

The Mechanic 51

Chapter 51: Rescue Mission (Part 2)

Zhang Wei's twin guns roared like fire-spewing dragons as they unleashed an endless stream of large-caliber bullets onto the nearest two all-terrain cars. Within the space of a few seconds, the two cars exploded into balls of flames.

Meanwhile, Lambert was showcasing his skill with the rifle. He remained still as he fired shot after shot of steel core bullets with 100% accuracy to halt the enemy's advance.

"The reinforcements are here!"

Aboard the fleeing car, Ma Qing Yang and his teammates rejoiced. Almost the entire team had sustained injuries and were lying down.

As they neared the hill, Ma Qing Yang stuck his head out from the window of the driver seat and yelled, "Old Zhang, there's too many of them! Quickly flee!"

Right at this moment, a strange gale of wind suddenly descended upon the rescue team's location. The dancing sand began to form the image of a ghostly face. The sight of it was both unnerving and ominous.

"Duck!" bellowed Zhang Wei as he hurriedly dropped to the ground to roll away. As the armored suit was too heavy, he did not have many other choices of movement. Li Ya Lin and Lambert were the quickest to react, and they managed to duck to a side.

As the gale crashed onto the ground, the blast sent a number of field agents flying.

Zhang Wei suddenly felt a sharp pain throughout his mind, and his nose started to bleed. As he looked around, to his horror, the other field agents who had not been able to run away in time were all bleeding profusely from their orifices as they twitched uncontrollably.

"Mental attack!" yelled a shocked Zhang Wei. "The enemy is a superhuman!"

As he looked towards the enemy fleet to find the source of the attack, he noticed the hood of one of the cars open up, and a slender woman in a jet-black leather suit jumped out and started running towards them at an incredible speed. Her headful of red hair floated behind her, making her seem like some kind of red and black flash of lightning.

Hila's eyes were emotionless. With a wave of a hand, another ghostly face appeared in mid-air in front of Zhang Wei. The wind wailed horrifyingly.

No, that's not the wind!

That is the screaming of souls!

Necromastery! This was indeed Hila's ability.

Zhang Wei's consciousness began to grow blurry, causing him to crumple to the ground. If it were not for his strong physique, he would probably have died on the spot.

Back at Division 13, Han Xiao furrowed his brows. Pushing Li Yao to take command, he barked, “She is the Germinal’s combat commander! Quickly flee!”

Zhang Wei was about to reprimand Han Xiao for snatching command when, to his surprise, he discovered that Li Ya Lin and Lambert were unhesitatingly retreating. It appeared as though they fully trusted in Han Xiao’s judgement!

‘Is the new guy that reliable?’

Suppressing his shock, Zhang Wei gritted his teeth and stood up to activate the thrusters by his legs, allowing him to jump 5 to 6 meters a leap. As he bounded after the pair, he continued to fire cover shots towards Hila to slow her down.

Hila reached the hilltop in no time, and with another wave of her hand, a gray light flashed across the entire area. The remaining field agents instantly collapsed to the ground. There was no apparent injury on their bodies, yet all of them had ceased breathing.

Han Xiao’s expression was extremely grave. He had known all along of Hila’s true strength. It was a thing of fortune that he had not needed to face her during his escape. In Galaxy, her powers were classified as having the exceedingly rare potential of S-Class, surpassing the Heavenly level.

At present, Hila’s power was still but a fraction of what she would eventually become capable of, yet even this bit was still too overwhelming.

“She’s too fast! Li Ya Lin, it’s up to you!”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Li Ya Lin turned around to face the incoming Hila. As she kicked towards her direction, a yellow burst of energy shot out that managed to push Hila back a few steps.

“Pugilist?” Hila squinted at Li Ya Lin as she clasped both hands together, conjuring an even larger ghostly face that smashed towards her.

Maintaining her composure, Li Ya Lin ducked underneath the ghostly face with a slide and managed to avoid a direct hit. As she approached Hila, she whipped out the Retractable Knife by her waist and gave a mighty cleave.

Hila’s eyes widened at the suddenness of her blow, and she did a tumble on the ground to evade.

Seizing the initiative, Li Ya Lin followed up with a series of powerful strikes with her legs: a stamp, a smash, a sweep, and a kick – the string of attacks flowing beautifully like a dancing swallow. Fast enough to create afterimages, but Li Ya Lin was certainly not just about speed. The force of her blows backed her killing intent.

Swallow Style!

On the receiving end, Hila wrapped her arms with a gray aura to strengthen them, allowing her to block each blow with them. The fact that Hila did not seem to be receiving any damage at all only went to show how far apart they were in terms of strength – Li Ya Lin specialized in close combat yet could not overwhelm her.

The exchange lasted for only a few seconds, but anything could have happened in that short span of time.

“Use the mecha arm! It’ll let you help Lambert get a chance to snipe her!”

Biting her lip, Li Ya Lin quickly inserted her left arm into the bag and pulled it out with the Lightweight Mechanical Arm equipped. With a powerful strike combining her own power with that of the mecha arm, she finally managed to break through Hila’s defenses by blowing her arms away, leaving her chest exposed.

The mecha arm followed through into her flesh!

A direct hit!

Hila’s face flashed red momentarily, and with a low harrumph brought her palms together and rubbed them slowly, and as soon as she did so, the gray aura wrapping her arms began to revolve faster and faster. Next, she threw down both arms – palms facing the ground – and, from where she stood, powerful winds began to arise, assaulting the entire surrounding!

