**Chapter 31: I want to go to the second floor (3)**

Every time I look at the status window, I wonder.

Everyone's stats are all jumbled up.

Every time you level up, your stats are randomized, so some people have higher or lower stats, while others have more evenly distributed stats.

Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, but everyone except me has one thing in common.

‘Every time you gain a level, your stats increase.’

It's as if your body needs time to adjust to the increase in stats.

My question is this.

[Free Points: 5]

‘If I invest 5 stats in a single shot, will my body be able to keep up?’

Athletic gains require a period of waiting. This means that torn muscles need time to reattach and grow.

[Agility: (2+10) → (7+10)]

Agility, a word that literally means to move quickly.

So, what happens to my physical body when my Agility stat increases dramatically?

The answer to my question came quickly.

A rain of arrows rained down from the ceiling.

-Thud, thud, thud.

My body, right after investing the stats, ticks to zero in a matter of seconds.

'It feels like I took a step up. My body evolved.'

I felt a radical increase in the speed at which my body moves.

From the speed at which my muscles gathered strength, there was a clear difference.

"Ugh-!"

"Kaaak?!"

The hand that held Grumpy swung with all the force it could muster, and she was thrown straight forward.

Jeremy didn't let go of her grip, either, and the two of them flew out of the trap area like a streak of lightning.

At least they were alive.

I looked up and saw a dense rain of arrows. I'm standing in the center of a circular rain of arrows.

A second ago, I would have somehow managed to survive this rain of arrows.

‘But I wouldn't have dodged it completely.’

I don't know about my armored head or torso, but I've probably taken three or four arrows in my legs and arms.

And the potions I have now can't heal that much damage. At that point, exploring the second floor would have been quite a challenge.

And as for Grumpy and Jeremy?

I couldn't afford to save them, so of course they would have turned into hedgehogs.

By comparison, how about now?

-Bam bam bam bam!

A rain of dozens of arrows pierced the stone floor, sending chills down my spine.

We're alive. All three of us are safe.

‘That was close.’

It was a close call, to be honest.

A moment's delay in judgment and execution, and I'd be circling the Jordan River tourist trail, hand in hand with the lives I killed.

"Brother!"

Jeremy gasped and grabbed my hand.

"Consideration for your party before yourself! Quick thinking and action! Hmph⋯ I'm still a long way off⋯!"

Jeremy, whose life was saved by my efforts, clung to me in tears of emotion.

"If I'd been hit by an arrow, even Anya in the backpack would have been seriously injured⋯!"

Ah. So that was the problem, let it go. You're suddenly so overbearing and creepy.

"Crazy⋯ Crazy⋯ Crazy⋯ I've never been like this before⋯"

Grumpy looks quite unhappy that she fell into a trap as soon as she entered the second floor.

Well, it was normal for her to react like that after being nearly pierced through the head with arrows before she had time to detect and confirm the trap.

"You saved my life, master, and⋯ I apologize. I didn't notice the trap."

She bragged about the second floor being her territory, but from the start, she slipped up and had an anxious, intimidated expression.

She immediately bowed low to me and a shiver ran down my spine at first glance.

It wasn't the sexually excited tremor I'd seen before. It was a darker, slimier shudder, a shudder of negative emotion.

For a moment, I remembered Deluna's dog-like thrashing.

The way she'd been beaten until her eyes were black and puffy, unable to say a word.

"What. A slave is supposed to be protected by his master."

"⋯?"

A slave is his master's property. I'm supposed to protect my own property, not entrust it to someone else.

I patted the bewildered Grumpy on the head, then walked over to what had become an arrow field and pulled out an arrow embedded deep in the stone.

The arrowhead was smeared with a purple liquid. Poison, apparently. The Labyrinth was serious about screwing with explorers.

"This should do the trick. And don't be intimidated, you've got a long way to go."

Her eyes narrowed momentarily as I offered the arrow and comforting words.

"⋯Yes⋯"

Denshi smiled faintly as she accepted the arrow.

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-Tadadak!

The three stones thrown from Grumpy’s hand landed on the ground.

-Tada, tada, tada.

