The set had 3 parts: first you had to cross a moving, slippery log, second, you had to pop 50 water balloons flying at you, and third you had to climb a wall using a rope. One needed to clear the 3 stages and save the princess waiting for him in the prison. Of course, the princess was one of the participants.

It was a game where you must save your own princess. In Hyun's case, he had to save Hayan.

"That's going to be pretty hard, will you be okay? Let's just give up before you fall in the water and catch a cold, Hyun."

Worry filled Hayan's eyes. The high structures looked pretty dangerous, and you would be splashed with water when you fall down from the log. Many people were crowded in front of the site, cheering fiercely. Most of the cameras were focused on the Princess Set.

"Don't worry. Just trust me."

This was an event where you receive the prize depending on your record. The fastest person receives 3 million won and a 2 million won gift card. Because the school and the broadcasting company invested a lot in this event, the prizes were big. Lee Hyun paid 20 thousand won and registered.

He had to wait for a long time. There were many challengers for the event. More than 95% couldn't rescue the princess and failed. Even if you did rescue the princess, the prize depends on your time, so there was a slim chance of winning.

Lee Hyun's turn finally came after an hour wait. It was near the end of the festival, after all the applications for the events were over.

"Hyun, be careful so you don't hurt yourself..."

"Yeah. Don't worry and just wait for a bit. I'll hurry to save you."

Hayan went inside the prison. Soon, she was surrounded by her friends who made a lot of fuss.

"Is that person your older brother who you're always talking about?"

"Yeah. Isn't he good looking?"

"He's just average..."

Her friends couldn't hide their disappointment. Hayan's sugarcoated depiction of Lee Hyun was very different from his real appearance.

"I really don't understand how your brother is so great that you reject every guy that asks you out."

"Yeah. The world is big and there are better people than your older brother."

"You guys have no idea."

Lee Hyun stood at the starting point. Two celebrity MCs, a man and a woman, approached him and pointed a microphone in his face. The guy was handsome and had a mature feeling to him, and the female MC was beautiful. He expected no less from a celebrity.

The male MC asked, "Why did you decide to participate in this game?"

"To save my one and only precious little sister," Lee Hyun replied tersely. If he didn't unlock the cage, it would move towards the water, and the bottom would suddenly open up. Hayan would fall into the water.

This time, the female MC asked a question. "Yes. You came to save your little sister. From the information I have just received, your sister is the prettiest student that has participated so far. Apparently she's the school's idol! I will be watching whether the beauty will fall in the water or be saved by the hero. It's just my opinion, but I think the crowds would prefer to watch her fall into the water. Before you leave, please say a word of resolution!"

"I'll try my best."

Lee Hyun felt like other words were unnecessary. He would try his best, and win by all means. He would save his sister, and win 3 million won and the 2 million won gift card! That resolution was immeasurable.

The starting gun sounded, and Lee Hyun bolted forward with his animal-like instincts. He skipped over few obstacles that were there just for the looks and arrived at the first challenge.

It was single wooden bridge, with water surrounding it and Styrofoam logs rolling around place to place to impede advancement. High school girls fired water cannons from all directions at the competitor.

The male MC was shooting out comments like a machine gun.

"The challenger has now arrived at the first challenge. I believe he is the fastest person to arrive at the first challenge so far, but it will be dangerous for him to rush because he might fall in the water! If he falls, he'll be automatically disqualified. He needs to time his movements precisely."

"Yeah!"

Hyun could hear neither the MC's words nor the crowd's screams. Even if he could, he wouldn't have given a rat's hat.

'This is a game based on speed. I can't be late.' Lee Hyun's eyes flashed sharply. He deftly jumped on to the bridge and started to run.

His hips, defined by strong and detailed muscles, prevented his body from shaking. Completely balanced, he ran as though the obstacle covered bridge was a flat plain. His body was very light and his feet dashed forward as though they were hovering; his steps looked like moves from Chinese martial arts.

The Styrofoam logs moved in a set pattern. Lee Hyun just proceeded on, as if the logs stepped aside for him.

"Fire!"

The high school girls shot water cannons, but most of the shots just splashed into empty space that Hyun had already passed. Lee Hyun cleared the bridge at the speed of light and arrived at the next challenge.

"Th- this is amazing. It's the first time anyone has cleared the first challenge this fast. He's running at an astonishing speed; it's like we're watching a circus act. What do you think, Ms. Ha? Ah, you're too focused on watching."

Ha Yejin was a rising star that was getting extremely popular of late. She was expensive to hire, so you could only usually see her in movies and commercials. But she was an alumna of Dein High school. That's why she was an MC for the event.

Ha Yejin just stared at Lee Hyun like a deer in headlights.

Water balloons were fired like cannons from machines.

Lee Hyun was in front of a tower of medium height.

He had to pop 50 water balloons!

You could only pass after popping at least a third of the 150 balloons that were shot. About half of the challengers failed in the first challenge and the other half failed in the second.