Li Ya Lin hastily retreated backwards, but even so, her mind was still struck by the mental attack, causing her soul to feel like it was being torn apart. The pain was indescribable, and two streams of blood trickled down from Li Ya Lin’s nose as her vision seemed to turn upside-down, causing her to nearly lose her balance and fall over.

As Hila examined the familiar visage of the Lightweight Mecha Arm, she yelled in rage and shock, “How are you related to Zero?”

‘Zero? Who?’ Li Ya Lin was bewildered.

Right at this moment, Lambert saw his opportunity and fired a shot! Hila’s expression changed at the sound of the sniper rifle, and she immediately lunged sideways to dodge while enveloping her entire body with her gray aura. The large caliber sniper rifle bullet hit her on the shoulder, sending her spinning backwards in the air – as though hit by a train at full speed.

“Zhang Wei, quickly take Li Ya Lin and run!”

Zhang Wei did not take offense at being directly called by name. It was with Han Xiao’s direction that Li Ya Lin and Lambert had managed to injure the scary woman, and he now had some trust in Han Xiao’s judgement. He hurriedly lifted Li Ya Lin in his hands and turned around to leap towards Ma Qing Yang’s vehicle.

As they retreated, the remainder of the Germinal fleet arrived at the foot of the hill, and they began to open fire. Sparks flew as the bullets deflected off Zhang Wei’s armored suit, only leaving dents and marks. Zhang Wei did not even bother to take a look behind him. All that was going through his head was that the armored suit was truly his lucky charm this day. In the past, he had always had grievances over it being too heavy, but now, it was proving to be extremely reliable.

“Get in the car!” yelled an anxious Ma Qing Yang as he hurriedly slowed down for them.

The trio managed to board the vehicle, but it was a close shave. The concentrated fire was nearly enough to penetrate it.

Now that they were in the clear, Zhang Wei finally had time to assess the enemy's status: their fleet was not fast enough to catch up with them, and that powerful superhuman had not gotten up yet. As long as they made it to the aircraft, everything would be fine.

"We're safe now!"

Zhang Wei let out a sigh of relief.

Unfortunately, Han Xiao had bad news for him.

"Look out above."

Above?

Zhang Wei gave a start.

Right, they still have a helicopter!

The Black Harrier finally made its appearance and began to shoot down at their car.

"We have to take that out somehow!" assessed Zhang Wei immediately. "If not, our own aircraft will be in danger. Lambert, it's up to you and your sniper rifle!"

Lambert shook his head plainly.

"I'm all out of armor-piercing shells. Standard bullets won't do against the Black Harrier's thick armor. Even if I had some left, it would take more than 7 shots."

"Are we really going to die here?"

Despair was written all over Ma Qing Yan's face. They were only a kilometer away from their escape plan's extraction point, but it did not seem like they would make it.

Suddenly, Han Xiao spoke, "Did you forget my present?"

Li Ya Lin gave a start and hurriedly took out the four magazines. One of them was filled with rifle bullets.

"What does this do?"

"See for yourself."

Lambert quickly took the magazine from Li Ya Lin and loaded his sniper rifle.

As he readied to fire the shot, everyone watched on in anticipation.

This single bullet was their final hope.

In this critical moment, time seemed to slow down for all of them.

As soon as Lambert pulled the trigger, a brass shell flew out from the chamber, and the crimson bullet was ignited as it accelerated out of the barrel spinning. Whirling, it landed directly on the helicopter's bullet-proof glass.

Suddenly, the crimson bullet opened up like a blooming flower to expose its explosive contents to the air.

“Kaboom!”

The entire helicopter was instantly engulfed in a giant ball of flames. On closer inspection, the fire was actually burning off on the very armor itself – as though it had actually been ignited!

The helicopter began to spin out on control mid-air. The pilot – in his panic – decided to abandon ship.

On board the car, everyone was completely stunned by what they had just witnessed. Slowly, their attention turned towards the magazines that were full of the magic ammo.

Even reinforced armor was ignited!

What the hell is this ammo?

“Who got their hands on such good treasure?” asked a stupefied Ma Qing Yang.

Li Ya Lin’s eyes began to shine. “This stuff is good!”

She immediately loaded up her handgun with one of the magazines and fired a few shots. The pursuing enemy vehicles similarly went up in balls of flames, and even the missed shots were setting the ground ablaze.

As the vehicles’ armor heated up, their interiors soon turned into furnaces, and the heat was even causing the engine and other key parts to overheat, putting a halt to their pursuit.

As the gang’s car charged into the aircraft hangar, the pilot who had been anxiously observing the situation immediately took flight, and they were soon gone with the wind.

Back on the ground, Hila’s face was pale. Where she had been shot at on her shoulder was only a shallow wound. She was using her gray aura to heal it up. As she grudgingly watched the aircraft leave, she made a call to the boss and said through gritted teeth, “We’ve found Zero’s trail!”

Chapter 52: Gains

[Rescue!] completed. You have earned 8000 experience points.

+100 Reputation (Stardragon SDI)

“Bro Xiao, you’re the best!” Li Yao’s eyes glowed with admiration.

“Heh, you only just realized?” replied Han Xiao with a hint of smugness.

