**Chapter 63: Catch him (1)**

The lobby of the Explorers' Alliance is always bustling.

It's packed with people, from clients who come in to place requests to explorers looking for work and the staff who serve them.

It's a normal scene, but lately it's been a little noisier.

"Did you see the minotaur carcass the explorers from the Academy brought in this time? It was almost the ninth floor."

"Ah. A beast that moved up a floor? Of course I saw it, and from what I've heard from the guy in charge of sorting the carcasses at the Alliance, it's believed to be the...seed of a mid-tier explorer!"

"Ah. I heard that a party of 13th level explorers was destroyed by an omen some time ago, and the male explorer was mauled by a minotaur."

"Well, new traps and monsters have appeared since the Omen, so it's certainly possible."

There was a lot of speculation and conversation in the Explorers' Alliance.

The chatter was generally similar.

The Labyrinth's omen, the changes it brought, and the aftermath.

It's been over a month since the omen went off.

And now, the explorers who had gone beneath the eighth floor when the omen broke had begun to return to the Labyrinth City.

Not all explorer parties have made it up, with some staying in Eden, the midway point on the 15th floor.

The number of people who had already returned was considerable, so the information about the Labyrinth that had been turned upside down by the omen was spreading quite quickly.

"Of course, with rumors spreading so quickly, there are some things that need to be filtered."

Gellan, a low-tier top-tier explorer and a man on the verge of becoming a mid-tier explorer, who had come up from the 11th floor of the Labyrinth this time, spoke along with the other party members.

"For example⋯ some crazy male explorer in a helmet slaughtered a dozen minotaurs."

"And not just any minotaurs, but special minotaurs."

“I heard that the power of the party I was with was at the level of 7th floor explorers? Does this make sense?”

His fellow Academy-commissioned explorers testified to having seen the scene, but to Gellan, it was nonsense

He just didn't like the fact that there was a male explorer as good as him.

"Besides, I heard one crazy rumor while I was on the ground this time."

As Gellan opened his mouth, the female explorers and the male explorers who were trying to get a rise out of him glared.

"What rumor? Just tell your sister, and I'll do anything for you."

“What rumor?"

Feeling confident in the way they looked at him, Gellan told them the rumor he couldn't believe⋯or, more accurately, didn't want to believe.

"⋯That the Alliance Leader has a male apprentice⋯Of course it's a rumor. What does that mean?"

A ridiculous rumor that the Explorers' Alliance Leader Idelbert has taken on an apprentice. It had been Gellan's biggest concern since he'd arrived on the surface.

"It's ridiculous that the leader of the Alliance would take on a male explorer of no consequence."

It was literally an absurd rumor.

What could the near-perfect Idelbert possibly lack that would cause her to take on a disciple, even a male disciple?

Gellan was currently considered the most skilled male explorer below intermediate level.

Gellan couldn't accept the fact that a strange male explorer had overtaken him and became Idelbert's disciple.

'How much do I love you, Idelbert?’

There was only one reason. It was because Gellan was in love with Idelbert.

He wasn't the only one.

It was well known that male explorers who met Idelbert, even once, would develop a serious case of love sickness.

"Is that true?"

From the table next to him came the dagger to Gellan's heart.

Some drunken junior explorers were talking excitedly.

Gellan's eyes rolled back in his head.

"You guys! Are you really saying that? Can you be responsible for that?"

"Huh? No, not responsible."

"We heard it, but we didn't see it."

The explorers flinched at Gellan's words, as he shouted with the energy of a mid-level explorer.

Few remember the time when Idelbert said she had taken Balkan as a pupil, and the rumors they spoke spread like wildfire.

Rumors travel with people and they spread like wildfire.

"I don't know the truth because even if I ask the teller, she won't tell me, saying that the information is confidential. I don't know if he's really a student or not."

"Some rumors say he's a lover, some say he's a prostitute who loves her, and some say he's a real disciple."

"Prostitute or lover?"

"He must be, because he always comes out of the elevator with his legs shaking. Bitch."

"From what I hear, he wears a helmet because he's so stupid, but his face is a bit of a landmine."

"Who said that?"

"I don't know, I just heard a rumor."

Gellan's stomach flipped hotly as the junior explorers began to gossip amongst themselves.

How dare they, how dare they!

His teeth grinded together as the delusion grew.

As Gellan chewed on the unknown, unrecognizable bastard who had obviously approached Idelbert with the intention of devouring the Explorers' Alliance whole.

-Ding.

The elevator dinged, signaling Idelbert's arrival in the lobby.

Order was restored to the Explorers' Alliance, including the clients who had been shouting for their own gain, the explorers who had been exchanging last-minute comments, and the nervous Alliance staff.