This was also a challenge where you could be subjected to embarrassment from situations like falling onto the sponge below from being hit by flying water balloons. Challengers needed to push their body to the limit in order to pop the water balloons that were continuously fired at them, so they tended to end up in silly positions. It was a challenge that guaranteed high numbers of viewers.

But the water balloons exploded near Lee Hyun. Water sprayed everywhere from the popped water balloons.

Lee Hyun's hands and feet moved like lightning as he demolished the balloons. People who have tried popping water balloons midair would know: this is not an easy task. Even though they were big in size and thus had a large surface to pop, spun towards the challenger so it was difficult to hit them without a high level of concentration.

The water balloons were shot by a machine and all had different trajectories. Some flew high, some low, and some flew far.

Even if you do succeed in popping a balloon, the water splashes at your eye, and people would start panicking at their loss of vision.

Things get even more difficult when the machine starts firing the balloons crazily.

But Lee Hyun found order in the chaos of balloons and sharpened his senses.

When he reached his hands out to pop some balloons, the weight of his body shifted to the front. He balanced that weight by doing graceful spin-kicks. His hands and feet flowed gently like water. At no time did he lose his balance, nor did he panic.

Lee Hyun did a flying triple kick, popping 3 water balloons before he dropped back to the ground.

His movements resembled dancing. He broke all the water balloons without missing a single one.

The MC's and the crowd were in awe.



"Oh, oh my god..."

"This can't be happening..."

"Who is that person?"

The camera crew was busy broadcasting the moment on the screen, and the MC's were just staring with their mouths wide open from the shock, forgetting the commentary.

After popping the 50 water balloons faster than anyone else, Lee Hyun moved on to the next challenge.

The challenge was to climb over the 3 meter high boulder-like wall with a rope and landing on the other side. The sides were blocked by walls for safety, and one rope dangled at the front.

'If it's only this high...' Lee Hyun charged at the wall, not reducing his speed.

"Ahhh!"

Even though it was a fake wall made of compressed Styrofoam, people screamed in fear at the reckless charge. It seemed as if he had no intention of grabbing the rope.

When Lee Hyun arrived at the wall, he threw himself up. He kicked at the side walls that were made for safety and continued to climb up. After jumping over the highest point of the wall with an elegant twirl, Lee Hyun continued to run straight ahead the moment he landed on the ground.

He could see his little sister trapped in the cage at the end of the game.

"I came to save you like I promised. I was a little late, right?"

Lee Hyun opened the cage door.

The school festival ended in a huge success. Due to the celebrities that arrived later in the day, the Princess Set was surrounded by hordes of viewers. Lee Hyun was also very happy about having come to the festival. Three million won of cash and 2 million won from a shopping center gift card! He was walking home quickly from all the excitement of making an unexpected 5 million won.

'If I exchange the gift card for cash, I save a lot to pay Hayan's university fees. But since it was won as a prize, should I buy grandma and Hayan some new clothes? The mall is too expensive so I'll buy them at the market...'

While he was deep in thought, Hayan tugged on his shirt.

"Brother."

"Hmm?"

"My leg hurts."

"Really?"

It must've been tiring for her, since she had to follow Lee Hyun around the whole day and couldn't enjoy the school festival.

Lee Hyun felt sorry for dragging his sister around to earn prize money.

"Then should we take a taxi home?"

Such a waste of good money on a taxi! He knew would have to pay above the basic fee since they were about 5 blocks away from home. Lee Hyun never rode a bus either when he went to school, but since he was so happy today, maybe it'd be okay to ride a taxi for once.

Of course, his chest was trembling. He had ridden in a taxi twice in his life, and he felt like it was a terrible waste of money both times.

Hayan shook her head at Lee Hyun.

"No. We're not too far away from home, it's ok."

"Then do you want to take a rest? I'll buy you a drink. You can't drink coffee yet since you are too young..."

Hayan stuck out her tongue. "Psh, I'm a grown-up now."

"In my eyes, you are still a child."

"Jeez. Anyways, you haven't had dinner yet. Let's hurry home."

"That's... not true. I ate a lot of stuff here and there when I was viewing the festival."

"Liar. I know that you're not the type of person to buy that kind of food."

There was no one who knew Lee Hyun better than Hayan. His frugal personality would never let him buy food from the expensive festival.

"Then what should we do? Would you like a piggy-back ride?"

He said it like a joke, but Hayan smiled. "You read my mind!"

"Uh... Really? People will stare."

"It's ok. Hurry up and give me a piggy-back ride. My legs hurt." Hayan started to whine.

Lee Hyun had no choice but to let her on his back. 'It's been such a long time, giving Hayan a piggy-back ride.'

When their parents passed away, Hayan was in Grade 2.

Lee Hyun carried his crying sister to school when she didn't want to go to school. He did this for about a year. After his parents' death, they had to pay back the loans so they had to sell their house, and move around from place to place.

