**Chapter 130: The 12th floor (6)**

-Bam! Bam!

The effect of the Weakness Detection spell was spectacular.

Starting at the center, where Bernie was trapped, the tree gradually began to crack.

As if a nail had been driven through glass, a series of cracks appeared throughout the ice tree.

The fate of cracked glass is irreversible and the same goes for the ice tree.

-Crack, crack, crack!

The first crack leads to more cracks, and the cracks quickly collapse, spelling doom.

If the tree suddenly falls, what happens to the monkey on top?

“Cheer-reuruk?!!”

The snowy kobold let out a panicked scream.

-Ssshhhhhhhhhhhh!

Just then, another wind ripping sound rang out but the direction wasn't towards me.

-Poof!

A rope-laced arrow lodged in the thigh of the snow kobold falling from the tree.

The snow kobold, perched on another icy tree, fired a rescue arrow.

-POP!

The rope stretched taut, pulling the arrow-struck snow kobold up.

“Where!”

I immediately pulled out the artifact axe and injected magic into it, then threw it at another snow kobold and shouted.

“Giant!”

-Koooooow!

The axe instantly grew in size, spun slowly, and flew toward the ice tree.

“Chirrrrrrr!”

Startled by that, the second snow kobold let go of the rope and ran away.

The first snow kobold, who had only an arrow in his thigh, fell to the ground.

-Pow!

The snow kobold, miraculously cushioned by the thick layer of snow, looked up at me with a despondent face.

“Didn't you like it when you were splitting the yarn?”

“Cheh, cheh, cheh!”

The snow kobold screamed.

-Tsk!

Blood splashed across the white snow.

The skin was white and the blood was red.

I grasped at the exhilarating sensation coursing through my hands and quickly scanned the battlefield.

The two ice trees that had taken the brunt of Ellie and Lammel's fireballs were half-melted, with two charred, shriveled snow kobolds lying beneath them.

Joy Hog and Jubeel, who didn’t have means to attack enemies up in the trees, were guarding the priest and wizard.

We encountered four in total, and one escaped.

“They're few.”

Kobolds, like goblins, live in groups.

It's not much different with snow kobolds.

They travel in groups of at least five and as many as thirty, but the snow kobolds that attacked us were only four.

“They must be the vanguard. The main group will be after us soon.”

There was no other reason for the pack-living creatures to send only a handful of fighters out first.

They wanted to analyze the strength of the force before going into battle.

The party nodded at Joy Hog's analysis.

“Wouldn’t it be better to leave quickly? I’ve heard that snow kobolds are good at climbing trees and shooting arrows. If we find ourselves in the same situation again, it’ll be dangerous.”

Lammel voiced her concern when dozens of arrows flew from the snow kobolds on the high ground.

It was definitely a dangerous situation.

“Hmm… no. It might be okay in a cave like the upper level, but in this wide terrain, it would be more dangerous to run away rashly.”

In a straight pathway, you can only protect yourself with a shield in front of you.

But in an open-world, non-side-scrolling game, you'll need to be aware of your front, back, and sides, as well as the diagonal.

What if you're out in the open and snow kobolds surround you with arrows from afar?

With minimal cover and low mobility, we'd be at a significant disadvantage.

We need to eliminate the enemy's advantage and increase the party's chances of survival.

An idea flashed through my mind.

“Ellie. Lammel. How many fireballs can you still use?”

“Five. Any more than that, and I might run out of magic power.”

“I'm limited to two.”

After hearing Ellie and Lammel's answers, I paused for a moment.

‘Will it work?’

I had enough power.

“Balkan. You got an idea?”

Joy Hog asked me. I nodded and told her my vague plan.

“A primitive plan.”

“Wasn't that just a recap of the battle?”

“It's the simplest and most straightforward, so it should work.”

Everyone in the party nodded in agreement.

Quickly strategizing, we acted swiftly.

