# Chapter 10: Moving for Money

As the effect of the tonic wore off, the erection subsided too.

When the erection subsided, my legs lost strength as well.

"I can't get up."

"Then get on my back."

"Okay."

Thanks to that, I had to be carried on the large back of a barbarian warrior who came down for rescue operations.

'The body odor is no joke. Doesn't this person wash?'

The barbarian warrior carrying the young lady on his back and tucking me under his arm.

Foreigners who came down from the North, like the Asians who came from the East.

They're called 'Barbarians'.

Their speech is clumsy, their personalities are extremely fierce, and their body odor is no joke, but.

Still, their loyalty is second to none.

Unlike the Asians who are perceived as especially petty within the labyrinth city, the northern barbarians are called easy targets.

Thanks to such reliable barbarians transporting us outside, we could be sent out of the labyrinth without any particular discomfort.

'My goodness.'

Outside the labyrinth was unbelievably chaotic.

It was more crowded than a market day, with rescue teams rushing into the labyrinth and rescued people intermingled.

And corpses of the dead were strewn everywhere.

Those who returned but ultimately died, I guess.

Wailing can be heard from all directions.

The cries of those who survived.

Today's events will probably be recorded as the Great Labyrinth Disaster.

"We're here. Get off."

"Thank you. I survived thanks to you."

"What's there to thank. Well then, I'm off. I'm going to save the next person."

"Yes, be careful."

The barbarian who carried me and the young lady out didn't even ask for any compensation.

He just put us down near the labyrinth entrance and immediately went back into the labyrinth.

He's giving his all for the rescue operation.

Judging by the gold badge hanging from his neck, he seems to be a veteran adventurer.

I felt really grateful thinking about how he's working hard for something that doesn't even pay.

"We survived.. We survived."

"Yes. We finally could get out of that damned labyrinth."

The outside air felt so good after being trapped in the labyrinth for almost two days when we expected it to be a day trip.

It was a bit awkward to express joy with so many people crying around, but still, it's fortunate that we survived.

If Rien hadn't obtained an ability and come down to find us, we probably would have been trapped for much longer.

"Thank you for coming to find us right away, Rien."

"Hmph.. I came down to find Lea.."

Rien glared at me slightly while taking care of the young lady.

It seems I've become slightly disliked because she caught me doing something strange with the young lady in the labyrinth earlier.

I feel wronged, but what can I do?

'Well, I'll see her today and never again anyway.'

What does it matter what she thinks of me?

There's no problem since the young lady made sure to keep her mouth shut.

Our connection ends here anyway.

Once I receive compensation from the young lady, won't we never meet again?

Thinking that way, everything that just happened felt like a dream.

To think I showed my genitals to and was touched by a noble young lady.

The labyrinth is truly a strange and cruel place where you experience many things you never imagined.

What just happened was one of those labyrinth happenings.

Being mentally cornered, we ended up doing lewd things that transcended the difference in social status.

Now that both the young lady and I have come out of the labyrinth, we probably won't experience such a thing ever again.

'By the way, the weather is really nice.'

Looking up at the blue sky made me feel refreshed.

I must have been under a lot of stress without realizing it while trapped in the labyrinth.

Well, it's more so because I nearly died several times.

Not just the young lady, but I might have developed slight cracks in my psyche too.

I need recuperation.

I should quickly receive compensation and buy a slave.

"Ugh. Aah."

While I was pondering how much compensation to ask for, the young lady who was looking up at the sky next to me clutched her chest and exhaled sharply.

"Lea, Lea! What's wrong..!"

"My whole body.. feels like it's going to burst.. Porter, what is this..!"

As she suddenly complained of pain, Rien panicked and didn't know what to do, and the young lady grabbed my arm with a surprised expression as if she didn't know why this was happening to her.

'Here it comes.'

She must be going through mana adaptation.

Everyone usually suffers like this when they experience it for the first time.

"You're going through mana adaptation, so you don't need to worry too much. Everyone goes through this."

"What? Ah. Aah... So everyone goes through this. Ugh.. It hurts.."

"Lea, are you okay...?"

"No.. My whole body aches."

Rien stroked the young lady's back, and the young lady soon returned to her normal state.

Maybe because she consumed a lot of experience, the growing pains seem to be quite intense.

She might have obtained an ability with this.

"Did you perhaps obtain an ability too?"

"Huh? No. I'm not sure about an ability. I think I just went through mana adaptation."

A miss, huh.

That's a shame. You don't necessarily obtain an ability every time you go through mana adaptation.

Even I've only gone through mana adaptation five times despite entering the labyrinth countless times, and I've only obtained two abilities from that.

"Hmm...?"

Then suddenly, my body started hurting too.

It seems mana adaptation is starting for me as well.

Well, it would be disappointing if I didn't go through mana adaptation after killing a Bunny Man.

'It tingles a bit.'

It used to hurt like hell at first, but now I'm used to it.

This is already my 6th mana adaptation.

I guess I've entered level 6 now.

With this, I should be able to endure in the underground city without mana poisoning.

'Have I finally become able to enter the underground city?'

It's already been 6 months since I started labyrinth excursions.

I've finally earned the qualification to become a veteran.

I've become able to enter the underground city that I couldn't enter before because my level was too low.

"Ugh...!"

Then a sharp pain that rang through my brain came belatedly.

This is...

'A new ability!'

During the five mana adaptations I went through, I only obtained two abilities.

Of course, both were extremely cheating abilities from an adventurer's perspective, but I was thinking it was about time to get a new ability.

I hope it's a good ability this time too.

'The ability I obtained this time is...'

[Spirit Eye Opening]

Spirit Eye Opening?

What's this?

It's an ability I've never heard of before.

Was there anyone around me with this ability?

I don't remember anyone having it.

'I can see things that others can't see?'

No other information was imprinted in my brain.

It seems to be some kind of magical eye.

I think I'll need more information to use it properly.

"Porter, are you okay?"

"Yes. I think I went through mana adaptation too."

The young lady looked at me with a worried expression.

Did she grow attached to me during this labyrinth excursion?

She's taking care of me even after we've come outside.

"Well, since we've caught our breath, let's go to the aid station soon. My wounds are stinging a bit. You should come too, young lady. It's better to treat small wounds before they leave scars."

"Okay. Got it."

My arm got quite badly torn while fighting the Bopal Rabbits.

I stopped the bleeding with the first aid supplies I had, but it would be better to get proper treatment at the aid station.

If the wound gets infected, we might have to amputate the arm.

Physical impairment leads to a serious decrease in combat power.

It's something that must be absolutely avoided to live as an adventurer.

Among high-ranking adventurers, there are even those who commit suicide and get resurrected, saying it's better to die and be resurrected than to suffer physical impairment.

Of course, that's only possible for adventurers wealthy enough to pay all the resurrection costs.

"This is the aid station. If you get hurt or need treatment in the future, you can come here."

"Okay. There are so many healers.."

The aid station was full of patients caught up in the Great Shift and healers treating them.

Those who had already died were left in front of the labyrinth for now, and all the living were being transported here for treatment.

It's chaos everywhere. I wonder how many people are dying because of the Great Shift.

The whole city has become a mess, and when this chaos is over, a heavy silence and period of depression will follow.

The number of people quitting being adventurers will increase significantly, and if the number of adventurers decreases, the economy of the labyrinth city that lived off them might freeze.

It's a bit scary because there will probably be a gloomy atmosphere in the city in many ways until a large influx of new adventurers comes in.

When people's livelihoods become unstable, thieves and robbers tend to increase, and when such people increase, the underworld naturally becomes more active.

'Well, it's not my problem to worry about.'

The higher-ups in the city will take care of it. If the number of adventurers decreases, it's also an opportunity to raise my value.

Let's not think too negatively.

"Next person, please come in!"

"It seems to be our turn. Let's go."

"Okay."

After waiting for a long time, the young lady and I were finally able to get our wounds treated at the aid station.

I heard that Rien's arm was also torn, so she received treatment before coming down to rescue us.

"That'll be 40 silver."

Of course, the treatment isn't free.

We have to pay for the consultation and medicine.

"Young lady, the payment please."

"What! Do I have to pay for this too?"

"Huh? Well, you know. It's because we got hurt in the labyrinth. I fought hard because you said you'd cover all the costs."

"...You're ruthless, really ruthless. It's true that Asians are misers."

"What? What did you say? That it's fortunate we survived thanks to the survival items I bought with money I saved up meticulously?"

"Ugh. Alright. I'll pay. Stop nagging."

The young lady paid for my share too.

It's nice to have a sponsor indeed.

"By the way, Rien."

"Yes..?"

"Erika and Rika haven't been found yet, right?"

"Yeah. I should go look for them again... I need something they gave me.. but I don't have anything."

At my question, Rien and the young lady's expressions darkened again.

Rien's 'Search Tracking' ability needed an object left behind or a part of the body of the target she wanted to track.

She said she was able to find the young lady and me by breaking the hairpin the young lady had entrusted to her.

Therefore, to find Erika and Rika, she needed something they had entrusted or left behind.

"Ah, right! I have something Erika gave me."

The young lady rummaged through her clothes and took out a rosary with a cross.

It seemed to be something the priestess had given to the young lady as a gift.

"It's something Erika gave me. The Goddess Church's rosary. We should be able to find her with this."

"W-wait a moment.. It might work... Will it work.. It works!"

Rien tore apart the rosary the young lady handed over and activated her ability.

"There, that way.... That direction!"

"South. It seems to be the sewer area."

The direction Rien pointed to was the south of the labyrinth city.

It was the direction where the entrance to the sewer area was located.

'It would be best to go look for them right away, but...'

Rien looked extremely tired.

Rien, who had entered the labyrinth again to rescue me and the young lady without getting proper sleep.

Her face was so pale that she looked like she might collapse at any moment.

"Rien, can you enter the labyrinth again?"

"Um... well."

Rien's hands trembled slightly.

It would be too much after all.

Without Rien to find the female knight and priestess.

We'd have no choice but to consider them both dead.

Especially in the sewer area where the corpse recovery rate is extremely low...

Resurrection would be impossible too.

It's sad, but do we have to give up?

"Wait... I... I can still go in.. I have to save them..."

Although she looked extremely difficult, Rien hoped to enter the labyrinth once more.

Looking at her condition, it would be right to dissuade her and give up.

But if we did that, the female knight and priestess would die.

Once Rien steeled her resolve to go in, the option to give up disappeared.

In principle, we should report to the guild first about what happened in the labyrinth, but time is of the essence now.

For now, we have to go rescue them.

"Let's gather a rescue team and go down. Young lady, you rest at the inn."

"Wait, I want to go too."

"If the young lady comes, that's two burdens."

"What?"

"Your legs are trembling right now, aren't they? I'll go down with Rien and rescue them, so just wait quietly at the lodging."

"...Alright. If you rescue them, I'll pay all the compensation I promised. Please do your best.."

"Yes. It's a promise. Then let's go, Rien."

"Okay...!"

It's 20 gold coins per person for rescuing the female knight and priestess.

'Even if they're dead...'

She said she'd give 10 gold coins if we properly recover the bodies.

So, this is... not volunteer work.

I'm not being a sucker.

I'm an adventurer who moves for compensation.

I'm absolutely not going back into the labyrinth because of the young lady's expression that looks like she's about to cry.

It's not because Rien grabbed my sleeve as if asking for help.

......Damn it.

My legs hurt like hell.

But if it's for money, there's no choice.

I need to earn a lot of money to build a slave harem.

Well, let's go down.

Even though we just came out.

The problematic party members aren't all gathered yet.

# Chapter 11: We Must Save Them Before It's Too Late

"First, we need to find people who will go in with us."

"Sh-should we go to the guild...?"

"The guild is too crowded right now. I think it's better to look at the labyrinth entrance."

Right now, the adventurers' guild is even more chaotic than a marketplace.

I checked on the way to the aid station.

It would be crazy to try to find adventurers to help with the rescue operation there.

The labyrinth entrance, crowded with patients and adventurers, would be better at this point.

"For now, since I have a spatial pocket and Rien has the search tracking ability, if we explain well, there should be an adventurer party willing to go in with us."

"Ah.. I see.. I.. don't know much about these things.. so I'll leave it all to you, porter..."

Rien, who glared at me when she was with the young lady, became extremely timid when we were alone.

It seems there's a big difference depending on whether there's a companion beside her or not.

She seems to be the type who acts a bit willfully when there's someone to rely on, but becomes extremely weak when left alone.

This type becomes easier to handle the more awkward they feel.

"By the way, Rien."

"Y-yes..?"

"You've been looking quite exhausted. Why don't you drink one of these?"

"This is..."

"It's a tonic. It's good to drink when you're in a hurry. There are some side effects, but..."

"Side effects...? What kind... Oh."

"Yes. That kind of side effect."

It's the medicine I ate in the labyrinth that wouldn't let my erection subside.

If we compare it to Earth, it's like Vigra, but the Vigra of this world has a small side effect.

'It causes an erection.'

For men, there's the side effect of getting an erection.

For women, probably...

'Did they say it makes the sense of touch more sensitive?'

It would be better to say it increases sensitivity.

It's somewhat of an aphrodisiac-like side effect, but when you feel like you're about to collapse, drinking one bottle gives you the strength to endure without fainting.

It's good to drink when you're in a hurry.

'Rien has been awake for over a day. It wouldn't be strange if she collapsed at any moment.'

She came back into the labyrinth right after escaping to save me and the young lady.

And now she's going back into the labyrinth, shaving off her lifespan again to save the female knight and priestess.

Rien is surely pushing herself too hard right now.

So even if there are side effects, it would be better to borrow the power of medicine.

"Despite how it looks, the effect is certain. And it's 10 silver per bottle. I'm recommending it without any other intentions because you look like you're about to collapse. If you collapse in the labyrinth, who's going to carry you around?"

"That's.. true.. I can't argue logically.. Alright.."

Rien carefully received the tonic I handed over.

It's much better to endure with the medicine's effect than to collapse.

Above all, the side effects will disappear after a few hours anyway.

Gulp.

Finally, Rien downed the tonic I handed her.

The effect of the labyrinth city's special tonic was certain.

Rien's half-closed eyes snapped open.

"Somehow.. my body feels hot..."

"That's the medicine taking effect. You don't feel any other strange symptoms, right?"

"It feels kind of.. tingly..? I don't know how to describe it."

Rien's expression became slightly flushed.

She seems to have difficulty expressing the phenomenon occurring in her body properly.

It doesn't seem bad.

She looks more satisfied than I expected?

"But... where do they sell this...? The Alchemy Association..?"

"No. There's a hole-in-the-wall store I often go to. The female owner there is an alchemist. She made this."

"What? Don't tell me... this is an unofficial drug..!?"

"Even if it's made with an unofficial formula, the effect is good. And if you try to buy something similar from the Alchemy Guild, you'd have to pay at least 30 silver. With that money, you could buy 3 bottles of this."

"..Huh.. You've staked your life on cost-effectiveness.. To think I drank an uncertified potion.."

"Thanks to that, we survived."

The hole-in-the-wall store, officially named Lafnel's Atelier.

It's a small general store in the east of the labyrinth city.

Few people visit, but the store's items are reliable.

After all, they're made by an elf of 'unknown age'.

In terms of experience and years, she might even overwhelm the elders of the magic tower?

"N-next time... could you... introduce me..?"

"Huh? Well. Yes. Sure."

What's this? When did she go from distrusting it for being unofficial to asking for a separate introduction to the store?