Zhang Wei, realizing that he had misjudged Han Xiao, apologized, “Sorry for doubting your ability before. Today, we only made it out alive thanks to your guidance and your equipment. Welcome to the team.”

A late welcome was better than none.

Han Xiao chuckled.

“No need to apologize over such trivial matters – I’m a gracious man.”

Zhang Wei felt a shiver down his spine. Han Xiao’s words sounded odd to him.

“Oh right,” continued Han Xiao, “who made your armored suit?”

“Oh, this is just a prototype of the [Combatant Powered Armor]. It was among the spoils of war during the battle with Theseus a few years back. Presently, it’s the only functional one we have. They tried to reverse engineer it, but as progress was too slow and maintenance proved troublesome as well, it was handed to me.”

The [Combatant Armored Suit]’s crafting prerequisite was the advanced weaponry talent [Large-scale Remodeling], which was also required to craft many other power suits, machine frames, and other larger combat machinery. If Theseus had only just created the prototype, then Stardragon would definitely be much further behind.

Han Xiao saw his chance.

“You can leave the maintenance to me.”

“Sure!” rejoiced Zhang Wei. He now trusted Han Xiao’s ability.

“Is this special bullet a new invention of yours?” interrupted Li Ya Lin excitedly.

Han Xiao proceeded to fully explain the use of the High-explosive Gunpowder.

Regular incendiary ammunition required a flammable target to work effectively, but the High-explosive Gunpowder contained a special chemical that could activate upon simply coming into contact with the air and ‘light up’ anything that it came into contact with. It’s temperature and power were comparable to a Molotov, but what made it scary was that this power could be harnessed within bullets! Everyone could see how this was a game-changer.

“Are you selling this?” asked Ma Qing Yang animatedly.

“Of course – 50 a bullet.”

Now that they had proved effective, it was a good time to release them.

“I want 200!” replied Ma Qing Yang immediately. “20 handgun bullets, 150 submachine gun bullets, and 30 sniper rifle bullets.”

“Okay,” answered Han Xiao. “You can collect them in a day.”

“You can start to collect orders,” he instructed Li Ya Lin privately. “Like before, I’ll give you a 20% discount.”

Li Ya Lin’s lips curled into a grin.

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News of how the mission unfolded spread like wildfire in Division 13. Naturally, the incendiary bullets became the talk of the town.

“Han Xiao’s new product?”

“I heard that that’s what saved their lives!”

The Retractable Knife incident had already garnered Han Xiao a lot of attention. Upon Ma Qing Yang’s order of the bullets becoming public knowledge, many agents came forward to inquire about them. As a way of repaying Han Xiao’s team for rescuing them, Ma Qing Yang held a live demonstration in the practice field.

Everyone was stunned by the power of the incendiary bullets, and the first thing they did after the demonstration was look for Li Ya Lin to place orders. Everything was going according to Han Xiao’s plan.

It was a revolutionary invention, and this time, the top brass knew they had to make sure that things would not end up like the previous fiasco.

They even brought the Research Director in for a warning before he even did anything.

The division offered Han Xiao numerous terms to provide both field-ops and special-ops with the new bullets, and he agreed to sell them at a slightly lower price of \$20,000 for 500 bullets.

In just the first day alone, Han Xiao’s stockpile of a few thousand bullets was sold out, earning him \$200,000. Coupled with the \$1,500,000 that he had earned from the underground network, his savings were not small.

After the class advancement, Han Xiao’s production speed was raised considerably, and he focused solely on producing the gunpowder. As a show of support, Division 13 decided to provide him with cartridges and shells, which greatly sped up the process. Each batch yielded around 300 bullets, and Han Xiao was able to produce over 10 such batches a day. Crafting a bullet gave Han Xiao 5 to 10 experience points, so he was able to earn up to 30,000 experience in just a single day.

It was probably the fastest experience growth ever by a Mechanic of his level.

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“Not selling to me?”

Korat was fuming. Initially, he had thought that a simple apology would resolve the grudge between him and Han Xiao – after all, money was money. However, Li Ya Lin actually shut the door tight on him.

“Han Xiao said that you’re on his blacklist, and he instructed me not to take either your money nor your apology.”

The other agents who had initially thought of reporting the Retractable Knife had Korat to thank for taking the initiative back then. Or else, they would be in the same predicament as him now.

When Korat offered to buy the bullets from his colleagues at a higher price, he found out that none of them were willing to. Even when he set his price at 200 a bullet, no one agreed – not even his closest colleagues.

He was clearly being ostracized, but he could not understand why – until one of his old friends told him, “Selling to you would offend Han Xiao. No one would want to risk being blacklisted by him, seeing as to how he probably will come up with more good stuff. Who would help you at their own expense?”

His words served a wake-up call to Korat. To think that it was the complete opposite back then – for money, he chose to trample over Han Xiao.

Unfortunately, it was too late for regrets now.

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Meanwhile, in a workroom, Luo Xuan opened up a box before him to reveal 20 incendiary bullets. He had gotten someone to help him acquire them.

Han Xiao had only blacklisted Korat and his team, not Luo Xuan. In Han Xiao’s eyes, Luo Xuan had simply been doing his job as part of the research department in trying to reverse engineer his blueprints. At the very least, he did not seem as vile to Han Xiao as Korat did. Now that the research department was being kept under watch, there was no need for Han Xiao to worry about them.

Moreover, Luo Xuan was also just support staff like him.