Because Hayan went to school like a good girl afterwards there was no reason to give her a piggy-back ride, it had become a nostalgic memory now.

Due to other people giggling and staring at them, Lee Hayan held tightly onto Hyun's body. "I'm heavy, right?"

"No, you need to eat more."

Hayan's body was pretty skinny for her tall height. For Lee Hyun whose body was covered in muscles from various training, she was light as a feather.

Hayan asked curiously, "Will you give me a piggyback ride even if I become a pig?"

"Of course, I'd still give you one even if you were a hippo."

"I'm always forcing you to do favors, what should I do to repay you?"

"What favors... Just grow up faster and get married."

"I'll find a person who is rich and will die soon so I can repay everything that you and grandma have ever done for me."

"Even if it's a joke, don't say such things. Find someone who will make you happy. I'll live with grandma so don't worry about us, and live your life doing whatever you want."

Festival Live!

Episode: Dein High School.

It received 10x more viewers than usual.

The man who cleared the Princess Set in the shortest time! The bridge crossing couldn't stop him, and he performed an astonishing feat at the balloon popping. He used martial arts that only people who are completely in control of their body could accomplish!

Viewers went wild at Lee Hyun's kicks.

He finished the final stage, climbing the wall with a rope with ease using his body's flexibility.

Though Lee Hyun starred in the program for only 1~2 minutes, the effect was beyond imagination. His clips were all over the Internet, spread out on websites from other countries.

He earned a nickname: The Princess' Knight!

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## Chapter 10 : Mountains of Loot

After he finished hunting in Barecan's Crypt, Weed returned to Seagull with Helain's Grail in hand. Seagull had recovered and was digging out herbs.

"Ah, you finally came. What of my quest? Were you able retrieved the Lost Treasure of Freya?"

Seagull bombarded Weed with questions one after another.

"Yes, here it is."

Weed took out Helain's Grail and showed it to Seagull.

"Ohhh! Finally, this holy artifact can be returned to the Order of Freya. Thank you. To be honest, I didn't really expect much when I first saw you because of your low level ability, but you've truly done a great deed."

Stolen Treasure of Freya completed

The Order of Freya received a prophecy foretelling the coming of an age where Chaos would reign once more.

Hoping to alter destiny, the Order raised gifted disciples and nurtured their talents. These holy knights and priests were tasked to retrieve the stolen holy treasures.

Seagull was ordered to retrieve Helain's Grail, but he failed where you succeeded.

You have gained 200 Fame (+200 Fame)  
You've Leveled Up!  
You've Leveled Up!

As expected, the rewards were on different scale from other quests, since it was related to a temple.

200 Fame and a level gain of 2!

Yet, Seagull did not take Helain's Grail.

"I'm sorry to trouble you further, but could you take Helain's Grail to the Order of Freya?"

"Me?"

"Yes. I could take it there, but the darkness is trying to rise once more. There have been signs of its attempts."

"Signs... you mean..."

"This is only an unreliable rumor, but it seems Barecan was attempting to unravel the secrets of immortality during the Last Battle. There is word that he's trying to come back to life and form his army once more. Still, no one knows the location or size of his forces. I beg you; please take Helain's Grail to the Order of Freya! I must prepare my fellow Avians for a possible attack and have no time to spare."

\*Ding!\*

Quest: Deliver Helain's Grail

Seagull is in a situation where he cannot travel to the City-State of Somre where the Order of Freya is based.

He has to prepare for Immortal Barecan's return.

You are the one whom Seagull trusts the most.

Rank: C

Reward: Unknown

Quest limit:

You need to finish mission within three months.

'It was a chain quest!'

"This task seems critical for the peace of the continent. I cannot find it in my heart to turn down this important request. I will return the treasure to the temple as soon as possible."

You have accepted the quest.

"Thank you!"

Seagull flapped his wings happily.

No matter how much Seagull tried to move with dignity, he could not change the fact that he was a cute Avian with a cuddly appearance. In truth, Weed had to avert his eyes to avoid laughing at Seagull's bright face and glistening eyes.

Still, he kept focused, planning on taking advantage of Seagull's good mood. It was a chance for his specialty: flattering people to extract as much information as he possibly could. Weed's instincts would not let him miss a single opportunity and here was a golden one.

"Seagull-nim, I have heard that you are the most renowned herbalist in Laviyas."

"Huh? Ah, I'm somewhat good at it, although you would not find a better looking, or cooler herbalist among the Avians."

Praise delights any man, and it works especially well on the birdbrained Avians.

"So how do you tell the difference between herbs?"

"Ah? Do you wish to learn medical botany?"

"Yes. I want to learn everything Seagull-nim can teach me. After all, isn't there meaning in everything a great person such as you do? The truth is, I want to follow in your footsteps and become a great sage like you."

"I love the way you think. Of course it is important to be able to differentiate between the herbs, but the crucial factor is the way you dig them out from the ground.