Should I take her there separately after the commotion ends?

No, I thought I'd never see her again after this incident is over.

It feels strange to keep getting entangled like this.

Was I trying to cut ties too coldly?

"For now, let's start looking for team members."

"Okay.. Got it."

Before entering the labyrinth, Rien and I had to find mid-level or higher adventurers willing to go in with us.

I'm originally a porter so my combat power is low, and Rien in her current state shouldn't be expected to do more than guide us.

The important thing is that most mid-level and above adventurers have already received orders from the guild and entered the labyrinth for rescue operations.

So those remaining at the labyrinth entrance now are either those who were just rescued or those who escaped on their own.

Those capable of normal thinking would have already gone to the guild or aid station, so those still at the labyrinth entrance must be those who have some lingering attachment to the labyrinth.

If we persuade someone suitable among them well, we might be able to bring them in.

It seems like we could say if they help us rescue the female knight and priestess, we'll help rescue their team members they left behind.

"Are you planning to enter the sewers by any chance?"

"No... We're... finished... It's all over.. Damn... Damn.... I want to die...."

"Ah."

There are a lot of people with broken spirits.

The labyrinth entrance was crowded with people like the guild, but among them, there were extremely few willing to go into the sewers with us to find missing team members.

With most of the rescue teams already gone inside, finding new people to go in was as difficult as plucking stars from the sky.

Above all, when mental strength becomes too low in the labyrinth, people's spirits break, and such people show abnormal behavior like this until they regain their composure outside the labyrinth.

Going into the labyrinth with people showing abnormal behavior is suicidal.

'Miss. Miss here too. Damn it. We don't have time.'

As expected, quickly assembling team members for a labyrinth excursion wasn't easy.

Everyone seems a bit off somehow.

Should we wait for the rescue team to come out of the labyrinth?

Going in with the rescue team when they come out with patients is one option.

But we don't know when the rescue team will come out.

We can't afford to waste time sitting and waiting for them to come out at the labyrinth entrance.

Every minute and second counts in the labyrinth.

We can't waste time idly.

Just as I was considering putting up money and making a request, someone approached us.

"Wait, did you say you have a spatial pocket?"

A dejected adventurer.

A blonde warrior whose spirit seemed half-broken.

But looking at his eyes, he wasn't completely gone.

He just seemed a bit desperate, not gone enough to show abnormal behavior.

"Yes. I have a spatial pocket. And this person has an ability called search tracking."

"Can you bring back corpses in the spatial pocket too?"

"Of course."

"Then... can you find the location of the dead with that search tracking ability?"

"I... I think it might be possible..."

"Good. I'll go down with you to rescue the people you want to save. In exchange.. cooperate with me in going into the underground city and bringing out our team members' corpses. If you do that, I'll go in with you right now."

He was an adventurer with a silver badge.

He would naturally be weaker than gold badge adventurers who can go below the underground city, but a silver badge means he's strong enough to roam around the underground city.

He should be able to move around the upper levels without any problems.

If we don't get screwed over, we should be able to rescue the female knight and priestess.

The problem is the condition this guy set.

'Going down to the underground city? Crazy.'

It's impossible right now.

Both Rien and I are in too strained a state.

"If you're thinking of going down to the underground city today, it's impossible for us. Both I and the witch here have reached our physical limits. And while I might be okay, this witch has only gone through mana adaptation once. The underground city is impossible for her."

"Is that so.."

The man pondered for a moment and then opened his mouth again.

He seems to have compromised with himself somewhat.

"Alright. We don't have to go in today. Tomorrow is fine too. The important thing is to recover the bodies, even if they're corpses."

If it's okay to go in tomorrow, it's acceptable.

It's a relatively simple mission to just bring up the corpses with an experienced person who has roamed the underground city.

And tomorrow, there will be less chaos than today, so we should be able to find more people to go in with us.

This is important. If we gather more people to go in tomorrow and start the corpse recovery operation, we can significantly increase our reputation with the guild.

"And we don't need that witch lady's search tracking. I roughly know where the corpses might be. But it was impossible to bring them out."

He rubbed his face once.

He seemed to be regretting something.

"I need a spatial pocket. We need to bring up six corpses. It's impossible for just me and this friend. Even the rescue team won't help with corpse transport."

"Understood. If you help us today, we'll help transport your team members' corpses tomorrow."

"Good. Good. Deal."

It's not a bad condition.

If we can farm monster corpses or other adventurers' corpses in the 5th floor underground city during the rescue operation, we might be able to earn quite a bit.

Honestly, the compensation the young lady will give later is already more than enough to enter the underground city and have some left over.

The young lady will take care of my value, so I just need to go in and bring out the corpses.

"Only us two survived from the team. The rest are all down there. By the way, I'm a warrior and this one's a monk. The two of us are enough to roam the upper levels."

A warrior whose spirit seems broken after losing his companions in the labyrinth.

And a bald, squinty-eyed monk who seems to have a story.

As he said, they looked more than capable of roaming the upper levels.

There's no healer, but we have first aid supplies, so we can make do with those for now.

Since we're not going down to the underground city today, we can find a healer again when we go down to the underground city tomorrow.

"Let's go in. Before it's too late."

We've already gathered everything we need.

All that's left is to rescue the two people before it's too late.

The four of us entered the labyrinth again.

Deep darkness greeted us.

"Rika. Rika, please answer me. Rika..?"

The priestess called out the name of her companion female knight pitifully.

...

But there was no answer.

Only silence lingered.

The scent of death was thick.

The smell of blood pierced the priestess's nose, but.

She called out the female knight's name once more.

"Rika. Please answer me. Rika... Don't leave me alone. Please."

Still, the female knight gave no answer.

Of course not.

She had already become a cold corpse.

"Ah.. Aah...."

When no answer came back, Erika despaired once more.

Her faith wavered. The wick of her heart was about to break.

Hope had already disappeared long ago.

And thick darkness began to fill its place.

The malice of the labyrinth embraced Erika's body.

Gradually, mana poison filled her lungs.

The ending that had been postponed for a moment came up to her throat and whispered to her.

It's time to give up now.

No one will answer no matter how much you pray.

[There is no goddess here.]

So just give up and become one with the labyrinth.

Such whispers kept coming to Erika's ears.

"No. No. No. It's not true. No."

The priestess covered her face with her hands.

She couldn't save the female knight who was dying from her wounds.

She tasted deep guilt, self-hatred, and frustration at the fact that she was about to die without being able to do anything.

Her mind was cracking.

Her mental state was on the verge of collapse.

She asked herself.

Was her holy power insufficient?

Or was her faith lacking?

No, everything was lacking.

She could only beg the goddess for mercy and salvation.

Begging and begging again. Begging for her life to one who wouldn't listen no matter how much she begged.

There are things approaching, drawn by the smell of death.

If they delay any longer, monsters will be drawn to the death resonance flowing from the female knight's body.

This is the 4th floor of the sewer area in the upper levels of the labyrinth.

The place with the most corpse-eating creatures.

A place known for having such a low corpse recovery rate that resurrection is impossible if you're wiped out here.

Rats, slimes, and even sewer insects.

They'll all come swarming, drawn by the female knight's death scent.

They'll eat the corpse and kick away the chance for resurrection.

This was a place without gods.

The priestess cries silently.

Because if she can't preserve the corpse properly, even resurrection will be impossible.

Resurrection is not an absolute power.

It's a crude process of forcibly pulling back the soul and cramming it back into a relatively intact body.

For that, the corpse needed to be properly preserved.

A corpse torn apart and mangled at will by monsters cannot be revived by any method.

"Please, God. Grant us salvation."

The priestess, who had lost her strength, could no longer even cast Holy Light.

In the labyrinth where she couldn't see an inch in front of her, she couldn't even properly check the female knight's condition.

The porter had the torch.

There were no tools to produce light.

There is no light, no hope.

What's coming is death by suffocation due to mana poisoning.

Or death by the monsters that will soon arrive.

Her breath is gradually being cut off.

Clank! Clank!!

The entrance to the room where the dead female knight and the dying priestess were hiding started clanking.

They've come.

The monsters have come to eat the corpse, drawn by the smell of death.

"Ah.."

Terror froze in the priestess's eyes.

She gathered her last remaining strength and offered a prayer.

Soon, the room's entrance burst open.

The things outside the door came pouring in.

# Chapter 12: Let's Hold Hands When It's Tough

"It's this way."

Rien pointed in the direction we needed to go.

Based on that direction, I guide the exact path through mapping.

We find the direction where the rescue targets are using search tracking.

And find the path to advance using my map creation.

"There are monsters ahead."

Hachi, the monk who had his eyes closed, detected the presence of monsters.

Seeing how he focused on sounds with his eyes closed, he seemed to have an ability related to hearing.

"Damn rats.."

At Hachi's words, Rohan, the warrior with a broken spirit, drew his sword and stepped forward.

As a purifying energy settled on his body, the negative things emitted by the approaching enemies were washed away.

It's not a buff that Hachi cast, and it doesn't seem like Rohan used the purification blessing that paladins use.

Then that must be an ability.

'I'm a bit envious of purification-type abilities.'

Rohan, befitting a warrior who takes the vanguard, had his own buff skill.

Especially, self-purification buffs are extremely useful in the sewers.

Because the rats crawling out of the sewers are filthy.

"That mister.. he's stronger than I thought..."

Rien's eyes widened at Rohan's skill.

Unlike his unremarkable first impression, Rohan leapt alone into a group of more than seven ratmen.

Then he slaughtered all the rat bastards by himself without a scratch.

It's skilled swordsmanship.

The way he mercilessly sliced up the rat bastards was flawless for a warrior in charge of the team's vanguard.

While he seemed mentally unstable, his skills were certain.

'He's certainly worthy of a silver badge adventurer.'

He accurately cuts down the vital points of approaching enemies without faltering.

Even though the monsters in the upper levels are weak, I didn't expect him to charge in so fearlessly.

The adventurer badges don't lie.

It means he has the skills to roam around the underground city.

"Silver badge adventurers are certainly strong. You need to be at least that strong to roam the underground city."

"Just how... dangerous is the underground city..."

"It's unbelievably dangerous. The types and numbers of monsters increase too."

"Ugh... I really hate the labyrinth.."

Rien might decide to never enter the labyrinth again after this experience.

Those who become afraid of the labyrinth end up being devoured by it in the end.

If you're afraid, it's better to just not enter the labyrinth.

There's nothing as dangerous as a team member who shows abnormal behavior dominated by fear.

"Squeak!!!"

"Kieee-"

Soon, the approaching rat bastards retreated, pushed back by Rohan's momentum.

"Get lost, you vermin."

When Rohan threatened them with a growl, the ratmen started fleeing as if they had encountered a tiger.

They must have judged that they had no chance of winning for now.

They'll probably come back with a larger group.

That's the kind of monsters they are.

"Swarming... disgusting..."

Rien unconsciously grabbed my sleeve while looking at the ratmen.

She seemed to find the rat bastards physiologically disgusting and repulsive.

Certainly, it would be creepy to see strange dwarves that are neither human nor rat crawling around the sewers.

But it's bothersome if she keeps pulling on my sleeve.

It would be better to just hold hands.

"Um, Rien. It's hard to walk if you keep pulling on my sleeve."

"S-sorry..."

Even while apologizing, Rien didn't let go of my sleeve.

Her eyes are wavering.

Rien was scared by the number of those rats.

'If I leave her like this, her mind might start breaking soon.'

That won't do.

Rien needs to direct us where to go.

If she loses her mind here, we won't arrive in time.

Like how I hugged the young lady, I think I need to help her recover mentally.

"Ah..!"

"Do you feel a bit better now?"

"Um.. yeah.. sorry.."

"It's nothing. Let's walk like this for a while, until Rien feels calm."

"Okay... thanks.."

I firmly grasped Rien's trembling hand.

Her trembling noticeably decreased.

Fear subsides to some extent just by having someone hold your hand.

Over the past 6 months, I've learned various ways to find comfort and stabilize my mind.

Just feeling the warmth of another person can stabilize the mind a lot.

Hugging would be best, but that's impossible in a situation where we need to move.

So I just lightly held her hand.

I'm absolutely not doing this to flirt.

It's because we can only advance in the right direction if our guide's mind is intact.

And if I can restore her mental strength just by holding her hand once, it's a cheap price to pay.

In the first place, there's no way a promising young witch would give her heart to a porter like me.

"Um.. porter..."

"Yes?"

"Those... rat humans?"

"You mean the ratmen?"

"Yeah. Those things.. Are there usually this many of them..?"

"Ah. Yes. There are an excessive amount. There are probably more sewer rats than breeding ground horn rabbits."

The first floor of the sewer area is a den of ratmen.

Rat bastards about the size of medium dogs attack those who enter, kill them, and live by eating their corpses.

They have night vision so they can identify enemies even in darkness.

Their claws and teeth have a weak poison that's not fatal, but as wounds from their attacks accumulate, movement becomes slower.

Moreover, since they carry dirty diseases and parasites, purification is essential after fighting them, and if you skimp on purification, you might even get rat fleas or lice.

Above all, there are many of them.

They multiply so quickly that it's hard to estimate how many offspring they produce, and if you neglect sewer cleaning, they form legions in no time.

It becomes troublesome when they form legions and start hunting adventurers.

The labyrinth city has already experienced such incidents several times.

That's why the guild often puts out sewer cleaning requests to deal with them before they form legions.

Well, anyway, ratmen are quite bothersome monsters for novice parties at the labyrinth entrance to deal with.

They're not difficult to kill, but they're troublesome and dirty in many ways.

"You're not collecting the ratmen corpses..?"

"Those guys aren't particularly useful. Their fur isn't used much because it's dirty."

"They really are monsters with no use other than their numbers..."

If you try to find a use, you could probably find one, but I didn't want to touch such dirty things unnecessarily.

And since ratmen eat the corpses of their own kind, if we just leave the corpses like this, they'll clean up after themselves.

'Satiated ratmen don't take risks.'

Ratmen who are full from eating their own kind don't attack adventurers by taking unnecessary risks.

So the more corpses you leave behind, the lower the encounter rate with ratmen naturally becomes.

"There's a transfer stone over there."

"Let's go in."

Soon we were able to find the transfer stone on the 1st floor.

As expected, the priestess and female knight weren't on the 1st floor.

We need to go to the next floor.

I wonder, will they be on the 2nd floor?

"You need to watch out for the ceiling and walls on the 2nd floor."

"Yeah... because of the slimes..?"

"Yes. They specialize in surprise attacks."

I explained the dangers of the 2nd floor while still holding Rien's hand.

Slimes are monsters that are traps in themselves.

Unlike other monsters, they make no noise as they crawl along walls or ceilings, then jump at adventurers' heads when they approach.

If your head gets caught by a slime like that, in the worst case, you die from suffocation.

Because they instantly stick to you and block your airway, you'll die if you don't know how to respond.

If you lose a companion like that, you get attacked by rat bastards drawn by the smell of death, and as the number of companions gradually decreases, you end up alone in the end.

"Then.. if.. my head gets swallowed, what should I do...?"

"You know slimes have a core that acts as their center, right? You just need to grab that with your hand and pull it out."

"That's all...?"

"Yes. That's all, but when you actually experience it, you end up panicking and dying from having your airway blocked. In the end, experiencing it a few times in real situations is most important."

"Ah.. so it's difficult to respond in real situations..."