However, this inexplicably caused Luo Xuan to become resentful of Han Xiao.

“Damn you, Han Xiao! Do you look down on me so much that you ignore me?”

What he did not realize was that Han Xiao did not look down on him – instead, Han Xiao had never even seen him before.

To avoid offending Han Xiao, the research director lay down an order preventing anyone from researching Han Xiao’s bullets, but Luo Xuan naturally did not care, and he still thought of himself as superior to Han Xiao, and that he could easily reproduce the bullets – like with the Retractable Knife.

“If I succeed, the higher-ups will definitely value me even more! I cannot afford to fail!” The more Luo Xuan thought about it, the more perfect his plan seemed to himself.

Taking a deep breath to prepare himself, Luo Xuan began to work at opening the bullet up. What he needed to do was examine the properties of the incendiary agent inside.

Clank!

Luo Xuan managed to extract the bullet case.

The next step would be to open it up and extract the contents with a special suction tube to prevent friction.

Carefully, he opened the bullet case.

“Success! Now I will just have to analyze-”

Suddenly, a blazing light filled up his entire vision.

Chapter 53: Undercurrents

Ring...!

The shrill of the fire alarm rang through the hallways as the fire spread. Thick, black smoke filled up the entire research department as the research staff headed for safety.

The sprinklers quickly put a stop to the spreading fire, but many documents were ruined, and sparks were flying out of some computers and machines. The walls and ceiling were filled with black burn marks.

“What could have caused the fire?” wondered the heartbroken research director aloud as he looked at the ruins.

Security soon arrived to begin inspection.

“The fire started from the workshop!”

Luo Xuan – his entire body soaking wet, and his entire face black – was supported out by the guards. All his hair had been burnt off, including his eyebrows, and he looked just like a soy egg – or rather, a century egg.

Being able to react quickly, in addition to having a fire extinguisher nearby, saved him from further disfigurement.

He had not expected the incendiary agent to be gaseous. It combusted the very second it came into contact with the atmosphere.

Luo Xuan had clearly overestimated himself.

“I’ve lost...” he grudgingly admitted.

“What have you done?” yelled the research director.

One of the security guards opened his hand to reveal a few bullet cases. Although they were blackened, they were clearly crimson before.

“This is the bullet case of the High-explosive Gunpowder. Your man was trying to analyze it.”

The research director was instantly livid. Speechless, he could only point a finger at Luo Xuan in his rage.

‘Are my orders something to be taken lightly of?’

‘When the higher-ups investigate, this will all fall onto me again!’

‘You bastards!’

Gu Hui also arrived at the scene. His face darkened upon seeing the wreckage.

“Explain yourself.”

The research director yanked Luo Xuan before him and said through gritted teeth, “He did this all by himself!”

Gu Hui looked at Luo Xuan plainly.

“Do you have anything to say for yourself?”

Luo Xuan lowered his head. He had thought that he would succeed and earn merit, but instead, he had now ended up disobeying orders on top of causing damages to the headquarters. This was probably the end of his career.

“You will go back to logistics,” stated Gu Hui coldly before turning around to leave.

Luo Xuan shuddered. Before, he had left the logistics department on bad terms. A return did not bode well for him.

True enough, when he arrived at the logistics department, his past colleagues all ignored him when they saw him. Even the logistics director, who had had high hopes for him in the past, was unwilling to see him. He only sent a secretary to inform Luo Xuan of his new position in a small team.

If only he had not been so narrow-minded and full of himself, he would not have lost his path and ended up like this.

Although he deeply regretted his actions now, it was too late.

“I was immature...” lamented a bitter Luo Xuan.

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Han Xiao was shocked to hear of what Luo Xuan had done from Feng Jun – not even he, the creator himself, would dare to mess around and open up a completed incendiary bullet.

‘That guy’s got some balls.’

However, the matter was inconsequential to him. All along, Luo Xuan had just been a name in the back of his mind.

Soon after, Zhang Wei’s armored suit was delivered to his workroom. Upon observation, it was a truly crude prototype.

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Combatant Armored Suit (Prototype)

Type: Modular Mini-Power Suit

Grade: White

Stats: 682/1400 Durability, 35 Defense

Power Level: 86

Energy Level: 250/250

Prerequisite(s): 42 STR, 48 END

Bonus Stats: -10 DEX

Height: 1.95m

Weight: 370kg

Control Method: Manual (Full)

Energy Source: Electricity

Combat Consumption Rate: 5 energy/min

Core Power: 125/130

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Frame Module:

Spring-piston Absorber (reduces load by 65%)

Power: 20

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Right Arm Module: Large Caliber Tri-barreled Machine Gun

Damage: 105-125

Firing Rate: 5 shots/second (per barrel)

Maximum Firing Rate: 8 shots/second for 5 seconds (per barrel)

Magazine Capacity: 30 (+120 in the ammo belt)

Power Level: 75

Power: 35

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Left Arm Module: Large Caliber Tri-barreled Machine Gun

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Right Wrist Module: Knife

Damage: 12-15

Power Level: 9

Power: 5

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Leg Modules: Spring Boosters

+15 Speed

Consumes 1 energy/minute when active.

Power: 30

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Attachment: Infrared Vision

Power: N/A

Attachment: Six-tipped Shield (reduces incoming damage by 12%)

Power: N/A

–

Tooltip: This abomination is a disgrace to all armored suits in the world!