Lammel and Ellie built up their stocks of magic so they could cast it immediately, and I used the spell Seek Weakness to identify and memorize the weaknesses of the nearby ice trees.

We prepared for an attack by the snow kobolds.

-Chirp-chirp-chirp

They stepped into my activated perception range.

“They're coming.”

The party nodded at my words.

The best defense is offense.

It was time to let the foolish raiders know where I stood.

\*\*\*

“Cherub! Cherub!”

The snow kobold that had attacked our party scurried away, but quickly returned to the group to explain the situation.

An individual with one head larger than the other snowy kobolds, the seed of a beast born from the sperm of a male explorer on the 14th floor, the leader snow kobold immediately led her troops in pursuit.

“Cheruk. Che!”

Thirty snow kobolds bowed their heads to the leader and obeyed her command.

The snow beasts skillfully climbed the trees and moved into the groove of ice trees.

“Cheruk. Cheruk.”

The leader kobold sneered at the six distinct footprints in the snow.

They were not skilled enough to erase the tracks.

The tracks left behind gave a good indication of the quality of the prey.

How many prey had been hunted here before.

The near-annihilation of the vanguard didn't seem like a big deal.

Only six prey? Her tribe could handle that many if she led them.

It wasn't arrogance, but the confidence of experience.

“Cheruk!”

The leading snow kobold shouted as she spotted the prey standing alone.

A short, shield-wielding female. It was Joy Hog, a dwarf.

“Che!!!”

At the leader's shout, the thirty snow kobolds that had been moving swiftly from tree to tree came to a halt.

Sometimes there were as few as two and as many as six in a single icy tree.

They quickly drew arrows and strung them on their bows.

“Rrr!!!!”

The leader kobold swung her arm and gave the command to fire.

“Arrrrrrrrrrrrrr!”

Twenty arrows shot out at once, tearing through the cold air and wind of the snowfield.

As Joy Hog activated her artifact shield in horror, the leader kobold noticed a strange discrepancy.

There were far fewer arrows to rain down on the short dwarf than she had expected.

“Chirrrrrr!”

“Chirrrrrr!”

Immediately, the screams of the snow kobolds in the rear echoed.

The ice tree the snow kobolds had climbed on the left had been hit by a fireball and was melting.

The ice tree on the right was tilting with an eerie sound.

“Cheh, Cheh?”

After a moment of panic, the leader snow kobold quickly realized what was happening.

The base of the ice tree, a blind spot you can't see when you're running straight ahead.

The unwitting prey had bared its teeth, waiting with bated breath to hunt them down in reverse.

To be ambushed by her prey trampled her pride as a hunter of the snowfields.

-Aaaah!

The leader, the Snowfield Kobold, gritted her teeth in fury and glared at her prey.

To her left, two mages with fireballs and a swordsman escorting them.

To her right, a male chopping wood with an axe and a helpless priest.

It's always better to start with the weakest.

The leader, a snowy kobold born from the semen of a male explorer, has always instinctively looked down on males and trampled them.

Stupid males. Sperm packets. An inferior species with no value beyond breeding.

A few arrows in the right places, stuffed and eaten, and the tribe will prosper.

-Kuddle, kuddle, kuddle!

The bowstring was drawn, and the arrowhead pointed at the male's abdomen.

The arrow gathered blue pellets of energy and then.

-Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tut!

The spinning arrow sucked in the cold air around it in an instant.

The power of the arrow was beyond the arrows of other snow kobolds.

An icy arrow, imbued with the chill of the snowfield that would freeze any axe it touched, let alone the man it hit.

But the man didn't even bother to dodge.

He just stood there, staring at the arrow flying toward him.

The leader, a snow kobold, smiled triumphantly.

“Bernie.”

Again, he didn't respond.

“Eat.”

Poof!

“⋯Cherub?”

The leader, a snow kobold, rubbed her eyes dazedly.

It was a sight she could hardly believe, even with the precision of her eyes, which could spot prey from a mile away.