It's over if you can't use the countermeasure even if you know it.

"Hmm?"

Splat!

Just as I was telling Rien how to deal with slimes, a slime that had been waiting on the ceiling fell onto monk Hachi's head.

Let's see how a silver badge adventurer responds.

Shluk!

"Huh... So that's how you pull it out.. He pulled it out so easily.."

"Yes. That's how you pull it out. Hachi seems used to it, so he pulled it out in one go. If Rien can calmly grab the core, you should be able to survive."

As soon as the slime fell on his head, Hachi immediately grabbed the core and pulled it out.

Since the mucus that forms the slime's body basically tries to follow the core, it's essentially game over once you grab the core.

Crack!

Hachi crushed the core he had pulled out.

Then the slime's mucus that was clinging to Hachi's hand trying to retrieve the core lost its elasticity and spilled onto the floor.

It died because its core was destroyed.

"We need to collect this. We should put it in glass bottles and take it. Though we don't have time to collect it now."

"You collect slime mucus too...?"

"Yes. The mucus is actually the core part of slimes. The reason adventurers enter this dirty and smelly sewer area is because of that."

Slime mucus is used in really diverse areas.

The Alchemy Guild uses it frequently as a catalyst, and the Adventurers Guild is always buying it in bulk.

"It's essential for making detergents or bleach."

"Ah, I see.."

It's used in small amounts when making shampoo that nobles use, and it's almost an essential ingredient when making bleach like Clorox.

It's no exaggeration to say that slime mucus is one of the key items in the labyrinth city's economy.

Because it's quite difficult to obtain slimes in the natural environment.

"They're not on the 2nd floor either, it seems..."

As we advanced dealing with slimes and ratmen, we came across a transfer stone.

It means the female knight and priestess aren't on the 2nd floor either.

The situation is gradually becoming serious.

Surely they're not really on the 4th floor?

'They might have a high probability of being on the 4th floor.'

I felt the thick malice of the labyrinth.

"Let's go down."

As we went down through the transfer stone, my heart started pounding more and more.

It's not a pleasant pounding.

My heart trembled as I imagined the worst situation.

'Maybe...'

I thought we might not even be able to find the corpses.

We're going down as fast as we can in our own way, but maybe we're already too late.

Because we can't stop the flow of time.

No matter how quickly we go down, if the two of them have already been killed by monsters....

'No. If we act hastily because we're in a hurry, we'll die too.'

Right now, Rohan and Hachi are silently clearing the path.

They're tackling the labyrinth with just two vanguards, without a healer or ranged DPS.

Even if they're silver badge adventurers.

Even if this is just the upper levels.

Those two are already doing their best.

Even if I urge them more here, the conquest speed won't increase.

All I can do now is pray that the female knight and priestess are safe.

No, I don't even hope for them to be alive and well.

'I hope at least their corpses are intact.'

The young lady's family will cover the resurrection costs, so that's not a worry.

The real problem is if the bodies are damaged to the point where even resurrection is impossible.

I should take comfort in the fact that Rien's search tracking can still detect the priestess's location.

If Rien's search tracking loses direction, it means the priestess has already been damaged beyond repair.

As long as Rien's search tracking is active.

Maybe... we can be a little at ease.

# Chapter 13: We Must Hold On Tightly to Prevent Collapse

"Multiple killer bugs ahead..!"

"Huh!! They're coming!"

"Kieeek!"

Just as my thoughts were deepening, Hachi alerted us to the presence of monsters.

Immediately, Rohan swung his sword at the approaching killer bugs, and the killer bugs caught in the sword's trajectory burst, spilling yellow bodily fluids.

They didn't get cut, but burst.

It seemed Rohan deliberately struck them with the flat of his sword, as it's more effective to burst those damn bugs.

As expected of a silver badge adventurer.

He knows very well how to deal with upper-level monsters.

If we move quickly now, we should be able to pass without much trouble...?

"Th-those things.. What are they...! D-disgusting!!! Aaah. Aaaah!!"

"Oh no!! Rien! Calm down! No, calm down!"

Rien started convulsing as large bugs crawled out from all directions.

It's understandable to fall into panic when such strange-looking bugs come swarming out.

'But the situation isn't good right now.'

We need to kill them quickly and leave this place, but Rien has fallen into panic.

Her stress must have exceeded its limit. Even though we walked holding hands, Rien's mind cracked the moment we entered the 3rd floor.

The situation is rapidly deteriorating. It's becoming serious. It's getting tangled up.

There's no helping it now.

I tightly embraced her and hid behind Hachi.

I hoped Rohan and Hachi could hold out.

If those two can't hold out until I fix Rien's mental state.

The party will break.

"Hmm...!"

As I embraced Rien and hid behind him, Hachi immediately clasped his hands together and deployed the 'Vajra posture', a monk-exclusive stance.

As an experienced monk, he seemed to have immediately grasped Rien's condition.

Hachi took on damage to buy time for me to hold Rien's mental state together.

Soon, Hachi's hands began to vibrate, emitting shockwaves towards the approaching killer bugs, causing their bodies to burst instantly.

It's a posture that can't move and can only counterattack, but it's that much stronger.

He'll hold out. From what I've seen of him coming down here, he should be able to endure.

"H-hiiik....!"

"Rien. Rien!!!"

"Ah, aah..?"

"Rien, you can't fall into panic now. Pull yourself together."

"Ah... yeah.. S-sorry. I'm sorry... sniff.. No, I can't. It's impossible. It's impossible... Those things are impossible..."

"Calm down. Hachi and Rohan will protect us. Silver badge adventurers won't lose to mere killer bugs. Calm down."

"Aaah... Ugh. I'm scared. I'm scared, I'm scared.. Aaah...."

Rien burrowed deeper into my arms, breathing heavily.

I stroked her back, trying my best to restore her mental strength.

I can't blame Rien. She's already been awake for over 24 hours, continuously entering the labyrinth without a moment's rest.

Not a veteran adventurer, but someone who had her first labyrinth experience yesterday, she's been going in and out of the labyrinth several times in a row, experiencing mana poisoning, getting injured, encountering monsters in life-threatening situations, all while grinding herself down with the sole intention of saving her companions.

It would be strange if she hadn't gone mad. Rien was currently on a labyrinth excursion beyond her limits, surpassing even unreasonableness.

Her stress levels were already close to the maximum.

If we just let this pass, her mental state will burst.

If that happens, she'll likely show various abnormal symptoms.

Hearing hallucinations.

Running madly into the darkness.

Or attacking companions.

We must stop it.

It's over if the guide goes crazy.

The priestess and female knight are waiting for us.

To save them, we must somehow fix Rien's mental state.

"Kuhm...!"

Hachi is pushing himself too hard.

Rohan's figure was already hidden by the bugs and no longer visible.

Rien's eyes were still wavering, unable to look straight at her surroundings.

If we continue like this, it's over.

Three more corpses will be added to the 3rd floor of the sewers.

Absolutely not.

I absolutely cannot die here.

So Rien, Rohan, and Hachi can't die here either.

No matter what happens, we'll escape from this fucking labyrinth.

"Rien. Rien."

"Aaah... Yeah?"

"Rien, isn't there something you like?"

"S-something I like... I.. I.. S-sweet.. candy... The candy mom gave me.. Candy.. Candy...."

"I see."

A response like she's regressed to childhood.

It's fortunate that she hasn't gone completely mad.

Her reason remains, albeit very faintly.

There's a possibility. It's a chance to bring her back.

"Here, it's candy. Here, take it, Rien."

"C-candy..?"

"Yes. When we get outside, let's go eat dessert together. I know a good place. Let's eat as much as you want and laugh together. Okay, Rien? We're all going together. You and me. And the young lady... Rika and Erika too."

I give her certainty.

The certainty that we can absolutely get out of here.

That certainty that we can survive.

It should bring her back.

"Together.. Together.. sniff.. Together... I want to go together... sob... I want to get out alive.."

"That's right. Let's all go together. So, Rien. You need to pull yourself together now. You mustn't be gripped by fear. Rika and Erika are waiting for us. We need to go save them. Right?"

"Y-you're right... We need to save them.. We came to save them.."

"That's right. Now, let's get up. Rohan and Hachi are working hard. We need to help them now too. It's time to show the witch's power."

"Okay..!"

Light returned to Rien's eyes.

Thank goodness.

Really... really thank goodness.

It was chilling.

It felt like the labyrinth's malice was choking me.

But Rien overcame it.

She stood up again.

Without succumbing to fear.

Soon, she shot a beam of light towards the killer bugs covering Rohan.

"Fireball."

Boom--!

The bugs covering Rohan burst.

Rohan, who had been swinging his sword even while buried under the swarm of bugs, finally jumped out.

"Kuheouk...!!!!"

He coughs up blood.

Immediately, Hachi rushed out and threw Rohan towards us, then shot both hands towards the rushing bugs.

Boom-!

With a vibration, an intense light filled the labyrinth corridor for an instant.

A branch of holy incantation.

The effect should be similar to a flash grenade.

The rushing bugs stopped.

They seemed blinded by the light.

They stopped as if all their senses had gone haywire.

Now's our chance.

"We must go!"

Hachi carried the fallen Rohan on his back and ran.

Rien and I followed behind.

I tightly grasped Rien's hand and ran and ran, getting away from the bugs.

"Rohan..! Open your eyes!"

"Wait a moment! I'll inject the antidote right away."

Killer bugs are insect-type monsters that appear from the 3rd floor of the sewers onwards.

They're vicious creatures that rush at adventurers' torches, and when one is killed, dozens more react and start rampaging.

They also stab with paralyzing poison-coated stingers, and while their bodies are weak, the situation becomes complicated if you fall victim to their paralyzing poison.

"Kuk..!"

Rohan, while dealing with the swarm of killer bugs at the vanguard, was stung all over his body with paralyzing poison.

His veins are bulging, and the stung areas are turning purple.

He was stung too many times.

If we leave him like this, he'll soon die from convulsions.

It's only because he has a purification-type ability and the sturdy body of a warrior that he's enduring like this. If it were an ordinary adventurer, the paralyzing poison would have spread throughout their body instantly, causing them to collapse.

Let's respond quickly.

Since our team currently has no healer, I must take on that role.

Hachi is a monk, but he said he can only use combat-type incantations.

"Rohan, Rohan! Can you hear me!?"

"Kuhak.. Kuheouk... Fuck.. Fucking bug bastards.. cough.."

After injecting three consecutive shots of antidote into Rohan's body, he suddenly stood up, spitting out blood and curses simultaneously.

His toughness puts even barbarian warriors to shame.

"You.. You... Tomorrow... You must save our companions.. Got it... If you back out of going to the underground city.. I'll kill you..."

Rohan warned me with bloodshot eyes, stumbling over his words.

It was a warning that he'd kill me if I backed out after they went to such lengths to help with our companion rescue.

Honestly, I didn't expect these two to push themselves this hard to help us.

Rohan and Hachi kept their word. If I betray this, I'd have no right to complain even if I get stabbed.

"I won't lie. Tomorrow, I'll go with you to the underground city and... bring out all of Rohan's companions."

"cough... It's a promise.. A blood oath.."

Rohan held out his blood-stained hand, and I grasped it.

Soon, Rohan stood up and spoke to Hachi.

"By the way, there are too many monsters in the sewers. I've been feeling this for a while."

"Indeed. From the 1st to the 3rd floor. There are excessively many monsters."

"Is it because of the Great Shift? Tch."

Certainly, even in the breeding grounds, an excessive number of monsters were crawling out.

Bopal Rabbits that don't usually live in groups forming packs, or Hoarding Rabbits coming out in groups of dozens.

"Let's keep going for now.. We don't have time to stay like this."

Rohan, who was injured the most, urged us to move quickly.

He probably wants to finish the rescue operation quickly and rest for tomorrow.

We continued advancing in the direction Rien pointed, without even having time to collect the dead killer bug corpses.

These damn bugs have the truly bug-like habit of gathering towards light, so we need to get away quickly.

We didn't have time to hunt leisurely. Especially now that their numbers have increased.

"There! There's a transfer stone ahead!"

Not long after, we discovered the third transfer stone.

When we came to where Rien guided us, there was a transfer stone.

This means the rescue targets are further below.

The female knight and priestess are on the 4th floor.

The worst situation we could anticipate has arrived.

"They're not on the 3rd floor either... We need to go down to the 4th floor..."

We've wasted quite a lot of time getting this far.

Although we came down as fast as we could.

It's hard to believe the two are still alive.

Did she realize this?

Rien's expression hardened even more.

Now she looked like she was about to cry.

'Her hands and legs are trembling too..'

The effect of the tonic seems to be wearing off gradually.

Can Rien endure on the 4th floor?

Above all, Rien has only gone through mana adaptation once.

It's already amazing that she's come down this far steadfastly, but if she enters the 4th floor in this state...

Rien might die too.

I asked Rien in front of the transfer stone.

Her hand gripping mine was trembling severely.

"Rien. Can you endure?"

We should endure, if only because it would be a waste to have come this far.

But I couldn't force her to endure.

Forcing is the worst option.

I had to make her find the will to go down on her own.

"W-well...."

Rien's eyes wavered.

She couldn't answer readily.

It must be tough. I know.

I could tell just by looking at her expression.

But she probably can't give up.

She obtained the ability of search tracking, most suitable for searching for missing persons.

If she can't save her companions just because it's tough, she'll feel immense guilt.

I decided to stimulate that guilt.

It's unavoidable, because we need to go down.

You can judge me as a cold-hearted person if you want.

But I'd like you to understand this.

This is the labyrinth city where loss directly leads to death.

We can't return empty-handed after coming down here through all that hardship.

To properly receive the value of coming down, we must save the female knight and priestess even if we die.

We had to bring up at least their corpses.

"Rien. It's okay to give up. You don't need to feel guilty. You might get in trouble if you push yourself too hard just because of your ability. Tell me clearly now. Is it okay to go down?"

I grasped Rien's trembling shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes.

If it's really too hard, give up here.

It meant that if we're going down further, a half-hearted mindset won't do.

Also, by giving her the option to give up before Rien could voice her desire to quit, I emphasized that we needed to go down.

"I can go down. I can still move. It's okay. I won't fall into panic anymore. We'll save everyone.. and go eat dessert together."

Her eyes no longer wavered.

I can feel a firm resolve.

She's completely steeled her determination.

Thank goodness. I'm glad she didn't give up.

"Alright."

Rien seemed to have finished her mental preparation.

A will to fight settled in her wavering eyes.

Rohan and Hachi also checked their conditions before going down to the 4th floor.

"Hachi. Do you have enough holy power?"

"Sufficient. Even if the White Evil appears.. I should be able to handle it."

"White Evil... I hope it doesn't appear, but it doesn't hurt to be careful. Hey, you two."

Rohan turned to look at me and Rien in front of the transfer stone leading to the 4th floor.

"There's a high possibility that the master of the 4th floor is down there. You two prepare for battle as well."

The master of the sewers.

The boss monster of the 4th floor.

White Evil.

A white man-eating crocodile.

It's incredibly large in size, and its outer skin is excessively hard.

Unlike other monsters in the sewer area that are generally easy to catch, the White Evil is absurdly tough.

If we're lucky, there's a possibility that the rescue team killed it first and went down to the underground city.

But assuming the worst-case scenario, due to the impact of the Great Shift, the spawn probability might have been messed up, and a White Evil might have respawned on the 4th floor.