Han Xiao had to agree. It was indeed an ugly piece of work – it looked like someone had just decided to weld a few sheets of metal together.

Low power aside, it did not even run on an integrated circuit! No wonder Zhang Wei always fired volleys instead of precise shots – there was no aiming system in place! An armored suit with an integrated circuit would be able to receive and transmit crucial information to its user during a fight.

Also, the only automated part of the suit was its legs! Other than the legs, the entire suit's framework had to be operated manually, which explained why Zhang Wei had not used the shield – he wasn't able to at all!

“Come on, even though it's a prototype, at least show it some love, you assholes!”

As Han Xiao examined the suit with crossed arms, numerous ideas began to pop up. However, it was still too soon to rush upgrades. Some of the tweaks he wanted to make required knowledge that he did not currently possess. Hence, after performing just some simple maintenance, Han Xiao got Feng Jun to help him return it to Zhang Wei.

Currently, Han Xiao's primary concern was regarding the three successfully destroyed Germinal bases, and what information he should disclose to Stardragon next.

The three captured bases were indeed the only ones located within Stardragon. If Stardragon wanted to continue its assault on the Germinal Organization, they would have to take the fight to a foreign nation. While relations among the Six Nations were truly not that amicable, no one really wanted to continue fighting since a lot of resources had already been depleted during the transition to the new era. Each nation was still counting their losses.

Hence, Stardragon would have to seek the cooperation of the other nations, and that would be complicated to accomplish. Han Xiao himself would also have to be directly involved as he was the key source of information.

The question was whether the higher-ups would let Han Xiao leave the Western Capital.

Suddenly, the phone rang. It was Feng Jun, who said gravely, “Han Xiao, Germinal operatives are on the move. They seem to know that you are with us and are trying to track you down.”

“I know.”

Han Xiao had expected this. He had instructed Li Ya Lin to use the mecha arm while knowing that Hila would recognize it.

“Rest assured. There will be men keeping watch around you 24/7.”

The Western Capital was Division 13’s territory. Even if the Germinal Organization were to find out Han Xiao’s exact location, they would probably not be able to touch him – not easily, at least.

Still, as there were several superhuman assassins amongst their ranks, Han Xiao knew that he could not afford to let his guard down.

‘Looks like I should prepare some defensive measures.’

“Help me draw two Berserk Eagle handguns from the armory.”

The Berserk Eagle was a close-range, large-caliber handgun. It had an effective range of 30m, where its power was comparable to that of a sniper rifle.

It would work wonders with Han Xiao’s [Strafe].

However, Han Xiao would need more.

Over the past three days, Han Xiao had gained 100,000 experience points from crafting gunpowder. He decided to spend 40,000 to raise [Basic Refining] to Lv. 5, fulfilling the requirements for crafting the [Platinum Alloy].

“It’s time for upgrades.”

...

A few days ago, upon learning of the appearance of the mecha arm in the hands of a Stardragon agent, the boss came to the conclusion that it must have been Zero who leaked information on their three bases to Stardragon.

“Is he a psychic?”

The boss found it hard to explain how Zero could have accessed top secret information. In fact, he had not once suspected Zero. Instead, he had mistakenly assumed that there was a traitor amongst his ranks. As a result, he had even wrongly killed one commander.

His mind flashed back to a month ago, where Zero had declared his intention to destroy them.

The boss clenched his fist.

“I may have underestimated you, but you are still a nobody – I don’t believe that you possess more intel.

“Pass down my order: recruit some wanderers to investigate Zero’s trail in Stardragon. The Germinal Organization will reward those who find him!

“If found, send Rosa to finish him off.”

Rosa, like Hila, was a Germinal commander. She was an assassin.

Each commander had their own specialty, but no one knew exactly how many commanders there were – not even most Germinal agents themselves.

The boss gazed into the distance.

‘Did you think that gaining Stardragon’s protection would keep you safe?’

‘Naive!’

Chapter 54: Beta Test!

The Platinum Alloy was an alloy composed from a few rare ores. Han Xiao had to spend quite a sum of money to purchase enough of them.

After making the alloy, Han Xiao used it to craft a Retractable Knife and another Lightweight Mecha Arm. Both had above average stats – as expected – and the Retractable Knife was even of a higher grade.

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Retractable Platinum Knife

Grade: Green

Base Stats: 24-28 Damage, 355/355 Durability

Bonus Stats: +3 DEX

Length: 0.77m

Weight: 8.7kg

Additional Effects:

Retractable – This knife’s blade can be retracted.

Durable – The platinum alloy in this knife makes it less susceptible to wear and tear.

Note: This knife can even be used as a shield.

The following day, Feng Jun came over to deliver the two Berserk Eagles. The Berserk Eagle had a slight longer barrel than the average handgun, and it was much more destructive at close range. Upon testing, they proved capable of blowing a chunk out of a test dummy’s head. The recoil was also extremely powerful, but Han Xiao possessed enough strength to tame the beasts.

They would serve as his protection against assassinations alongside the Platinum Retractable Knife. Han Xiao also altered his clothes to conceal several magazines – two magazines of incendiary ammo and four

regular ones. For regular ammo, Han Xiao chose to use steel core bullets as their penetrative power suited the Berserk Eagle well.

Han Xiao brought up the information tab to check his remaining experience points. He currently had close to 200,000.

In Version 1.0 Galaxy, it was thought for a while that investing experience points into skills instead of leveling was optimal.