You must not let the roots get damaged. Start by scooping out the surrounding dirt slowly and carefully..."

Skill: You learned Medical Botany.

\*\*\*\*

Weed hunted in Barecan's Crypt a little longer before setting out to return the grail to the Order of Freya. Regrettably, he did not finish hunting in Balog's Ruin, Gahet's Holy Place or Secmail's Relics. But it was impossible to finish those all places by himself anyway. The weakest monsters in those hunting grounds were Death Knights. The other monsters: Balogs, Succubi, Blood Ladies, and Blood Lords, were all monsters over level 400. They were too strong even for Weed.

Those monsters noticed players instinctively, so he could not move around hiding like he had been doing earlier to avoid Death Knights. But he was thinking of leaving Lavias anyway, so he did not mind too much.

"Welcome, human!"

The grocery store owner was an Avian Weed knew well, but Weed was still treated like a stranger due to the Avian's exceptionally short memory.

"I want to buy two hundred Feathers of Lightness and one thousand Fruits of Heaven."

The market owner was surprised.

"Ohh, it'll be pretty expensive if you're buying that much, is that alright?"

Because Lavias did not have many visitors, items were always overpriced. Simple items sold in grocery stores were at least four times as expensive those sold in the Citadel of Serabourg. Neither did they have any weapons with good abilities for the price that was paid. Weed could not make use of most of the equipment, considering it was meant for the Avians.

Still, there were some items that were exclusive to Lavias. The Feather of Lightness and Fruit of Heaven belonged to that category.

**Feather of Lightness:**

Durability: 1

Number of Uses: 1

Makes the body as light as a feather, so damage can be avoided when falling to the ground.

Price: 50 silver

**Fruit of Heaven:**

Price: 15 silver

A sweet fruit only grown in Lavias.

It is edible for 6 months after its harvest.

It will greatly increase Intelligence and Luck Stat if used in cooking.

"Hmm... that would cost 250 gold, but I'll charge 235 gold, just for you. Thank you for your patronage!"

The power of fame!

Weed had attained a fame level of over 1,200 by finding new dungeons and finishing maps. With that, even the shopkeeper's attitude toward him had changed.

"Is there anything else you need?"

"Could I get some Avian eggs?"

"Our eggs? Why would you need those?"

Avian eggs were kept and incubated in a separate area, since the Avians laid an enormous number of eggs. In fact, there were Avians who laid an egg every day, so the quantity was unimaginable. Newly hatched Avians were no different from normal birds, but once they turned 10, they began to slowly gain the unique shape of an Avian. When they turned 30, they could speak, gain a higher level of intelligence, and begin to live in cities.

"I love nature as much as the Avians do, and I haven't met a nobler race. If I had the chance, I would humbly accept to become their father."

With that, Weed procured 300 Avian eggs.

He could feel his stomach rumble by simply looking at them. Needless to say, Weed had no intention of raising them.

Would I get a reward if I brought these back to their parents?

Unfortunately, Avians did not have a close relationship with their offspring. No matter who he brought them to, no one would give him a reward. Weed decided to cook the eggs and eat them. Each egg was not only delicious, but also conferred an increase in health and mana by 500, and a 2% improvement in Cooking skill.

There was one more place that Weed needed to visit: The Beginner Training Hall. There was unfinished business, and it seemed impossible to ignore.

I will succeed this time.

Weed threw open the doors and proceeded inside the training center.

"Welcome!"

The rooster-like Avian greeted Weed cheerfully. With his thick torso and powerful legs, the instructor looked quite peculiar for an Avian. The smile abated and was replaced with a solemn expression when the man recognized Weed.

"I see in your eyes show that you have gotten stronger. Still, I'll warn you again: if you fail, you could die. Will you still take the challenge?"

"Yes."

Unable to resist the benefits of completing the task, Weed chose to take on the challenge despite the danger. The instructor took him to the dark entrance that led only to a pitch black corridor where one could not even see one's own hands and feet. Here, one could only survive by utilizing their other sense; smell, hearing and their sense of touch.

"If you fail, I won't come to save you. In that case, you'll probably die. If you want to leave a will, I'll be happy to keep it for you."

"If you want one, I'll give it to you on my return."

"Ambitious, I see. You may go inside."

Weed entered the dark tunnel, his sword ready in hand. He had not walked far when...

\*Fwoosh!\*

At the distinct sound of a flying weapon, Weed dodged instinctively at the sound and counterattacked.

\*Clang!\*

The sounds of metal clashing. The brisk reaction of the wrist. The flow of the air currents.

Sparks flew with every strike of the sword, briefly illuminating the pitch black corridor. Weed struggled to see the vague silhouettes of his attackers, the engulfing darkness drowning him in fear as the howling wind tore at him. Weed's level may have risen, but the Steel Barbarians' capability had also risen to match his. Their coordinated attacks hid their weaknesses and maximized their strengths. The relentless attacks gave him no room for thought and forced him to be on the defensive.