After all, we're in a situation where the number of monsters has increased exponentially.

'This is why I hoped we wouldn't have to go down to the 4th floor.'

Can those two handle the White Evil?

They're silver badge adventurers after all.

They should be able to handle it.

However, they're both quite exhausted from coming down this far.

To begin with, these two also entered the labyrinth almost immediately after escaping, so their condition didn't look particularly good.

"Rien."

"Yeah.."

"How many more times do you think you can use magic?"

"Maybe... five times..?"

"I see. Here, take this club."

"A club...?"

"Yes. A club is good because you can just swing it even if you haven't learned how to use it specifically. If monsters rush in, kill them by hitting them with the club. If you hit their heads well, you should be able to kill most of them."

"A mage with a club.. Mm..! I'll try...!"

I took out a sling and a sword.

There will be situations where we need to fight.

Until now, Rohan and Hachi dealt with most of the monsters, but from now on, Rien and I need to fight too.

The 4th floor of the sewers.

A place where ratmen, slimes, and killer bugs all crawl out.

Moreover, floor division phenomenon would have occurred on the 4th floor too.

When we rescue the female knight and priestess, to go back up, we'll eventually have to go down below the floor division.

We couldn't know what would happen then.

The labyrinth always presents the worst situations.

So we must always assume the worst.

"Let's go. Down."

After finishing our preparations, we crossed the transfer stone and entered the 4th floor.

Finally, the end of this rescue operation was approaching.

# Chapter 14: The Labyrinth is Always the Worst

"There are more monsters than on the 3rd floor."

"Indeed, the number of monsters has increased."

As Rohan and Hachi said, the 4th floor was more chaotic than the 3rd.

The footsteps of killer bugs could be heard everywhere, and there seemed to be more ratmen and slimes too.

"The 4th floor will likely be a speed battle. We need to rescue and escape as quickly as possible before the monsters swarm in."

"Kieee!!"

"Oh no, they're already here!"

Ratmen rushed in in droves.

At least ten of them.

More monsters will be drawn by the commotion.

We need to deal with them quickly and get away.

"Uryaaah!!!"

Rohan swung his sword at the rushing rat bastards, slicing them apart, and Hachi grabbed the surviving rat bastards and smashed them.

It was quickly cleared, but there was no time to rest.

More are coming. The path is blocked.

We had to hold out until Rohan cleared the way.

"Porter..!"

"Aaah!!!"

Monsters rushed towards us too.

It's more than Rohan and Hachi can handle alone.

The moment to fight came sooner than expected.

"Rien! Save your magic!"

"Okay..!"

A short sword with a short blade is suitable for narrow passages.

If you can't handle weapons as well as Rohan, you should choose weapons that can be swung recklessly without problems.

Slash!!!

I sliced the neck of a ratman rushing towards me and immediately threw the short sword I was holding to hit a killer bug targeting Hachi's back.

"Thank you!"

Receiving Hachi's thanks, I took out a hand axe from my inventory and split the head of a rushing ratman in half.

The dirty rat bastard's blood and brain matter spurted out.

With no time to pull it out, I dropped the axe and took out a javelin from my inventory, throwing it at the ratmen jumping out from the right corridor.

Thud-!

Two of them were pierced by the javelin and died. There's no time to retrieve the javelin.

A brief gap appeared, so in that time, I pulled out the axe stuck in the ratman's head and used it to check the killer bugs again.

"Uh, aaah! Get away!"

Rien was also swinging her club hard from behind, crushing the heads of two ratmen.

I'm trying my best to keep monsters away from her, but it's not perfect.

"Let's get out of here now!"

"Yes!"

Finally, Rohan cleared the way.

We ran.

"To the right!"

"They're coming, run faster!"

We ran and ran in the direction Rien pointed, and finally we were able to arrive.

As if to prove that our destination was right in front of us, a scream was heard.

-Kyaaah!!!

It's the scream of a living person.

And I know that voice.

The priestess was alive.

"Erika!"

Rien shouted.

It seemed monsters had burst into the room where Rika and Erika were hiding.

Monsters are pouring out from both corridors.

"Damn! I'll break through the entrance, you two go in and save them!"

Rohan pushed through the monsters filling the corridor.

To prevent any more monsters from entering the room where Erika and Rika were.

Hachi, realizing the urgency of the situation, also jumped in among the monsters.

While those two hold back the monsters rushing out from both corridors, we need to quickly enter the room and rescue the two.

"Rien!"

"Yeah!"

Rien and I entered the room where Erika's screams were coming from, avoiding the monsters' attacks.

"Kyaaah!!"

"Erika!!!"

Ratmen that had entered the room were rushing towards the convulsing Erika and the fallen Rika.

Erika was already pushed to her mental limits.

She didn't recognize us even though we entered the room.

Moreover, Rika already seemed dead.

If so, we need to at least save Erika.

If we leave her, those dirty rat bastards will bite Erika's neck and kill her.

"You rotten bastards!"

If Erika dies, the reward will be halved.

I absolutely can't let that happen.

I threw myself and buried the axe in a ratman's back.

It wasn't enough with one hit, so I pulled it out and smashed its head again.

A fountain of blood spurts out as the ratman dies.

Not even having time to pull out the axe stuck in its head, I dropped it and took out a kitchen knife from my inventory.

To think I'd even take this out.

It's a kitchen knife I bought to peel apples.

"Haa. Haa. Haa. Fuck!"

I feel like I'm going to die from shortness of breath.

My hands won't move, but I can't stop.

My muscles are screaming.

But still, I have to stab and kill.

The kitchen knife is the only weapon left.

I brought down the kitchen knife towards the back of a ratman attacking Erika.

To prevent cutting my hand if I stab recklessly, I gripped the knife in reverse, fixing the end of the handle with my thumb to prevent my hand from getting cut.

In a situation like this, I absolutely can't injure my hand.

"Kieeee!"

The ratmen clawed and bit my body.

Each time, I shoved the kitchen knife harder into their bodies and picked up the axe to smash their vital points.

Just as the poison on the ratmen's claws and teeth was gradually spreading through my body, I took out a syringe from my inventory and stabbed it into my thigh.

"Kugh..!"

It's the same antidote I used on Rohan.

To resist the poison, I kept injecting antidote into my body in real-time while reducing the number of ratmen.

"Haa. Haa. Haa..."

I dealt with all the ratmen that were clinging to Erika trying to kill her.

Covered in blood and bodily fluids, it was hard to even keep my eyes open.

I wiped my face with a towel to secure my vision.

At that moment, my arm trembled and I dropped the kitchen knife.

My legs won't listen.

Did I use all the muscles I could to their maximum?

I sat down and gasped for breath.

"R-Rien.. How's it on your side..."

"Uugh..!!!"

"Huh? Rien!"

While I was saving Erika, Rien had dropped her club and was convulsing.

A slime had covered her head.

I didn't pay attention to Rien while saving Erika.

'Shit.'

Rien, who was trying to rescue the fallen Rika, seemed to have failed to check the slime on the ceiling.

In the end, the slime fell on her head, leading to the current situation.

"Rien!!! You need to pull out the core!!!"

I didn't know if my voice would be properly conveyed, but I shouted anyway.

I wanted to rush over and help right away, but my legs were trembling and it took time to stand up.

"Uugh..!!!"

"Oh no."

This won't do.

Rien couldn't grab the slime's core.

She was just flailing her arms uselessly towards the air.

Curses naturally came out.

I forcibly moved my creaking legs and threw myself towards Rien.

Splat!

I straddled her fallen body and grasped the slime's core, pulling it out.

"Ugh. Uweeek..."

Rien vomited mucus.

When I smashed the pulled-out slime core on the ground, the wriggling mucus soon spilled onto the floor.

"Uugh.. Kuhak."

She repeated dry heaves and lay face down.

Erika, who had lost her mind, crawled to a corner of the room and trembled while holding her head.

Rika, who was already dead, was in a state of undress, her clothes torn off by the ratmen.

Everyone's in a terrible state.

"Hey!! Did you save them!?"

"Yes..!"

Hachi's urgent voice was heard from the corridor.

We need to leave soon. If we delay any longer, monsters will gather in unmanageable numbers.

"Erika. Erika!"

"Huah. Hueeeh..!"

"Erika, pull yourself together. Erika."

"No, no. No. I can't. Don't kill me.. Please..."

"I'm not killing you! We came to save you. Look at me! Open your eyes and look properly!! Pull yourself together!"

"Heok...!"

I firmly grasped Erika's face as she was trying to lower her head while shaking it, making her look at me.

Only then did Erika open her eyes wide and properly confirm my face.

"P-Porter...?"

"Yes. We came to save you. We need to move right now."

"I-is this... reality? I'm not dead, right?"

"You're not dead yet, so get up quickly! We need to get out! If we stay here, we'll die!"

"Ah... Y-yes. Yes!!"

Thank goodness.

Maybe because she's a priestess with high mental strength, Erika quickly regained her senses.

I put the dead Rika into my inventory and helped the panting Rien stand up.

"Rien! Transfer stone location!"

"Ah, aah. Wait a moment..!"

Rien took out the postcard she received from the young lady from her chest and tore it.

Search tracking activates.

Actually, this is why I told the young lady to stay on the surface.

Rien's ability, search tracking, will now track the young lady's location, and since the young lady is on the surface, the search tracking will end up pointing to the location of the transfer stone.

We can now find the transfer stone on the 4th floor.

"Rohan! Hachi! Let's go!"

Rohan pushed back the remaining monsters while stabbing the antidote I gave him into his leg, and Hachi used another incantation like a flash grenade to paralyze one corridor.

"This way..! Left at the fork!"

"Run! They're coming!!! Run!! Damn it!! Why are those women so slow!!!"

"I'll carry them and run! Lead the way!!!"

Hachi grabbed Erika and Rien, who were lagging behind, with both arms and ran frantically.

Rohan, his face pale from overdosing on antidote, cleared the way ahead, and I followed behind them, running at the very back while checking the map.

"There! We need to go down the stairs!"

"Damn floor division!!!"

Rohan cursed the labyrinth with an irritated voice.

The transfer stone is probably below those stairs.

And 'that thing' will be there too.

"Fuck..!"

"Ah. As expected."

White Evil.

The pure white crocodile monster.

It was standing in front of the transfer stone with its mouth wide open.

As if it had been waiting for us to come down.

Yes, it seemed the labyrinth didn't want to let us leave just like that.

To add the worst on top of the worst and present such an absurd shittiness.

"Rohan!! Can you break through!?"

"Damn it..! There's no time to hesitate!! You guys block the stairs!"

Rohan seemed to have steeled himself.

Soon, he took out a small glass bottle containing something unknown from his chest and consumed its contents.

"Huaaah..."

Steam erupted from his body.

Also, his eyes became bloodshot, and all the muscles in his body swelled.

Don't tell me this person...

'Berserker's potion!'

Rohan, who consumed a potion worth 10 gold coins per bottle, ran towards the White Evil.

Crazy doping warrior.

Is his guts made of steel?

Soon, Hachi followed behind him.

No matter how much berserker's potion he drank, it's impossible to take on the White Evil alone.

"From now on, we need to block the stairs."

The remaining me, Rien, and Erika had to block the monsters coming down the stairs.

"Erika, take this club. From now on, you and I will kill the monsters here. And Rien, you take care of the stairs."

"Okay..! Fireball."

I saved Rien's magic for this moment.

The labyrinth's malice?

I was already assuming the worst.

That's why we could prepare.

The result of saving Rien's magic unfolded before our eyes now.

"Burn to death."

A fireball shot towards the stairs.

The bodies of the rat bastards coming down caught fire.

Moreover, the stairs themselves were engulfed in flames and burned.

It's because I had sprinkled oil on the stairs in advance while following behind the group at the very back earlier.

"Uh, aaah..!"

"Erika! Hit them straight down!!! They're not dead yet!"

"Ah, aah..!"

While Rien blocked the stairs, Erika and I had to deal with the monsters rushing towards us.

"Cough! Cough..!"

No, I'll have to handle it alone.

Erika sat down clutching her chest.

It's mana poisoning.

Rien, who had gone through mana adaptation at least once, was forcibly enduring, but Erika seemed to have reached her limit now.

"Kraaah--!!"

"Die!!!!"

Just then, a roar was heard from behind.

When I quickly checked the situation behind, Rohan was shoving his arm into the White Evil's eye. How is that even possible?

Anyway, they took down the White Evil.

Rohan and Hachi had defeated the White Evil blocking the transfer stone.

"Crazy!!! They really did it!!! It's done! Erika! Hold on a bit more! Rien, let's go now!"

The White Evil fell.

Rohan and Hachi did it.

To think they could take down the 4th floor boss with just the two of them.

Those monster-like humans.

Maybe those two will go through mana adaptation when they get outside this time.

They are truly adventurers with the qualities to become gold badge holders.

"Let's get out!"

"To the outside!!!"

We ran towards the transfer stone.

As the flames on the stairs gradually subsided, monsters soon poured down.

"Jump into the blue one!"

Rohan, who had activated the transfer stone in advance, waited for us.

Hachi probably went through first and is clearing the surroundings.

"Kyah! W-wait!!"

"Ueeeh!"

I strongly pushed Rien and Erika's backs, sending them through the blue gate first, then immediately jumped in.

-Thud!

"Kugh.."

"Uaah. It hurts.."

"Cough. Cough..."

Both Rien and Erika are safe.

Hachi, who had gone through first, seemed to have roughly cleared away the nearby monsters.

Woong-!

Soon after, Rohan also succeeded in coming up to the 3rd floor.

"Haah.. Fuck. I never want to experience that again..."

Rohan, whose armor had become rags, sat down on the ground and sighed.

"Fortunately, there are no monsters nearby."

Hachi, who detected that this place was safe through his sensing.

He sat down too.

"We survived..."

"Sob.. Huah... We survived... Goddess.. We survived.. Thank you.. Thank you.."

Rien stared blankly into space like a person whose soul had left their body.

Erika lay face down, clutching her rosary and expressing her gratitude for a long time.

"Hey. Porter."

"Yes?"

"You, you got it, right?"

"You saw?"

"Of course. How could I not see that?"

"Just pay me the transportation fee."

"Alright."

Rohan grinned.

He saw that I had acquired the White Evil's corpse before jumping into the blue gate.

If it were an ordinary adventurer, they would have had to abandon the White Evil's corpse because it was too big and heavy, but thanks to the spatial pocket, I can bring its corpse up intact.

I'd like to gulp it down myself, but I can't do that.

Knowing that Rohan and Hachi fought to death, I intend to hand over the White Evil's corpse to the two of them.

The transportation fee is between 5 to 10 percent of the sale price, so it would be profitable just to receive that.

The White Evil's skin sells for a high price.

Moreover, since I'm bringing up the entire corpse intact, we can sell all the other parts too.

"Rien."

"Yeah..?"

"You worked hard. Would you like to drink this?"

"Heh.. It's orange juice. Thanks.. Porter."

"It's nothing. Let's all replenish our sugar levels a bit."

I handed out sweet fruit juice to the group.

Rohan and Hachi downed the juice in one shot with good spirits.

Erika, whose face was covered in tears, fell into my arms and cried for a long time when I handed her the juice, as if something had been so sad and difficult.

We can't fully relax yet since we're still in the labyrinth, but at least we had a moment to rest.

# Chapter 15: Dating an Adventurer is Crazy

A brief sweet respite.

Rien, who had been on a forced march without rest for nearly two days, fell asleep as if fainting.