The axe blade snapped in two, and it gaped, swallowing the ice arrow whole.

But the moment of panic was short-lived.

“Spit it back out.”

At the man's command, the axe opened its mouth again and spat out the ice arrow it had swallowed.

-Pfft!

The ice arrow pierced the leader's head.

With a hole in its forehead, the snow kobold's head gradually froze, and its body lost its strength and fell from the ice tree.

“Cheer! Cheer cheer!!!!!!”

“Churrrrrrrrr!!!”

The sudden death of their leader caused a rift in the kobold horde.

The sudden confusion clouded their judgment about where to go after their prey.

Balkan would not miss that moment.

“Fuck you all!!!!”

A fireball flew from his left, melting ice trees and snowy kobolds in an instant.

Balkan rampaged through the icy forest, swinging his oversized axe and a nearly as large artifact axe at will.

-Tsk, tsk, tsk!!!

Each time the axe struck a weak spot in an icy tree, the tree collapsed, sending the snowy kobold tumbling to the snowy ground.

-Thud! Thud!

With each swing of his axe, an icy tree collapses, splattering red blood across the pure white snow.

-Puck! Puck!

The ice tree shattered with splinters flying.

His skin was torn and large splinters embedded in his flesh, but Hitolis' healing miracle kept him going, and he swung his axe in a trance.

“Cheruk. Cheh. Chehhhhhhhh!”

He chased after the snow kobold, who stumbled backward with a terrified look on her face.

The snowy kobold stopped in its tracks, its back and paws brushing the snow.

The base of an icy tree blocked his path.

There was nowhere to run.

“Che, che, che-”

The snowy kobold let out a strangled cry and stared at the being before him.

A helmet splattered with blood and a massive, muscular body.

A male, larger than she was, holding two gigantic axes.

No, no.

Crueler than her kind, wilder than any beast in the hierarchy.

A savage, a warrior.

-Tsk!

The sound of tearing flesh rang out and the cries of the snow kobolds could no longer be heard.

“Whoa.”

Balkan took a quick breath and looked back.

There was no white snowfield.

All he could see was red, blood-soaked snow.

His hands were shaking.

How long had it been since he'd killed so many people?

His brain was racing and his heart was pounding.

The excitement of battle had fired his body with a heat that could melt even the chill of winter.

“Is it over⋯”

“I thought I was going to die. Dozens of arrows at once⋯ one more thing to talk about over drinks.”

“No, anyway, Balkan, what kind of magic did you do?! How did you get the arrows back⋯!”

“Oh. Oppa. Are you all right⋯?!”

I smiled bitterly as I watched the party regroup and begin to discuss.

We survived.

\*\*\*

We got one Leader Snow Kobold Soulstone, three Soulstones from normal Snow Kobolds, forty special poisoned arrows, Snow Kobold's hide and other miscellaneous byproducts.

“Crazy, so many soul stones!”

“The arrows of the Snow Kobolds are of high quality, we should be able to sell them for a good price.”

“A good harvest for the effort!”

We take what we can, discard what we can, and stack the battle's rewards in my backpack.

After a short break of an hour or so to drink a healing potion, we resumed our march.

“It's snowing.”

“Wow⋯ it's pretty⋯ oppa. Let's watch.”

The snow falling on the snowfield was indeed a spectacular sight, but it wasn't something we could afford to sit and stare at.

“Night will be here soon, and we need to find a place to sleep before it gets colder.”

“Right. Let's move quickly. We need to find a cave or an igloo like the explorers who came before us.”

We needed to find a place to stay warm and safe.

From the middle floors on, the Labyrinth has day and night.

This is a change from the upper floors, where there was a ceiling.

I checked the wristwatch Diana had given me. It was already 17:00.

The battle with the snowy kobolds had delayed the time a bit.

The sky was already gradually turning dark.

“Huh.”

“Hooo. Heavy.”

The party members moving in formation blew their breath on their hands to ward off the cold.

