**Chapter 35: I want to go to the second floor (7)**

Joy Hog's party is a four-member group of adventurers who primarily operate on the 7th floor of the labyrinth.

As a 7th floor party, they have come down to the 5th floor and entered the Hobgoblin Village for one reason.

This time, the party has a very specific request to get the staff of the shaman Hobgoblin who came before them.

The fifth floor of the Labyrinth is special in more ways than one.

5. 10. 15. 20. 25. 30.

The floors where fountains exist, which are multiples of 5, are known for their unique environments and peculiar challenges compared to other floors.

'Some are absurdly difficult, others are yawn-inducingly easy.'

The fifth floor they were standing on was the former.

It was bizarrely spacious and chaotically arranged, with the five types of monsters living together in a village-like structure.

It's much larger and more complicated than the other floors, making it harder to capture.

That's why the reward for completing the task was higher than the reward for slaying the 7th floor monsters.

Since it's not easy for even a 7th-floor explorer to go through the five monster villages on the 5th floor one by one the right way, everyone cheats.

‘If it wasn't for the fountain scroll, I wouldn't have taken the job in the first place.’

It's not really a trick. It was the norm on the 5th floor.

They tore up the fountain travel scroll and traveled to the fountain at the end of the floor.

Seven reformed explorers were drinking from the Fountain of Healing, yet no major trouble ensued.

Joy Hog's party finally made it to their destination, Hobgoblin Village.

The party consisted of leader and dwarven tank Joy Hog.

Catgirl priest Hitolis.

Harpy wizard Lammel Royce.

Bovine Girl warrior Jubeel.

And behind them was Gregor, the third level warrior Lizardgirl, who had joined the party as a porter.

Turning to Gregor, Jubeel said.

"Watch closely. I’ll show you how amazing our party is."

"Kerrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!"

The shaman Hobgoblin, who had found them, shouted loudly, then the entire goblin village began to shudder.

The hobgoblins in the caves on the third and second floors headed to the storerooms at the end of each floor to gather their weapons.

The hobgoblins on the first floor immediately joined the battle.

"If we stall, the armed hobgoblins from upstairs will come! We need to end this quickly before it gets complicated!"

Dwarven warrior Joy Hog shouted, and harpy wizard Lammel Royce nodded and raised her wand.

"I'll do my duty, protect her!"

Her mouth twitched as she began to chant. Heat gathered at the tip of the wand.

The shaman hobgoblin didn't stand still. The light that burst from her staff spread throughout the goblin village.

And the hobgoblins turned even more fierce and vicious.

A sizable number of hobgoblins, perhaps dozens at a guess, lunged at them with no fear of death.

-BANG!

However, their opponents were also skilled explorers.

"I can do this, it's only a little harder than the goblin lair on the first floor!"

Tough. The first floor? It's a child's playground compared to the fifth floor. Maybe I shouldn't have asked.

"I've never done the Hobgoblin Village before, but it's easier than I thought! I shouldn't have used the scroll to skip it back in the day!"

Bullshit. It was really good to use the scroll back then. If I came when I was weaker than I am now, I would have died. I'm going to keep skipping the fifth floor.

Joy Hog and warrior Jubeel bluffed with each other and swung their swords and blunt instruments relentlessly in defense of the priest and the wizard.

The priest provided them with buffs and heals, and the wizard's spell was gradually coming to an end.

"Move out of the way, Fireball!"

The wizard's wand glowed and a huge ball of flame fell over the hobgoblins' heads.

The smell of burning meat and smoke cleared and all that could be seen was the panicked face of the shaman hobgoblin.

"You cub. Look at you panicking."

"Don't underestimate the power of a seventh-level wizard."

"Yeah, yeah."

There wasn't much the shaman hobgoblin could do, having lost all her warriors.

The beast began to scurry away, and Jubeel, the bovine girl swordsman, disposed of it with a swing of her sword and grabbed her staff.

"That was easy?"

"I mean, it was a lot easier than I thought. Were the hobgoblins always this weak?"

