# Chapter 20: Forming the Underground City Conquest Team (3)

"Barrel. It's me."

"Huh? Sion! You're alive too!"

A man with a plump impression.

It's Barrel, the owner of the clearance weapon shop.

True to its name as a clearance weapon shop, it's a store that sells things roughly in bulk at low prices.

There's a reason why broke novice adventurers flock here in droves.

It's more about quantity over quality.

It's a shop I frequently visit.

It's not a high-end weapon shop where dwarves make and sell weapons.

Just an ordinary weapon shop where humans make and sell weapons.

They're cheap but break easily or the iron quality isn't good, or there are some defects, but I use them well.

If one breaks, I can just take out the next sword from my inventory.

I'm not a warrior who fights monsters on the front lines.

Cheap weapons that I can use and throw away are enough.

"Mister. Give me all the leftovers this time too."

"Did everything get smashed again in that short time?"

"Yes. Everything got smashed. And I lost a few."

"You sure have an eventful life. Here, there's plenty over there, take a look."

Swords randomly stuck in wooden barrels.

There was no respect for weapons to be found anywhere.

This is why I like this shop.

Dwarf dwarves are excessively proud of their weapons, so they're expensive.

"Will you buy this double-bladed axe I made recently?"

"A double-bladed axe?"

"Here, this. How is it? Try holding it. It should be heavy."

As soon as I held the double-bladed axe, I could tell it was well-balanced.

This seems like a very good weapon for splitting monster heads.

It's quite heavy so carrying it around would quickly drain stamina, but I have a spatial pocket, so.

"You made it well. I'll take this too."

"Hehe. Use it well."

"Ah, give me a helmet and armor too."

"Should I give you leather armor?"

"Yes. Leather armor and a shield too."

"Hehe."

Uncle Barrel's face bloomed with a smile, probably because he sold a lot after a long time.

"I'll come again next time."

"Alright. Come back in one piece."

With this, I've got all my equipment.

'I've already spent 10 gold coins.'

After buying various items, I used about 10 gold coins out of the 30 gold coins I received from the young lady.

Replenishing what I lost and buying additional items as needed, 10 gold coins were gone at once.

'I feel like I'm going crazy.'

It's extremely difficult to earn 10 gold coins, but it didn't even take a day to spend it.

If I had bought better equipment and better items at full price, wouldn't it have cost almost twice as much?

Thinking about it that way, I felt like I bought things cheaply and well.

'The remaining task...'

Now I just need to check in with the young lady and go back to the guild.

I headed to that luxury inn I went to yesterday.

Just like yesterday, I was filling my inventory with free sugar cubes and cookies in the reception room when the young lady and her party members came down.

'They all look fine.'

The young lady, who had looked haggard due to her companions' disappearance, returned to her lively self.

Rien, whose face had been streaked with grime from not washing, looked much cleaner.

The priestess Erika, who had been constantly whimpering with her mental state half-broken, was back to normal.

And the female knight Rika, who had died once in the labyrinth, was now alive and well.

"It seems like it's been a while since we all gathered together."

"That's right. It's the first time since the first day we entered the labyrinth. I'm glad everyone's safe!"

I thought we'd just go around the labyrinth together briefly on the first day and part ways.

But somehow, it looks like I'll be taking care of them continuously.

I didn't want to get involved with nobles if possible.

How did I end up getting so deeply involved?

"Umm. Mr. Porter."

"Yes?"

While I was lost in thought for a moment, the female knight standing behind the young lady bowed her head to me.

'Why is this person suddenly acting like this?'

On the first day, she had quite a haughty attitude.

Now she's calling me Mr. Porter.

No, if you're going to add 'Mr.' anyway, why not call me Mr. Sion...

Isn't Mr. Porter a bit strange?

"I wanted to express my gratitude. I have benefited from your grace."

"Uh. Yes. Well. The young lady said she'd pay me. And you don't need to use honorifics."

"Yes. I intend to serve the young lady to the end. And I will become stronger."

"Excuse me? Ah. Yes."

This person, while respecting me, wasn't actually listening to what I was saying.

Just saying what she wanted to say, she was exactly like a typical narrow-minded knight.

"I tasted my powerlessness in the labyrinth. Monsters are different from humans. I want to overcome my own weakness that only realized this simple proposition after dying."

"Ah... yes."

Why is she suddenly making this kind of vow-like statement in front of me?

Whether the female knight serves the young lady to the end or not, I'm not really interested.

Yet the female knight seemed to feel something like a sense of mission.

She probably felt a sense of kinship with me, who agreed to help the young lady's labyrinth excursions.

But one important thing to point out is that I'm not the young lady's retainer.

I'm just thinking of helping with upper-level conquests so she doesn't die helplessly after entering the labyrinth.

"Um.. Uh.."

"Yes?"

"I also... want to enter the labyrinth.. I've become interested in mana adaptation and abilities.."

After the female knight expressed her ambition, Rien also said in a timid voice that she would enter the labyrinth.

I thought Rien would never enter the labyrinth again, but it seems her desire for power was greater than expected.

Well, once you taste mana adaptation and abilities, you can't help but be addicted.

There are many people who enter the labyrinth just to gain strong power without any other purpose.

"I also want to enter the labyrinth again. Because I feel like I witnessed the form of the Goddess in that deep darkness."

The priestess suddenly clasped her hands together and prayed to the Goddess.

She probably thinks there was help from the Goddess in her escaping without dying.

There are occasionally people like this among priests.

The type whose faith deepens even more after returning alive from the brink of death.

These types keep entering the labyrinth to seek religious enlightenment and radiance.

They're imposing trials on themselves. They've become ascetics.

"That's right. They all say they'll enter the labyrinth."

They're all out of their minds.

No matter how good their strength and mana adaptation are.

To say they'll enter this crazy labyrinth again.

"You told them about the conditions I set, right?"

"Yes. They all said they agree."

"I understand. I don't know how long our journey will continue, but. Let's do our best."

I shook hands with the young lady.

I'm thinking of taking care of them until they can freely come and go in the upper levels.

We'll talk about what comes after that later.

"By the way. When do we enter tomorrow?"

"We'll probably enter sometime in the morning."

"I see.... You must come back alive. Even if you happen to die, I'll pay for the resurrection costs, so don't worry."

"Haha. Well, that's good to hear. Then I'll be going now."

"Okay. Be careful. Ah, and this."

The young lady handed me a scroll.

"This is.."

"It's not as good as Lightning Bolt, but. It will be helpful."

"The magic inscribed is... Fireball.."

"Did Rien make this?"

"Yes.. The young lady gave me the material costs.. It's not very strong because I made it in a hurry, but.."

"Thank you."

Scrolls are good.

They're disgustingly expensive, but they're good for creating variables in moments of crisis.

"May the Goddess's blessings be upon Mr. Porter's future."

"Oh. A blessing."

"Yes. It's a blessing of physical enhancement. It should last about a day."

The priestess bestowed a blessing on me.

Vitality returned to my tired body.

"I'll lend you this. It's a ring I received from my uncle."

"Isn't this imbued with magic?"

It was a heavy ring that seemed to be made of iron.

Judging by the unknown characters engraved on it, it seems to have magic inscribed.

"It has pain resistance magic imbued in it. It will alleviate pain."

"Wow. This is good. Thank you."

A scroll and a ring.

Thanks to the blessing, my fatigue is quickly disappearing too, it's very good.

"Then I'll really be going now."

"Okay. See you later. Make sure to come back alive."

The young lady suddenly hugged me.

It was too fast to refuse, so I ended up receiving her hug in a daze.

Rika, who was watching us, looked very flustered, and Rien, for some reason, glared at me again.

Why is Erika making such a lewd expression?

Anyway, I left the inn with the young lady's enthusiastic support.

Now I just need to stop by the guild to finish the final preparations.

"Sion, here. This is the payment for the monster corpses."

As soon as I went to the guild, I was able to receive a pouch containing silver coins from Edwin.

This is the income earned through this labyrinth excursion.

I earned about 1 gold and 80 silver coins, huh.

The fact that I was able to receive over 1 gold coin in compensation despite only entrusting a few corpses to the dismantling shop is probably because the White Evil's corpse sold for a high price.

I received 10% of the White Evil's purchase price as transportation fee.

I guess one White Evil must be worth about 10 gold coins.

White Evils sell for a high price especially because of their skin.

"Ah, by the way. Sion."

"Yes?"

"Tomorrow, maybe... the guild master's daughter might join the conquest team."

"Ah."

I have a somewhat awkward relationship with the guild master's daughter.

It's nothing much, but she thinks I seduced her mother.

I don't know why she came to have such a misunderstanding.

The guild master's daughter thinks of me as some kind of casanova.

It's better not to get involved if possible. It becomes troublesome if I get involved.

"Sion! Over here!"

"Ah, yes."

When I went to the bar inside the guild, Rohan called me.

Besides Rohan and Hachi, three more people were gathered and sitting.

It seems they gathered team members while I was preparing supplies outside.

"Here. These are the people who will help us transport the corpses."

A magician with a full beard, a healer with squinty eyes.

And a hairy druid?

"I'm Louis, an earth mage."

"I'm Yata, specializing in healing magic."

"Horaru, who serves the ancestor spirit."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Sion."

All three were silver badge adventurers.

Perhaps because it was a hastily formed party, the atmosphere was awkward for everyone.

"If you have any items you want to entrust, please give them to me right away. I have a spatial pocket."

"We'll entrust the luggage tomorrow."

"I prefer to carry my own things. Just take care of the food for me."

"I don't have anything particular to entrust."

"Ah, okay."

Everyone seemed to have no particular problems yet.

Louis looked a bit arrogant but didn't say much.

Yata looked slightly gloomy but just seemed like a timid person.

I couldn't read the expression of Horaru the druid.

'Is it a bear?'

Horaru was a bear beastkin.

The fur color was brown and the body was quite large.

I'm not sure about the gender.

"Since this is my first time in the underground city, is there any information I should know?"

"There's nothing particularly special, but according to the rescue team that returned yesterday..."

Rohan told me about the information he had gathered about the underground city after the Great Shift.

To summarize, the map of the underground city had completely changed, the number of monsters had increased dramatically, and monsters that weren't seen before had started appearing.

How should I put it?

It felt like the labyrinth had been updated.

"And traces of heretics have been found."

"Heretics?"

"Yes. Those bastards whose seeds were wiped out after the mass purge 4 years ago. For some reason, they've come back alive."

The mass purge 4 years ago.

It probably refers to the massacre of heretics hiding in the underground city.

The heretics who had disappeared since then have returned through this Great Shift.

"We need to be careful. The fact that the number of monsters has increased dramatically means they have more sacrifices to handle."

The earth mage Louis chimed in.

"Sacrifices?"

"Those heretic bastards gain power by offering sacrifices. Filthy creatures."

"I see."

This is my first time hearing about heretics.

Since they were completely eradicated before I was transferred to this world, there wasn't much information circulating about them.

'There's too little information about heretics. I think I need to investigate separately.'

You need to know your enemy to come up with countermeasures.

I need to gather more information about heretics and the monsters of the underground city.

# Chapter 21: The Guild Master's Daughter is Troublesome

"Here, these are the supplies to carry in."

"Is this all?"

"For now, this is all."

Kaisen, the guild's storekeeper, pointed to the supplies piled up in the training ground behind the guild.

There must be dozens of wooden boxes.

Probably those boxes contain food and various daily necessities.

"And take these too."

"They're water containers."

Large glass bottles filled with water.

Securing drinking water in the labyrinth is important.

Most water sources in the labyrinth are either contaminated by monsters or have already become monster nests, so drinking water must be prepared from the surface.

Just for myself, I pack more than 10 water pouches when entering the labyrinth.

Of course, if it's really urgent, we'd have to boil and drink, but.

Or it would be perfect if a priest who can use purification magic follows along.

"The ones next to it are strong liquor. Be careful not to break them and don't put fire near them."

"Yes, I understand."

Strong liquor, high-proof alcohol.

This is used in various ways.

For example, when the pain is extreme, drinking strong liquor to create a dazed state.

Or when pushed to mental extremes, giving alcohol to make someone sleep.

The most common use is probably for disinfection. Spraying it on wounds to prevent infection.

The number of priests is always insufficient, so we always need to be prepared for emergency situations.

"And this."

"Is this oil?"

"Yes. Be careful not to put this near fire either. And don't put it next to drinking water or strong liquor. Sometimes there are idiots who get confused and drink it. No, they definitely appear."

"Yes. I'll be careful."

So there are bastards who drink it even though it smells like oil.

Well, all sorts of strange things happen in the labyrinth.

I thought that people with numbed noses for some reason or those whose minds are unstable might mistake oil for water and drink it.

"Then I'll be going now."

"Alright. Come back alive."

People in the labyrinth city always tell those going into the labyrinth to come back alive.

It's the simplest and most popular greeting.

Because everyone's wish for people they know not to die is the same.

'I hope nothing happens to me too.'

Praying inwardly for luck to be on my side, I entered the guild.

"You've come, Sion."

"Yes, Guild Master. I've finished receiving the supplies."

"Good. Then let's begin."

Many people were already gathered in the guild.

The adventurers who joined the conquest team, the guild master who rarely comes down from the second floor, and even a quite famous merchant guild leader from the city.

"Sion, over here."

"Yes."

Rohan and our team members were gathered too.

As I went in between them, the guild master soon opened her mouth.

"We'll now begin the underground city conquest. Illuminate as much terrain as possible. Gather information about the changed districts. Also, please investigate the newly appeared monsters."

This is the first conquest team after the Great Shift.

It could be seen as an advance party.

If proper exploration isn't carried out, the underground city will be filled with unknown terrors.

"And the conquest team leader is Solar, a gold badge adventurer. His party, Morning Sunshine, is the leader team of the conquest team. Follow their orders as much as possible."

A team with a name that resembles a certain drink from Earth is the leader team, huh.

The conquest team is essentially an organization where multiple adventurer parties have gathered.