Each time, her ears twitched.

She puts her palms over her ears to hear the sound better, and since she's squatting on the floor, she looks like she's imitating a rabbit.

"Don't touch the tiles over here and the tiles on the wall over there. Just follow my path."

She stepped carefully, avoiding certain stone tiles.

Jeremy and I quickly followed in her footsteps, stepping over the tiles.

"Phew. That's it. I don't think there will be any traps for a while."

"⋯How do you know that from throwing rocks on the floor?"

I asked curiously, and she flicked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and gently touched her own auricle.

"When you throw a stone on the floor, it makes a very faint vibration, and it travels along the walls, floor, and ceiling, often making a strange rattling noise somewhere."

Grumpy said as she picked up a rock.

"I don't know the exact workings of the Labyrinth Traps, but I can tell you that wherever I hear that sound-"

Whiz-!

She throws the rock hard at the wall tile she was talking about earlier.

Click.

The tile is pressed down slightly.

Thud!

The floor we were on a moment ago folded in half, revealing a pit.

"Like this. This is where the trap is."

I sneak over and look down into the pit, where dozens of sharp spears are stuck with their blades pointing up.

""Ohhhhh.""

I and Jeremy could only stare in awe. This was the kind of trick that only someone with exceptionally good ears could pull off.

"The trickiest ones are the arrow traps with muffled sounds and the transition traps with no sound at all⋯ I've only seen them once, so I don't know how to recognize them."

"Transition traps?"

That was a shitty name for a trap. Where else in this shitty labyrinth would it transition to?

"It depends on the color, but sometimes there's a transition trap that takes you further down. In fact, the last time I went down to the third floor with Deluna's party, I got caught in a transition trap. I almost died back then⋯"

Grumpy shrugged her shoulders as if she didn't even want to think about it.

"It's a good thing I fell on the third floor, or I wouldn't be here⋯"

The difficulty of the Labyrinth increases sharply with each floor that is a multiple of four.

The difficulty increases from the 4th, 8th, and 12th floors.

For this reason, the 4th and 8th floors are also known as the Wailing Wall for beginner explorers.

"⋯That is a dangerous trap."

"Exactly. One wrong step and you'll fall to the bottom of the fourth floor, and that's the end of your life."

"But wait, you got caught in it? Your party stepped on it?"

"Oh. The transfer trap is an area trap. Light spreads out, and if you touch it, you're caught in the trap immediately."

The most dangerous trap in the Labyrinth, where if you're unlucky, you could be caught in something someone else stepped on.

Due to the nature of the Labyrinth, which requires you to climb back up the way you came through the Ascension Portal, falling into a Transition Trap can leave you waiting to die with no answers.

‘What's the difference between this and a descent portal?’

Is it just the difference between a trap and a portal? Isn't it safe to assume that they are the same portal or trap in the sense that you're descending a labyrinth?

'I should research portals as well⋯'

I don't even know how to start, it just disintegrates and metastasizes as soon as I touch it, so what the hell am I supposed to check?

"⋯Hoo. Let's go."

"Yeah!"

I sighed unnecessarily and started walking. I'll have to check out the library when we get back to Valerus.

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Zzzzzzzz!!!

I plunged my axe into the goblin's neck. There was a slight jerk, but with a little more force, the goblin turned into a go\blin.

'Tougher than a ground floor goblin.’

It wasn't unbeatable, but I could feel the goblin's level increase.

"Whoa. Huh."

[Jeremy LV.5]

It's been three days since we entered the Labyrinth and it had been a little over two days since we entered the second floor.

Jeremy has already gained two levels on this trip to the Labyrinth.

Perhaps it's the efficiency buffs, but it's clear that the monsters on the second floor give more experience than the monsters on the first floor.

"Woman's body is cursed⋯ this rotting mass of fat, woohoo⋯ every time I move, my breathing is ragged⋯"

Jeremy exhaled harshly, perhaps because he was unfamiliar with fighting in his altered body.

Well, great power comes at a great price.