Dodge. Can't dodge. Hit. Miss.

As soon as he chose which move to make, he was forced had to make another. The enemy attacked ceaselessly, limbs striking like lightning. As he overcame his fear of the enemy, his training kicked in and his body began to move on its own. He parried, dodged and countered the attacks with greater ferocity. In fact, he improved to the stage where he occasionally had a free hand as he dealt with the ongoing blows.

Weed came to remember the feeling of popping balloons. Definitely, the danger was greater this time around, and the Steel Barbarians' speed was truly astonishing, but once he was accustomed to the initial shock, the rest came easily...

A pattern. There is a pattern in their movements. I must find the precise sequence.

Weed began to match his movements with the Steel Barbarians' attacks, perfecting his own sequence of movements.

Water, I have to become fluid like water.

Synchronized to the Barbarians' movements, Weed evolved from an impregnable wall to a maelstrom. As they fought, it felt like his heart was about to explode. As his blood surged, his destructive strength began to break them one by one.

\*Crack! Pop!\*

He was no longer afraid of the Steel Barbarians. They were no longer a threat.

Within a span of 30 minutes, Weed managed to destroy all hundred Steel Barbarians. He collapsed onto the floor as he finished his deed, his chest heaving from exhaustion.



"... Huff" He gasped for breath and tried to move but his aching muscles prevented him from doing so. His heart pounded wildly and his stamina had dropped dangerously low. He felt the biting pangs of hunger in his stomach.

The dark hallway lit up and the rooster-like instructor appeared.

The Avian's face flickered with surprise as his gaze fell upon the remains of the Steel Barbarians.

"Amazing. You are the first one to succeed in the second attempt here."

Weed shakily stood up, needing to be supported by the instructor's wings.

"Did I pass the Beginner Training Hall?"

"Of course!"

"If it's not too much trouble, could you tell me how many people have passed this before me?"

"Here, you are the first. If you're talking about the whole continent, you're about the 400th."

There were about 3,800 people who had passed the Basic Training Hall. They were the ones who had raised their stats by constantly hitting scarecrows for a month.

It was an impressive number, considering the sheer determination and willpower one required to accomplish such a task. Yet, the number who had passed the Beginner Training Hall was significantly less. This was possibly because there were many who couldn't find a Beginner Training Hall, but the more likely reason was the difficulty of the test.

Instead of the mindless task of hitting a scarecrow for a month, to pass the Beginner Training Hall, one was required to understand the essence of fighting against groups.

This could not be done by just anyone.

Even after repeated failures, few have the will to continue trying after dying dozens of times. That was the amount of perseverance it takes to pass the Basic Training Hall.

Of course, the reward was well suited to its level of difficulty and incredible risk.

"You have the potential to be a true fighter. Do you have any intention of quitting your useless class and becoming a Master Fighter? You will be able to equip any weapons. Your punches and kicks will become stronger too. It is the secret class of a Martial Arts Practitioner."

\*Ding!\*

You can change your class to secret class 'Master Fighter'

You will be able to use special skills related to this class.

You could raise Weapon Mastery further. Attack and Vitality increases. Do you wish to change your class? If you change your class, secret class 'Legendary Moonlight Sculptor' will automatically disappear.

Only those who had an innate understanding of fighting could pass the Beginner Training Hall. Knight, Archer or any other job could have its level raised using Weapon Mastery. In addition, the ability to use any weapon and change them while fighting was a huge advantage.

Bows for long range attacks. Spears for facing cavalry, powerful axes... All of it would be at his immediate disposal.

The strength of attacks and his vitality would increase faster than with the other classes.

Master Fighter.

It was a reward offered only to those who had passed the Beginner Training Hall. Most people would choose to become a Master Fighter without hesitation.

But...

Weed did not have to think about his answer. Although he had acquired the Moonlight Sculptor class unintentionally and had many regrets initially, all of it was now in the past.

The charms and hidden advantages of the Sculptor class attracted him. Though he did not know how strong the Master Fighter class was, his resolution did not waver.

"I'll keep my current job."

You have declined the offer to change your class.

The instructor's face was tinged with disappointment.

"Very well. Here is another reward, based on your performance during the fight." The instructor continued, "Also, you have a chance to attain a new skill. Whatever action you take, a skill will be created for you. Do as you wish."

Weed fell deep into thought. A skill was not something that could be attained by effort alone, and so this opportunity should not be wasted.

What skill do I need?

Sword fighting? He did not need it. He could not even use his existing sword fighting skills properly.

Footwork? He only used special footwork when he was trying to reduce the distance between himself and his opponent in a long distance fight, or when dodging magic spells. His basic instincts were more than adequate and he did not need that skill.

Of course, when met with a highly skilled opponent, he would need to use footwork, but he could compensate with his other skills.

Magic? He could not learn it now, but when his Intellect rises above 300, then he would be able to learn magic, regardless of his job. It was something to consider in the distant future.