Of course, conflicts will arise and opinions will differ.

Adventurers are not soldiers, and the conquest team is not an army.

That's why the strongest and most experienced ones become the conquest team leader team.

If conflicts or disagreements occur, they follow the judgment of the leader team.

If there isn't even a minimum of discipline, it will eventually collapse.

"Then. Come back alive."

The guild master's short speech ended.

She didn't waste time by adding flowery words.

It's the adventurer style. Adventurers dislike complicated and long things.

Well then, shall we depart for the labyrinth?

"Hey, Sion."

"Ah. Yuria."

Before departing for the labyrinth, the guild master's daughter spoke to me.

A swordswoman with red hair and red eyes just like Guild Master Moira, and large breasts as her characteristic.

Ah, and her personality is a bit strong and assertive.

The most serious thing is that she thinks I hit on her mother.

"What is it..?"

"I was told to protect you in this conquest operation."

"Huh?"

"It's mother's order. There's no right of refusal."

"Wait.. So you're going to..."

"Go down together and come up together, that's what it means."

"I need to discuss this with Rohan, our team leader first..."

"I've already finished talking with Rohan. While you were preparing supplies."

"Oh no."

It seems there's no way out of this.

This woman, she's troublesome.

She gets irritated over strange things.

Tries to interfere in strange areas.

Constantly ordering and harassing.

In many ways, she was a creature that sucks out one's soul.

'Still, she's a silver badge adventurer.'

Her strength is somewhat proven.

Having a silver badge means she has the skills to roam the underground city.

Above all, she's a swordswoman who might soon get a gold badge.

She probably won't hold us back. She's just troublesome for me.

"Hey. Smile. Don't make the atmosphere weird."

"Ha.. hahaha."

I laughed.

If she tells me to laugh, I have to laugh, what can I do?

If I make her angry, she'll be sulky and annoying all day.

She's more troublesome than scary.

'With Yuria added, it's a total of 7 people, huh.'

It's basically become the size of two parties combined.

Of course, since I'm a porter and not part of the combat force, it would be better not to include me in the number.

"By the way, I heard you gained a new ability again?"

"Huh? Where did you... Ah."

The guild master must have told her.

This person, casually passing on information about guild-affiliated adventurers to her daughter.

I want to go and confront her about it, but I couldn't.

Because the guild master gave me extra supplies earlier.

The supplies I received today alone amount to 1 gold coin.

When she's so openly favoring and taking care of me, if I confront her about telling her daughter just the information that I gained an ability, not even what kind of ability, I'd be the shameless one.

'In the first place, she wouldn't tell anyone except her daughter.'

The guild master isn't the type to casually leak my information.

She probably just quietly informed Yuria, her only blood relative.

Yuria also has quite a sharp side towards others, so she's not the type to talk about my ability elsewhere.

Above all, the guild master's goal is to tie me to the guild.

Maybe since seduction with her own body didn't work, she's trying to tie me down through her daughter.

Yuria likes unusual people, so she'll naturally be attracted to me who has an unusual ability.

"What kind of ability is it? Tell me."

"No, why should I."

"You won't tell me? After knowing all about my ability? This is completely thievery!"

"That's because you told me on your own!"

"Huh. If there's something given, there should be something received. Always trying to just take advantage. Quickly tell me. What secrets are there between us? If you keep acting like this, I'll spread rumors all over town that you seduced our mom?"

"Aargh..!!! You damn.. I'm telling you I didn't seduce her? Ugh, stop poking my side."

Yuria teases me and pokes my side.

There's no sense of tension even though we're about to enter the labyrinth.

It's always like this when I get involved with this woman.

She's always thinking about how to torment and tease me.

"Ahem. Hey, porter."

"Huh? Ah, yes. Mr. Louis."

"Here. Please take care of this luggage."

While I was fooling around with Yuria, our team's magician, Louis, cleared his throat and handed over a lot of luggage.

No, why is there so much luggage?

'Top-quality bedding and pillows? What's this? No, a bathtub? Detergent and cosmetics set..? No, this old man seems to care about beauty.'

I don't understand why this person, Louis, has so many miscellaneous items when entering the labyrinth.

Most of them were beauty-related products. Maybe because he's old, he seems to care a lot about his skin.

Could he be an old bachelor? Well, there are many old maids and bachelors among magicians.

You could say they've poured all their youth into magic research.

"We're almost there, huh."

Before long, the conquest team entered the eastern district of the city.

There's an entrance to the upper labyrinth's botanical garden here.

They probably chose this place instead of the northern underground tomb where mental management is difficult due to the dead, the dirty sewers, and the breeding grounds where you have to be careful of ambushes because of the bopar rabbits.

Of course, the botanical garden is equally dangerous, but it was cleaner than other places.

It's a place where plant sap splatters instead of blood.

"Currently, the conquest team has a total of 72 members. 14 parties will enter the labyrinth. Let's quickly find the transfer stone and meet on the 4th floor."

Solar, the conquest team leader, briefly conveyed the strategy.

Even though it's called a strategy, it wasn't much.

The content was to conquer up to the 4th floor by each team and then meet on the 4th floor to enter the underground city together.

If 72 people are crowded in narrow corridors, the situation would become more complicated, so they're probably saying to just go down to the 4th floor by team.

"Time will be judged by the hourglasses distributed in advance. Let's plan to go down to the 4th floor within 7 hours. If you can't come down even after 7 hours have passed, it will be considered a failure. The teams that arrive first will go down together."

The gates of the transfer stones existing in the labyrinth send everyone to the same place once opened until they close.

It meant that if you can't reach the 4th floor by the time the hourglass runs out, you'll enter the underground city as an individual team.

The survival rate would decrease. It would be better to go back up instead.

"Well then, let's meet on the 4th floor."

The team to which Solar, the conquest team leader, belongs entered the labyrinth.

They would have been blown to somewhere on the 1st floor of the botanical garden.

"It's our turn."

We're next. Rohan, our team leader, stepped forward.

I'm probably the most important person in this conquest operation.

I, who's in charge of supplies, must not die.

That's why we decided to receive help from Morning Sunshine, the conquest team leader party composed of gold badge adventurers.

The necklace Rohan has will point to Solar's location.

Solar will probably have the same item.

It's an artifact called the 'Guardian of Fate', which points to the location of the other half of the necklace.

It's an item lent by the guild.

You could say we'll receive protection from the gold badge party until we enter the underground city.

The real thing would start after we enter the underground city and unload the supplies.

# Chapter 22: A Smooth Labyrinth Excursion

"The Guardian is vibrating. They should be around here."

"Just a moment. I'll activate map creation."

The Guardian of Fate is pointing in the direction of its other half.

I immediately activated my mapping ability to start tracking the Morning Sunshine team that entered first.

"Seven Laplercorns coming from the front."

Walking plant-type monsters, Laplercorns, commonly known as Gardeners.

Hachi immediately detected the monsters' presence as soon as we entered the labyrinth.

The warrior Rohan and earth mage Louis easily dealt with the approaching Gardeners.

'It's certainly relaxed.'

Maybe because everyone except me is a silver badge adventurer, the monsters on the 1st floor of the upper levels were a piece of cake.

Especially since only one type of monster appears on the 1st floor, there was no need to worry about other monsters.

Yuria didn't even draw her sword.

"Isn't Yuria fighting?"

"Huh? Yeah. I have to escort you."

"I see."

Yuria seemed to have no intention of leaving my side at all.

Her attitude showed that she was interested in nothing but escorting me.

'She's not even playing around.'

Outside the labyrinth, she would play pranks and be annoying whenever she got the chance.

But as soon as we entered the labyrinth, Yuria became drastically quiet.

She's constantly looking around to see if anything is approaching me, and completely blocking monsters from even getting close to me.

"Why are you staring? What? Bored? Want me to entertain you?"

"Ah, no. Just surprised."

"Huh? By what?"

"Ah, I was just thinking that you become serious during labyrinth excursions."

"Hey. Isn't that obvious? If you play around in the labyrinth, the Labyrinth Lord will get angry."

"Labyrinth Lord?"

"Yeah. Don't you know about the Labyrinth Lord?"

"I'm from the East, so I don't really..."

"This foreigner. You don't even know our local fairy tales."

What's this Labyrinth Lord fairy tale?

I've collected information about the labyrinth for the past 6 months, but I haven't heard much about the Labyrinth Lord.

Did the Labyrinth Lord actually exist in the first place?

"Are you asking if the Labyrinth Lord actually exists?"

"Yeah. I was suddenly curious."

"Hmm. Well, I don't know either. No one has gone to the end of the labyrinth yet. In the end, isn't it just a story made up to make kids behave?"

As expected, there's no proper information about the master of the labyrinth.

Listening to Yuria's words, it seems the Labyrinth Lord is something like the bogeyman in this world.

If you make noise and play around too much in the labyrinth, the Labyrinth Lord will take you away.

Well, it was that kind of story.

"More monsters. Five in front."

"They keep coming endlessly."

Maybe because the number of monsters had increased dramatically, they kept crawling out.

Rohan grumbled that this was already the 3rd encounter, and the expression of the healer Yata, who was quietly following behind, was becoming increasingly sour.

He seemed flustered by the sheer number of monsters appearing.

"Phew."

"I'll take care of the corpses."

Of course, no particular crisis situation occurred.

It's not like we're a beginner F-rank party. It would be funny if a party composed of silver badges struggled on the 1st floor of the upper levels.

Yata was just the type of person whose expression naturally worsens when he sees monsters.

We continued to deal with the Gardeners and moved forward like that.

How long did we walk?

"The Guardian is vibrating. They should be around here."

"I sense presences ahead."

Soon we were able to encounter the Morning Sunshine team.

We found the conquest team leader team 30 minutes after entering the labyrinth.

This was quite a fast pace.

As a result of the combination of the Guardian, Hachi's presence detection, and my mapping, we found them before the advance team could find us.

Our detection abilities were somewhat superior to those of the gold badge adventurers.

"Finally found you."

Solar smiled and extended his hand to Rohan, our team leader.

"I'm glad we could meet up so quickly."

Rohan calmly grasped Solar's hand.

Although most gold badge adventurers are eccentrics or have a screw loose somewhere, making them difficult to approach, Solar was a bit different from the others.

You could say he seemed normal.

'As for the rest of Solar's people..'

They all looked strange in their own way.

The swordsman was muttering pessimistic words.

The spearman was yawning widely, looking extremely bored.

Also, the archer carrying a bow as tall as a person was, for some reason, reading a book.

The female thief standing behind him stuck out her tongue and grinned when our eyes met.

'What's with that woman.'

I quickly averted my eyes.

I didn't want to stare at the gold badge adventurers for too long and risk getting into trouble.

'Except for Solar, they all look a bit strange somewhere.'

Solar's party "Morning Sunshine" is an adventurer team composed of five members.

Warrior of Light Solar, Storm Archer Gou, Lightning Spearman Stein, Dark Flame Swordsman Torius, and Dark Moon Thief Karan.

From gold badge, you can have a title, and the title represents their skills or abilities.

It's so you can tell what kind of ability they use just by looking.

Anyway, the other four people besides Solar generally looked very bored and tedious.

It's understandable since those with the skills to go down to the underground city have to escort a porter in the upper levels.

"Well then, let's go down now."

Solar took the lead with a bright smile, not caring whether his team members were bored or not.

The Morning Sunshine team took on the structure of breaking through all the monsters and advancing.

Thanks to this, our party had a chance to catch our breath.

Also, all team members changed to a position of surrounding and protecting me.

Currently, I'm the most important person in the conquest team.

That's why everyone was focused on protecting me.

Because I'm carrying all the supplies for 72 people.

If I die or become unable to continue the labyrinth excursion, the conquest team would collapse right there.

"By the way, Yuria. I'm curious about something."

"Hm? What is it?"

"That team doesn't have a healer or a magician?"

"That's what you're curious about? I thought you were going to ask about our mom."

"Ugh. I told you I don't like your mom."

"Heheh."

Yuria grinned and nodded, saying it's understandable to be curious.

Long-term exploration going down to the underground city could take an unknown number of days.

Therefore, the presence of a supporter or magician could be seen as practically essential.

However, Morning Sunshine had no supporter, let alone a healer or magician.

It was a party composed entirely of combat roles.

"That team doesn't need to bring a healer. They all have healing-type abilities."

"I see."

"Not just anyone can get a gold badge. It means they have that much ability."

Surprisingly, most of Solar's party members have healing-type abilities.

That's why they didn't need a healer in the party.

"Having a healer increases the stability of the party, but. To be honest, a healer with no combat ability becomes nothing but a burden in the deep levels. They can just use potions even if they're expensive and go down, that's the idea."

"That's certainly true."

Yuria's position was that healers are ultimately just auxiliary roles like porters.

Her thinking is probably that unless it's a healer with truly legendary holy power, they become someone to protect when going down to the deep levels.

I'm of the opinion that there should be a healer, of course.

But everyone has different thoughts.

"Well, the real problem is that there aren't many priests willing to go down to the deep levels."

"Well, there's no particular reason for them to go down, I guess."

Rohan, who had been listening to my conversation with Yuria, offered a new perspective.

Certainly, as he said, the small talent pool is probably a problem in the first place.

If you're a priest of the Goddess Church, it would be safer and more profitable to just work in the cathedral.

Even priests of other religions didn't have much reason to go down to the deep levels for exploration.

"Of course, there are some weirdos."

"People addicted to the labyrinth?"

"That's right. Those addicted to ability acquisition or mana adaptation. Or those who like to stand on the brink of life and death. Such people keep going down. Until they die."

There must be various types.

It's a story that you can't generalize or determine based on just one aspect.

In the end, those who will go down will go all the way down.

And those who stop might just taste the upper levels and stop.

"Hey, Sion."

"Hm? What?"

"You should stop at an appropriate level too. If you don't want to be consumed by the labyrinth."

"Of course. I'm planning to quit the labyrinth once I secure funds for retirement."