Erika also couldn't resist drowsiness and nodded off, eventually closing her eyes.

'But why are they sleeping on my shoulder?'

For some reason, both of them used my shoulders as pillows to sleep.

Rien put her head on my right shoulder, and Erika borrowed my left shoulder.

I don't know why, but as drowsiness overcame them, they naturally came to my side and leaned on my shoulders without a word.

"Are those two lovers?"

"Huh? No. I just met them yesterday."

"....What?"

Rohan opened his eyes wide in surprise, as if to say 'what do you mean?'

But surprisingly, I haven't even been with these women for a full day.

I was actually with the young lady longer.

I have no connection with them other than spending a few hours in the labyrinth.

Yet somehow, I seem to have become someone they can rely on.

Seeing how they came and leaned on me to sleep so comfortably.

"Wait, wait, wait a minute."

"Yes?"

"No, so. They're not precious people to you, and you just met them yesterday, but you came to rescue them risking your life? Why? For what reason?"

"Ah, well, you see."

It's a bit awkward to tell the truth that I agreed to receive gold coins.

Adventurers are very faithful to their desires.

No matter how kind and trustworthy they seem, there's no need to readily reveal all the financial aspects.

Money, gold coins have a demonic nature.

Some people kill for a single gold coin.

Rohan and Hachi are certainly reliable men.

But they're also people I just met today.

I haven't been with them long enough to fully understand their inner selves.

There's camaraderie, but in terms of trust between humans, there's nothing to say.

Above all, these two have six companions that need to be saved.

Six corpses in the underground city.

I don't know what relationship they have with these two.

Resurrection requires a huge amount of money.

It's common to become indebted or end up having to watch your companion be sold as a slave because you couldn't raise the resurrection costs.

That's why I decided not to say anything about the compensation I'll receive.

There's nothing more foolish than boasting about money in the labyrinth city.

"A noble I have a connection with asked me. Since I owed them a favor. I couldn't refuse, so I came in."

I didn't lie.

I certainly made a connection with the young lady, so it's true that she's "a noble I have a connection with".

And since the young lady dragged me up to the 3rd floor when I collapsed on the 4th floor of the breeding grounds, it's true that "I owed them a favor".

Moreover, it was too large an amount of gold coins to refuse, so I came in.

It's also true that "I couldn't refuse, so I came in".

I didn't lie.

"Ah. So that was the reason. You're a more loyal man than I thought."

"Haha. It's nothing."

Rohan nodded with a slight smile.

He must have constructed a story about me and the noble in his own way.

It's not loyalty but money that made me come in, but it's good if he thinks well of me.

"Anyway, those two. Even though they're not lovers, they seem to rely on you quite a bit."

"That's right."

This is all because of the suspension bridge effect.

When you go through crisis moments together, hearts sprout, love sprouts, and such.

Actually, it's common in mixed-gender parties.

Of course, you should absolutely not "date within the party", but you know.

No, to be precise, it's better not to date "active adventurers".

This is, how should I put it.

Like the reason for not having a company relationship.

No, is it a bit different?

'It's dangerous. Dating an adventurer is dangerous.'

If you date within the same party, you can see each other often.

It might be good because you can naturally do various things when you see each other often.

But.

'What if they die. What will you do then?'

Let's think about dating a woman in the same party.

To be honest, labyrinth excursions are crazy.

Adventurers are clearly a 3D job.

Dirty, Difficult, and Dangerous.

If there's a way to make money without fighting monsters, there's no reason to be an adventurer.

Of course, there are quite a few people like me who aim for a life reversal through labyrinth excursions, or those who enter the labyrinth to raise their level and gain abilities through mana adaptation.

But why?

Is there a reason to enter the labyrinth if you already have money?

This was why I inwardly laughed at the young lady when I first saw her.

I was irritated by the fact that a noble child, who didn't need to struggle in the labyrinth, was voluntarily trying to enter.

While some risk their lives to enter and struggle like dogs.

I thought nobles entered just for fun without such hardships.

And this notion of mine was formed by months of experience.

Of course, the young lady was a bit different from that type.

A young lady whose dream is to be an adventurer? She's not in her right mind.

Anyway, adventurers are in a profession where it's completely unpredictable when, where, how, and in what state they'll die.

Can you date someone in such a profession with peace of mind?

Especially within the same party.

What if your partner gets torn apart by monsters right before your eyes while dating?

Your mental state would be completely shattered that day.

It would be better if the corpse was completely destroyed, leaving no possibility of resurrection.

You could quickly commit suicide or give up on life in despair.

But what if resurrection is possible?

You'd go crazy trying to raise the resurrection costs.

Blinded by money, you'd take risks and die.

Those who die like this are discovered by someone again, moved to a temple.

After being forcibly resurrected, they're given the choice to either forcibly repay the money, go to the mines, or be sold as slaves.

I've seen this ending several times already.

A truckload of adventurers have died like this.

The temples in the labyrinth city have a tenacious side.

If they can collect the resurrection costs, they'll use any means to do so.

And among these methods, there are cases where they threaten to auction off the resurrected person in the slave market.

Because the temple holds the identity of the resurrected "revived person" until the resurrection costs are repaid.

Adventurers without relatives are sent to mines or handed over to slave traders to receive a suitable price when judged unable to repay the money.

But for adventurers with relatives, or those judged to have someone who can repay the money, there's no way they can't repay the money.

They must repay it no matter what.

Moreover, they make it impossible to buy the resurrected person as a slave at a cheap price.

If you want to get your dead companion back.

You must prepare at least 100 gold coins.

Revived people are products for the temple.

Especially for adventurers who have gone through many mana adaptations and have high levels, the price becomes even higher.

Furthermore, the cost can increase several times with each resurrection.

The minimum is 100 gold coins.

If you were killed by another adventurer or companion, you might not have to pay separate resurrection costs if you testify in front of a priest with lie detection... Well, that doesn't happen often.

Anyway, if you're from a wealthy family, or your parents are nobles, or you're a rich adventurer, it might be easy to prepare 100 gold coins, but for others, it's an amount they can't gather even if they earn for a lifetime.

For these reasons, dating within the same party is crazy.

And dating someone from a completely different party is like saying it's okay for anyone to sleep with your girlfriend anytime.

As I've said many times, the labyrinth city is full of Golden Suns, and cases of NTR happen more often than you can imagine.

I'd like to give examples of how you might lose your girlfriend...

But just imagining it makes me want to vomit.

'Wait, so what's the conclusion?'

In conclusion, you need a pretty slave who will faithfully do housework without having to enter the labyrinth.

Moreover, people in the labyrinth city don't intimidate or discriminate against someone just because their status is a slave.

Because it's not their slave.

Unless you're the slave's owner, you can't treat that slave recklessly.

You shouldn't use or damage other people's property carelessly.

If you treat someone else's slave recklessly, you should be prepared to face the consequences.

Treating something that's not yours carelessly?

That's a challenge to the slave owner.

Anyway, after going round and round, my conclusion is this.

I've given various reasons, but in the end, what I want to say is always one thing.

Slaves are the best.

Hmm. No matter how I think about it, slaves are the best.

Without having to enter the labyrinth and risk my life fighting.

Living off the money I earn without complaint.

Furthermore, unable to cheat no matter what happens, by order.

Such a woman.

Even better if she's a virgin.

Actually, I didn't care much about virginity, but after what the slave merchant said last time, I don't want to buy slaves who aren't virgins.

Right? If you're buying with expensive money, new is better than used.

'Come to think of it... The young lady was a virgin too.'

Oh my. What am I thinking?

After going through various things with the young lady, her face naturally came to mind.

My goodness, I must be crazy.

To consider a noble young lady as a dating prospect.

I'm crazy. Know your place, porter.

'Don't even imagine it. I don't want to die prematurely at the hands of Margrave Lionel.'

As I shook my head to clear my thoughts, Rohan spoke to me again.

"By the way, do you belong to any party?"

"No. Not particularly."

"Then.. would you like to join our party later?"

"You'd always be welcome, my friend."

Rohan proposed an exclusive contract.

And Hachi, who had been quietly listening to our conversation, chimed in.

Those two seem to like me quite a bit too.

"Haha. I don't really plan to join anywhere."

"Is that so. May I ask why?"

"Well, you see. How should I put it..."

There are several reasons why I don't seek an exclusive party.

There's the reason that I don't want to be deeply tied down anywhere.

And I'm also afraid that if I get too close to companions, I won't be able to accept their deaths.

Moreover, if I get an exclusive party and go in and out of the labyrinth, somehow...

'I really don't like feeling like I'm actually working.'

It feels like becoming a company employee.

It feels like I have to go to the labyrinth out of obligation.

Being part of a team means coordinating schedules with team members.

That alone is quite stressful.

I'm satisfied with just grabbing a suitable party on days I want to work, when I want to work, and just going around the upper levels and coming out. You could say I aspire to a freelancer's life.

But if I have a team I belong to, I have to adjust to the party leader's opinions, which is a bit uncomfortable. It feels like getting a workplace superior.

The situation is different between participating as an external member and as an official party member.

Even without an exclusive party, there are many who seek me out.

To increase my value and expand my influence further, it's better to be free.

And probably after escaping from this labyrinth, there will be even more people seeking me out.

Why, you ask?

'Because now I can roam around the underground city too.'

I went through my 6th mana adaptation while rescuing the young lady yesterday.

I reached level 6. I've met the minimum entry condition for the underground city.

Up to level 5, you show symptoms of mana poisoning when entering the underground city, but at level 6, you can roam the underground city without problems.

Love calls from those who usually want me will pour in.

Spatial pockets are that rare.

"I see. If you ever change your mind, let me know. You're always welcome."

"Yes. Thank you for the invitation."

"It's nothing. A porter of your caliber will be welcomed anywhere."

Hachi and Rohan left the possibility open.

It seems they really don't want to let me go, even though I clearly refused.

"Well, let's end the chat here and start going up."

"Yes. Rien, Erika. Wake up. It's time to leave."

I woke up the two sleeping women.

"Sssip.. Mmm..."

Rien woke up, wiping the drool from the corner of her mouth.

No, there's drool on my shoulder...

"Ugh.. M-my legs.. They hurt so much..."

Erika couldn't stand up.

She looks like she wants to be carried, but there was no one to carry her.

I felt like I was about to collapse and die too.

Rohan and Hachi needed to fight, so they had no room to carry a burden on their backs.

Even if they had room, they probably wouldn't have carried her anyway.

"Get up quickly. There's no time to whine."

"Ugh... Okay.."

The whiny priestess got up too.

We moved towards the transfer stone on the 3rd floor again.

"Monsters are coming from the front."

"Erika, can you cast buffs?"

"Yes..! Just a moment."

There were still many monsters.

If there's one fortunate thing, it's that we now have a healer in the team.

"There! The transfer stone!"

"Damn bug bastards!"

We ran towards the transfer stone.

An enormous number of killer bugs chased us from behind.

It's still dangerous even up to the 3rd floor.

"It'll be easier once we get to the 2nd floor! Run!!!"

Rohan shouted while sweeping away the bugs.

Rien ran half-crying because her legs hurt so much, and Erika, who was lagging behind, was eventually carried by Hachi.

"Haa. Haa.. Shit.."

I feel like I'm going to die too.

Damn labyrinth.

"Go in!!!"

Hachi, carrying Erika, jumped into the blue gate.

Rien and I immediately followed, and Rohan, who was watching us enter until the very end, succeeded in coming up to the 2nd floor.

"Ha. Hahaha!"

Rohan laughed.

Killer bugs don't appear on the 2nd floor.

Goodbye to those damn bug bastards.

"Cursed sewers. I'll never enter here again in my life."

"I agree."

Hachi agreed with Rohan's words.

Rien, who was bent over dripping sweat because she was so out of breath, nodded vigorously.

"Rien, are you okay?"

"Yeah.. I'm fiiine..."

She didn't look fine at all.

"Well, let's go up again. We're about to escape."

"Phew. That way. We should go that way."

"Ah, there's a map here. I'll guide us."

The place we transferred to was marked on the mapping.

We can move to the transfer stone by the shortest route.

"Haah.. Thank goodness."

Rien, who was suffering from a headache due to overusing search tracking, sighed and stroked her chest.

Soon we were able to go up to the 1st floor through the transfer stone.

As expected, we quickly found the transfer stone and were able to escape the labyrinth.

Finally, we could escape from this damn labyrinth.

# Chapter 16: Nobles' Perspective on Resurrection

Outside, it was late afternoon.

The sky just before sunset.

The air was cool, and the blowing wind seemed to announce that this was not the labyrinth.

The victims of the Great Shift gathered outside the labyrinth had also been somewhat sorted out.

The patients would have been moved to the aid station.

The corpses would have been sent to the temple too.

The adventurers who had been sitting in despair at the labyrinth entrance were almost gone.

They must have gone to the guild or entered the labyrinth again.

'Judging by the lack of pain in my body...'

It seems I didn't go through mana adaptation.

Since Rohan and Hachi took down most of the monsters, I didn't have a chance to gain experience points except for killing a few on the 4th floor.

"Kugh..!!!"

Just then, Erika, who was next to me, clutched her chest and sat down.

"Ah, it hurts. It hurts. My body.. Kuugh...!"

"Erika, it's mana adaptation, so don't be too surprised. Everyone experiences this. Calm down."

"Ah.. yeah.. okay.."

Because I had anticipated this, I was able to immediately grab her shoulders and calm Erika, who was about to convulse.

Even if you're aware that you're going through mana adaptation, experiencing it directly is another matter.

Especially in cases like this where people have come out after struggling between life and death, they sometimes have seizures at the fact that there are still unknown situations even after leaving the labyrinth.

At such times, it's better to reassure them quickly.

If someone tells you it's nothing to worry about, your mind becomes more at ease than you'd think.

Come to think of it, the young lady was surprised and flustered too.

I wonder how it was for Rien.

I suddenly became curious.

"Rien, wasn't your first mana adaptation surprising?"

"Me...? I was.. Well. I was surprised, but I didn't have time to be surprised..."

As expected of a mage-class character for whom meditation is routine.

Her mental strength is on par with a monk's.

Rien says she woke up alone in an underground tomb and was rescued while being chased by the dead.

She even said her arm was cut by a skeleton at that time.

In that state, she went through mana adaptation as soon as she came out, gained an ability, and entered the labyrinth again. To save me and the young lady.

Then, after rescuing me and the young lady, she immediately started the rescue of Rika and Erika.

It's no ordinary mental strength.

She almost broke down in the middle, but she entered a semi-awakened state with the sole thought of saving her companions.

To be honest, while Rien herself is sick of the labyrinth, her talent itself was overwhelming.

You can tell just by the fact that she survived consecutively in the labyrinth where she was thrown to die.

She is a person suitable for the labyrinth.

"Hmm.... I'm starting to hurt too..."

It seems Rien went through mana adaptation too.

She must have gained quite a bit of experience from going down to the 4th floor as a level 1.

There was no change in me, Rohan, and Hachi.

Rohan and Hachi didn't go through mana adaptation even though they took down the master of the 4th floor together.

It must mean they're in a state where they can no longer go through mana adaptation with upper-level monsters.

"Uaah....!!!"

Erika, who was going through mana adaptation, suddenly clutched her head.

A headache. This means she gained an ability.

"Congratulations, Erika."

"Some-something entered my head."

"You've gained an ability."

"I'm envious."