Holy Magic? He did not even give it a second thought. After much consideration, he decided to just do something random.

Whatever I do, a skill suitable for me will be made.

He could do anything he wanted, but with the stage set, he had no idea what to do. Weed stood there unmoving, while the instructor stared at him.

Weed suddenly felt uncertainty as he thought about leaving Lavi. Memories of the brief period he spent with Da'in inundated him, the hunting grounds they scoured, the Skeleton Knights, Skeleton Mages, Soldiers, Dullahans, Death Knights, and Spirits they fought together. He'd be leaving all these behind with no chance of returning.

She might be not even be alive anymore. He still regretted not saying farewell to her in the end.

"Ahhh..." Weed opened his mouth and made a small sound. The shout steadily grew louder, until it reverberated through the whole cave.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

This was a farewell to the Avians and his memories of Da'in. His suppressed emotions exploded in one agonizing howl.

\*Ding!\*

**You have learned a new Skill: Lion's Roar**

It is a thunderous shout that will shake the heavens, and it is filled with the fighter's Will.Effect:

Allied army's Fighting Spirit increases by 200%.

Enemy army's confusion state increases.

Temporary increase of Leadership.Stat Charisma formed.

\*\*\*\*

Baran Village had prospered after the Lizardmen's defeat. Home to the epitome of abundance and beauty, the Statue of Goddess Freya drew visiting nobles and merchants from far and wide. Perhaps due to the statue's blessing, the town had not encountered further invasions from the monsters. Nobles would chat excitedly about the statue when they returned to their cities.

There was a small inscription by the Statue's feet, which most thought of as nonsense:

"Thought the sculpting level is low, I hope the finished product of the Freya's Statue will be accepted by all and praised for its beauty"

Baran was previously a small town despite the patronage of nobles, kings and merchants. But as users who hunted near Rosenheim Kingdom increased, their gradual southward migration in search of new hunting grounds and adventure rapidly increased the town's population.

The abundance of nearby dungeons coupled with the conference of a 15% increase in the recovery rate of vitality and mana for a day on all those who laid eyes on the Statue of Goddess Freya, were key factors in attracting new residents.

"Was this great statue here before?"

"Who made this?" People were intrigued and amazed by the statue. Rumors spread that the mysterious sculptor was in the punitive force that helped liberate Baran.

Weed became a celebrity.

The pure smile and face fresh like the morning dew captivated the masses. They could not bear not seeing it at least once a day. The square near the statue was filled with merchants hawking their wares and adventurers come to admire the statue.

"These are weapons sold in Citadel of Serabourg. Selling very cheaply at original price plus some transportation price."

"Buying items. I'll pay 10% more than the retail price."

"Need fighters above level 100 damage dealers for hunting Salamanders and Werewolves. Rogues or Assassins are welcome too!"

"I'm looking for a party to hunt at Chalupan Valley or at least someone who would guide me there. I'm level 120 Ranger."

"First time in Baran Town. Invite me to a party! Job is Bard. I'll sing beautifully for the whole battle."

Within the noisy, packed square, a hushed silence suddenly spread. This was because of a single merchant: Mapan.

He was level 70 merchant. Though only a beginner, he mainly delivered items over a long distance and transported items from the Citadel of Serabourge or nearby major cities to the rapidly growing Baran Town in need of resources. Customers flocked to him in an instant.

With a dream that he would one day rule Rosenheim Kingdom, Mapan worked hard to gain money. Gathering money little by little was the fun only merchants can savor. Mapan wheeled his wheelbarrow to a corner after selling off all his items and took a well-deserved stretch, looking towards the sky.

Something was falling from the sky.

"Hu...Huh? That..."

That something was a person.

"A person, a person is falling from the sky!" Mapan yelled with all the air in his lungs, pointing at the sky.

"What is he talking about?" Many dismissed it as nonsense, but some looked up to where Mapan pointed.

Someone was really falling from the sky. A person holding on to nine gigantic bags appeared from above, hurtling towards the ground at a tremendous speed!

"Ahhhhh!"

"Run for your lives!"

In an instant, the square fell into chaos.

\*\*\*\*

Whoosh!

Weed's ears hurt because of the howling winds, and if he hit the ground at this velocity, every bone in his body would be broken and he'd end up as a gory pancake. Even hardened stone and huge boulders would be splintered and crushed to pieces.

Even in the perilous situation, he was calm. Squinting, he looked at the ground to aim.

A little bit to right...

Weed adjusted his body accordingly and sped up towards the ground, seen as he wanted to arrive as soon as possible.

"Ahhhh!"

"Run! Hurry!"

He could see people screaming and running helter skelter very clearly. Merchants jumped and abandoned their stalls as though a fire was burning them.

Were there this many people in Baran Town?

Weed used Feather of Lightness when he was about 500m above ground. His body which was free-falling quickly slowed down, gaining air resistance. Only a small cloud of dust rose upon his landing. However, due to the weight of the nine gigantic bags he carried, his feet plunged into the ground to a depth of 10cm.