"Retirement funds? Hmm. Then what about marriage? Are you going to get married too?"

"Marriage?"

Why is Yuria suddenly asking about marriage?

"I guess I'll get married too. Why?"

"Do you have a woman in mind?"

"What? No. Not particularly yet."

"Hmm. You don't have someone you like? I heard rumors. That you got involved with a noble young lady."

"Well, that's. I just went along as a guide and got involved. What does that have to do with romance?"

"That noble young lady. I heard she's extremely beautiful. Don't tell me you've fallen for her?"

"What are you saying? I moved because of money. Well. She was pretty, but."

"...."

"Why are you glaring at me?"

"After seducing our mom. You're looking elsewhere?"

"Oh come on!"

Since gold badge adventurers are protecting us, Yuria is starting to act up again.

"Still, it's better not to mess with noble young ladies. It'll become troublesome in many ways."

"I know that much."

"Hmph. And an adventurer like you should date a real adventurer. Not someone who enters the labyrinth for fun. Someone like me... a real adventurer like that."

"I don't think that's right."

"Huh!? Why?"

"I'd be sad if they happened to die. It takes a lot of money to resurrect, you know."

"...Well, that's true, but... Hey."

"Ah, what is it now?"

"I have a lot of money."

"What? What are you saying all of a sudden?"

"Just. That's how it is."

"If you want to brag about money, buy me a meal or something."

"Even if I offer to buy, you always say you don't have time."

"Huh. Did I say that?"

"Sigh."

Yuria messed up my hair for no reason and then walked ahead.

That girl was sticking close to me saying she'd escort me until just now, but now that there are gold badge adventurers, she's acting on her own again.

She's such a troublesome woman.

"Transfer stone found. Let's all enter the next floor."

Soon we found the transfer stone.

At this rate, I think we might be able to reach the 4th floor within 4 hours.

'I think this is the first time I've roamed the labyrinth so leisurely.'

It's certain when I see Yuria playing around.

As expected, gold badge parties are amazing.

They annihilate monsters as soon as they're discovered.

It feels like they're sweeping them away before the monsters even recognize us.

Especially Lightning Stein and Dark Flame Torius were unbelievably strong.

"Weak. Too weak. Boring. Tedious!!!"

"Why... is it going so smoothly... Isn't something going wrong.. It's too smooth.. I'm going crazy with anxiety."

Lightning Stein was shouting that he's dying of boredom.

Dark Flame Torius was expressing anxiety that things are going too smoothly.

"Um.. Mr. Rohan. Is that person really okay?"

"Hm? Ah. You mean Torius."

"Yes. He's been muttering constantly."

"He should be fine. He might have the strongest mental strength of anyone here."

"Excuse me? That person?"

You're saying the person who's been muttering that we're all going to die has excellent mental strength?

He looks like he's about to have a mental breakdown at any moment?

When I expressed my doubt, the earth mage Louis explained about Torius's ability.

"Torius has an ability called Indomitable Will. His mental strength is superior to anyone else's."

"But why is he..."

"Why is he muttering like that? It's because another ability's penalty is conflicting with Indomitable Will. If it weren't for Indomitable Will, he would have already gone berserk."

"Berserk?"

"It's a side effect of one of Torius's abilities. Abilities don't always give only positive effects. There are abilities with penalties."

"I see."

An ability that has disadvantages as well as advantages.

I've heard about abilities with penalties before.

'I heard those abilities are particularly strong.'

I heard they're extremely powerful in exchange for having penalties.

High risk, high return. That kind of feeling.

"So in the end, Torius erased the penalty of another ability with Indomitable Will?"

"That's right. He's suppressing the penalty of habitual seizures and going berserk with Indomitable Will. Instead, he's become pessimistic."

I don't know what other ability Torius has.

It must be quite a terrifying ability to change his personality to this extent.

"Um, excuse me.. As far as I know, Torius was pessimistic since he was a novice adventurer."

"Huh? Is that so? Then he was originally like that."

As I was arbitrarily understanding, our healer Yata, who had been listening to our conversation, timidly chimed in to correct Louis's words.

So it wasn't because of his ability, but he was originally like that.

As expected, it's true that gold badges are all strange people.

"Transfer stone discovered ahead. Entering the 3rd floor."

At that moment, we discovered another transfer stone.

We were able to descend the labyrinth very smoothly.

# Chapter 23: Entering the Underground City

"We've come down incredibly fast."

"We reached it in just about 3 hours."

We reached the 4th floor of the labyrinth in 3 hours.

Is this what it means to be a gold badge adventurer?

The time spent in combat with monsters was very short, between 1 to 2 minutes, and since they just broke through most traps with their bodies, a rapid conquest was possible.

For gold badge adventurers, the upper levels of the labyrinth must be that low in difficulty and easy.

It felt like once they figured out where the transfer stones were located, they just broke through everything in a straight line.

"Multiple Seed Shooters ahead."

"Fucking bastards. These weak shits keep crawling out, it's annoying."

Lightning Stein threw his spear towards where the Seed Shooters were.

Seed Shooters are annoying monsters that attack adventurers by shooting seeds, and if the seeds get stuck in your body, they take root and bind you.

Since they're bothersome to encounter, Stein didn't even get close to them.

When Hachi detected the monsters' locations, he just threw his spear wrapped in lightning towards them.

Crackle!!!

The lightning-wrapped spear stuck into the wall and instantly fried the Seed Shooters.

When they end up like that, even if you recover the corpses, they're of no value.

There's nothing to salvage from a thoroughly cooked Seed Shooter.

'I guess they don't even care.'

They didn't even think about picking up Seed Shooters in the first place.

From a gold badge's perspective, upper-level monsters are no different from worthless waste paper.

"Retrieve."

As I was looking at the dead Seed Shooters with regretful eyes, Stein waved his hand and retrieved the spear stuck in the wall.

The thrown spear returned to Stein's hand.

It's said to be his weapon retrieval ability.

'It's not even telekinesis.'

To be able to remotely retrieve thrown weapons.

I guess you need to have an ability of that level to become a gold badge.

I understood anew how high the wall of gold badges is.

Gold badge adventurer literally meant 'superhuman'.

They appropriately combine their abilities to exterminate monsters like bugs.

Due to physical enhancement through mana adaptation, they can just tear apart upper-level monsters with their bare hands.

I have a feeling that to catch up to their strength, I'll really have to struggle like a dog.

"Wow."

"Hey, Sion. You're about to drool."

"Ssup. No, does this even make sense."

"What?"

"The spear just came back to his hand."

"Are you envious of Stein's ability?"

"Huh? Well... I am envious of their strength. Because I'm weak."

"Hmm. Is that so? From what I see, you're plenty strong too."

"Me?"

"Yeah. Abilities and physical capabilities aren't everything when it comes to strength."

"Is that so?"

"And abilities are ultimately just tools, right? How to use them is up to the owner's mind. Don't confine your abilities too much to the frame of being a porter. And above all, it's a bit irritating to hear someone with a spatial pocket say they're envious of others?"

"Haha.."

Yuria giving serious advice for a change.

Is she also an adventurer close to gold badge level?

Certainly, her words might be right.

I had been recognizing my spatial pocket only as a support ability.

I might have limited the ability to just storing and taking out items.

'Come to think of it, I don't really know the exact specifications of the spatial pocket.'

This seems like an issue worth pondering.

I don't even know the effective range for taking out items, or how much I can put in and take out at once.

If I delve into this aspect a bit more.

Perhaps my spatial pocket might enter a new phase.

"Thanks for the advice?"

"If you're thankful, give me a leg massage later. My calves hurt."

"What are you saying? No way."

"Oh, come on, just do it."

"No. It smells. You've been wearing boots all day."

"Hey..! I don't smell of sweat, you know?"

Is that so?

Certainly, Yuria did smell nice.

No, wait. No matter what, there's no way she wouldn't smell at all after walking in boots all day.

"Don't you know I have an ability to remove body odor?"

"How am I supposed to know all the abilities you have?"

"No, this bastard really forgot? I told you last time!"

"Uh. Did, did you?"

"Wow."

Yuria looked at me with an expression of disbelief.

Come on, how am I supposed to remember all that?

I might not remember well about an ability to remove body odor.

"You, smell it yourself."

"What?"

"So you can remember it clearly. I'm telling you to smell me."

Yuria grabbed the back of my head with a dangerous expression.

She was about to bury my face in her chest.

This is dangerous.

If I stay like this, my face will end up buried in Yuria's chest.

No, is that actually good?

It's a chance to bury my nose in Yuria's chest.

"Hey. You two. Not concentrating?"

"Ah, sorry."

"Hmph. Be careful from now on. We've found the stairs, it's the 4th floor division."

As Yuria and I were making a fuss, the female thief Karan cautioned us.

Solar, who was at the front, had found the stairs leading down to the 4th floor division.

The 4th floor division phenomenon that appeared after the Great Shift.

From my experience with the breeding grounds and sewer areas so far, there was almost always an upper-level elite monster below the 4th floor division.

There was a Bunny Man in the breeding grounds.

A White Evil crawled out in the sewers.

Then surely here too...

"Dryad detected. Silver badges and below, hold your breath."

As expected, it appeared.

The master monster of the botanical garden.

Flower Keeper, Dryad.

A female-type monster with green skin.

And it sprinkles sleep powder from the flower on its head to trick adventurers.

If you inhale the powder sprinkled by the Dryad, your body becomes languid, and you get caught and have your life force sucked out.

'A Dryad that has increased its victims is a disaster.'

While the White Evil of the sewers or the Bunny Man of the breeding grounds tear apart adventurers with pure force, the Dryad is optimized for creating strongholds.

It puts adventurers to sleep with sleep powder and consumes them alive to make a nest on the 4th floor.

If not dealt with in time, a monster on the level of an underground city field boss is born.

Of course, it has no answer to flame throwers.

Plant-type monsters have fire as their worst natural enemy.

Most of them burn to death with 3rd circle or higher fire magic.

"Gou. Kill it."

"Confirmed."

At Solar's words, Storm Gou, who hadn't participated in battles until now, took out his great bow and nocked an arrow.

A great bow about the size of an adult male.

And an arrow that looks more like a javelin.

Whoosh!!!

As Gou shot the bow, a sound that shook the eardrums occurred.

The arrow pierces through the sleep powder and advances.

Boom-!!!

The yellow sleep powder that was hazily spread in front got blown away by the wind in an instant, and it pierced right through the Dryad's chest.

The arrow stuck in the wall, shaking.

The Dryad, with most of its upper body blown away, lost strength and fell forward.

"Hunt successful."

"..."

"Wow."

Isn't that basically a siege weapon?

"Um.. It seems the recoil is severe.. Should I cast a healing spell...?"

"Hm? Thanks."

Our team's healer Yata approached Gou and cast a healing spell.

Only then did I notice that Gou's hands were trembling slightly.

Yata, being a healer, is quick to assess conditions, I see.

'The recoil on the body is as great as its destructive power.'

Well, it would be strange if there was no recoil from shooting such an absurd bow.

It seemed like the destructive power was almost on the level of a ballista.

"Transfer stone found. Watch out for Nepenthes, let's rest."

Solar found the transfer stone.

Now we just need to wait here until the hourglass runs out.

It took about 3 hours to get here, so we should wait about 4 more hours before going down.

The condition was to gather in front of the 4th floor transfer stone within 7 hours.

"It's a Nepenthes."

"Aah!"

Nepenthes, a plant-type monster that appears in the botanical garden. It approaches quietly and swallows adventurers. Also called the Pitcher Plant, its gastric acid is strong, so if swallowed, you can get chemical burns.

"Be careful."

"Thanks."

Yuria, who sliced the Nepenthes in half with one stroke, grinned.

I almost got swallowed by a Nepenthes that was hiding while trying to pick up the Dryad's corpse.

"Your team can distribute and keep the sale proceeds from the upper-level monsters, including the Dryad."

"Huh? Is that okay?"

"I don't mind?"

"I don't care."

"Do as you like."

The Morning Sunshine team handed over the corpses of the Dryad and other miscellaneous monsters to our team.

They don't seem to have any interest in upper-level monster corpses.

What exactly are gold badges doing?

They have no interest even in the Dryad, which is one of the upper-level bosses, let alone other monsters.

'It's good for me.'

I shouldn't refuse if they're giving it for free.

I decided to accept it gladly.

"You were already here."

"We thought we'd be first."

As we were waiting in front of the 4th floor transfer stone, adventurers started gathering soon.

A team including a hunter arrived after us, and after waiting about 3 more hours, most teams succeeded in reaching the 4th floor transfer stone.

"12 teams have gathered?"

"Two teams have fallen behind."

A total of 14 parties belonging to the conquest team entered the labyrinth.

Among them, 2 teams failed to reach the 4th floor transfer stone before 7 hours passed.

They must have had an accident or gotten lost along the way.

"We can't wait any longer. We'll go down by ourselves."

"Total of 63 members. Entering the underground city."

72 people entered, but 9 fell behind.

The remaining members will enter the underground city.

We can't wait for those who may or may not come.

They probably just went back up after confirming their hourglass had run out.

Or they might be dead somewhere.

"Well then, shall we go down?"

Solar took the lead and entered.

The gate stays open as long as you keep your hand on the transfer stone, so once opened, it sends everyone to the same place until it closes again.

'Finally, the underground city...'

This was my first time in the underground city except for a brief accidental visit before.

It could be considered essentially my first experience in the underground city.

Moreover, there was a high possibility that the scenery had changed a lot from before due to the Great Shift.

"It would be nice if we land directly in the plaza district."

"Yeah."

As Yuria said, it would be really nice if we land in the plaza district.

If so, we could quickly find the corpses of Rohan's companions that he hid and go back up quickly.

"Next, porter party enter."

After the Morning Sunshine team entered, it was soon our turn.

Now, once we enter and unload the supplies, our real underground city exploration begins.

The gold badge adventurers won't protect us anymore.