The reasoning for this was that, since the death cost was low around Lv. 20 to 30, it was an optimal level range to grind PVP. Unfortunately, it had all been someone's ploy.

When the system congratulatory message popped up to celebrate the first Lv. 60 player in Version 1.0, the entire server was first stunned, then outraged. It was none other than the same guy who had advocated the theory of self-capping one's level.

Han Xiao decided to spend 180,000 experience points to level up three times.

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[Novice Technician] has leveled up! +30 Energy, +1 DEX, +1 END, +1 INT, +3 unassigned stat points, + 1 talent point.

[Novice Technician] has leveled up! +30 Energy, +1 DEX, +1 END, +1 INT, +3 unassigned stat points, + 1 talent point.

[Novice Technician] has leveled up! +30 Energy, +1 DEX, +1 END, +1 INT, +3 unassigned stat points, + 1 talent point.

Besides these newly acquired stats, Han Xiao had also gained 30 Energy from regular use of the [Energy Training Technique] over the past few days, so his Energy was now Lv. 4 at a total of 280.

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Lv. 4 Energy (200):

+3 STR, +4 DEX, +5 END, +4 INT, + 150 Max Stamina, +4% Crafting Speed, +4% Machinery Power

In total, Han Xiao gained +10 STR, +10 DEX, +14 END, +8 INT, +320 Max Stamina, +10% Crafting Speed, and +10% Machinery Power from Energy bonuses, which made up nearly a third of his total stats.

Initially, Han Xiao had invested quite a number of points into STR and END in order to ensure his survival during his escape from the Germinal laboratory, but now, as he could focus solely on INT, which was all that a Technician needed, he immediately spent all 9 unassigned stat points on INT, reaching a total of 58 points.

Now Lv. 24, and also a Lv. 4 Novice Technician, Han Xiao's combat power was at 160 on a.

"At this rate I should be able to remain much stronger than the first batch of players for a while..."

Suddenly, a notification sound played.

When Han Xiao opened up the notification, he received a huge shock.

—

Beta testing has been scheduled

Retrieving Information...

Retrieval Complete

Beta Test Period: 12 Days

“Beta testing?”

“I completely forgot about that!”

Han Xiao vaguely remembered that the beta test had been a two-day event. As time was accelerated by six times in Galaxy, that translated to exactly 12 days.

The beta test period was extremely short, and only had 30,000 slots. Most of them were taken up by big corporations and gaming organizations, leaving only a fraction to be distributed through a lottery system. Han Xiao was not lucky enough to win a slot.

From his memory, the beta test was held only a week before official launch, translating to about over a month inside the game. Yet, on the system information interface the countdown still displayed 130 days!

“Could it be that the in-game clock runs differently when service is down? That must be it! Each version update takes two or three days to go live, but between updates years could have passed by in-game. It makes sense!”

Han Xiao rubbed his chin with his fingers and realized that a beard was growing. He had been in Galaxy for over half a year. He suddenly remembered a controversial version update from his past life – ‘The Chosen Ones’. This version update was unlike any other. Other updates typically came with world-changing events and incidents, but this one had completely lacked a theme. No one could make sense of the version’s title, nor its contents.

Suddenly, the interface lit up, giving Han Xiao a start.

—

NPC functions unlocked!

Discussion board unlocked!

“NPC functions? What’s this?”

As it did not come with any further information, it seemed that Han Xiao would have to figure it out on his own. In any case, it was likely to do with the ways that NPCs interacted with players, such as handing out quests, buying and selling goods, and imparting skills.

In the beta test, the 30,000 players were distributed across over a dozen planets. Han Xiao was not too concerned over this, as one or two thousand players per planet would not really have much of an impact. Official release would be when all hell broke loose.

Nonetheless, interacting with some of them would be a good opportunity to learn more about his NPC functions.

The discussion board, on the other hand, was something that Han Xiao was already familiar with. It was an internal forum that players frequented a lot – especially while waiting to revive.

“To think that we would meet again. It’s probably only unlocked now due to the time being synced up.”

The button for the discussion board was located on a corner of the interface. Upon opening it up, Han Xiao was greeted by an empty forum. The account name on the top right of the window indicated ‘Guest’, and the registration button was grayed out.

Han Xiao clicked it out of curiosity.

–

Attempting to Connect to the Dive-capsule...

No Player Detected

Registration Failed

It took a few moments for Han Xiao to understand why – accounts for the discussion board could only be created with the unique ID of the user’s dive-capsule. This rule was implemented as a measure against trolls.

“Well, I can’t create a forum account, but at least I can access the forum for reading!”

There were a million questions on Han Xiao’s mind regarding the state of his existence. Perhaps, this forum would be able to give him the answers if he watched out for his own username.

“Interacting with the beta testers will be a good start.”

...

Character Name: Frenzied Sword

Regular Settings Selected

Character Creation Complete

Race: Human (Yellow)

Based on your preferences, you have been matched to Planet Aquamarine

Starting Zone: Big Horn Village (24.152, 182.644)

Spawning... Please wait...

Chapter 55: Our First Day Together

Big Horn Village was one of several starting zones on Plant Aquamarine.

As Frenzied Sword's consciousness slowly adjusted, he found himself standing atop a loess field. The warmth of the sun felt just like it was real and so too did the earthly smell of the soil. When he looked down to see his two arms, he was shocked by how realistic they looked and felt.