"An ability from your first labyrinth excursion. You're lucky."

Hachi and Rohan, who were watching from the side, chimed in.

Gaining an ability from your first labyrinth excursion is quite lucky.

Not everyone gains an ability from the start.

You can tell just by looking at the young lady.

She too was on her first labyrinth excursion, but she didn't gain an ability.

I even went through mana adaptation quite late.

Because I entered as a porter, I hardly had any chances to fight monsters.

Anyway, Rien and Erika, who gained abilities on their first labyrinth excursion, were quite lucky cases.

"Hey! Are you survivors?"

The guards watching the labyrinth entrance ran towards us.

"We can provide first aid here if you're injured."

"If you have difficulty moving, we can call an escort team to transport you to the aid station."

An older-looking guard and a man who looked like a newcomer asked if there were any patients.

'I'm still okay, but Rien and Erika...'

Rien's arm had a wound that hadn't fully healed yet.

Although we applied medicine and wrapped it in bandages, blood was still seeping through.

She should probably receive proper holy incantation.

In Erika's case, she didn't seem to have any physical wounds, but she was mentally quite strained.

She seems to be doing quite well now, but she looked like she needed rest.

"I think I need to go to the aid station."

"Same here."

"Then let's all go to the aid station together."

Rohan and Hachi were quite badly injured.

Both of them fought too hard.

Especially Rohan, who rampaged at the vanguard, didn't look good.

"Since there doesn't seem to be anyone who has difficulty moving, we'll return to our posts."

"Thank you."

When the guards judged that there was no one they needed to take over, they returned to their original positions.

For now, there are roughly three things we need to do immediately.

First, take Rien and Erika to the aid station.

Second, go to the young lady's lodging and report the situation.

Third, take Rika's corpse to the cathedral with the young lady.

Besides that, we need to go to the Adventurers' Guild to pass on information related to the Great Shift, and hand over the adventurers' corpses acquired in the labyrinth.

Also, before entering the underground city tomorrow, I need to discuss with Rohan about when and where to meet, and hand over the monster corpses we caught in the labyrinth to the guild.

Lastly, I need to receive the success fee for this request from the young lady.

'Busy. So busy.'

It's not good to postpone work.

It's better to handle all the tasks you can do at once.

"Let's go to the aid station first."

While moving to the aid station, I spoke to Rohan about when we would enter the underground city.

After all, I agreed to go into the underground city with them in exchange for helping with this rescue operation.

"Originally, I was planning to go in right away tomorrow, but I've changed my mind. It's crazy to enter the underground city with just me and Hachi."

"Right."

Of course.

Surely this guy wasn't thinking of going in with just the three of us?

Obviously, we need to find more companions to go in together.

"Let's take time to prepare tomorrow. We'll recruit people to go in together too. We should enter after making more thorough preparations."

"Sounds good. I'll put up a recruitment notice at the guild later."

"You'll do it directly?"

"Yes. If I write that we're taking a porter with a spatial pocket.. quite a few people will probably gather. Besides Rohan, there should be quite a few people who want to find companions they left behind."

"Certainly..."

Some time has passed since the Great Shift swept through the labyrinth city.

Adventurers who have come to their senses will start labyrinth excursions again.

There could be various reasons.

It could be to find dead companions.

Or it could be to gain advantages by entering the renewed labyrinth first after the Great Shift.

Of course, there will be more people leaving the labyrinth city than entering the labyrinth again.

There will be a vacancy of mid-level or novice adventurers except for high-level adventurers.

Unless there's a new influx, the labyrinth city's economy will be in recession for a while.

The vacancy of mid-level or novice adventurers. For those who don't plan to leave the labyrinth city, this is no different from an opportunity to earn a lot of money.

Anyway, going back to recruiting companions...

'While Rohan and Hachi are strong and reliable companions, the darkness of the underground city is too thick for two vanguards to handle.'

I'm outside the main force.

Since I'm extremely focused on support, I shouldn't be counted as someone who can fight.

Therefore, I want to add at least two backline fighters and one priest to the team.

Only then can we roam the underground city somewhat stably.

"It might be good to form a conquest team. Since I have a spatial pocket, there won't be any problems with supplies."

I can carry enough supplies to feed however many people enter.

So forming a regular conquest team to enter would probably increase the survival rate.

"Certainly, forming a conquest team would increase stability. Let's talk about that part at the guild tomorrow. Forming a conquest team isn't something we can decide just among ourselves. The scale is too big."

Rohan is right.

A conquest team is almost like a 'private army'.

A armed group stronger than the city guard.

If adventurers form a conquest team on their own, the higher-ups in the city won't like it.

'If we form a labyrinth conquest team without involving the Adventurers' Guild, there will surely be sanctions or suppression. Though we don't have the money to form such a large conquest team in the first place.'

The emergence of a group of superhumans with abilities is a disaster in itself from the perspective of those running the city.

We might even be accused of rebellion and have a few people dragged away, tortured, and beheaded.

It's scary just imagining it.

And for that scale, it's better to receive support from the guild or join a conquest team created by the guild.

"Yes. Let's talk about that separately at the guild tomorrow. And we'll deal with the White Evil's corpse tomorrow too."

"Good."

As we coordinated our schedule, we soon arrived at the aid station.

Afterwards, Rohan and Hachi went into a separate intensive care room, and Rien and Erika entered the examination room.

"I'll go report to the young lady first. Please receive treatment and come back."

"Okay.. Thanks, porter."

"Thank you for saving us."

Leaving the two at the aid station, I immediately headed towards the lodging where the young lady would be.

The young lady is probably waiting for news of us with bated breath.

She must be very anxious.

It's better to deliver the news quickly.

.....I also need to talk about Rika.

"It's a luxury inn."

Being a noble, she seems to be staying at quite an expensive place.

The neighborhood itself was a place where quite well-off people come.

Well, for a team composed of women, it's better to stay in a neighborhood with good security.

It's not like they're short on money anyway.

"What brings you here?"

The inn's receptionist looked at me with sharp eyes.

My current appearance was quite dirty.

Covered in blood and dust, you could say.

Of course they'd be wary when an outsider like that just walked in.

"I'm here to see the young lady. Here, this."

I slightly showed the Lionel family seal I had received from the young lady as proof of contract.

Immediately, the counter man's expression changed.

It seems he had already heard something from the young lady.

"Ah! Are you the young lady's porter?"

"Yes."

"I'll relay the message right away. Could you please wait in the first floor reception room for now?"

"Sure."

I was guided to the first floor reception room.

It's my first time entering a luxury inn.

To be honest, with the money it takes to stay at such a luxury inn, it would be more beneficial to just buy survival items.

It's not like I'm some noble child with a name value. A porter can just eat and sleep adequately at a modest lodging.

"Wow, they even serve coffee."

To keep me from getting bored while waiting, they provided free coffee and cookies.

As I was sweeping the free sugar cubes and cookies into my inventory, the young lady soon entered the reception room.

"Porter! You're safe!"

"Yes. I feel like I'm going to die from exhaustion, but I'm safe."

"Thank goodness.. I was so worried.. when you didn't come up.."

The young lady immediately ran and hugged me as soon as she saw me.

Oh my, I must smell quite bad right now.

It could have been unpleasant with the mixture of sweat and blood smell, but the young lady hugged me and expressed her joy as if it didn't bother her at all.

She's quite a rough young lady in her expressions.

It must mean she was that glad to see me.

There can't be any other emotions, probably.

"But what about the others? D-don't tell me."

Soon, the young lady sat down opposite me after separating from me, and only then did she look for where the other companions had gone.

"Rien and Erika are safe. They should be receiving treatment at the aid station now."

"Phew. Thank goodness.. Huh? Only Rien and Erika? What about Rika..?"

"I rushed here to talk about that part."

The young lady's expression visibly darkened.

She seemed to have intuited what I was about to say.

"Rika died on the 4th floor of the sewer area in the upper part of the labyrinth."

"....Ah."

The young lady, upon hearing the news of Rika's death, covered her face with her hands and bowed her head deeply.

She must be feeling a mix of emotions.

Rika didn't enter the labyrinth of her own will.

She suffered misfortune after going along with the young lady's stubbornness.

Of course, she can be revived through the elixir of resurrection.

She would come back to life.

But.

From a 'noble perspective', that is, from the young lady's point of view, it was no different from social death.

In noble society, resurrection meant the corruption of the soul.

While in the labyrinth city, resurrection is something anyone can do if they have money.

Outside the labyrinth city, resurrection is an act of forcibly dragging out and humiliating the dead.

Especially for conservative and old-fashioned noble groups, resurrection was something even harder to accept.

And you can understand why the elixir of resurrection has such a bad perception just by looking at the title competitions among noble children or the royal succession battles among royal family members.

Think about it. It would be troublesome if a political opponent who was painstakingly assassinated through intrigue is revived through resurrection.

It meant that if you're someone who can't even protect yourself and will die, you should just step back from the stage.

From the moment the crowds find out that you've been resurrected, you no longer get a chance to make political statements.

If you don't like that, it meant you shouldn't die.

And the moment resurrection is accepted, the position of not only the Holy Kingdom but also the temple would become too large.

Isn't this the reason why both the royalist and noble factions of the kingdom strongly oppose resurrection?

If the temple's power becomes too great, it becomes troublesome in many ways. It feels like everyone is keeping them in check.

Of course, the labyrinth city, where the interests of 'various groups' are entangled, is using the elixir of resurrection without any regard for the evaluation of outside nobles.

Anyway, Rika, being a knight, might not be able to return to her own family, let alone find a husband, the moment she's resurrected.

If Rika's family is a noble knight family and conservative, it would be fair to say that Rika's identity is now tied to the labyrinth city.

"So Rika... is dead."

"Her damage state is good, so we can revive her. What would you like to do, young lady?"

"I..."

The young lady would want to save Rika.

But Rika might not want to be resurrected.

"I'll resurrect her. I'll deal with the aftermath."

"Alright. Then let's go to the cathedral right away."

"Okay.. Hey, porter, aren't you tired? Is it okay to keep moving around?"

"I prefer to finish all my tasks and then sleep with peace of mind."

"Okay. Then let's go right away."

I headed to the cathedral with the young lady.

I'll just confirm Rika's resurrection and then go to the lodging to pass out.

# Chapter 17: Labyrinth Partner

"There are more people than I expected, even though it's evening."

"That's right."

The cathedral was still bustling with people.

It must be because there have been so many deaths after the Great Shift.

"By the way, porter. Does the cathedral in the labyrinth city always operate this late?"

"Yes. The cathedral in the labyrinth city operates 24 hours a day."

It's difficult to check the time separately when you enter the labyrinth.

Some people buy expensive watches or use inconvenient hourglasses, but most adventurers roughly judge how many hours have passed by their body clock.

As a result, quite a few people have their day and night reversed because they can't gauge time well.

There are surprisingly many situations where they come out to find it's the middle of the night.

That's why the cathedral in the labyrinth city operates 24 hours a day.

They need to resurrect the dead quickly before they decay.

"Wow. It's really splendid. The cathedral ceiling is full of paintings..!"

"Yes. Because they have a lot of money."

As we entered the cathedral, priests and nuns were bustling about busily.

The young lady couldn't close her mouth as she looked at the cathedral while passing by them.

The cathedral ceiling had paintings like Michelangelo's Creation of Adam, and the decorations standing here and there were also very splendid.

Since they make money from resurrections, the interior can't help but be luxurious.

"There should be a basement entrance somewhere around here."

"Basement?"

"Yes. The resurrection room is in the basement."

We surely had to go underground.

I forgot where it was because it's been too long since I came.

In the end, we could only find the entrance leading to the basement after asking a very busy-looking nun about the location of the resurrection room.

"So this is the resurrection room."

"Yes. The place where Rika will wake up."

After wandering for a bit, we arrived at the resurrection room in the cathedral basement.

As we entered the resurrection room, a priest in sanitary clothing greeted us.

"Fortunately, the condition is relatively good."

"There won't be any problems reviving her, right?"

"Yes. The head is there. Hands, feet, arms and legs are all attached. The internal organs are slightly lacking, but I think we can fill them with cow or sheep organs."

"Cow? Sheep?"

When he said they would replace Rika's lost internal organs with those of livestock, the young lady asked the priest back as if to say 'what nonsense is this?'

"Yes. We need to fill in the missing parts separately. It's essential for proper attachment."

"I see..."

"If you don't like animal parts, monster parts are possible too."

"Ah, no. That's fine."

The young lady shook her head vigorously.

Animal parts would be better than monster parts, I guess.

"Now then, about the cost. First, she's a beginner who hasn't gone through mana adaptation even once. And this is her first resurrection. Her rank is quite high, but not enough to emit sword aura. I think about 140 gold coins should do."

Fortunately, it didn't exceed 200 gold coins.

"Do I have to pay the cost right now?"

"No, it's an amount you can pay off. But please be aware that until you pay off the full amount, the revived person's identity will belong to the temple."

"I understand."

The young lady nodded.

Soon a document came out, and the young lady wrote her name and stamped her seal on it.

"Good. You've chosen to pay later. Then we'll start the resurrection."

"Okay.."

Rika's corpse entered the resurrection coffin.

They'll revive Rika using some kind of incantation developed by the Goddess Church.

This is called the elixir of resurrection.

"It will be finished by tomorrow morning when you come. Well then, take care."

The priest bowed his head slightly and saw us off.

"Young lady, could you wait a moment?"

"Huh? Why?"

"I'm going to hand over the belongings and corpses of adventurers found in the labyrinth."

"Ah, okay okay. I'll wait."

Afterwards, I was able to go back to the busy nun, hand over the adventurers' corpses, and receive a few small confirmation slips.

If I take these to the guild, they'll increase my reputation points.

"Then let's go back. We've finished our tasks."

"Okay. You worked hard. Thank you again for saving our team members."

"It's nothing."

It's all because of money, after all.

"So, young lady."

"Yes. You're talking about the compensation, right?"

"Yes."

It's good that we communicate well.

You immediately understand what I'm trying to say.

"First, you rescued Erika and Rika, so 30 gold coins. Right?"

"Yes, that's correct."

It was 20 if alive, 10 if we brought back even the corpse.

"And for rescuing me. My family will probably prepare a separate reward for this."

The reward prepared by Count Lionel.

It's likely not to end with just gold coins.

"For now, here."

The young lady took out a leather pouch from her chest and handed it to me.

"I filled it with just 30 gold coins. Is it okay if I give you the price for my life later?"

I nodded and received the money pouch the young lady handed over. When I slightly opened the entrance, it was full of shining gold coins.

She probably put in almost all the money she had.

The young lady probably didn't think she'd need this much money in such a short time.

In the first place, it's rare for people to carry around hundreds of gold coins.

It seems she's already contacted her family.

I'll probably be able to receive the price for the young lady's life soon.

In the first place, 30 gold coins is absolutely not a small amount of money.

There are many people who risk their lives to earn 30 gold coins.

'I can buy a slave with this.'

Then it's almost over now.

Most of the tasks that needed to be handled have been handled.

I've received almost all the compensation I should receive.

The connection between the young lady and me.

It will probably end soon too.

"Here's your adventurer badge, young lady."

The young lady's adventurer badge and family seal that I had kept as proof of contract.

I took out the adventurer badge to hand it to the young lady, then took it back.

It's not simply because I haven't received all the payment that I'm not giving it.

"What? Why are you taking it back?"

"Young lady."

"Yes?"