We had to set out to search for corpses with just our party members composed of silver badges.

"Are you nervous?"

"What? No. Just. A bit excited."

"Liar. Your hands are shaking."

"Ah, hey..!"

Yuria suddenly grasped my hand tightly.

"Big sis will protect you. So don't be nervous. Heheh."

"I'm actually older than you, you know?"

"But my experience is overwhelmingly greater."

"You.. Don't tell me you're not a virgin?"

"What? You bastard! What are you saying! I meant my labyrinth experience, not that kind of experience!"

"Hey! You there, hurry up and enter!"

"Ah, yes."

"Sigh. Damn Sion.."

I crossed the gate while hearing Yuria's lament.

We entered the 5th floor, the underground city, the graveyard of veterans.

# Chapter 24: The Beasts of the Plaza District

"You've come, porter."

"This is..."

The first thing that caught my eye when the transfer ended was the female thief Karan waiting for us.

Looking around, Solar and Gou were having a serious conversation.

Stein and Torius were setting up torches, illuminating the dark space.

All members of the Morning Sunshine team had quite serious expressions.

As if something had gone wrong.

"Excuse me, Karan. Where is this?"

"I don't know either. It's our first time here too. Probably a newly added district."

Karan told Rohan that this place was new to them as well.

She says it's a place that even gold badge adventurers, who could be called veterans among veterans, have never seen before.

That means it's a new place that appeared after the Great Shift, right?

'Is it a dome building?'

Inside a stone building that feels like the interior of a dome performance hall. The ceiling was round in shape.

The ceiling is quite higher than ordinary buildings, but certainly lower than the ceiling of the underground city I know.

It looks like the interior of some building.

But since it's open on all sides, it also feels like the plaza district.

"Hachi, this couldn't be the plaza district, could it?"

"It wouldn't be. The plaza district is much brighter than this. And you should be able to see collapsed buildings. Also, the ceiling isn't this low. The ceiling of the underground city is high."

"Then as expected..."

"It's a new district. A new building. I've never seen this place either."

The earth mage Louis also said this was a new place.

"Monsters?"

"None. I've checked several times. In this wide space, we're the only living beings."

"I don't sense anything particular either."

Hachi closed his eyes and spread out his sense, and Horaru the bear beastkin also sniffed with his nose twitching.

"Monsters. None."

Horaru also says there's nothing.

"Hey. For now, help us set up torches too. Securing visibility is the priority. Porter, take out some torches."

"Alright. We'll help too."

Stein said to just light the torches.

Now that we knew there was no immediate danger, we needed to secure our vision.

Our team also followed Stein and Torius in setting up torches and lighting up the dome area.

'There are gates.'

As I set up torches, I noticed several gates that seemed to connect to the outside.

It looked like we could move to different districts by going straight through the open gates.

Does that mean this structure is built in the center of the underground city?

Looking at the shape of the building drawn in my brain through map creation, it does seem to be in the center of the underground city.

No, the center of the underground city?

I had never heard such information before.

The underground city was just divided into 4 districts.

There was no such building in the center.

As Karan and Rohan said, it must be a newly added district after the Great Shift.

It's a space where a boss monster might appear.

However, according to Karan, Hachi, and Horaru, there's nothing in this wide space.

Something does feel a bit strange.

"I feel uneasy."

"You too, Yuria?"

"Yeah. The appearance of a new place means. New monsters will appear. It's more unsettling because there's nothing."

Yuria's expression also became serious.

New places mean new monsters appear.

And new monsters always bring death to adventurers.

As we were feeling anxious for a while.

Soon, adventurers from the conquest team on the 4th floor came down.

"Advance team, where is this?"

"We don't know either. Solar says it's his first time too."

"What? Even Solar-nim's first time.. Hey. Don't let your guard down, everyone. We don't know what might appear."

Unknown terror.

As we couldn't define where this place was, anxiety grew in the adventurers' hearts.

We need to illuminate this space quickly.

I took out torches in bulk from my inventory, which I had received as supplies, and distributed them to the incoming adventurers.

"Stick them in the ground to light up. We need to drive away the darkness."

Darkness fundamentally eats away at the human mind.

Just being in a bright space fills up mental strength, so we needed to quickly color this space with light.

There's a reason the gold badge adventurers lit torches first.

"Hmm. Judging from the circumstances, this building seems to be built in the center of the underground city. I'll name this district the 'Central District' from now on."

"Central District?"

"Yes. We can call it the Central District or the Gate District. And let's call this building the Central Hall."

Solar named this place.

Naming something is humanity's struggle to escape from unknown terrors.

The moment you quickly decide on a name and define the subject, it's no longer an unknown terror.

Defining an unknown existence was quite important.

"There are no monsters here."

"As Gou said, I didn't sense any traces or presence of monsters in the Central Hall either. After checking several times, the Central Hall seems to be completely empty."

"Conquest team leader. Are you saying the Central Hall is safe?"

"I can't say it's perfectly safe, but. For now, we should think it's safe."

Most of the gathered adventurers were convinced by Solar's words.

No matter how much they looked for over an hour, nothing that could threaten adventurers appeared in the Central Hall.

Of course, it's possible that danger factors haven't activated because we haven't triggered or fulfilled certain conditions.

"Anyway, it seems we can go to other districts through the five gates of the Central Hall."

"Wait a minute. But why are there five gates? Shouldn't there be four?"

Adventurers expressing doubt while looking at the five gates.

I was curious about that too.

Why five instead of four?

'The underground city should originally be divided into 4 districts.'

Ruins District, Plaza District, Spire District, and Garden District.

The underground city originally had only these 4 districts.

But now it had changed to a total of 6 districts.

In addition to the existing 4 districts, this 'Central District' and a 'Submerged District' have been added.

"Wait, look at this gate. The buildings are submerged in water. It's a new district."

"Huh... Does that mean aquatic monsters will appear?"

"It looks like it might be waist-deep."

"Look over there. The deep parts are so deep you can't see the bottom."

Some adventurers expressed concern at the changed scenery of the labyrinth, while those with a strong sense of adventure showed interest, saying it was a new farming spot.

The anxiety and excitement emanating from the adventurers amplified.

"For now, let's set up a base camp in the Central Hall. We'll proceed with exploration after that. Porter, unload the supplies."

Following the order of Solar, the conquest team leader, I took out the supplies from my inventory one by one and placed them in the center of the building.

From food to large pots, firewood, oil bottles and glass bottles filled with drinking water, and even strong liquor.

Plus various items like simple tents and boxes containing all sorts of herbs.

"You can carry this much? There's all sorts of things."

"I envy that spatial pocket."

"Hey, don't put oil bottles near the torches! Do you want to die?"

"Ah, I didn't know. Sorry!"

As I unloaded the supplies, adventurers who started organizing the luggage made comments while setting up the base camp.

It's a rare sight to see someone with a spatial pocket, so everyone is reacting with curiosity.

"For the defense of the base, 2 teams will remain here. The remaining 10 teams will divide into 2 teams each and start exploring the districts."

"Who's going to that submerged area?"

"The submerged area. Let's name it the Lake District for now. We, Morning Sunshine, will lead the exploration of the Lake District. We'll take one more team for support."

"I'll pass. I don't want to die in a place I've never seen before."

"Our team passes too. It's too dangerous."

"No support team? If there's no support team, we'll decide by drawing lots."

"Wait, our mission was just to deliver supplies."

"Ah, the corpse retrieval team can be exempted. You've worked hard. Let's meet alive."

At Rohan's words, Solar exempted our team from the drawing.

We didn't come in for exploration, but to retrieve corpses.

"Then, let's go to the Plaza District first."

"Rohan-ssi. You said you roughly know the location, right?"

"Yes. I remember the scenery of that place. If we succeed in retrieving the corpses, we should be able to go up through the transfer stone within 30 minutes."

A half-collapsed building in the Plaza District.

6 corpses hidden inside.

After retrieving the corpses, we just need to run to the location of the transfer stone that Hachi and Rohan remember, and escape the labyrinth right away.

The problem is that we don't know exactly where the place Rohan and Hachi remember is located.

We had to find the place where the two of them remembered the scenery. They say they'll know when we get close, but we had to keep roaming the plaza until we get close.

"As we go deeper into the Plaza District, more High Orcs appear. They're particularly strong among the underground city's native species, so we need to be careful."

Each district of the underground city has native species that make that district their home.

There are High Orcs in the Plaza District and Hop Goblins in the Ruins District.

We had to assume that these would keep crawling out as basic mobs.

"Besides that, we need to be careful of Garum, Gulun, and packs of Hati."

The Plaza District is wide open. And wild dogs (Garum), wolves (Gulun), and dire wolves (Hati) fill the open plaza.

So we need to be careful not to get surrounded by them.

If the Ruins District, which is composed of corridors and rooms with buildings connected in a winding manner, is relatively low in difficulty in the underground city, on the contrary, the Plaza District, which is wide open and can be surrounded at any time, was a place with quite high difficulty.

'Especially because those beast bastards gather instantly when they smell blood, we need to hunt quickly and leave that place as soon as possible.'

Adventurers who don't know this die.

It's a structure where if you kill a hunting dog and start skinning it, wolves come, and if you kill the wolves, this time a pack of dire wolves comes to attack.

Moreover, because they're beast-type monsters that chew on adventurers' corpses, the possibility of resurrection is also quite low here.

'To hide corpses in a place like this. Rohan must be out of his mind.'

He must have hidden the smell and applied preservatives.

The canine monsters here generally have poor eyesight, so if you just handle the smell well, you don't have to worry about the corpses being discovered.

But if we delay any longer, the smell will eventually leak out.

We need to retrieve the corpses before the decay progresses further and it's too late.

"Then let's go."

We crossed the gate leading to the plaza.

The Plaza District is a place with sparsely collapsed buildings.

To survive here, you had to enter buildings from time to time to clear the aggro of beast-type monsters.

If you continue hunting while covered in blood, you'll attract the attention of beasts, and if aggro accumulates like that, you eventually end up in a situation where you have to face a horde of monsters.

The problem is that the buildings you can enter to hide from time to time are already all occupied by High Orcs.

So while moving, you have to deal with beasts, and to rest, you have to deal with High Orcs.

This was why the Plaza District had high difficulty.

"7 charging from the right."

"Louis! Put up a barrier!"

"Kugh..!! Earth Wall!"

The earth mage Louis raised an earthen wall towards the direction the Garums were charging from.

The leading Garums that couldn't slow down crashed their heads into the wall and collapsed, and the ones chasing behind also fell, unable to slow down.

"Um bahara. Mera."

The druid Horaru immediately sang the 'Voice of Empathy' towards the half-dazed pack of Garums.

If they were normal Garums, they would have rejected Horaru's communication, but the ones that had received a shock to their brains fell into an empathetic state.

"Shit..!!!"

Meanwhile, Yuria, Rohan, and Hachi swung their weapons against the charging pack of Hati.

Black-furred wolves avoid Yuria's sword and keep their distance.

Rohan was giving orders while simultaneously annihilating three large wolves.

Hachi was protecting me while supporting his companions.

"Oh no..!! 6 more charging from behind!"

"Horaru! Quickly control the Garums!"

At Rohan's shout, the druid Horaru, who had finished empathizing with the Garums, made them charge towards the pack of Hati our party was dealing with.

At the same time, Louis, who had finished his incantation, raised an earthen wall towards the Guluns charging from behind.

"Let's run!"

"Aaah!!"

We ran.

Looking for an empty building.

We had to run and run.

"Damn it..! I didn't think the monsters would increase this much..!!!"

"Shut up and run!"

Even Rohan and Hachi didn't think the monsters would have increased this much.

Even though we erased the blood smell and left the battlefield as soon as the combat situation ended, we ended up surrounded like this.

There's no way around this.

Because there were too many monsters to use the existing solutions.

"There! That building! Let's go there!!!"

"What about the Orcs!!?"

"I don't sense any! Run! Keep running!"

"Louis! Can you chant while running!"

"I'm chanting so don't fucking talk to me!!"

Louis started chanting.

He must be planning to close the entrance and raise an earthen wall at the entrance as soon as we enter the building.

'I feel like I'm going to die.'

I can taste blood as my breath rises to the top of my throat.

But still, I ran. If we're late, it's over.

"Sion!! Hey!!!"

"Huff.. Huff.. Huh?"

"Throw an oil bottle behind."

"Huh? Aah! Got it!"

At Yuria's shout, I immediately stretched my arm back and took out an oil bottle I had put in my inventory.

Then the oil bottle fell to the ground and broke, and Yuria threw the torch she was holding.

Whoosh!!!

Flames rose and caught on the bodies of the beast bastards chasing us.

Good. Beasts fear fire. They started to run amok in confusion, and soon moved away from us.

"Earth Wall!"

Rumble!!!

An earthen wall rose at the entrance of the building we hid in.

We made it. We survived.

"Haa. Haaah."

"Horaru, are you alright?"

"Ugh.. The empathy broke. They're all dead. Ugh.. Huurk.. All.. All dead.. Again.. Again.. Again..."

"Hey, Horaru! Pull yourself together. If you break down, we're finished."

Rohan shouted.

Our team has survived three times now thanks to Horaru.

It's because he controlled the beasts with the druid skill Voice of Empathy and drew aggro from other monsters.

However, Horaru was expressing mental anguish.

It seemed his mental strength was being chipped away in chunks every time an empathized creature was torn apart and died miserably.

"Rohan, just a moment."

"Hm?"

"Let me take a look. Shouting will have the opposite effect."

"Haah... Is that so. I'm counting on you. If Horaru breaks down.."

Rohan swallowed his words.

He seemed to have no talent for managing team members' mental states, although he was perfect in giving orders in combat situations.

Rather, Hachi is better at mental management, but currently, Hachi is also in a very weakened mental state.

I, who had been away from the fighting, had no choice but to take care of Horaru's mental state.

If Horaru breaks down, our party is finished.

"Horaru. Hey Horaru?"