The cold on the 12th floor penetrated even their winter gear.

It was cold enough now, but if night came, they would freeze to death from hypothermia or something.

Sleeping outside in this weather is no joke, it's freezing.

We had firewood from Joy Hog, so we had to find a cave or something to start a fire and warm up.

“Etchy!”

I gasp.

Ellie snorted, red-faced.

I handed her the winter coat I was wearing.

“Put this on and stay warm. Ellie.”

“Oh, it's okay, I'm sure you're cold too.”

“I got a miracle from a priest I know, so I'm fine.”

“Well, if I'm cold, I can warm myself with a fireball⋯”

“No. You never know when something might happen, so you should conserve your magic as much as possible. We can't afford to waste it on something like that.”

“⋯Yes. I'm sorry.”

Ellie was more concerned than the rest of the party, since this was probably her first time in such an extreme environment.

“⋯You smell⋯ Hehe.”

Ellie laughed, looking much better in the fur coat I'd been sweating in for days.

But apart from that, after three hours of exploring, we hadn't found a decent place to rest.

It's now 8pm.

The party's movements slowed as the bitter cold continued, and their complexions grew pale.

As the surroundings grew abysmally dark, it became impossible to explore any further.

“Should we dig a tunnel and hide in it?”

“Are you crazy? You want to be buried alive?”

“Yes, but it's dangerous to move any further. The monsters are more active at night.”

I've given up on finding a shelter and am seriously considering digging a hole to get out of the cold.

“There, there! Light! Light!”

Ellie shouted, pointing somewhere in the distance.

All eyes turned in that direction, there was a cave not too far away with a warm glow emanating from it.

“Now, wait a minute. Couldn't it be an outlaw party?”

“No, but we don't have a choice, and if we lose any more time, there's no turning back.”

Joy Hog shook her head in concern.

‘That cave is the only place to rest around here.’

If we pass it, no one is sure when we'll find shelter again.

If we miss this shelter, our party could be found cold and dead tomorrow morning.

Somehow, we had to huddle together and stay warm for the night.

If it was an outlaw we couldn't talk to, we'd have to kill them.

“I'll take the lead, just in case, I'm in the best shape.”

“I'm sorry. Can you do that?”

Joy Hog's hands were already shaking so badly she could barely grip her shield.

With me in the lead, just in case, the party cautiously approached the cave.

Out of politeness, and just in case, we didn't approach fully.

“Are you there!!!”

I shouted from near the cave, and immediately felt a stirring inside.

“Nu, who's there?”

It was a small, cute voice.

For a moment, I thought it was a child, but no ordinary child would be in a place like this.

“This is the Explorer Joy Hog Party, along with the Explorer Balkan from the Alliance! Excuse me, but can we stay in the cave together—”

 “⋯Ba, you mean Balkan?!”

The cute voice was quickly tinged with panic.

At the same time, the sound of someone else moving inside the cave was heard.

In total, there were two people in the cave.

“Is that true?! Are you saying your name is really Balkan?!”

Something was wrong. They know my name.

But I nodded anyway.

“Yes! Explorer Bal-”

“Master!!!!!!!!!!”

-Pow!

The woman rushed out of the cave, and in a flash, she was on top of me.

I fell instantly to the snow, and she was on top of me.

-Thrrrr!

“Oh, oppa!”

I heard the party arm themselves, and Ellie screamed in terror.

My eyes were fixed on the woman on top of me.

The blue moonlight revealed her form.

Black short hair, violet eyes that seemed to mix with chaos, her breasts were just the right size, not too big, not too small, and her hips were wide and strong.

Dressed like a maiden, even in this cold weather, wearing only a white fur coat, a black shred of fabric, and short denim pants.

She had a smile full of joy and playfulness, and a pet collar, still around her neck.

[Bonded Slave: Denshi LV.31]

“I've missed you! Master!”

She once tried to fuck me, but was rehabilitated and swore obedience to me.