[Nam Soo-jin LV.6]

[Free Points: 1 point]

[Bonded Slave: Denshi (LV. 8)]

Grumpy And I have leveled up, but our progress is slow.

‘Let's take it slow. No need to feel like we're being chased.’

"We've come quite a ways already. We're near the center of the second floor, would you like to take a break?"

"A break sounds good."

"Great!"

We moved on, resting and exploring as appropriate, and had already reached the center of the second floor.

Since the first drop was at the beginning of the second floor, we had succeeded in reaching the center in two days.

"At this pace, I think we'll reach the center in three more days. With two first-timers on the second floor, that's pretty fast, and honestly, it's faster than when I was at the Deluna party."

The main theme of the second floor is traps. Aside from the addition of traps, there's no dramatic difference from the first floor.

"Ah. If you sit on it, you'll get..."

-Click.

-Chaaaahhh!

"Heeeeeeee!"

Jeremy tried to sit down on the floor and fell into the net trap, dangling in midair.

I sighed and cut the netting with my axe.

"Thanks, brother."

Aside from the more silent or non-damaging types of traps, the main challenge of the second floor, the traps, were largely bypassed thanks to Grumpy.

Dealing with monsters like goblins wasn't too difficult either.

Honestly, the most dangerous time I was on the second floor was right after the transition.

My party was fine on the second floor, so I figured I could set the next objective a little higher.

For a moment, I thought about going all the way to the third floor this time, but I shook my head, thinking that would be too greedy. It's best to play it safe and take it one step at a time.

'Please, let it end smoothly as it is⋯'

If this labyrinth run ended safely, there were many things I wanted to do.

I'd like to go back and prepare for the third floor, visit the library, and, oh yeah, take a bath, since I've only been wiping myself down with a towel.

I also missed Diana’s hot soup.

I haven't eaten the jerky yet because it's a waste, but just holding the string bag gives me a strange feeling of strength.

After a short rest, we resumed our walk.

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"Damn."

The master of flagging returned.

"That's a transition trap."

Grumpy muttered as she saw the yellow portal stuck in the air.

A transition trap. A trap that explorers must avoid at all costs.

"Judging by the color, it's a trap to the fifth floor."

I had no intention of going through it, but the destination made me want to avoid it even more.

The fifth floor. I can't even begin to imagine how hectic it will be.

I hadn't even made it to the third floor, let alone the fourth floor, where the difficulty level rose sharply, and I didn't want to go to the fifth floor.

"Well, that's good. I found it first. We just need to avoid the transition traps, so let's go!"

Grumpy flinched for a moment and it didn't take me long to realize why.

Seven people got caught in it. The number is seven. Somehow, it's just like lucky seven.

But the information that an explorer was coming wasn't all bad news. Common sense tells us that even if you find a transition trap, 90 out of 100 times you'll avoid it.

"Woohoo~ super lucky~ it's a transition trap on the 5th floor, right?"

"I can skip the pesky third and fourth floors. Good job."

With a hellish probability, ten were caught but these were people who did not fear transition traps.

They either had to go past the fifth floor in the first place, or they entered the Labyrinth for the fifth floor.

Transition traps are a terrible disaster for lesser explorers, but for others, they can be a super-fast elevator that skips all the hassle.

But it's still okay. We can just ask them to wait until we're out of range of the transition trap.

"What, do you know him?"

"⋯Yes, I know him very well."

‘Son of a bitch.’

[Zelvin LV.11]

[Mercy LV.9]

There was a familiar face on the other side, walking this way.

Zelvin and Mercy, the rehabilitated explorers who had tried to rape me, only to break down and run away.

"Nice body. You look like you're ready to f\*ck."

"Oh, no. You can't touch him."

"What? Why?"

The two bitches paled as soon as they saw me, but the bitches around them didn't seem to mind.

They stare at me with lustful eyes, and it's obvious that their minds are filled with thoughts.

"Grumpy, looks like you've used up all your luck."

Yeah. I never counted on luck in the first place. I've always been the furthest thing from luck.

If I want to get the results I want, I have to earn them.

I gripped the negotiation tool in my hand tightly.

People often refer to this great tool of conversation as an axe.