"Ugh..?"

"Here. It's honey. Eat some honey."

"Honey.. Ah.. Honey. Like.."

"There's still a lot of honey. Let's hang in there a bit more. We've picked up a lot of monster corpses. When we go out, we'll be able to earn a lot of money. You'll be able to eat all the honey you like, right?"

"Honey. Yeah.. I'll.. hang in there a bit more. Thanks."

I decided to give up the honey I had bought for myself to Horaru.

Bear beastkin like honey after all.

When you're tired and in pain, it's good to eat something sweet.

Especially if it's your favorite dessert, it's even better.

It wasn't a waste because he needs to eat honey and recover his mental state for us to move forward.

"Phew. Rohan, is it still far?"

"I'm starting to see familiar scenery. If we go a bit further.. We should come across the place where the Chimera's corpse was."

"The Chimera's corpse won't be there."

"Right. The Chimera's corpse would have been eaten up or dealt with by the High Orcs. Well, anyway, if we explore a bit more, we'll find it. We should be almost there."

"That's somewhat of a relief. Everyone... Let's eat something."

He says the corpses of his companions that Rohan hid are around here.

It was a great comfort to hear that we should find it if we roam around a bit more.

As I took out meat and ingredients from my inventory.

We need to eat. We needed to fill our stomachs and rest a bit now.

"I'll prepare dinner, so everyone rest a bit."

"Thank you.."

"Nothing I can help with?"

"Ah. Yuria, you rest too."

"Okay. Thanks. Phew..."

Yuria took off her boots with a deep sigh.

The others also slumped down, took off their equipment, and started resting.

"Rohan-ssi.. Let me look at that wound on your arm.."

"Kugh.. It hurts."

"I need to disinfect it. Please bear with it a bit more...."

"Aagh..!"

The healer Yata sprayed disinfectant on Rohan's arm.

It's good to have a healing mage so we can recover right away after battle.

-Grrrr..

As Rohan screamed in pain, the howls of beasts were heard.

"Ugh, those dog-like bastards."

"They are dog bastards indeed."

"Right. That's right. They were dog bastards. Hahaha..."

As the tension eased slightly, Hachi, who had been keeping his mouth shut, cracked a joke.

There's warmth in the building, probably because we lit a fire.

Since we blocked the entrance, the beasts will probably loiter around for a while and then leave.

It looked like we'd have to spend tonight here.

# Chapter 25: The Healer Envies the Porter

"Uhh.. Th-there..! Hnnng. Hiet.. Ssup... Haa... Haa. Haa..."

"Ah, stay still for a bit."

"U, ueh...!!"

After dinner, Yuria kept demanding a massage, so I was kneading her calves..

She's making some strange sounds.

Don't tell me this bastard just came from a calf massage?

No way. Surely not.

"Ahem."

"Huh..."

"Well. Cough."

Louis, Hachi, and Rohan glanced at the trembling Yuria.

Horaru was absorbed in eating honey. Being a beastkin, he's quite self-centered.

And the healer Yata..

"Um.. I'm.. I'm good at massages too.. I have a massage therapist license.."

"Yata-ssi, that's not necessary."

"Ah.. Okay."

He was rejected.

Yuria shot him down immediately.

"No, Yuria. Wouldn't it be better to get a massage from a professional?"

"It's fine. The porter is enough for massages."

"Porter discrimination?"

"No, it's not discrimination. Just do it."

"Huh..."

To be honest, Yuria is right.

Originally, in a typical party, the porter is in charge of odd jobs.

From cooking to all possible chores, that's what a porter does.

Above all, in this battle, I just stood frozen while being protected by Hachi.

I feel like I couldn't even do my part. Shamefully so.

Of course, no one expects combat ability from a porter, so the party members didn't say anything.

How should I put it? I just feel a sense of inferiority on my own.

'I didn't know I'd be this powerless.'

I could fight to some extent in the upper levels.

Coming down to the underground city, I could clearly feel that I'm not yet fit to be a bronze badge adventurer.

The beasts all avoided the slingshot or were fine even when hit.

It was very difficult to pierce their skin with a knife, so I couldn't inflict damage.

I clearly felt that I wasn't properly exerting the potential I had.

I realized that I need to systematically learn how to properly use my muscles.

I felt a bit anxious watching Yuria slice through the Garums on her own.

'I need to get stronger.'

Once this labyrinth excursion is over, I really need to register at a swordsmanship dojo or learn martial arts.

I can't stay with the sense I had when roaming the upper levels forever.

The underground city was not easy enough to enter with such a complacent mindset.

'I wish I'd get a combat-oriented ability instead.'

It's somewhat disappointing that I only get abilities favorable for support for some reason.

Of course, it's not that I dislike the spatial pocket.

"Sion, how many monster corpses did you manage to collect?"

"I picked up pretty much everything I could grab. I think I collected over 30 corpses. I haven't properly checked the types of monsters yet, but. I tried to collect all the Hati corpses as much as possible. I think I got at least 10 of those."

Garum, Hati, and Gulun.

I collected all the corpses of these that I could grab.

Especially the Hati corpses, I tried to collect them no matter what.

"I see. 10 Hati corpses is quite good."

"Hooray for spatial pockets!"

Rohan nodded with satisfaction, and Horaru praised the coolness of spatial pockets.

The reason we need to collect Hati is simple.

Among the three types of beast monsters, Hati is the most expensive.

Hati's fur is jet black, and it's the rarest of the three monsters in the Plaza District, so its price is quite high.

In contrast, Garum, the wild dog, was the cheapest.

Its fur color is a mottled dung color, and they're overwhelmingly numerous, so the supply is quite high, making them relatively cheap.

'As for Gulun...'

Gulun are quite large and look ferocious.

If Garum has the typical appearance of a guard dog, and Hati is a handsome wolf, Gulun is a truly ugly canine monster.

We call them "wolves" using another word for wolf because there's no proper term to describe them.

But in fact, it might be more accurate to say they have a large wolf's body with a bulldog's head attached.

Anyway, Gulun's hide sells well too.

It's just that it's overshadowed because Hati's hide is so high-quality.

"Come to think of it. Earlier, some of the Hati disappeared instantly. What was that?"

"Are you talking about shadow hiding?"

"Shadow hiding?"

"It's Hati's unique ability. The ability to hide in darkness. You need to be careful because you're likely to be killed if you don't know about it."

"I see."

So it was Hati's ability.

No wonder I was surprised when they suddenly disappeared from sight.

"And Gulun's heads are harder than rocks, so if you get hit, it's over. Remember that too."

"I already know that.."

"Hey! Even if you know, can't you just say thanks for telling you! How embarrassing."

"Sorry?"

"Ugh. Forget it."

As Yuria said, Gulun's heads are extremely hard.

They're monsters whose heads can't be cracked with a stone throw.

I couldn't kill them even by hitting their heads with a sling shot.

It would be most effective to aim for the heart instead of the head, or to stab vital points like the mouth or eyes.

"I think High Orcs might start appearing soon."

"High Orcs often tame and use Garums. If we get close, we're likely to be detected first. It would be really troublesome if the Orcs swarm out."

"Judging by the numbers we're seeing now, it looks like Orcs might crawl out in large numbers too."

"Haah.. This is maddening."

"But they're hostile to Hati and Gulun. If we use that well, we might be able to make them fight each other."

As Louis said, High Orcs engage in territorial disputes with the other two monsters except for Garums.

To use this well, the role of Horaru the druid was extremely important.

"Horaru."

"Woo?"

"We need your help again."

"Mm. Understood. But porter."

"Yes?"

"Honey. Do you have one more bottle..?"

"Ah. Yes.. I do have one... But we'll have to deduct this separately when calculating compensation later."

"Alright. Everyone agrees, right?"

"It can't be helped. The druid's role is important."

"Honey is expensive. I agree."

"S-sorry.. You can deduct it from my compensation.."

"It's fine. We'll deduct it from the party's shared funds. Just eat as much as you want without worry, Horaru."

"Hehe.."

Honey is a luxury item.

There is a beekeeper living near the labyrinth city, but honey is still expensive.

'Rohan is really fair and square in these aspects.'

He might not be good at managing team members' mental states, but he's thorough when it comes to dividing compensation.

Horaru plays a very important role in the party.

We used honey to protect his mental state, so it's right to deduct the cost from the party's shared funds, not personal expenses.

"Anyway, to continue our discussion. Our goal is ultimately to retrieve the corpses of our hidden companions, so we don't need to fight the Orcs unnecessarily."

Rohan's words meant that we should use the Garums that Horaru succeeded in empathizing with to lure the Hati or Gulun packs and attack the High Orcs first.

If we dealt with the Orc bastards one by one, we'd reach our physical limits, and if they called for their companions, there was a high possibility we'd be completely annihilated.

The labyrinth is now in an unprecedented monster boom period.

So we needed to use the druid's ability to reduce their forces first and avoid fights or gain an advantage.

Looking at it this way, this is really a proper Plaza District conquest team.

Including a druid who can take advantage of the high number of beasts and an earth mage who's good at blocking entrances in the party was a genius move.

It's just that there are too many monsters for them to shine properly.

"Honestly, it seems like there are more now than right after the Great Shift."

"Certainly. It wasn't this bad even right after the Great Shift. It feels like they've increased rapidly in just a few days."

"Surely a new leader specimen hasn't been born?"

"Ugh. Louis. Don't say such chilling nonsense. It's good to assume the worst in the labyrinth, but... Ugh. It's terrible just imagining it."

Rohan shuddered.

It's hard enough as it is, and now a new boss monster?

"But judging by how seriously the monsters have increased, maybe a large-scale subjugation operation will begin after the conquest team's underground city exploration is over."

"You mean the unlimited monster hunting period?"

"Yeah. The unconditional purchase festival."

Subjugation operation.

Also known as the unlimited monster hunting period.

It refers to a period when the guild unconditionally buys at maximum prices without considering market prices.

Since monster parts ultimately fluctuate in price according to market conditions, adventurers tend not to hunt certain monsters during periods when they don't sell well.

However, if the Adventurers' Guild, with the Merchants' Union and the Temple in the middle, sets unconditional purchases at maximum prices, there's no need to consider market prices, so adventurers set out to hunt.

The Merchants' Union might take a loss, but if they feel the labyrinth needs cleaning in the long term, they were willing to make sacrifices.

After all, they can only make money if there are adventurers to enter the labyrinth.

And if the Temple has any shame, they should chip in some money.

Nowhere else welcomes the elixir of resurrection except the labyrinth city.

To continue doing business in the labyrinth city, they needed to manage their image a bit.

'Above all, it's impossible to estimate how much margin they make from the elixir of resurrection.'

The reason the elixir of resurrection is expensive is not because the ingredient costs are high or anything like that.

It's simply because the Goddess Church is the only group that has such a 'near-perfect resurrection technique'.

It's highly likely that they set the price as they please because they have a technological singularity.

'Wasn't 100 gold coins the upper limit of the amount an adventurer could produce after pouring in several years, which they calculated and quoted?'

They try to collect money by any means.

And if they think there's no way to collect money, that's when they sell to slave traders.

In the end, slaves are clearance items discarded by the Temple.

So I think they probably sell them cheaper than the minimum resurrection price of 100 gold coins.

'Thanks to that, most of those who come to slave traders are...'

Either those who have absolutely no relatives who can repay the money for them.

Or those who have physical defects too severe to be sent to the mines.

Most of them don't even have the skills to roam the upper levels of the labyrinth.

'Those at silver or gold badge level will try to repay the resurrection costs and get out of the debt relationship somehow.'

Those who roll down to slave traders are mostly novice adventurers below that level.

Or those who don't even have the skills to enter the labyrinth.

Moreover, since men almost always go straight to the mines, the proportion of women is quite high among slaves.

The Temple finds uses for men because there are many places to use them, but they just release women with no abilities as slaves.

It's not official, but this is my judgment.

It's the brain juice of a porter with 6 months in this world, but it's probably correct.

"Let's decide the night watch order soon. Everyone looks tired."

"Alright."

It's about time to sleep.

Since there are many people, there will be many on night watch, so it seems we can sleep for quite a long time.

"Mmm....?"

I woke up feeling something tight on my chest, and something was hugging me.

It's very soft, warm, and squishy. No way.. Horaru???

With this terrible imagination, I immediately opened my eyes and checked who was hugging me.

'Ah, what. It was just Yuria.'

Yuria, with her mouth slightly open, drooling and even snoring.

She was sleeping in a completely carefree and unguarded state. I didn't know she could be this defenseless.

"Ugh. Hey. Move over."

"Mmm.. Siro.."

When I tried to push her away, Yuria hugged me even more tightly.

Her body scent was certainly good.

Was it an odor removal ability she mentioned?

Anyway, even though we rolled around in the labyrinth, there wasn't even a smell of sweat.

Well, there wasn't any bad smell when I was massaging her calves earlier either.

"Are you awake..?"

"Ah, Yata-ssi."

Yata was on the last shift of the night watch.

It means it's about time for everyone to wake up.

As I raised my head while being hugged by Yuria, Yata's face turned red when our eyes met.

"Th-the guild master's daughter.. This is the first time I've seen her act so familiarly with someone..."

"Is that so?"

"Yes.. I, I've been on a few labyrinth excursions with her too.. Hehe.. But she doesn't remember me well..."

"I see."

This guy, Yata.

Does he really like Yuria?

"W-well.. I've been saved by her a few times. Sh-should I say I admire her.."

"Is that so."

"Yes.. She's cool. Yuria-ssi. She looks so energetic when fighting..."

He really seems to like her.

This is, well, I don't know what to say.

I know Yuria likes energetic types.

But Yata-ssi is too timid and lacks masculinity.

He's rather delicate like a woman.

"Ah, time's up.. We should wake everyone up soon..."

"Yes. Come on, everyone wake up."

I woke up the group along with Yata.

It's time to head back into the labyrinth.

We should be able to retrieve the corpses today.