"You're going to keep entering the labyrinth, right?"

"Well. Yeah. That's right."

"Even after experiencing this? Are you really going to keep entering?"

"....."

When I asked while looking straight into her eyes.

The young lady avoided my gaze and didn't answer.

"Young lady. We haven't known each other for long, but. I'm saying this because I'm worried."

"Do you really have to say those worried words?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, but I must say it."

The young lady glared at me.

As if telling me to stop.

But I have to say it.

It can't be helped.

I don't want her to die.

"You don't suit being an adventurer. How about giving up on your dream of being an adventurer and returning to your hometown, to your family?"

I know it's presumptuous meddling.

Of course, I know I'm not in a position to tell someone to give up on their dream.

But.

If you keep entering the labyrinth like this.

Surely one day.

I felt like I would find the young lady's dead body in a corner of the labyrinth.

"Hey, porter. Who are you to tell me not to enter the labyrinth?"

"...."

"Do you feel like a hero after saving someone weaker than you? Do you want to nag and meddle? Why are you interfering?"

Sharp words.

But I couldn't answer her words.

Because it is meddling.

"If the young lady and I were truly complete strangers with no relationship at all. I wouldn't have given such advice. No, I wouldn't have cared at all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It was a short time, but. I felt some affection for you. That's why I came to this conclusion. Young lady, if you keep going into the labyrinth like this. There will surely be a moment when you can't come out alive luckily like this time."

"At such times, with resurrection..."

"Young lady, resurrection is not absolute."

"I know that too."

"No. You don't know."

You think you can enter the labyrinth recklessly because you have a lot of money and there's a cheat-like technique called resurrection?

No. Not at all.

How many people who die in the labyrinth do you think can be resurrected?

If there are 100 corpses.

50 of them can't be revived.

Above all, the corpse recovery rate in the labyrinth is not that high.

It's because rescue teams were formed with gold badge adventurers due to the Great Shift that we were able to recover corpses to this extent.

Usually in the labyrinth city, there are more cases where they can't bring back corpses even if they want to, or can't revive them because they're damaged.

Not everyone has a spatial pocket.

And it means you can revive relatively intact corpses.

It doesn't mean you can revive everything unconditionally.

Just the sewers in the upper levels are a place where it's difficult to properly collect corpses.

If you die in the sewers, your corpse disappears after being eaten by monsters that make corpses their staple food.

Let alone the underground city.

There are almost no monsters that dislike eating human corpses.

"Young lady. I understand well that you're a noble young lady who doesn't care about society's gaze and is very lenient towards resurrection. But there are cases where revival itself is impossible."

"..."

"Do you know where I went after telling you to wait just now?"

"..I don't know."

"The crematorium. I handed over the adventurers' corpses I picked up from the labyrinth to the crematorium. Why? Because they were in a state too horribly damaged to be revived."

"Are you saying, I'm going to die?"

"No. I'm just saying don't die in the labyrinth unnecessarily."

The young lady stared straight into my eyes.

She's pretty. Her eyes are extremely beautiful.

How can a person's eyes sparkle so much?

It's like they captured the stars in the night sky.

She's probably the most beautiful person I know.

It would be a waste of her face to die meaninglessly in this rotten labyrinth.

To be more honest, I've developed a slight crush on the young lady.

Why, you ask?

Well, because she's pretty.

So I don't want the young lady to die painfully in the labyrinth.

Although it was just one night, we overlapped our bodies and slept together.

We shared body heat.

There was even a brief sexual exchange.

Those various situations and the useless emotions that arose from them made me worry about her.

'She's still not listening, is she.'

I hoped she wouldn't die.

But she looked determined.

She'll enter the labyrinth again.

Rather, the more I try to stop her, the more she might want to enter the labyrinth due to reverse psychology.

Still, I had to say it.

So that I wouldn't have any lingering attachment to her.

I said what I wanted to say.

Even if she dies in the labyrinth, I won't have regrets about not being able to stop her.

Yes, this is enough.

It was just a one-night relationship in the first place.

It wasn't such a deep relationship anyway.

Let's not give too much meaning to this brief encounter.

That person and I are not anything...

"Hey, porter."

"Yes?"

"You're worried about me, right? That I might die somewhere."

"...That's right."

"Then you know. Can't you just keep protecting me?"

"Pardon?"

The young lady took one step closer to me.

"You protect me. Don't tell me not to enter the labyrinth. Just come with me every time I go to the labyrinth. You can save me coolly like yesterday in every crisis situation."

"No, that's..."

"Why, you tell me not to go in. Who are you to say that. If you hate me dying so much, just follow me around and protect me."

"That's..."

As I've said several times.

I have a policy of not making exclusive contracts.

There are various reasons, but I disliked losing my freedom the most.

And I also really disliked having someone I formed too deep a connection with die in the labyrinth.

"I'll meet all the conditions you want. I won't insist on making an exclusive contract. I'll only enter the labyrinth on the days you want. Let's enter the labyrinth together."

"No, why are you so obsessed with the labyrinth?"

"If you become my labyrinth partner, I'll tell you then."

What's a labyrinth partner now?

It's not like a sex partner or something...

Haah, this young lady is really driving me crazy.

My head is getting complicated.

The young lady saying she'll meet all the conditions I want, so enter the labyrinth with her.

"All the conditions I want. You'll meet them all, right?"

"Yes. If you want.. even this and that..."

"Excuse me? What did you say?"

"Ah, no. Nothing."

Why are you blushing?

What exactly is "this and that"?

"First, young lady."

"Yes yes."

"We need to ask the opinions of your other companions. If they all don't want to enter the labyrinth. Then you give up too. Don't think about finding new party members."

"Okay.. I understand."

"And."

"What else?"

"I'm going to buy a slave."

"Huh? Why are you suddenly talking about that.."

"Don't interfere with my private life. My dream is to get lots of slaves."

"Well, I don't really have a reason to interfere. We're just labyrinth partners anyway."

"Yes. That's fine. And this is not an exclusive contract. Also, I might present my own strict standards."

"It's okay. If I can have a capable porter like you as a companion. I'll allow all the conditions you want."

"Yes. I understand. Then the first condition."

"Okay."

"Don't enter the labyrinth arbitrarily without me. You're too much of a novice."

"Alright. I didn't really plan to go in without you anyway."

Her attitude of accepting all the conditions I would set was quite satisfactory.

Honestly, I'd prefer if she didn't enter the labyrinth at all.

But since she says she'll enter no matter what,

I have no choice but to go along with her for a while.

"Let's talk about the details over dinner. I feel like I'm going to collapse from hunger."

My stomach growled.

For now, it seems we should talk about future conditions while eating something.

# Chapter 18: Forming the Underground City Conquest Team

"Alright. I'll follow the conditions you set."

"It's a promise."

"I said I understand."

I nodded while dipping bread in soup at a suitable restaurant.

The conditions I set for the young lady weren't much.

Only enter the labyrinth when I say to enter.

Follow my instructions as much as possible inside the labyrinth.

Never date an adventurer no matter what.

And so on.

The reason for not dating an adventurer is none other than to protect the young lady's mental state.

Because you never know when an adventurer might die.

If you pour out affection unnecessarily and they die, your mental state will break.

"By the way, I'm curious about something."

"Yes. Ask away."

"You said earlier that you're going to buy a slave."

"Yes. What about it?"

"Perhaps... are you going to use them for that kind of thing?"

The young lady asked carefully, as if embarrassed.

By "that kind of thing", she must mean lewd acts, right?

"Well. I was thinking of getting someone to support me domestically. I was considering it along with other things."

"I see.."

Why are you making a gloomy expression?

What exactly does the young lady want to say?

I can't quite understand her inner thoughts.

"Anyway, I understand. And thank you for your hard work. Thanks to you, we were all able to come out alive."

"You're exaggerating. I just worked as much as I was paid."

"You're so modest. By the way, when and where should we meet tomorrow?"

"I have things to do tomorrow too. For now, gather your companions and discuss future plans. There might be people who don't want to enter the labyrinth."

"I will. We're going into the labyrinth again the day after tomorrow, right?"

"That's right."

At my calm answer, the young lady lightly grabbed my sleeve.

If someone saw, they might think she was holding back a departing boyfriend.

"Porter. Make sure to come say hello before we go in. Okay?"

"Yes. Well. If I have time tomorrow evening, I'll come see you."

"Okay. It's a promise."

She even offers her pinky finger, saying it's a promise.

This world also makes promises by linking pinky fingers, just like Earth.

"Why are you making a promise with fingers for something like this?"

"I'm worried you might suddenly leave. Don't you want to link fingers with me?"

"No. That's not it."

I linked pinky fingers with the young lady.

A much smaller finger than I expected.

The young lady smiled, her face slightly flushed.

At this point, even someone as dense as me can roughly guess.

Surely, this young lady. She doesn't like me, does she?

No way. No matter what, why would a noble young lady have romantic feelings for a labyrinth city adventurer, and a porter at that?

It's self-conceit to think the young lady would like me.

"Then let's go back. I should go rest soon too."

"Okay okay. Let's do that. By the way, the air is cold in the evening. Can't you hold my hand?"

"Are your hands cold? Should I take out some gloves for you?"

"No, not gloves. I'm asking you to hold my hand."

If your hands are cold, you can just wear gloves.

I don't understand why she wants me to hold her hand.

I'll hold it since she's asking, but still.

"Huh, well. Alright. But won't your other hand still be cold?"

"Yes. It's fine if just one hand is warm."

"Well. If you're satisfied with that."

I held hands with the young lady and took her to her lodging.

Only after that could I go to the inn where I was staying.

'My legs hurt.'

My steps become heavier.

Tomorrow I need to prepare to enter the underground city.

The day after tomorrow, I have to go straight into the underground city.

'I wonder what state it will be in.'

The underground city is, true to its name, an extremely vast place.

In fact, the 5th floor underground city is wider and larger than the 1st to 4th floors combined, which are essentially the upper levels.

'A place with huge spaces and buildings that for some reason no one lives in.'

There are plazas, and special facilities like towers.

You have to fight monsters that suddenly pop out while wandering through buildings tangled like a maze.

Not only undead and beast-type monsters.

The labyrinth's 'Ain' also start crawling out.

'The labyrinth's native species with intelligence.'

High orcs and hop goblins rarely seen in nature, as well as dungeon trolls and werewolves, sometimes crawl out.

Among them, the worst is definitely the minotaur.

It can be considered one of the boss monsters of the underground city.

The worst existence that even gold badge adventurers struggle against.

It's a type of monster called an adventurer hunter.

For some reason, I had a strong premonition that we would encounter it on this expedition.

"Haah."

I can't run away just because I'm scared.

I've already made a promise with Rohan.

If I don't go down and bring out his companions,

Rohan will probably hold a grudge against me.

I don't know what he might do.

Also, I wanted to repay his loyalty in my own way.

Rohan and Hachi really fought with their lives to save Rika and Erika.

If I betray such people, I'd have nothing to say even if I get stabbed in the back.

'Judging by my physical condition, I should rest for at least a week.'

I'd like to just rest for a month if I could.

I want to match my equipment, go to a swordsmanship school to learn how to fight properly.

I wanted to properly research the underground city too.

There's no time.

Rohan's companions are probably rotting away somewhere in the underground city right now.

'The biggest problem is that we don't know how the underground city has changed after the Great Shift.'

Just the upper levels have had floor division occur on the 4th floor, and the monster spawn rate has increased exponentially.

If the beginner area of the upper levels has become like this, what about the underground city?

Ugh, let's stop thinking about it.

It's not a problem that will be solved by worrying.

For now, I just want to sleep comfortably today.

Mental management is important.

"I'm back."

"So you're alive."

"Yes. As you can see, I'm fine."

It's Mr. Connor, the innkeeper.

We've known each other for about three months, and he says he's a former adventurer.

"You've gotten stronger."

"I went through mana adaptation one more time."

"I see. Have you eaten?"

"I ate outside before coming in."

"Alright. Wash up and rest."

"Yes."

He's a man of few words and taciturn.

And unlike his appearance, he's quite good at cooking.

"Haah."

I washed my body at the well behind the inn.

I shook off the blood, sweat, ash, and dust.

When I splashed cold water on my body, I felt my muscles tighten up.

After wandering around the labyrinth non-stop for days, my legs and arms felt like they were going to fall off.

'I need to buy new equipment too.'

I think I need to completely replace my equipment with the money I received from the young lady.

My shoes are in tatters.

The leather armor I was wearing is unusable too.

I need to replenish weapons as well.

I lost 3 swords, one axe, a javelin, and a kitchen knife during this labyrinth excursion.

Some broke during battle, and some I had to abandon because there was no time to retrieve them.

I need to visit the weapon shop and the hole-in-the-wall store after a long time.

"Ugh.. So stiff."

When I lay down on the worn-out bed in the room, my whole body ached.

Now it feels like I've come home.

I covered myself with the blanket up to my neck and closed my eyes.

Sleep comes immediately.

"Ugh."

The morning sunlight disturbed my eyes.

Is it morning already?

I want to sleep more, but I have to get up.

There's a lot to prepare before entering the labyrinth.

If I don't start the day early, I'll have to work late again.

"Ow. My shoulder."

When I forcibly raised my body, a very loud cracking sound came from my joints.

My muscles were trembling slightly too, feeling like I might get cramps if I didn't stretch.

"Shit..."

I want to rest, but there's no time to rest.

I put on casual clothes and headed to the Adventurers' Guild while chewing on a sandwich I took out from my spatial pocket.

'Wow, so many people.'

The Adventurers' Guild was still crowded with people.

It feels like the people who gathered due to the Great Shift haven't all left yet.

The inside was much noisier than usual, and people recruiting party members were flooding everywhere.

I pushed through the crowd and finally arrived in front of the receptionist I was familiar with.

"Oh! Sion! You're safe!"

"Yes. I made it out alive."

Edwin, the guild's counter lady, immediately opened her eyes wide and grabbed my hand when she saw me.

She must have thought I was dead because there was no news.

"Thank goodness. You didn't come, so. I thought something might have happened."

"I half-died and came back to life. And I perfectly took care of the noble party too."

Come to think of it, I entered the labyrinth with the young lady's party on Edwin's recommendation.

That's already become something that happened more than two days ago.

"Oh! Did all those noble party members come out alive too? The guild situation is like this, so. We couldn't confirm all the detailed news."

Edwin seemed sorry that she couldn't properly check on us after sending us into the labyrinth because of the Great Shift.

I don't particularly mind. She's not my exclusive counter girl. She can't pay attention to everything.

"You must be busy. I understand. To report, one team member died, but the count's young lady is safe."

"As expected, parties with Sion have a very high survival rate. Indeed, a top-class porter!"

Edwin clapped her hands and rejoiced.

I told her that floor division occurred on the 4th floor, and the monster spawn rate in the labyrinth was too high.

"Floor division on the 4th floor and increased monster numbers. Everyone is giving similar reports. It seems there are definitely abnormal phenomena occurring. Thank you for the report, Sion."

Other adventurers have already reported too, huh.

Well, it's something experienced in the upper levels. Reports would have come in quickly.

"Then to celebrate your safe return. I'll give you your reward."

Soon she took out a small reward from behind the counter and handed it to me.

I was supposed to receive compensation for acting as a guide for the young lady's party from the beginning.

Now that the young lady's party has returned safely, it's time to receive the reward.

"3 gold coins and a mid-grade healing potion. And your reputation points will increase quite a bit too."