Still, it was better than I thought it would be, considering how much I'd been freaking out.

I'm not kidding, I'm serious. There were fewer hobgoblins than I expected.

"I don't know about the other floors, but I heard that the hobgoblins on the fifth floor are so fucking numerous because they fuck all day long⋯"

Just as they were recounting the battle, which ended more refreshingly than they expected.

Kaang! Kaang!

"⋯What was that?"

A familiar sound of battle came from somewhere.

"Kerrrrrrr! Kerrrrrrr!"

"Kekekekekek!"

And the cries of the hobgoblins, many of them, screaming at the same time.

A question mark hovered over the heads of the Joy Hog party.

Something was wrong. Surely they had taken care of the shaman hobgoblin, so where were the cries coming from?

"Miss Jubeel. There-"

Gregor, looking alarmed, pointed somewhere.

Everyone in the Joy Hog party turned to look where Gregor's finger was pointing.

"Crazy."

The same word came out of everyone's mouths.

"Kekekekek!!!"

"Die, die, you fucking bastards!!!"

They'd forgotten for a moment in their triumph.

In retrospect, it didn't make sense that the goblin village had no troops.

Why the shaman hobgoblin had panicked, why the hobgoblins on the second and third floors hadn't come down after the battle.

-Uh-oh!

On the third floor of the Goblin Village the battle was still raging.

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A fist flies toward my right face.

I ducked my head to the left to avoid it.

Then, a dull pain shot through my left cheek. The hobgoblin had punched me.

At the same time, I felt bites on my side, elbow, and leg.

The damn hobgoblins were clinging to my limbs except for my arms and biting at my body, sapping my health.

If I dodge one, I get hit by two or more. There were so many of them, I had no choice.

-Tsk, tsk, tsk!

I swung my battle axe and decapitated one of the hobgoblins.

Red blood spurted, blinding me for a moment.

I wiped the blood from my eyes and my vision turned red.

The green hobgoblin looked brownish in the red blood.

"You shitty bastards⋯"

They'd found me hiding and their lust had gotten the better of them.

So they seemed to be fighting to capture me alive as much as possible. That's when I reduced the hobgoblins' numbers the most.

‘Ten? Twenty?’

I don't remember exactly, but I must have swung my axe at least thirty times with all my might and sent a dozen of them into the Jordan River.

But at some point, their mood changed. They started swinging their fists and weapons like they were going to kill.

The good news is that the armory is small.

It's hard to swing a spear or sword freely, and with dozens of hobgoblins crammed into that small space, there's no room to swing a fist properly.

Hobgoblins couldn't even think of wielding swords or spears.

Those with hammers or axes, which were less constrained, were quickly killed.

It would be difficult to find a blunt weapon again in the midst of all this mayhem, scavenging through corpses and blood-soaked floors.

The hobgoblins clung to my breastplate and legs, clawing and biting at my joints.

I grit my teeth and endured.

-Tsk! Tsk!

I raised my right arm high, whacking the hobgoblins in the head with my axe like I was whacking moles.

-Tsk!

A tremendous pain shot up from my quadriceps and the outside of my thigh felt hollow.

It feels like lava is flowing from my thigh.

My head felt hot and my heart was beating wildly.

I didn't even have to look down to know what they were doing to me.

This crazy hobgoblin had bitten down on my left thigh with nothing but its teeth.

My left foot twitched like a rat and the sensation gradually faded away.

I immediately lost my balance and fell to the blood-soaked ground, where the goblins pounced on me in a mass attack.

I crouched as low as I could. With my shaky left hand, I swiped the vial of restorative potion from my waistband and tipped it into my mouth.

Fuck. Good thing I'd taken it out of my backpack right before the battle.

Will it work? I don't know. I'm sure it'll do for now.

I immediately stood up, straining my right leg.

"Ugh!"

Fuck. Hold on. Stand up like you didn't feel the pain.

As I rose, the hobgoblins that’d been crushing me like a sandwich fell apart.

I axed each of them in turn as they fell off my back and onto the floor.

"Whoa, whoa."