So far, there hasn't been any unexpected trouble except for the excessive number of monsters.

I hoped the retrieval operation would end without any problems till the end.

# Chapter 26: Mutation

"I don't sense anything around us."

"Looks like they all left while we were sleeping."

"Phew, damn wolf pups. They howled all night, then must have gotten tired and collapsed on their own."

The beasts that had surrounded the building had moved to another location.

In the Plaza District, if you just block the entrance well, a safe zone like this is created.

The beasts loiter around the entrance for a few hours, then move on to another place.

Of course, this doesn't work for High Orcs.

They break down doors to enter.

Entering a building and blocking the entrance was a method that only worked against beasts.

"For now, let's all have breakfast. How about some light toast?"

"Huh? Are you going to bake bread?"

"No, I'm going to take out what I bought in advance. It should still be warm. The spatial pocket maintains temperature too."

"That's an unbelievably enviable ability."

Louis, who had an unexpectedly large amount of personal items, was very envious of my spatial pocket.

He even invited me to go on the next labyrinth excursion together, saying he felt unprecedented comfort during this labyrinth trip.

"Are you really going to reject my offer? I think we work well together."

"I have a prior engagement. Let's go on a labyrinth excursion together next time there's an opportunity, Louis-ssi."

"Hehe. Alright. You're really a likable young man."

Louis probably doesn't know.

That my prior engagement is actually with a party composed only of women.

If this old bachelor knew this fact, he would probably shed tears of blood and tremble with envy.

"Well, now that we've eaten, we should start moving again soon. From here on, High Orcs will start crawling out. Everyone be careful."

"Understood."

"Yes, captain."

"No, captain feels a bit awkward."

"Hehe. Watching you command yesterday, I saw qualities of a leader."

"Hahaha."

Rohan laughed heartily at the praise from his team members.

Everyone seems to be in very good condition.

First of all, because there were many people in the party, everyone slept better than expected, and because we had warm food instead of hardtack and jerky for meals, it felt like our mental strength had recovered a lot.

That's fortunate. This is better than a gloomy atmosphere.

"Whew. Preparations complete."

"I'm done too."

"Then let's go."

With this, everyone's checks were finished.

The moment to enter the darkness again had come.

We brought torches to the bonfire we had lit in the center of the empty building.

The fire caught on the sticky oil smeared on the ends of the torches.

Whoosh.

We obtained flames to illuminate the darkness of the labyrinth.

Rohan, the leader, checked the faces of the party members.

"Horaru. How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. Perfectly alright."

"That's good. The corpses we need to retrieve should be around here. Let's do our best until the end. When we go up, we'll all have a drink together."

"Hehe. Sounds good."

"Are you treating us, Rohan-nim...?"

"Of course, Yata. I'll definitely treat you."

We steeled our resolve.

From the area where High Orcs start crawling out, we expect to see more High Orcs than beast-type monsters.

So the plan is to drive a pack of dogs into the High Orc colony from around here, then use the commotion to retrieve the corpses.

We'll avoid the High Orcs as much as possible, pit the beast packs and Orc groups against each other, then find and retrieve the corpses.

They said Hachi and Rohan's party dealt with the Chimera on the first day, so we just need to be careful of the Orc hordes.

High Orcs are naturally more dangerous than beast packs.

They're highly intelligent, use weapons, and set traps.

Still, according to Rohan, we're almost there.

If we can just retrieve the corpses that should be nearby, after that we just need to run away with all our might.

Rohan said he knows the location of the transfer stone.

We just need to run straight from where the corpses are hidden to the transfer stone.

Swish.

Yuria, who was at the front, drew her sword.

Currently, Yuria has the strongest single combat power in our party.

That's why although Rohan was the leader, Yuria took the vanguard position.

Rohan and Louis followed behind her, while Hachi protected Yata, Horaru, and me.

-Woof! Woof!

After walking around for a while, we heard the sound of dogs barking in the distance.

It's Garum. The Garum are tearing at the flesh of a dead beast.

It doesn't seem to be one of their own kind.

They appeared to be eating the carcass of a Gulun.

The timing was good.

Gulun and Hati are so ferocious that they're difficult to empathize with, he said.

Among the three types of beast monsters, Garum was the one with the lowest difficulty.

Finding a pack of Garum right from the start might be lucky.

The atmosphere is good. The goddess of luck must be smiling on us.

"Um bahara. Mera."

Horaru immediately used the Voice of Empathy.

In the labyrinth where no wind blows, Horaru's melody flowed through the air like wind.

"Four, five... Hmm. Successfully empathized with all six."

Horaru brought 6 Garum under his control.

Originally, we would have had to hit their heads to shock their brains and render them unconscious, but Horaru succeeded in bringing 6 under his control without inflicting any particular shock, with considerable concentration.

Even just this much shows he's a high-level druid of considerable skill.

"From now on, it's a speed battle. Is everyone ready?"

"Yes."

"Whew. Let's do this."

"Good. Sion, take that out."

"Yes.."

I took out a glass bottle containing beast blood from my inventory.

It's a 'throwable blood bottle' that we prepared yesterday.

The result of extracting blood from the Gulun corpse I had taken out of my inventory.

We deliberately put it in cheap glass bottles that break easily.

We're going to throw this at the pack of Garum that Horaru has under his control.

A total of 6 bottles.

It was time to make the Garum bloody messes.

Then the beasts will flock to the smell of blood, and we'll send the Garum towards the High Orc colony.

The beasts in the Plaza District are crazy for the smell of blood.

That's why when a battle breaks out, all the nearby ones are drawn to the smell of blood and gather.

Crash!

The blood bottles that Rohan threw fell and shattered among the Garum pack.

At the same time, the blood inside splattered in all directions.

It's beast blood.

That blood thoroughly coated the Garum pack that Horaru was empathizing with.

Awooo--!!!

There's a reaction.

The howl of wolves.

The Hati pack has caught the scent.

Soon all the beasts in this area will smell the blood.

They'll come flocking.

"They'll be coming soon. Horaru, let's start."

"Woo woo."

Horaru asked the blood-covered Garum pack to run forward.

We raise the commotion.

As the smell of blood spreads, the beasts will naturally gather where the blood scent lingers.

The High Orcs will have a hard time turning their attention elsewhere as they deal with the incoming beasts.

Once the two groups start fighting, we just need to watch the fight while eating rice cakes.

"Let's run!"

We started running.

We can't fall too far behind.

We needed to maintain a certain distance from the Garum pack that Horaru was controlling to gain the most benefit.

-Grooar!

It's the cry of Orcs.

And the death throes of beasts.

"They're fighting!"

"We need to keep the battlefield as far away from us as possible."

"W-woo...! J-just a moment.. Concentrating..!"

Horaru stopped while running.

He closed his eyes and started remotely controlling the Garum.

"Oof..!!!"

Hachi carried Horaru on his back.

We keep running like this. There's a commotion far away.

We just need to take care of our business and get out.

"Around here. It's in my memory! We're almost there!"

Rohan finally pinpointed the location where he had hidden the corpses.

He says the appearance of this area remains in his memory.

"There..! That building!"

Rohan pointed at a dilapidated building.

We found it. Finally the building where he hid his companions' corpses....

"Kuagh.!!!"

Hachi collapsed, coughing up blood.

The eyes of Horaru, who was riding on his back, turned red, and he was tearing up Hachi's back with sharp claws.

An incomprehensible situation.

Horaru was clearly controlling the Garum, so why...

"What is this..!!!"

Rohan tried to run towards Horaru to save Hachi.

At that moment, something flew towards us.

Bang-!!!!

Dirt and dust rose up.

A High Orc with a huge body and dark red skin stood up.

It looked around at us and let out a bloodthirsty howl.

"Grrrr.."

Bone-chilling terror.

The High Orc's two eyes scanned Yuria and Rohan at the front.

As if appraising prey.

As if evaluating opponents.

At the same time, Horaru started going berserk.

Something's wrong with Horaru's eyes.

He was possessed by something.

"Graaaah!!!!"

Front and back.

A High Orc and a bear beastkin consumed by madness.

There are two incomprehensible things.

First. High Orcs have reddish-brown skin.

The huge monster that appeared before us was different from the appearance of High Orcs I had heard about.

Second. There are no monsters that bewitch people in the Plaza District.

Whatever drove Horaru mad must be a new type of monster that shouldn't be in the plaza.

Therefore, the conclusion...

No, there is no conclusion.

It's over.

The moment I made this desperate judgment, Rohan's body flew through the air.

Crash-!!!!

Rohan, smashed into one of the buildings in the Plaza District, lost consciousness.

Yuria immediately lunged at the dark red High Orc.

Her sword slices the Orc's arm.

But it wasn't fatal.

Yuria is struggling.

She's holding on, but she won't be able to take down that monster alone.

She needs help from other party members.

But there was no one to help Yuria.

The earth mage Louis was using magic to neutralize the maddened Horaru.

Yata was pouring healing magic towards Hachi while screaming with tears.

Rohan, who had barely regained consciousness, tried to force himself up but collapsed forward several times as if his legs had given out.

There's only me. I have to help Yuria.

If I aim for that Orc's eyes with my slingshot, I can surely create an opening.

But before I could step in, an even greater darkness approached us.

"Did you enjoy hunting beasts, invaders from the surface?"

Darkness.

So it's that thing.

The monster that shook Horaru's mind.

The aura it gave off was considerable.

If the party hadn't fallen apart, we might have been able to take it on.

But in our current state, I think it's difficult.

It intelligently targeted Horaru to neutralize Hachi as well. Furthermore, it broke up the party.

Moreover, for some reason, it used the common language of the continent despite being a monster.

Could it be that the labyrinth has "learned" from adventurers?

Just as adventurers conquer the labyrinth...

I don't know.

All I can know are the phenomena occurring before my eyes.

For some reason, my eyes are hurting.

Just before being consumed by despair, the pain in my eyes forcibly awakened my mind.

'What... What on earth is that?'

The unknown being was an old High Orc wrapped in Gulun hide.

A High Orc with pitch-black skin.

A specimen holding a staff decorated with beast skulls.

It's a type I've never seen before.

I've never even heard of such a specimen existing.

A new monster.

A superior specimen or mutant of High Orcs that appeared after the Great Shift.

"Mutation."

A huge High Orc with dark red skin and an old High Orc with pitch-black skin.

Two mutant High Orcs revealed themselves before us.

# Chapter 27: One Who Knows When to Step Up

"Hachi!!! Hachi!! Open your eyes!!"

"Damn it!!! Horaru! You idiot! Come to your senses!!"

Yata and Louis shouted.

Yata's hands were covered in Hachi's blood, and Louis was staggering from overusing magic.

However, Hachi still hadn't woken up.

Horaru, who hadn't regained his senses, continued to rampage, breaking through the earthen walls Louis had created.

With this, we should consider four people retired.

What's left are Yuria, Rohan, and me.

"Kuaaaah!!! Just die!"

Yuria shouted a battle cry as she rushed towards the dark red Orc.

Yuria's ability 'Sword Segmentation' activated, causing her sword to break into pieces.

An ability that can freely fragment a designated sword or blade and use it like a chain sword.

You can think of it as being able to wield the sword like a whip.

It's an incredibly powerful ability.

Yuria employed a technique where she would swing the fragmented sword at the opponent's body, wrapping it around their neck or arm, then pull to sever that part.

However, for some reason, that Orc warrior's arm wasn't being cut off.

Normally, the wrapped part should have been sliced off by the blades, but the High Orc warrior's skin was too tough.

She couldn't land a fatal blow.

We were in a crisis.

It's a monster that can't be taken down even with her ability.

More precisely, there was a separate culprit making that Orc warrior unkillable.

"Kashna, Skinteria. Ro-haia."

The old Orc kept chanting curses in a vile language.

Those spells must be strengthening the Orc warrior's power and toughening its skin.

That old Orc bastard was a shaman.

Or maybe an unpleasant dark mage.

Anyway, unless we deal with that one first, the dark red High Orc warrior will never fall.

Someone needed to step up and stop the Orc shaman.

Then create an opening for the Orc warrior, and Yuria needs to thrust her sword into that opening.

If not, our party will soon be annihilated, and we'll die without even leaving corpses, surrounded by the Orcs and beast packs that will gather upon hearing the commotion of the battle.

But right now, there was no one who could stop that Orc shaman geezer.

Louis was barely managing to stop the rampaging Horaru.

Yata and Hachi were both incapacitated.

Rohan still couldn't even stand up properly.

The only person who could fight was Yuria alone, but Yuria had to deal with that Orc warrior.

In the end, the conclusion was that I was the only one who could stop that shaman bastard right now.

Yeah, it's only me.

"Shit!"

After quickly assessing the situation, I drew my sword and ran towards the shaman High Orc.

Do what needs to be done.

Do what you can do.

If you ask if I'm good at fighting... I can answer that I've at least rolled around enough in the upper levels.

No, wait a minute.

With skills from just 6 months of rolling around in the upper levels...

I have to fight a mutant Orc shaman from the underground city?

This is insane.

It's a mindless charge with no sense.

Even if it's a shaman, the opponent is still a High Orc.

Its physical abilities are naturally far higher than a porter like me.

My charge might end up being a meaningless dog's death.

But right now, there's no one else who can stop that Orc shaman over there.

Everyone is focused on their own roles.

It's a situation where the porter has to step up.

So even if I'm scared to death, I have to run.

I had to run and throw an oil bottle, set it on fire somehow.

If I hesitate, Yuria will be crushed to death by that huge monster Orc.

If I don't step up, Louis and Yata will be torn to pieces by Horaru.

If I don't deal with that bastard...

"Foolish."

Dark Swarm.

"Aaaaargh---!!!!!!!!"

A swarm of insects burst out from the Orc shaman's fingertips.

Without time to dodge, the insects flew towards me.

I was enveloped by the swarm and rolled on the ground.

Pathetically dropping my sword.

"It hurts!!! It huuuurts!!!!!"

It stings.