It was a small field, and Frenzied Sword noticed that there were hundreds of other players around him; they, too, were curiously examining their 'bodies'. Each player's name was displayed on the top of his head.

Following the mini-guide shown during character creation, Frenzied Sword opened up the character information window. It displayed that he was Lv. 1 and also showed the default starting equipment that he was equipped with: a shirt, a pair of pants, and a pair of shoes. They did not come with any stat bonuses.

"Damn it, I can't strip!"

A fellow player nearby was causing a commotion. He appeared to be trying to remove his pants unsuccessfully.

'What the hell are you even trying to do that for?'

The alarmed Frenzied Sword decided that moving away would be a good idea.

Frenzied Sword was a professional gamer, albeit not so well known. Aspiring professional gamer would be more accurate. He had only recently joined the scene, so he was, by all counts, a newcomer. He had been keeping a close eye on Galaxy ever since learning of its promising e-sports prospects, so when the beta test was announced, he immediately asked his association for a slot.

As the saying goes, the early bird gets the worm. Frenzied Sword was determined to succeed in this new game.

Conversation broke out amongst the crowd.

"This is so realistic!"

"What should we do now?"

"Any hints?"

Suddenly, a white-bearded, fearsome looking white elderly man appeared before the crowd and bellowed, "All of you outsiders! If you want to eat, then find yourself a job! Loafers are not welcome in our village! The crops in our farms need picking, and the shops to the south need workers! As long as you work hard, you will have food to eat!"

Beside the players' health bars were two other bars for hunger and thirst. Upon reaching 0, the player would gain a [Hungry] or [Thirsty] debuff that would cause their health to drop.

Frenzied Sword 'examined' the old man.

–

Based on your level, you acquired the following information:

Xander – Big Horn Mountain Village Chief

Level: ?

Stats: ?

[I am your village chief now.]

Danger Level: Middle

Players had an 'examine' function that allowed them to learn an NPC's name and information. However, the amount of information obtained differed based on their level difference.

"The weapons store sells guns, bullets, and other weapons, the marketplace is where people sell food and water, and the amphitheater is where you will find mounts to rent. If you wish to leave, there is a train station several kilometers north of here. If you wish to learn a craft, the blacksmith's or the tailor's are good choices..."

Xander's explanation filled in the new players on their situation. There were only a few sub-classes and one combat class – [Novice Hunter] – available in this village, and they cost money to learn.

Frenzied Sword opened up the map to find it mostly shrouded in fog. Before he explored the planet, he would have to first earn money.

"Is it possible to take on hunting quests straight away?"

Frenzied Sword recognized the man, SliceYouUp, as the guild leader of the guild 'Kill-all'. His IGN was telling of his personality.

Upon hearing his question, Xander burst out into laughter.

"You weaklings think that you stand a chance against wild beasts? See those mountains over there? If you are not afraid to die then by all means try, but it looks to me like none of you are even strong enough to even take on a Silver Hyena."

The players looked towards where the old man pointed to see a range of forested mountains in the distance. Some of the mountains stood so tall that the clouds seemed to encircle them like huge, coiling pythons, creating an extremely scenic view that stole the breaths of the players. The graphics were incredibly life-like. Galaxy was clearly ahead of the competition.

Refusing to believe the old man, SliceYouUp took his party to purchase some basic equipment with the starting money of \$100 and headed for the mountains.

It did not take long for them to return.

SliceYouUp, in particular, was shaken up quite badly. The first beast that he had encountered was a gorilla larger than an adult man. As soon as he raised his dagger, the gorilla threw its excrement at him, the force of which blew up his head. And it only got better. He respawned in the middle of a stampede.

'Why the hell would that freaking monkey know how to throw its excrement? Must everything be so realistic?'

For some reason, the foul smell still lingered around even after respawning. The developers were definitely trolling when they decided to add in this smell.

"WTF, aren't those monsters too strong?"

"They didn't even stand a chance!"

"He only managed to do 1 damage!!"

"Damn it, I dropped the knife I just bought!"

The amount of experience lost upon death depended on the character level. The respawn time also increased with each death. For the first death, respawning only took 10 seconds, but it would take a minute for the second, five for the third, and half an hour for the fourth, increasing up to a whopping six days.

Death was very costly in the Galaxy. Each character could also only die up to 10 times every day (6 days in-game). Reaching this limit would result in a character lock until the next day. It was an anti-addiction system that proved to be more effective than the 'exhaustion system' of certain mobile games.

The Kill-all party's sad state immediately deterred the other players from thinking of hunting monsters. They quickly dispersed to find work to do.

As Xander watched over the buzz, he stroked his beard with a smile.

"The reward is so low! I only got \$50!"

"Leveling is so slow! It took me half an hour of quests just to earn enough experience to level up!"

"Everything feels so real!"

"I hit myself to test, and blood actually came out! Amazing!"

"Something is wrong with you dude."

The start was not as easy as the players had expected; everyone was at least put on a level playing field. Furthermore, there was an extremely high degree of freedom for them to choose what they wanted to do. As the players went about their quests, many started to find themselves enjoying the game. Quests were tiring yet felt so fulfilling.

'Today is a blessed day!'

...

“Are you a pro gamer, too?”

