**Chapter 61: Taking a short break (6)**

I have a record of 73 wins, 0 losses and 0 draws in my career.

That's my record against Idelbert.

Of course, it's not surprising.

Idelbert is a level 70 monster, and I'm just a little boy who's been an explorer for less than three months.

'It would be a miracle if I could even wound her.’

It was an overwhelming skill gap considering the hardships we've endured and the experience we've gained are on a different level but I don't plan to use that as an excuse to run away.

If I hesitate, there's no point in this fight. It's all about gaining battle experience.

'No, I can't be satisfied with that.’

I'm going to defeat my master, who has this indifferent, nonchalant face, but inside she's harboring thoughts of a mad pervert.

That's how it has always been, and that's how it will always be.

"You may enter at any time."

Unguarded and unprepared, Idelbert snapped her fingers.

She had the confidence that she could take me down with one arm.

‘Ha.’

I sighed slightly and drew the axe from my waistband.

"⋯?”

Then a strange, very strange sensation took over my fingertips. The axe felt more comfortable in my hand than usual.

I interpreted it as a positive sign. I must be in good shape today.

Regardless of my physical condition, I'm always nervous to face Idelbert.

Somehow, I'm even more nervous than I was when I fought the Boss Minotaur.

I swallowed my hesitation and stomped the ground.

-Pow!

The distance of about five meters closed in a few steps.

I've always been physically strong, but now I feel like I'm really becoming something beyond human.

Ka-ang!

Idelbert blocked the axe at the nape of her neck with only her index finger.

There's the sound of iron clashing as the axe and her fingers collide.

"Still an honest attack-"

-Pow!

Before she could finish her sentence, I tried to push Idelbert away with a side kick to her stomach⋯ but she didn't even flinch.

It felt like I've kicked a high castle wall. Only my leg hurts like hell, but the wall is fine.

"You should listen to your master. Disciple."

"You say you're giving me flesh-and-blood instructions, when you usually just fucking beat me up."

"You must have been bored with your training lately. Time to up the ante."

The first dirty trick, the temper tantrum, worked but it seems to have worked too well.

Idelbert grabbed me by the ankle and threw me into the air like a shot put.

There must have been a 40-pound weight difference between us, but she threw me so lightly.

Suddenly, Idelbert was on top of me, her fists clenched.

"Guard well."

As soon as I heard those words, I immediately raised my guard.

And right after that.

-Pfft!

"Kghhh!"

I felt a fist pierce my side. How cowardly of her to use words but it wasn't the first time I'd been hit, so I guarded my side.

Even with my force control, a minotaur's worth of damage pierced through one arm of my guard.

I braced myself for the impact of the fall but I was a turn away from hitting the ground.

I swung my axe at Idelbert, who was right in front of me.

-Wham!

The axe sliced through the air. Idelbert was nowhere to be seen.

"What are you aiming for? Look your opponent in the eye."

The voice came from below. Without even realizing it, I was caught into Idelbert's arms like a princess.

My fist shot straight for Idelbert's face, but she lightly blocked it with her hand on my thigh.

"How am I supposed to hit you when I can't see you?"

"I used to be good at it when I was your level."

"Ah. I see. I'm very jealous."

"Don't be envious. You'll be there soon enough."

With that, Idelbert pushed me to the ground.

The first duel was over.

"Rest for a while. I'll get you a potion."

Idelbert gave me a moment to recover, for she is not satisfied until she has fought at least three times a day.

If I didn't recover in time, I would be forced to fight anyway, so I quickly closed my eyes and rested.

Even as my body rested, my mind was busy with various thoughts.

First, the biggest question.

‘The axe feels unusually comfortable in my hand today.’

It wasn't just that I was in good shape.

My ability to move my body in combat had been enhanced by my confrontation with Idelbert but the sensations I felt now were inherently different.

'Something, more basic⋯'

Suddenly, I remembered the time when he had stamped Ellie's ass with my praise.

Now that I think about it, a strange sensation has lingered in my hands ever since.

It's like every single finger, including the palm, is meticulously controlled.

It's more than just swinging my arms and fighting.

'⋯As if realizing the essence of the act, the finesse with which I move my body⋯'

"Here's a potion. Shall I give it to you?"

"⋯No. I'm fine, I've recovered."

I was dragged back to the training room, axe in hand, by Idelbert's merciless urging.

My fingertips tingled strangely as I stand holding the axe.

One more step, and this inscrutable itching and frustration would be replaced by a brilliant realization, but taking that step was not usually difficult.

"Master. What do you think I'm lacking?"

"Don't be silly, student."

"I'm at a loss to explain it to you, but I feel like I'm grasping at straws, and yet I can't quite put my finger on it."

Idelbert closed her eyes, crossed her arms, and pondered my question.

"⋯You lack everything."

"⋯Not from your point of view, Master. Is there something I lack at the level of an explorer similar to me?"

"You are subtly lacking in all but physical prowess and instinctive combat sense."

Sure. Physical prowess and grit are my biggest strengths.

Even by status bar standards, I'm at 0 in everything but Stamina, Strength, and Agility.