It itches.

It's unbearably disgusting.

Unknown insects crawl all over my body, biting, digging into wounds, and laying eggs.

Insects enter through my ears and nose.

They crawl into my mouth too.

I'm dying.

What came to me was death.

The grim reaper's scythe was at my neck.

Soon insects filled my windpipe and I couldn't breathe.

My vision darkens.

Consciousness gradually fades away.

I hear Yuria's scream.

The Orc shaman's laughter echoes in my ears.

Death.

It's death.

I opened my eyes.

I was lying on the ground.

Why am I looking down at myself?

Is this an out-of-body experience? Or did I really die?

I don't know.

But. Not being able to do anything and dying like this...

It was too pathetic.

And unfair.

Why. Why am I the only one so unfortunate?

If you're going to dump someone who was minding their own business into this crazy world.

Shouldn't you at least make it so they can live happily?

I'm going to die without even fulfilling my dream of a slave harem?

If I knew I was going to die so meaninglessly like this....

I should have treated Yuria better.

Regret.

Frustration.

Anger and resentment.

Yes, this resentment made me feel like my body was twisting.

To think this is all there is to the ending.

To collapse here without being able to do anything.

What about all the preparations I made to survive?

What about the knowledge I acquired for survival?

Is this all?

Am I really going to die here?

Sion.

No, damn it, Yu-chan.

You need to open your eyes.

Yuria is screaming over there.

She looks like she's about to be torn apart by that huge Orc bastard.

Yu-chan.

Kang Yu-chan, you idiot.

How long are you going to lie there?

Get up and fight.

Yuria is going to die.

You have to save her.

I opened my eyes again.

This time, the scene I saw was different from before.

Everything around me had turned black and white.

A desolate air.

Black shapes whose forms are hard to make out wander about.

It's still the labyrinth.

But different from the labyrinth where I collapsed.

Ah. This must be the afterlife.

I guess I really did die after all.

Then are those the souls of adventurers who died in the labyrinth?

I guess I couldn't survive through sheer willpower after all.

If so, I have to accept the ending, disappointing as it may be.

This world is too cruel for resurrection to be possible through wishes and passion alone.

In the end, everything dies.

My turn just came a little earlier.

There's an order to the birth of life.

But there's no order to its death.

As I realized this simple fact, everything I had been seeing crumbled and shattered.

Except for one thing.

-Hey. You there.

The only soul maintaining its own form called out to me.

It was the soul of a warrior with hollow eye sockets.

He pointed at me.

As if he wouldn't let me go.

Thud. Thud.

He walks towards me.

Slowly, but surely.

Unsteadily, but persistently.

-You.. Can you see me?

He asked.

If I could see him.

I wanted to answer but no voice came out.

So I nodded towards him.

I can see you, I said.

I can sense you.

-Finally. I've finally found someone I can communicate with.

The nameless warrior shed tears of emotion.

Black pus flowed from his hollow eye sockets.

-Take me.. Take me to the surface. Won't you get me out of this damn place?

He proposed.

To get him out of this damn labyrinth.

But how?

I'm already dead.

-No. You are not dead yet. I can sense a faint life force.

He asserted.

You are not dead yet, he said.

-But you are in danger. Good. For a moment, just a moment. Lend me your body.

He reached out his hand.

A gaunt body.

An arm like a mummy.

A hand twisted and dried like an old tree.

The warrior's hand, nothing but skin and bone.

He held it out.

-It should be fine for just a very short moment. I'll lend you my power. Take me. Take me up to that sun above. Please. Nameless adventurer.

Should I take his hand?

Can I trust the words of a dead person?

Maybe this is a ploy to steal my body?

Ha..... Hahaha!

A dying man is thinking all sorts of things.

You're going to die anyway if you don't take this hand.

Not trusting won't make the situation any better.

This is a gamble.

The last chance to save myself and Yuria and my party members.

It's fine even if my body gets stolen.

Because I'll be able to save Yuria.

I'll lend it to you.

I grasped the warrior's hand.

Soon, his soul.

Into my body....

"Urgh... Aargh......"

Sion woke up.

He who had collapsed got up and surveyed the battlefield.

Yuria was sent flying after being hit by the Orc Slugger's fist.

Horaru was charging towards Yata and Louis.

Hachi was still unconscious.

Rohan staggered as if concussed.

After confirming their state, Sion quickly checked his own body condition.

Insects were burrowing into his skin.

His airway was blocked, and parasites had hatched eggs.

Dark Swarm. You fell for a dirty trick.

"Haaah!!!"

He let out a battle cry and shook off the filth clinging to his body.

The black flesh-eating insects that had burrowed into Sion's body were all crushed by the aura and died, turning belly-up.

Then the insects blocking his airway burst out and his breathing cleared.

Finally, air enters his lungs.

His fingers, arms, and legs move properly.

His two feet firmly support his body.

It's a body.

A physical body.

"So this is life."

The great warrior Shaka confirmed the enemy before him.

A pitch-black form.

A mutant of the High Orc, a Warlock.

One who wields black magic and toys with adventurers.

An enemy that must rightfully be killed.

An obstacle blocking the path forward.

An aura of fighting spirit frosted over in Sion's eyes.

The ability, Warrior's Intimidation, struck the Orc Warlock's mind.

"Kuuugh..!!!!!"

It's different from before.

Those are the eyes of a predator.

At this, the Orc Warlock was shocked and swung his staff.

What he instinctively fired was the 4th circle black magic 'Dark Spear'.

Sion took a breath as he saw the black spear flying towards him.

Because he needed to change the phase.

"Woooaah---!!!!"

The warrior's roar echoed across the battlefield.

The black magic fired by the Warlock was torn apart in mid-air.

At the same time, the light returned to Horaru's eyes, which had been possessed.

Strength entered Rohan's legs, which had been staggering from concussion.

Also, the Orc Slugger pressuring Yuria stepped back.

Hachi, who had lost consciousness, twitched and opened his eyes again.

The tide of battle changes.

With just a single roar.

The roar let out by a great warrior is the ultimate crowd control.

Fear for the enemies.

Courage for allies.

"A weapon. Give me a weapon."

Sion opened his spatial pocket for Shaka.

Shaka reached out and drew a single weapon.

What was pulled out was the ambitious work of Barrel, the owner of the clearance weapon shop.

"A double-bladed axe, huh."

A double-bladed axe was gripped in the great warrior's hand.

"This will suffice."

In an instant, Sion's body completely disappeared from the Orc Warlock's sight.

Splat-!!!!!

The Orc Warlock's body was split in half.

The double-bladed axe broke.

The weapon was destroyed, unable to withstand the overwhelming power.

"This far. Any more... is dangerous."

Cough...!!

Control of the body returned.

Sion collapsed, coughing up black, dead blood.

'It hurts.. It hurts like hell...'

The pain resistance ring Rika gave him allowed him to endure the extreme pain.

If not for that, he would have fainted right away.

-Ah.. Aah...

Soon, Shaka's voice could be heard in the ear of the collapsed Sion.

-Please.. Make sure.. to take me.. up there...

The soul of the great warrior Shaka disappears to the other side of consciousness.

Shaka borrowed Sion's body for about 30 seconds.

In that short time, Shaka consumed most of the life force Sion possessed.

Sion paid the price for accepting a spirit entity too powerful for his body to withstand.

"Kuaah!!! Die!!!"

Meanwhile, Rohan, who had recovered from his concussion, rushed in and thrust his sword towards the Orc Slugger's leg, and Horaru, who had regained his senses, rammed into the Orc Slugger with his massive body.

Crash!

As the Orc Slugger's body was thrown backwards, Hachi immediately jumped on its body and started crushing its face.

"Sion!! Sion!!!"

Yuria ran towards the collapsed Sion.

Hearing Yuria's voice, Sion smiled blankly, unable to even lift his head.

"Ha.. Hahahaha.. Cough.."

I survived.

Just how tenacious is this thread of life?

"Yuria..."

"Sion! Blood, there's blood..!!"

Yuria pulled up the collapsed Sion into a sitting position.

Only then did she see the pool of Sion's blood spilled on the ground.

"S-Sion!!! What do we do. What do we do..!"

"Yuria.. Please.. feed me this..."

"What?"

"This... this..."

Sion took out a nutritional supplement from his spatial pocket.

However, he didn't have the strength to hold it and drink it, so he asked Yuria to feed it to him.

"J-just a moment..."

Yuria hurriedly opened the cap of the nutritional supplement and fed it to Sion.

"Ugh.."

Strength returns to the body again.

This was like borrowing tomorrow's strength to use today.

"Corpses.. We need to retrieve the corpses.."

Sion reached out and put the High Orc Warlock's corpse into his inventory.

"Orcs are coming..! Cough..!"

"Damn it.. Sion! Are you alright!"

Meanwhile, the rest of the group ran towards Sion.

There was no time to ask about that impossible roar just now, or the power that split the Orc Warlock in half with a single blow.

A group of High Orcs was approaching in this direction.

"We need to hide for now!"

"Damn it..! We were so close! Horaru! Carry Sion! Run towards where we hid the corpses!"

"Woo woo..!!!"

"W-wait.. That bastard's.. corpse..."

"Damn it! You're collecting corpses in this situation? You crazy porter!! Louis! Raise an earthen wall to cover our sight!"

"Shit! I'm almost out of mana! Damn it all!!"

Louis raised an earthen wall to briefly hide the group's appearance, and during that time, Horaru carried Sion on his back and approached the Orc Slugger's corpse.

"Ugh.."

Sion reached out and retrieved the corpse.

Soon, the group fled to the building where they had hidden the corpses, avoiding the approaching Orc group.

Rohan: dizziness.

Hachi: anemia.

Yuria: joint injury.

Yata and Louis: mana depletion.

Sion: exhaustion.

Only Horaru was unharmed.

It was a dramatic survival.

# Chapter 28: The Worst Possibility

"Sion. Are you okay?"

"Cough.. Cough... Huh?"

I opened my eyes to the call and saw Yuria looking down at me.

When did I faint?

Even after drinking the convenience store brand nutritional supplement, I ended up fainting after all.

That means my body condition is not good at all.

"Yuria, where is this?"

"We came into an empty building to hide. High Orcs are roaming outside."

"Ugh.."

I barely managed to sit up.

I could see the others.

Everyone's condition is terrible.

"Are there... any casualties?"

"Fortunately, everyone survived."

Rohan, with a bandage wrapped around his head, answered.

His eyes were trembling slightly.

In one corner, Yata was examining Hachi's back, and Louis was motionless as if asleep.

"Hachi. How's your condition?"

"I can manage. I think I'll recover soon."

Thankfully, it seems Yata's healing magic is proving effective.

"Ugh... I'm sorry."

"It's nothing. It was an unavoidable accident. Don't worry about it."

Horaru was watching the reactions of the party members.

Because the party almost got wiped out when he had his mind taken by the Orc Warlock.

But we couldn't blame Horaru.

It was a kind of accident.

None of us knew that an Orc Warlock would crawl out.

Moreover, we couldn't blame him even more because he had his mind stolen while in a defenseless state, remotely controlling the Garum.

Horaru did his best.

We just got hit according to the old labyrinth adage that you have to get hit if you don't know.

Because we didn't know about the existence of the Warlock and Slugger at all.

Naturally, we had no countermeasures.

It's fortunate that we have the Spirit Eye.

It's fortunate that we didn't die.

We shouldn't hope for more than this.

That would be greed.

'I've forgiven Horaru, but I'm not sure about the others.'

It's not always possible for reason to take precedence.

In the realm of emotions, one could harbor hatred towards another.

There are often cases where you can't forgive even though you know it's not the other person's fault.

You need someone to blame. You need a target to pour out your overflowing anger.

"Isn't everyone hungry? Let's eat something."

When your stomach is full, your mind naturally becomes more relaxed.

I took out prepared sandwiches from my inventory.

I chose food with minimal smell, as too strong a food odor would allow the High Orcs' hunting dogs to pinpoint our location.

"There really is nothing your spatial pocket doesn't have."

"Louis-ssi. Weren't you sleeping?"

"I was meditating. Extreme mana depletion. I really used up every last drop. Here, see how my hands are shaking?"

"Oh my."

Louis's hands were trembling like those of a patient with hand tremors.

If mana depletion persists, dizziness and hand tremors begin, and in severe cases, it can even lead to loss of life.

"This is delicious."

"Eat plenty. You can have up to 2 each."

"Hey, Sion."

"Yes?"

"Give me one more."

"You already ate two."

"So. You won't give me another?"

Yuria looking up at me cutely, asking if I really won't give her more.

I guess two sandwiches weren't enough at all.

Well, she faced the Orc Slugger alone.

It's understandable that she's hungry.

"Here."

"Thanks!"

Yuria munched and swallowed the third sandwich.

Vanguard classes typically consume a lot of calories.

They need to eat a lot to use their strength properly.

"By the way, Sion."

"Yes?"

"You, earlier.. that.."

After swallowing the rest of the sandwich, Yuria asked about the power I had used.

To be precise, that wasn't my power.

It was just the result of lending my body to the great warrior Shaka.

'How should I explain this?'

I pondered for a moment.

"If it's difficult to talk about, you don't have to tell me."

"It's not really secret content. How should I put it. It's just very difficult to explain."

Should I vaguely say that I made a deal with an earth-bound spirit of the labyrinth right before dying?

'No. That's not quite right.'

Hachi is a monk and Yata is also religious.

Talking about making deals with the dead in front of those two wouldn't be good religiously.

"I saw something right before I was about to die. I blacked out for a moment. When I opened my eyes, it was all over."

"Hmm. So you don't remember exactly what happened?"

"Yes. I think it might be because of the Spirit Eye. But I'm not sure of the details myself."

"Spirit Eye. Right. You had that ability."

"What are you talking about? This is the first I'm hearing of this?"

Louis asked to be told what the Spirit Eye was.

Of course, I didn't have to answer.

But since Louis had told me about his ability before, I decided to answer out of courtesy.