"....."

"Who is he?"

"Is he a Mage?"

Users pointed at Weed, speculating the identity of the mysterious man who fell from the sky. Everyone's first suspicion was that he was a mage who used Flight magic. But Flight magic couldn't be used by just anyone. Only a mage with Five Circle Supporting Magic over level 300 had the ability.

Level 300 could be only seen from the top gamer in Royal Road. What sort of mage would appear like that, falling from the sky?

Because Weed descended with such speed, he attracted more attention than he would normally have. Over a hundred users stared at him as he surveyed the town.

Weed focused on a stand that did not close despite the chaos and looked at Mapan who was hiding behind the Freya Goddess Statue, peering back at Weed.

"Hey, you."

Mapan answered in surprise, "Yes? Yes."

Weed said gently, "You look like a merchant, do you buy items?"

"Yes, of course!" Mapan hurriedly nodded as he scurried from behind the statue, afraid that Weed might change his mind. Mapan was a businessman after all, and he specialized in trading with items.

After buying items from major cities cheaply using the Item Trading Skill that only merchants could get, he sold them at a high price in stores. Merchants could earn experience points by buying at a cheap price and selling at a high price.

Weed said in a laid-back voice, "How much would you pay for it?"

"If you sell to stores, the profit would be 2% of the original price. I could pay at least 15% more than the stores, and when in bulk, I'll pay at 18% more. I would be buying with only 2% margin left for me."

Weed looked around for someone who would suggest better deal than Mapan, but no one called out. The price suggested was a very honest price.

A Merchant's trading skill depended on how quickly he could sell his merchandise. Mapan, who could leave a 2% margin, was considered as very highly skilled merchant. Weed decided to make a deal with him.

"If there's any item you're collecting, I'll sell them to you separately."

Mapan's jaw dropped.

'This person is a big catch!'

How many items did he have to be able to say that he'd sell an item separately if there was any Mapan was collecting?

When selling items, it was much more beneficial to sell in bulk.

"Anything. I sold all the items I had, so it was about time I bought some more."

"Is that so?"

Weed flipped his bag upside-down and shook it. Out poured Dullahan's legs, Skeleton bone pieces, charcoal, tree stems, rusted short spears, bone clubs, and other items to no end. Suede Pants, golden strings, tunic cloth, and other such items flowed out freely as well. They piled up until a mountain formed.

"H-How can this be!" Mapan's eyes couldn't get any wider.

'To be able to bring this many of items... Where did he go hunting?'

Logically, the enormous amount of items was impossible to get: these items could only be gathered through hunting, but this amount was beyond anyone's capabilities.

Considering the fact that not many people had discovered Lavias, Weed had gathered items in secret hiding places throughout the dungeon. He couldn't sell at a good price if he sold them to

stores in Lavias. He would benefit much more from selling them to merchants who would buy such items at a higher price.

Profit!

Money!

Weed would never budge in this area. He would never throw away even an item worth just 1 copper.

"Th-This many items..." Mapan's eyes twitched slightly. He had never imagined that anyone could see such a sheer amount of items in a lifetime!

"How many will you buy?"

Mapan replied immediately, there was no need to even think about it, "I'll buy everything I can."

159 gold was all the money that Mapan had. Merchants could only get money by selling items that they bought from other users, but due to fierce competition, prices were constantly raised, so getting a surplus was difficult.

"Then take it."

The moment Weed gave his permission; Mapan began categorizing the items by their price. His abilities in item evaluation were used for moments like these, so assessing an item's value on the market took less than a second.

1 gold... 2 gold... the value rose quickly, and he had soon calculated that the mountain of equipment had a net worth of 157 gold.

The magic backpack, able to be filled with ten times its volume and reduced the work to carry it to a third, spilled out an avalanche of items.

"Th-then..." Mapan gave Weed a strained smile as he began to wobble off to his nearby store.

'How heavy is it to cause...?'

"I feel his pain..."

The crowd had begun to scatter, but the remaining spectators looked at Mapan with pity. Meanwhile, the merchants' expressions were filled with bitter jealousy, since if they could sell that many items, they would definitely be able to raise their level.

Following the wake of Baran's expansion, Weapon Stores and Smithys were yet to be built. On the other hand, variety stores did which sold and bought a plethora of different items.

"I'm grateful for your business. Since there is a lot, I'll give you 169 gold in this special case. Will you accept?"

"Thank you, sir!" Mapan was able to sell the items at the reasonable price of 169 gold by bargaining with the variety store owner. Mapan joyfully rushed out of the variety store.

"I have hurry and thank him."

Since his level and proficiency rose greatly due to selling items in large quantities, Mapan ran to the town square in hope of at least giving thanks. Weed was still in the same place.

"Thank you! My name is Mapan. If you come by again, at any time..."

Just then, Weed opened another bag and turned it upside down. Suddenly, another pile of items poured out!