This is fucking hard but I have no time to spare. In fact, just holding and swinging the axe is all I can do now.

My vision gradually flickers. It's like a lightning bolt. My breathing is getting hotter.

My head goes from hot with pain to cold in an instant, and my heart beats wildly.

‘Ah, here we go.’

I haven't felt this excitement in a long time.

I'm at the crossroads of life, and one wrong move will lead to death.

[◆ Blessing of Fierce Battle]

- You have reached the crossroads of death. Adverse conditions are met.

- Stamina +2, Strength +2, Agility +2

Every movement of my body feels faster and stronger at once.

My breathing returns a bit but nothing dramatic. There are still many enemies.

I've invested my leveling free points into my stats, but the battle is still unfavorable.

‘So what?’

What I have to do is clear.

Just swing the axe. Swing, swing, swing, slice through the enemy.

That's what I must do now, and that's the only way to survive.

I swing the axe in a trance.

"Kerrrrrr!"

"Ke, Ke, Ke! Kerrrrrr!"

As I continued to slaughter, I gradually realized that I was swinging the axe wide.

As I began to gain distance, I could finally see my surroundings.

"Ker-"

"Ke, ker-"

I still couldn't make out the creature's expression, but I knew instinctively that it was one of terror.

The hobgoblins were freaking out and backing away from me.

For a moment, I looked at the ground. I was standing over hobgoblin corpses and there were at least fifty of them on the floor.

My gaiters were soaked with blood, and the hobgoblin's blood was up to my shins, forming a river of blood.

My feet crackled with every movement.

My axe and hand stuck together. They didn't slip in the blood, but became one.

I walked across the blood-soaked ground, swinging the axe as an insane pain shot up my left foot.

I was breathing hard and weak, as if I would collapse at any moment, but I neither faltered nor flinched.

I couldn't let them off the hook. If there was the slightest opening, they would pounce again, screaming.

"Keruk! Kekekekekekekek!"

Despite overwhelming numbers, those who couldn't even handle a single prey began to flee in terror, one after another, out of the warehouse.

Kaaaah!

One by one, the hobgoblins began to escape from the warehouse, only to be met with fireballs and burned to death. It happened in a flash, followed by the sound of swords being swung.

‘Explorers.’

In my trance I forgot about the explorers that came for the shaman hobgoblin. They didn't seem to be outlaws, but I should have been prepared. I should have been.

"Ahhhhhh."

My body didn't move an inch. It didn't collapse or fall, but stood tall and stiff.

My eyes slowly closed and I don't even have the strength to lift a finger.

An explorer is caught in my perception. I should respond, but...it's a strange, familiar feeling.

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"What the hell?"

Arriving at the warehouse on the third floor of the Hobgoblin Village, Joy Hog's party stared in disbelief at the horrifying scene.

There was blood everywhere. The walls, floors, and everything else was red.

Only the ceiling looked like brown drawing paper with red paint splattered on it.

They could only guess that the room had once been brown.

The floor was littered with blood-soaked hobgoblin corpses. It was difficult to estimate their number from a single glance.

'This battle wasn't easy for nothing.’

All the hobgoblins from the third floor had gathered here.

The hobgoblins on the second floor had also noticed the commotion upstairs and rushed over,

‘What if a force of this magnitude has joined forces with the Shaman Hobgoblin?’

The party would have suffered catastrophic damage.

‘No, would we have survived in the first place?’

They swallowed hard as they imagined the battle that would have taken place in this small space, even for a party of seven.

The results of the bloodshed were right in front of them.

A man stood in the bloody space, trampling over the corpse of a hobgoblin.

His helmet, breastplate, and axe were covered in blood and his body was no different.

His limbs were dripping with blood, covered in wounds, including goblin nails and tooth marks.

They couldn't tell if it was the goblins or the man's blood but even if they couldn't tell, Joy Hog Party and Gregor recognized the man in the helmet at a glance.

"⋯Are you the staff of the Cozy Winter's Night Inn?"

They were regulars at Diana’s Inn.