They headed for the elevator, pretending not to notice as they returned to work.

Gellan's bloodshot eyes also turned to the elevator doors.

‘Of course it's a rumor.’

He waited for the doors to open, hoping for the best.

Sure enough, the elevator opened, revealing an expressionless beauty with a high black ponytail and a flick of her cat's tail.

The head of the Explorers' Alliance and to the right of Idelbert⋯A tall man, a head taller than Idelbert, with a massive, muscular body.

He boldly threw one arm around the neck of the awe-inspiring Alliance Leader and leaned in close to her.

His body was drenched in an unidentifiable liquid, and his limbs were covered in red handprints.

The female explorers and staff gulped at the sight of the man's body.

They didn't know exactly, but they could tell at a glance that something terrible had happened.

Idelbert carefully placed a hand on his waist.

"Walk carefully, you'll fall."

"Yes, sir. Master."

With a word of advice, Idelbert carefully helped him to his feet and led him out of the Explorers' Union.

They were the only ones to slip out of the Explorers' Alliance when everyone else stopped.

"⋯The rumor, was it true?"

"It's crazy, the Union Leader actually took a disciple!"

"Hey. Does that look like a master-disciple relationship to you?! It looked like a male being fucked by a female!"

"No, but⋯ I didn't smell any semen."

"That could be explained if the Alliance Leader gave him a massage."

"The Alliance Leader giving a massage to some guy she calls her apprentice? Ha. I'd rather believe a goblin raped a woman!"

The gossipy crowd, dazzled by the titillating sight, chattered on.

"By the way, doesn't that helmet and axe ⋯ look a bit like the male explorer who captured the unusual minotaur?"

"Yes, that's him, I saw him when I was out on a mission for the Academy! His helmet has changed a bit, but there's no way there's another man his size!"

"A rookie of that caliber is a disciple of the Alliance Leader."

"This is a bit tempting."

Those with more of an explorer's ego began to take more interest in his specs and background.

And Gellan.

"How dare you, you fucking whore, steal my Idelbert!"

He glared at the door of the Alliance he had left, eyes filled with anger, envy, and jealousy, ready to rip it down at a moment's notice.

Gellan's party silently distanced themselves from him as he began to spew insults.

\*\*\*

"Go in carefully. Master."

"Yes. I also gave you a massage, so be on time tomorrow."

"I think I've had a week's worth of training just today."

"If you come, just come."

"Okay."

Idelbert and I parted ways at the door without entering the inn.

It seemed that she had come purely to escort me to the inn.

Luckily, the imprints of Idelbert's hand on my limbs have almost completely disappeared by now.

"⋯Balkan. Are you here?"

"Yep. I'll be right there."

"⋯⋯Good."

Diana, who had been looking at me strange lately-or, more accurately, since Eli left-didn't seem to notice, judging by the fact that she didn't say anything.

We casually prepared for the evening's business.

It was just after 6:00 and the customers started coming in.

The inn is still very popular but tonight, unusually, there were a few guests who came in for something other than a meal.

“We are a 7th floor explorer party. Do you want to join our party?”

 I'm guessing they were Explorers who saw me with Idelbert and ran over to try their luck, but their level of sophistication was obvious.

‘I'm sure the more serious explorers will be much more cautious.’

"You've been talking for over ten minutes now, and if you're not going to order, go away. Before I chop off your head with an axe.”

"What, is this asshole trying to-"

"Ahaha, our mistake, We'll come to you next time, properly!"

A party member was indignant at my cold response, but the leader of the party turned pale and ran off with the party member's mouth shut.

I glanced back to see Diana staring at them with eerie eyes.

‘As expected of her.’

I gave her a silent thumbs up, and she closed her eyes once more, smiled softly at me, and walked into the kitchen.

"⋯⋯?"

Her back looked strangely listless.

 ‘Is something wrong?’

I followed Diana into the kitchen with a question mark hovering over my head.

"Bar, Balkan, is Balkan there!"

A desperate voice called from the entrance of the inn. It was a familiar voice by now.

Lammel Royce, the harpy wizard of the Joy Hog party.

‘The next trip to the Labyrinth is tomorrow.’

What on earth could have happened to cause such an urgent call?

Lammel turned to me, her face pale.

"First of all, calm down and tell me slowly, what's going on?"

"That, that⋯ haha⋯"

In response to my question, Lammel rubbed her forehead and sighed deeply.

The reaction was unexpected.

"Jubeel and Joy Hog have been taken away by the⋯ guards!"

Alas.

So that's what happened.

I slapped my forehead in disbelief.

“That crazy milk bag and drunkard…”

 Someone finally reported her⋯