"Th-th-that's..." Mapan's gaze was frozen in place as he stared at the small mountain that had just formed in front of him. He was already dazed from just one of the nine bags that Weed was carrying.

'... It can't be!' It was just as Mapan thought: all nine bags were filled with various items.

Weed emptied out the other eight bags where he stood. Excluding the first bag, six bags were filled with minor items, while two bags were filled with weapons and armor. Together, the items were worth an astounding sum of one thousand gold. The last bag was filled with the Death Knight's armor and various ores that he had kept for when he became level 200.

He had collected 145 iron ores and 109 copper ores!

Once one's Repair skill reached Intermediate level, one could learn the Blacksmith skill, so Weed was saving them until then.

"Please tell me just where you had such training!"

"You came from the sky, but how did you do it? Even a magician like me couldn't feel the flow of mana!"

"Could you give me some money?"

Users swarmed Weed.

In just a moment, he became a celebrity of Baran Village. However, soldiers that were protecting the village soon gathered around Weed.

"Is that you, Commander?"

"You guys..."

They were the soldiers from the Lair of Litvart: Hosram, Dale, and Becker.

"Ooh! You have finally returned!"

The elder, Ghandilva and the other villagers came out to greet Weed as well. At the sight, everyone's curiosity was amplified. Who was this person who literally fell from the sky and was getting all the NPC's respect?

Weed exchanged greetings with Ghandilva and the soldiers. Seeing the transformation Baran Village had gone through, he felt a surge of emotion.

'To think that my sculpture would have this effect...'



Under the sleeve of the Statue of the Goddess Freya was an inscription that only Weed knew about. Every time he saw it, he became anxious. If by some chance Seoyoon discovered this, a clashing of swords was inevitable!

The recovery speed of Health and Mana has risen by 15%. This effect will last the entire day.

The effects of the statue influenced Weed. The statue not only affected users, but also gave similar results to NPCs. It gave significant help to the NPC soldiers when exterminating monsters and leveling up. If a Fine Piece had this much affect, what would happen in a city with a Grand or Master Piece?

Statues could strengthen the military force of a city.

Sculpting could be an indescribable amazing thing...

While Weed was looking at the statue, lost in his thoughts, the merchant who bought his items, Mapan, appeared.

"Excuse me... if it's not too much trouble, may I ask where your next destination will be?"

Mapan, thanks to Weed, had hit the jackpot. He had leveled up 14 times, and his Trade skill leveled up three times.

One could say it was a miracle for a merchant. Shrugging, Weed answered,

"I'm going to go past the Baruk Mountain Range."

"The Baruk Mountain Range?"

"Yes. The place I am trying to reach is the Free City of Somre."

The destination was where the Order of the Goddess Freya was based. Weed had to deliver the Helain's Grail. There were two ways to reach the Free City of Somre, which had a church.

The more commonly used route was to go back to Serabourg Castle, pass Brent Kingdom, and before passing Hilcos Badlands, go straight in the Southwest direction. This was too complicated, for not only did it take three months just to get there, but one had to follow a trail.

It was far too boring for Weed, so instead he was planning to cross over the perilous Baruk Mountain Range and reach the Free City of Somre more quickly. Although the Baruk Mountain Range was infamous for its monsters, Weed had a secret weapon for emergencies, so he was unconcerned.

"So you are." Mapan smiled.

"Could you take me with you? Oh, please don't misunderstand! By seeing the items you brought, I can tell that our levels are very different, but I am not trying to burden you. I know very well that Merchants are weak in combat," he explained.

Merchants were one of the weaker classes of the non-battle type classes. However, Sculptors were commonly known to be weaker than Merchants, and Mapan did not know that Weed was a Sculptor.

What kind of Sculptor could kill a Death Knight or Dullahan? Furthermore, a Sculptor searching for stronger monsters because he got tired of hunting Death Knights was unthinkable.

"Even if we make a party, not many experience points will come to me. I will even cover all the costs of the herbs and bandages used for battle."

The largest part of Weed's losses was due to buying herbs and bandages. Mapan the Merchant said that he would take care of that part knowing that if he gives something, it would be reciprocated.

"What is it that you are after?"

"Items. If you choose to carry everything that drops, you'll be restricted in more ways than one. The bags will become too heavy and you will be unable to fight, so I will buy it all. The items you would otherwise sell ends up with me, and your burden is lightened considerably."

Mapan's goal was high level items. Following a strong fighter would be a huge advantage for him. Just one item from a level 200 monster was ten times more valuable than items from level 50 monsters.

He wanted to get items while following Weed rather than waiting at a town. Since he could trade items at each town, it wasn't bad business at all.

Weed considered it momentarily. It was a win-win situation if he took up the offer. His previous tactic of storing items in a hideout when he was hunting could only be used in Laviya. If someone used that tactic on the mainland, others would steal his bounty and get away with no repercussions.

"Very well! Let's travel together."