"It allows you to see what cannot be seen, huh."

"Yes. But it's an ability I can't use at will."

"A conditional activation, then. Does it only activate at the boundary between life and death? Indeed, an unusual ability. Hey, Yata. Have you heard of the Spirit Eye before?"

"Uh.. I've never heard of the Spirit Eye either..."

"Horaru. What about you?"

"Hmm.. Spirit Eye. I'm not sure."

Yata and Horaru also said they didn't know anything about the Spirit Eye.

It's certainly not a common magical eye.

The well-known magical eyes among the public are the 'Eye of Charm', 'Eye of Petrification', and 'Eye of Discernment'.

The Spirit Eye was a little-known magical eye.

Even the guild master couldn't properly understand it, and even Raffnel, whose age is unknown, couldn't give a proper explanation.

"Anyway, thanks to you we survived. I'm grateful."

Louis bowed his head in gratitude.

"It's nothing."

I waved my hand.

Anyone in that situation would have struggled to survive.

'If we could have prepared for the Warlock and Slugger's attacks in advance. Then we wouldn't have had to go through all this trouble.'

This crisis came from ignorance.

But now we have knowledge about them.

Now that we've figured out the enemy, we can prepare countermeasures for the next visit.

'Knowledge about the Warlock and Slugger.'

It's knowledge that arbitrarily entered my head when the great warrior Shaka briefly borrowed my body.

Originally, I didn't even know their names and called them shaman and warrior, but now I know their proper names.

'And the fact that the Slugger who exerts great strength and the Warlock who uses black magic have appeared means...'

It might mean that a High Orc Lord has also been born.

It's probably not just the Plaza District that's like this.

'Superior specimens.. mutations must have been born in the other four areas as well.'

We need to go up and report this fact.

Other conquest teams besides us are probably struggling as well.

Maybe some parties have already been wiped out.

Native species in other districts must have produced mutations too...

Among them, how strong would the mutation of the Dungeon Troll be, which could be called the strongest native species in the underground city in terms of single combat power?

I should never go to the Garden District.

"Rohan, I'd like to go up soon. Where are the corpses we need to retrieve hidden?"

"If you go out of this building, and walk further to the right based on the entrance, you'll find them."

"I see. What about the transfer stone?"

"It's in the opposite direction from the building where the corpses are. To the left, based on the entrance."

"The opposite direction..."

The building we're hiding in was right in the middle between the transfer stone and the building where the corpses were hidden.

We need to retrieve the corpses and then go back the way we came to get to the transfer stone.

"Hmm..."

At that moment, Hachi exhaled as if troubled.

"What's wrong?"

"There are Orcs and a pack of Hati holding their ground at the locations of each building."

"What?"

According to Hachi's detection, there was a group of High Orcs around the building where the corpses were hidden, and a pack of Hati gathered around the building with the transfer stone.

"Can we handle the High Orc group and then deal with the Hati pack?"

"We'd need to rest here for a full day to do that. We need recovery."

"It's impossible right now. Let's just rest here today and retrieve them tomorrow."

"..."

Louis expressed his reluctance.

Yuria also said we should rest.

Moreover, Yata said he had used up all his holy power after using healing magic to the limit.

Everyone was reluctant to move right away.

They desperately needed rest, and everyone was already too exhausted.

'But we can't. We can't rest. We must leave this place today no matter what.'

I asked Hachi:

"High Orcs don't have as good noses as beasts, right?"

"That's right. If they had tamed Garum to use as hunting dogs, they would have solved that part... Well. I only sense Orcs in my detection. It seems the High Orcs haven't tamed Garum yet. Probably because not much time has passed since the Great Shift ended."

"Good. Then I'll retrieve the corpses and run to the transfer stone."

"What kind of crazy talk is that?"

Yuria looked at me like I was insane.

"It's not crazy talk. It's the best way for everyone to escape safely."

Of course, staying here for a day to rest and then moving in a fully prepared state would be a much more stable and better method.

But we couldn't waste another day here.

Why, you ask?

'The existence of the High Orc Lord.'

I'm not sure if it exists or not.

But assuming it does exist.

We needed to get out of the Plaza District as quickly as possible.

Because in the labyrinth, you always have to assume the worst.

"High Orc Lord...?"

"What on earth is that?"

"Um, what exactly is that?"

"It's the leader of the High Orcs. If it has really been generated in the Plaza District... It will soon release its subordinates to track down the missing Warlock and Slugger. And in doing so, they'll discover us."

"If we're discovered..."

"We won't die a normal death."

"This is insane.."

If we waste an entire day, we'll definitely be caught by the tracking team.

That's why we had to get out of here today, even if we had to use every last bit of our strength.

# Chapter 29: Run, Little Mouse

"I'll retrieve the corpses and run to the location of the transfer stone. You all go to the building with the transfer stone first, kill the Hati pack, and wait for me."

"No, you crazy bastard! How are you going to break through a group of High Orcs alone!"

"This. I'll break through with this."

I took out a glass bottle while trying to calm down the seemingly excited Yuria.

A potion I got for free from Raffnel's atelier.

"If I drink this, I'll probably turn into a mouse for about an hour. They said intelligence is maintained. I'll drink this, sneak into the building where the corpses are hidden, retrieve everything with my spatial pocket, and then run to where the transfer stone is."

"Listen, Sion. No. That's too dangerous."

Rohan shook his head and denied it when I said I would run into the Orc group alone.

He might have felt sorry from his position.

We came in to retrieve corpses, but he ended up with a concussion and I was carrying the log.

But I'm fine with it.

Rohan carried the log plenty when we rescued Rika and Erika.

This is mutual aid.

"Did such a drug actually exist in the first place?"

Hachi, who heard my plan from the side, asked.

He seemed unable to easily believe in the existence of a potion that turns you into a mouse.

"It could... exist.."

"Is that really true, Horaru?"

"Yeah. It's possible if you use a secret technique that only the highest rank of druids who have mastered alchemy can use."

The highest rank among druids.

Was Raffnel's identity an alchemist druid?

"But Sion. Who made that medicine?"

"An elf living in the eastern red-light district of the labyrinth city."

"Red-light district?"

"A courtesan from the red-light district made this?"

"No, how could a woman from a brothel... Could it be for semen collection? Or is she an eccentric alchemist obsessed with men?"

"Sion, do you go to places like that?"

"No! That's not it. There's a hole-in-the-wall shop in the neighborhood where brothels are gathered."

"Hole...?"

"Not that kind of hole! And Yuria, I don't go to those places, so don't misunderstand."

"Really? I'll believe you...?"

Yuria sighed in relief.

I corrected her before she could form any strange misunderstandings.

"An elf. Hmm. Probably an elderly elf. Indeed, you've met a noble person."

Regardless of the strange misunderstandings other companions were having, Horaru was just admiring the drug I was holding.

Then Rohan, who had been silent, opened his mouth again.

"I wonder if we're entrusting too heavy a burden to you."

He seemed to be feeling something akin to guilt.

I waved my hand at him, saying it was nothing.

"If you're really sorry, give me 3 of the Hati corpses Rohan-ssi caught."

"Huh?"

"I think that's enough compensation for turning into a mouse."

"Is that so. Hahahahaha! Alright. I'll transfer the rights to all the monsters I caught during this labyrinth excursion to you."

Rohan laughed heartily.

"Wait a minute. I have no intention of transferring my share because I got caught up in the atmosphere. Make sure to calculate properly."

"Yes, of course."

Louis quickly claimed his share, worried that everyone might get caught up in the atmosphere and end up donating money to me.

Right, this is how adventurers should be.

Rohan is being excessively generous.

"Well then, let's get started."

Before drinking the mouse-transforming potion, I downed two bottles of nutritional supplements at the same time.

I know it's crazy, but I have no choice.

I can't stop or collapse in the middle.

I had to maintain consciousness no matter what until my companions picked me up.

"Whew. I might faint, so please take care of me then."

"I'm sorry for entrusting you with such a heavy duty."

"It's fine. Thanks to Rohan-ssi, I was able to get Erika and Rika out too. And anyway, the Young Lady will pay the compensation for this job. Don't worry too much."

The Young Lady said she'd pay the price of a life.

As soon as we go up and I get the money, I'll just buy slaves right away...

"Be careful, Sion."

"Huh? Yeah. Got it. I'll be back."

I was excited thinking about buying slaves when Yuria suddenly grabbed my hand.

This one, her skinship has become more intense since entering the labyrinth.

She expresses her emotions to me overtly.

She radiates her affection in a way that can't be misunderstood.

Honestly, it was a bit burdensome.

Of course, that doesn't mean I dislike Yuria.

I don't dislike her.

Rather, I respect her as an adventurer and rationally have a good impression of her.

This is the problem.

'I don't intend to date adventurers.'

Moreover, Yuria wasn't even my slave.

She's an adventurer who could die at any time, and since she's not a slave, I don't know when she might cheat.

I'm sorry, but Yuria...

She wasn't qualified to be my wife.

So I kept putting up walls.

Even when she openly showed signs of liking me, I kept pretending not to know until the end.

If I get caught up in her emotions too, I'll end up having to date her in the end.

And then I really felt like I wouldn't be able to handle the aftermath.

Yeah, I'm a coward.

That's why I kept avoiding Yuria.

'But...'

I felt that it wasn't courteous to the other person to keep pretending not to know and avoiding while knowing their feelings.

I guess it would be better to make things clear by taking some time.

"Yuria."

"Yes?"

"When this labyrinth excursion is over. Let's have a serious talk."

"A serious talk?"

"Yeah. A serious talk."

"But, but making such a serious expression in that state... Pfft."

"Huh? Ah. Damn it."

Yuria laughed looking at my lower body.

I had an erection.

It's a side effect of the nutritional supplements.

"Damn it."

"S-Sion.. Don't tell me you have... that kind of perverted inclination that enjoys crisis situations?"

"No! No, I don't! It's a side effect of the nutritional supplements! Stop slandering me from earlier, Louis!"

I wanted to explain more about the drug's effects...

But explaining the reason for my erection seemed too pathetic.

Let's just get out quickly. I need to get out of this rotten labyrinth.

I feel like I'm going crazy from being in the labyrinth for too long.

"Ah, whatever. I'll be back soon, so just keep the transfer stone open!"

I drank the mouse-transforming potion.

It tasted like sweet melon soda.

"Squeak..!?"

Soon my body rapidly shrank.

There was a strange sound like muscles and bones breaking, and my field of vision became very low.

It's real magic.

I turned into a mouse just by drinking one bottle of potion.

Come to think of it, this drug has immediate effects.

If used well, it seems like you could feed it to enemies and turn them into little mice.

For example, what if you threw it into a dragon's mouth?

Couldn't you turn a dragon into a little mouse? Is that not possible?

But they said this had side effects.

I can't really tell right now.

It seems to be the type where side effects appear after the drug's effects wear off.

"Squeak!"

I put my scattered clothes and belongings on the floor into my spatial pocket.

The clothes I was wearing became too big when I turned into a mouse and all fell off.

'I can still use abilities even in mouse form.'

Mapping is still active too. Good.

I lost my language ability, but I didn't need it anyway since I was going to run alone.

"Squeeeak!"

"He really turned into a mouse..!"

"Let's start before Sion's drug effects wear off!"

Rohan opened the entrance of the building.

They run towards where the transfer stone is.

I ran towards where the corpses are.

'The scenery looks different with such a low viewpoint.'

Even the senses were a bit strange.

Antennae? Whiskers? Yeah, must be whiskers.

The whiskers near my snout sensitively detected air currents and the presence of monsters.

It seems night vision is applied to some extent too.

I felt no discomfort running in the darkness.

Like that, I ran to the building Rohan mentioned, avoiding monsters.

'Is it that building?'

Soon I reached the building where the corpses should be hidden.

Nearby, Orcs were making a fire and tearing into beast meat.

If we had come together as a group, we would have definitely been noticed by the Orcs.

I carefully looked for a mouse hole and entered the building without being noticed by the Orcs.

'Somewhere here... Found it!'

I discovered them.

Six corpses buried in a pile of dirt.

I quickly crawled over and put them into my inventory.

The decay didn't seem too severe yet.

At this level, they should be able to be resurrected.

'Done!'

With this, corpse retrieval successful.

Now I just need to run towards where the transfer stone is.

'Now nothing else will happen, right? This is really the end, right? Stop the bad luck.'

Please. We've rolled enough by now.

I think rolling any more than this is a bit much.

'Huff.. Huff...'

I kept running while coaxing and soothing the labyrinth in my mind.

Being a mouse made me very fast, but my stamina was depleting just as quickly.

"Squeak.. Squeak!"

I took out dried fruit from my inventory and chewed on it.

If I didn't consume something intermittently, I felt like my heart would burst and I'd die.

'I really feel like I'm going to die.'

My erection subsided.

The effects of the nutritional supplements are wearing off.

Even though I drank two bottles, my eyes were already closing.

Probably because Shaka used up a tremendous amount of my life force.

Damn labyrinth. If I get out this time, I'm going to rest for at least... really at least two months.

'So hang in there. Just a little further...'

I forced myself to run.

With my eyes half-closed, relying on instinct and senses.

I ran and ran.

"Oh! There! I sense the presence of a small animal!"

"Sion! Over here!"

Soon I saw my companions waiting for me in front of the transfer stone.

Corpses of Hati were piled up in one corner.

"Squeak..!"

I ran towards the corpses.

As the small mouse hand quickly swept over the corpses, all the piled up Hati corpses entered my spatial pocket.

"Hehh. Hehh...."

With this, my mission was really completely over.

Wouldn't this make me the best corpse retriever in the labyrinth city?

"Sion!"

"This guy is exhausted! Let's quickly take him up! Monsters will be swarming soon!"

Someone picked me up.

Now I can really faint, right?

Soon I felt my body crossing the gate.

Consciousness gradually faded away.

When I open my eyes again, I hope it's outside the labyrinth.