"Wow! 3 gold coins!"

I didn't expect to receive 3 gold coins just for acting as a guide for a beginner party.

If it weren't for the Great Shift, it would have been a job where I could earn 3 gold coins in just one day.

This is quite good. And I really like the mid-grade healing potion too.

This is something that would cost between 1 to 2 gold coins if bought with money.

It's essentially like earning 5 gold coins.

They really give amazing rewards for taking care of a noble family's child.

"Are you going into the labyrinth today too? If you're looking for a party, over there..."

"No. I already have party members. I came to post a recruitment notice for a conquest team today."

"A conquest team recruitment notice? Don't tell me.."

"I'm thinking of going down to the underground city. There are a few adventurers I need to retrieve."

"If it's the underground city.. Sion. Have you gone through mana adaptation 6 times?"

"Yes. I've become able to go down to the underground city."

"I understand. I'll relay this to the guild master."

Edwin left the counter and went up to the guild's second floor.

Forming a conquest team.

Conventionally, only gold badge or higher adventurers can apply to the guild for this.

But I'm a bit different.

I receive various special privileges from the guild.

Because I'm the owner of a spatial pocket.

'As far as it's known in the labyrinth city, there were only three spatial pocket owners including me.'

One of the three is the owner of a large trading company, so he hardly enters the labyrinth.

One of the remaining two is a platinum badge adventurer who rarely comes out of the labyrinth.

There's a high possibility that he has gone down to the depths of the labyrinth and completely assimilated with it.

He hasn't come up for several months now.

Then essentially, I'm the only available spatial pocket owner for the guild.

It's natural to receive special privileges, and they'd be desperate to make me a guild member somehow.

Of course, I refused.

If I become a guild member, I'd get more privileges, but I'd also have to handle the tasks given by the guild obligatorily.

There's no such thing as a free lunch in this world.

In the end, they're just thinking of using me.

It's only because the labyrinth city has a culture of considering individual adventurers' circumstances as much as possible that they don't bother me anymore. If it wasn't the labyrinth city, I would have been kidnapped as a transport mule long ago.

This is why I don't want to leave the labyrinth city.

If you don't have power, you never know when and where your human rights might be violated.

That's the reason for growing stronger.

"Sion. The guild master is calling for you."

"Okay."

Here it comes.

I followed Edwin up to the second floor.

# Chapter 19: Forming the Underground City Conquest Team (2)

"Sion, you're alive. I'm really glad."

A red-haired woman with an eyepatch on her left eye grabbed my shoulder and grinned.

Guild Master Moira.

This was probably the fifth individual interview.

She's a woman with quite large breasts.

Also, she was a former platinum badge adventurer with her whole body covered in small scars.

"So you've finally decided to become a guild member. I'm proud!"

"No. That's not it."

"What? It's not fun if you keep playing hard to get. Won't you come under me soon?"

"Hmm. I'm not really interested."

"Damn it."

This woman has been throwing passes at me ever since I acquired the spatial pocket.

She even subtly tried to seduce me to share a bed with her.

Sorry, but I'm not into married women.

I don't know much about her husband, but she has a child.

It was a daughter who looked exactly like her mother.

I'd rather prefer the daughter, to be honest.

"So, you want to form an underground city conquest team?"

Moira returned to her usual expression after her advances didn't work at all.

"Yes. I made a promise with a silver badge adventurer."

"I heard roughly from Edwin. You want to bring back your companions' corpses from the underground city, right?"

"Yes yes. And I thought it would be good to help with supply transportation while going down to retrieve the corpses."

"I was thinking of forming a conquest team anyway, so the timing is good."

The guild master had it all planned out too.

Well, the underground city must be a real monster den right now.

Although the guild master didn't say it, she probably realized that sending in a few adventurer parties wouldn't be enough.

There's a high possibility that the underground city is teeming with monsters after the Great Shift.

So there's a need to deploy adventurers to clean up the monsters once.

"Of course, since I have almost no combat ability, I'm planning to just handle supplies and get out."

"That alone is excellent."

My plan was also to recruit a conquest team, gather lots of silver and gold badge adventurers and throw them into the underground city, then just transport supplies while riding along with the conquest team and get out.

Then the map will be made naturally, and monsters will be hunted, so safety will increase naturally. Then I can retrieve Rohan's companions with him.

"Good. About thirty people have gathered already. Probably more people will gather if you say you'll be responsible for supplies. Since they won't need to carry luggage down."

The story of a porter with a spatial pocket has spread to some extent among adventurers.

Right now, there are even some gold badge adventurers who have sent love calls to me, so I think many will apply if I say I'm participating.

"Then when will the conquest team be able to depart? I'd like to go and come back as soon as possible."

"Since you can transport supplies freely. We should be able to enter by tomorrow morning at the latest. The sooner we enter, the better. I'm thinking of moving up the time as much as possible."

"Good. I have some separate preparations to make too."

"Alright. I'll prepare the supplies to be transported in advance."

Done. The conquest team was formed smoothly.

Now I just need to go down, quickly find Rohan's companions' corpses, and escape back up.

"By the way, Sion. Did you gain something?"

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"No, I mean an ability. It seems like you gained some unique ability."

"Ah.."

The eye behind the guild master's eyepatch observed me.

Moira is the possessor of a magic eye. She said it was a magic eye type ability.

Although I don't know exactly what effect her magic eye has, her left eye could somewhat discern others' abilities.

"I gained an ability called Spirit Eye Awakening. Do you perhaps know anything about this ability?"

"Spirit Eye? An eye that sees souls. Hmm. I don't know the detailed abilities, but judging by how my eye reacted, it must be quite a good ability. Sion, did you receive some blessing from the labyrinth? A spatial pocket and a magic eye, huh."

The guild master looked at me as if she was secretly envious.

This person doesn't know what kind of ability Spirit Eye Awakening is either.

If even the guild master doesn't know, just how rare of an ability is it?

Should I ask 'that person' after all?

"Alright, I understand for now. I'll be going then."

"Okay, see you later."

The guild master nodded and started paperwork again.

I quickly left so as not to disturb her further.

By the way, so the guild master was thinking of forming a conquest team too.

Well, there's no way the guild would just stand by in this situation.

The rescue teams brought out people they could quickly bring out.

From now on, they were probably planning to leisurely explore the changed underground city.

"Rohan."

"Ah, Sion. You came first."

"Yes. I just had an interview, and the guild master says she's forming a conquest team. It seems we can join that and go down to the underground city."

"You've already finished talking?"

"Yes. I was called in as soon as I arrived."

"I see. Then can you tell us when we'll be going down?"

"I think we'll depart sometime tomorrow morning. We should finish our preparations by then."

We'll all go down together, but we'll have to retrieve the corpses on our own.

It's true that I'm planning to ride along with the conquest team to move around the underground city more safely, but we can't just follow the conquest team without doing anything.

Even within the conquest team, everyone will move in team units.

While the purpose of exploring the underground city centered around a base camp is the same, where to go will be different for each team.

Therefore, it means we need to separately recruit people who will retrieve corpses with us.

Because we have our own purpose of retrieving corpses and going back up.

It's not like everything is solved just by forming a conquest team.

The conquest team is literally just a device to increase the probability of survival in the underground city.

"By the way, about the corpses of the people we need to rescue. You remember exactly where they are, right?"

"I remember the location clearly. We hid them in a building next to the plaza district before coming up. If we go down and find the plaza district, we should be able to retrieve them."

The underground city is divided into several districts by the type and style of densely packed buildings.

I haven't heard the details, but I think there were broadly a plaza district, a temple district, and a spire district.

The monsters that appear in each district are all different, so I need to study this part separately too.

"I'm sorry, but could I also know how your companions died?"

This is important information.

We need to know why they died to be able to deal with it.

"We were caught up in the Great Shift and blown into the plaza.. and unfortunately, a chimera appeared."

"Ah."

Chimera.

It's a notorious resident of the underground city, as vicious as the minotaur.

"Don't worry. We killed the chimera before coming out."

A party of 8 including Rohan and Hachi.

To be precise, it seems that the party led by Rohan and the party led by Hachi, 2 parties, cooperated to fight the chimera.

And six people died in the process.

Everyone except the two leaders of each party died.

"There were some mixed in who were going down to the underground city for the first time. Our role was to guide them and show them the underground city as leaders."

If they hadn't been caught up in the Great Shift, they probably would have looked around the underground city a bit and then come back up.

"There were some whose mental state broke as soon as we were caught in the Great Shift. We fell back into the underground city while we were on our way up after exploring the underground city."

It's understandable for a newcomer who just came down to the underground city to have their mental state break.

Just as they were barely escaping alive from the damn underground city, they were caught in the Great Shift and fell back down.

"Anyway, it was chaos. Killing the chimera and coming back up alive in that situation was an impossible miracle. If not..."

If Rohan and Hachi didn't have skills, they probably would have been annihilated and become the chimera's meal.

"Probably when we go down tomorrow, I'll unload the supplies in a building to be used as a temporary base, and then I'll be able to move with Rohan and Hachi to retrieve the corpses."

"We'll need to find adventurers to move with us."

"Yes. I'll leave that part to you. I have somewhere else I need to go."

"Alright. I'll find them before sunset. Let's meet later."

"Yes. See you later."

Rohan and Hachi will find backline fighters and a healer.

It would be good to have a priestess from the Goddess Church who can quickly cast healing spells, but.

Priestesses from the Goddess Church don't often enter the labyrinth, so that might not work out?

"Ah, I'll leave the White Evil's corpse separately. Please distribute the amount later."

"Understood."

After entrusting the monster corpses to the dismantling shop in the guild, I came out.

I entrusted all the monster corpses I hunted, from the bunny man onwards, so I should be able to receive payment later.

'Then..'

I headed to the hole-in-the-wall shop.

The place where I bought various items including the tonic I used last time.

A hidden shop located in the eastern part of the labyrinth city.

An atelier run by an elf alchemist, no less.

It's a small workshop that you come across when you follow the alley next to the eastern red-light district.

"Hmm? Ah. It's Sion."

As I entered the shop, a thick smoke greeted me.

It's something similar to tobacco.

That woman is always smoking this.

"It's been a while, Raphnel."

A white-haired elf.

Elegant features and pointy ears.

And an expression that somehow looks languid, lazy, and bored.

"It's been a while? Ah. It has been a while indeed."

Her sense of time is different from humans.

She looks like a young child, but she's actually a bent old granny of unknown age.

A true loli-baba existence.

How strong she is, what abilities she has, are all completely secret.

In the first place, only people who have permission can come to this shop.

The mysterious alley next to the eastern red-light district is a kind of ward.

I didn't even know a place like this existed at first.

I became able to enter here on the day I gained the spatial pocket.

"The labyrinth was shaking. Did you survive the Great Shift?"

"Ah, yes. I nearly died but survived."

"I see. To gain the Spirit Eye at the brink of life and death."

"Huh? You can recognize this?"

"Of course. You've obtained something rare."

Raphnel immediately recognized the Spirit Eye.

As expected of an elderly elf who seems to know things.

"Could you tell me a bit about this ability? I want to use it, but I don't know how to."

"Hmm. The Spirit Eye, huh."

Raphnel thought for a moment and then told me about the gist of the Spirit Eye Awakening power.

"It's ultimately an ability that allows you to see what can't be seen. For example, the dead. Or the souls of others. Or perhaps the unseen back side of the world."

"It sounds like an incredibly cheating ability?"

"It might be cheating, or it might not be. Being a magic eye, it will probably depend a lot on the owner's disposition."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You haven't even opened your eyes yet. You've just gained the qualification to open them. It means no one knows yet what you'll be able to see. You might be able to see everything, or you might only witness very insignificant things."

Raphnel stared intently at my eyes while stroking her chin.

Her green eyes seemed to look into my inner self as if observing.

Even after hearing Raphnel's words, I still couldn't quite grasp how to use this.

Above all, according to Raphnel, I haven't even awakened the Spirit Eye yet.

Literally, I just have the qualification to open the Spirit Eye.

"I don't even know when the ability will activate?"

"That's right. But you'll be able to awaken it someday."

It wasn't proper information, but I'm glad it's not a bad ability at least.

Because there are some abilities that are a bit ambiguous.

"By the way, the fact that you came to buy things. It means you're entering the labyrinth, right?"

"Yes. I'm thinking of going down to the underground city this time."

"The Great Shift has just ended. You can't know what will happen. It seems like it would be good to take a lot of things. So, about that..."

"Don't tell me. Another experimental product?"

"Haha. Well, you see. I've made something quite interesting lately."

Raphnel took out a potion of a very mysterious color and put it on the counter.

This person always tries to experiment on me.

She only started selling the erection-inducing tonic after experimenting on me several times.

"What's this one?"

"If you drink it, you can turn into a rat."

"A rat?"

A potion that turns you into a rat when you drink it?

No, transformation magic itself is rare, but you made it into a potion?

Crazy monster of an elf.

What on earth did you create?

"Yes. The selling price would be about... 10 gold coins should be fine. No, considering the ingredients used... I think I should receive at least 20 gold coins."

20 gold coins?

No good. If the price is estimated too high, I won't be able to buy it freely.

I have to knock it down. I must absolutely bring down the price.

'A long-lived species whose wealth I can't even gauge. It probably won't hurt much even if I knock it down a bit.'

Raphnel is actually an eccentric who just wants to receive money equal to the value of the item.

I've already found out through several conversations that she's not the type who earns money because she needs it.

So it means Raphnel doesn't really care even if I blindly haggle down the price.

To buy it as cheaply as possible, I, as a regular customer, had to absolutely knock down the price.

"No, who would buy that for 20 gold coins? It's just for turning into a rat."

"Huh? But, but.. it's a potion imbued with transformation magic?"

"Ah geez. It won't sell. Who would buy it? Why would anyone buy a potion to turn into a rat for 20 gold coins? Do you have a death wish to get stepped on?"

"Huh.. You really won't buy it?"

"No, I won't buy it."

"Whyyy! Buy it!"

"It's just an experimental product for now anyway, right? You're selling an unverified potion for 20 gold coins? Are you in your right mind? Have you gone senile?"

"You... young whippersnapper... Alright. I'll give you one bottle for free for now. Try it and tell me your thoughts."

"I can't resist free stuff. I'll try it and let you know how it was later."

I received the "potion that turns you into a rat" for free from Raphnel.

'This is amazing.'

If you turn into a rat, you can enter small places.

Your presence will be much less noticeable than when you're human too.

It seems good for infiltration or escape.

If intelligence is maintained, there are endless ways to use it.

"But this doesn't have side effects like, say, lowering intelligence to rat level, right?"

"Huh? Ah. You mean side effects. Hmm. Your intelligence should remain the same. However... your preferences might change for a while?"

"Preferences?"

"Yes. Try it once. I'm not sure of the details either."

"Hmm."

From my experience of frequently using Raphnel's potions so far, there were no extremely fatal flaws.

Rather, there were cases where it became beneficial if you used the side effects well. It didn't lead to bad results.

I trust Raphnel's skills.

This will surely be useful later too.

"Thank you. I'll come again next time."

"Alright. Let's meet alive."

After quickly buying the things I needed to buy, I left the hole-in-the-wall shop.

They sell all sorts of items, so I was able to get a lot of good things at quite cheap prices.

Above all, I acquired a potion that turns you into a rat, so I should use it effectively in the underground city.

The preparations for entering the labyrinth are almost complete.

I hope nothing bad happens.