‘⋯?’

What do I lack?

Wisdom 0. Finesse 0.

In general, explorers with 0 stats are fairly rare.

Your base stats are randomized, and your stats are also randomized as you level up while exploring the Labyrinth.

At least, none of the level 10+ Explorers I've ever seen had two stats that were zero.

Suddenly, I remembered the details of the Blessing of Swordsmanship that Jubeel had shown me.

+1 Wisdom and +5 Finesse.

It was a good blessing, and the stat increase was huge, but that's not the point.

'Why did her Wisdom and Finesse increase when she was using swordsmanship?’

After a short thought, I came to the conclusion.

‘Do you need Wisdom and Finesse to use swordsmanship?’

[Free Points: 3]

Naturally, my gaze turned to the free points.

"I feel like I've found the answer."

"⋯You did?"

I must have been in a rather excited mood if it could be seen in Idelbert's eyes as well.

After all, I've been interested in magic and fantasy ever since I fell into this world.

My jaw dropped as wizards and priests performed their various spells and miracles, and when Jubeel drew her sword, I didn't flinch, but I thought my stomach was going to drop.

But I was too afraid to waste stats. What if I took the wrong shot and got screwed?

But now I saw the light.

So I'm going to close my eyes and just take one shot.

[Would you like to allocate 1 free point to Wisdom?]

[Would you like to allocate 1 free point to Finesse?]

Yes, yes, yes.

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Idelbert thought she'd gotten a good idea of Balkan's level from the previous matches.

'Simple physical abilities are below mid-level explorers. Other abilities are subtly below average for a low-level explorer.'

It was good progress. How many people could show this kind of growth in less than half a year as an Explorer?

‘He must have some pretty good blessings.’

Each blessing has a huge impact on an explorer's life.

Many explorers cling to them, crave them and desire them but Idelbert was a woman who saw the individual, not the blessing.

Boom!

Idelbert's fist slammed into Balkan's cheek.

Balkan narrowly avoided a fist that was flying straight for his face.

He squints and stares at the fast-moving fist until it's about to land on his face, then calmly decides whether to dodge or parry, and takes precise action.

‘It’s something that can't be done with ordinary guts.’

This was the nature of the individual, which could not be overcome even by blessings.

-Ka-ang!

The blow was immediately followed by a calm and precise strike.

It was a blow that would have killed him if he didn't have a body of steel.

The corners of Idelbert's mouth twitched upward.

'He has a good taste.’

Every time I duel and train him, I can see that he continues to grow.

Even when he suffers hardships, he never stagnates, always looking for the next move, the next breakthrough, to become stronger.

The speed at which he gained combat experience was also significant.

At first, Idelbert was fighting Balkan lightly, with one-arm, as if he were a child, and then she was fighting him with her whole body, loosening the limits of her strength little by little.

He certainly has the qualities to go to greater heights.

‘⋯But.’

There was something nagging at Idelbert's mind.

'Strangely, he only grows physically.’

He's still a beginner explorer, so he can't handle magic.

For the rate at which his physical abilities are rising, there's almost no growth in his skills to back it up.

To put the current situation of Balkan in a more favorable light.

‘He's got a big cock, good body control, and he can get erections and ejaculate at will, so he's definitely the best, but I feel like he doesn't know how to wiggle his ass.’

"Hmph."

Idelbert let out a dumbfounded voice.

It was an even more shocking flaw now that she thought about it.

'⋯Even if I somehow manage to solve the problem with the specs for now, if the gap between his technique and the specs gets wider and wider⋯a major flaw will appear one day.

⋯Should I change my training method?’

But even if she changed his training method, it wouldn't improve. This was entirely his problem.

No matter how gently she instructed him, if he didn't instinctively realize the movements, it would mean nothing.

-Boom!

Idelbert instinctively stopped thinking and focused on dodging the axe coming for the nape of her neck.

Similar force, similar trajectory, similar angle, in every way it was not much different from the previous axe strikes.

Strangely, the blade seemed more threatening than ever before so Idelbert dodged the blade.

Releasing control of her power, in earnest.

-Pow!

In one swift movement, a huge gust of wind blew up and turned the training room upside down.

"Hmph."

Balkan, caught in the gust, let out an odd laugh as he slammed into the wall of the training room.

The mockery clearly belonged to the loser.

"This time, I win, Master."

At this moment, there was no loser.

Idelbert stared at him, bewildered by Balkan's sudden growth and change, but also humiliated.

"⋯A pupil dares to defeat his master."

"But honestly, this round is my round, right?"

"⋯⋯"

"Isn't it?"

"⋯⋯"

"Yes, Master, you heard me, I won, didn't I?"

Balkan laughed softly under his helmet, perhaps excited at the prospect of his first victory.

Idelbert was silent for a long moment, then sighed and nodded.

Balkan exclaimed in glee. It was a worthy victory after 74 defeats.

Idelbert was strangely unhappy with the reaction.

"...Be very happy. There will be no more complacency from now on."

"Eh."

Balkan's body stiffened at the low muttered words.

He racked up nineteen more losses that day.