Frenzied Sword recognized the trio walking towards him. They were also famous pros: Twinkle Fried Rice, a genius lauded for his mechanical skills, Sleepy Winter, a super veteran of e-sports, and Rainy Kim, a female idol gamer with tens of millions of fans.

In the face of these big gods of the gaming world, Frenzied Sword felt as though he had shrunk a few feet.

“Is something the matter?”

Sleepy Winter laughed, replying, “I was wondering – did you notice that the map sold in this town costs \$3000?”

Chapter 56: Encounter

There were three groups of beta testers. The first group were casual gamers who won their spots from the lottery system, while the second group were professional gamers or prolific personalities for whom a certain number of spots were reserved for. As for the third group of beta testers, they bought their accounts from resellers.

The casual gamer would only be interested in checking out the game, but the latter two shared the same reason for playing the beta: to get a head start.

“This beta test will only last for twelve days in terms of game time. It’s quite obvious that doing the beginner quests here is a waste of time, but you should have noticed that we are not forced to do them at all. What we should do is to take advantage of our head start and start exploring this world! We can be the first to discover all of this planet’s secrets and treasures.”

Frenzied Sword nodded slowly.

As time was indeed limited, to dawdle around in a beginner zone did seem like a waste of precious time. Questing here would certainly give them a level advantage over the newer players, but that would be all.

In contrast, exploring seemed like a more promising – and definitely more fun – option!

“But why would you tell me all this?” he asked.

Sleepy Winter laughed.

“Those big guilds will definitely realize this soon enough. The problem is that they have the advantage in numbers, so they will easily be able to buy the map. What do you say to joining our party? It will definitely make things easier.”

Frenzied Sword accepted the invitation without hesitation.

“How are we splitting the cost?” asked Twinkle Fried Rice.

“Since I suggested it, I’ll contribute more,” replied Sleepy Winter.

“I don’t like to owe people, so I’ll contribute a thousand,” added Rainy Kim coldly. “My part’s settled.”

She immediately turned around and left to earn money from quests.

Sleepy Winter rubbed his nose bitterly.

‘We’ve known each other for a few years already, why won’t you give me a chance...’

...

With the money they earned from questing, the four of them were able to procure the map the following day. Obtaining it cleared some of the fog on their maps, and it also provided basic information on the planet’s current situation. They learnt of the Six Nations, the Germinal Organization, and the Revolutionary Army, amongst other factions.

“According to this, the two biggest powers are the Six Nations and the Germinal Organization. The Six Nations seem to have quite a number of training schools and academies. It’ll probably be easier to learn a main class there. Let’s see... seems like Stardragon isn’t a bad choice.”

Big Horn Mountain was situated in Stardragon, and the public train station was not too far away.

Sleepy Winter nodded.

“We don’t have much time. It’ll take about 3 days for us to reach the capital.”

Frenzied Sword groaned inwardly. He was starting to regret having joined the party. However, he knew that it was too late for him to chicken out.

...

The journey could not be skipped, so the party had to sit through the entire 3 days. There were some quests available on the train, but overall, it was not a pleasant trip at all. They did, however, have the forums to stifle their boredom. On the forums, players were posting about their experiences on the different starting zones.

It provided them with much amusement – except for Frenzied Sword, who could not stop worrying about the passing time.

After three days, the train arrived at the Western Capital.

Upon arriving at the great metal fences, each of them received a system message, alerting them of a new explored location.

“So, discovering places gives experience too, huh?”

“This is amazing,” gasped Twinkle Fried Rice as he looked around.

Everything was extremely realistic – down to the way that people were casting him strange looks.

The group proceeded to the security checkpoint where they were scanned for weapons.

After passing the check, the guard gave them each a temporary ID card, and they received a system message notifying them that they had unlocked reputation with Stardragon.

—

Stardragon

Reputation: 0

Current Relationship: Neutral (Temporary Citizen)

“Shall we continue as a group or go our own ways?” asked Sleepy Winter.

“I’ll follow you,” replied Twinkle Fried Rice immediately with a grin. The two of them were from the same gaming club.

Rainy Kim also decided to join them as some company was better than none.

“No bullying me,” she said flatly.

Sleepy Winter laughed. Unintentional or not, this girl said the cutest things. They exchanged a few more lines before Sleepy Winter finally turned to Frenzied Sword and asked, “What about you?”

Frenzied Sword was furious at being so blatantly overlooked, but he understood that there was no point in forcing himself to tag along.

“No- no need.” He waved his hand and stammered, “I prefer playing alone.”

“Alright then, good luck!”

As Frenzied Sword watched the trio of gods depart, he mumbled to himself, “Sooner or later, I’ll become popular too!”

The Western Capital was obviously a first-class city. Here, there would definitely be plenty of opportunities for him to surpass them and become number one!

Renewed with ambition, Frenzied Sword began to head off in another direction.

Suddenly, he noticed a masked man watching him.

Something about the way the man was looking at him seemed odd. As Frenzied Sword felt a chill run down his spine, he instinctively used the examine function.

—

Name: Han Xiao (?)

Level: ?

Stats: ?

??

Danger Level: Fatal

Chapter 57: Quest Reward Settings

“Fatal danger?”

Frenzied Sword gulped. Even the armored security guard just now only had a ‘high’ danger level. This was his most dangerous encounter yet. Who exactly was this guy whose information was full of question marks?

“Shouldn’t it be safe in the city? Will today be the first time that I die?”

Suddenly, the man spoke.

“Examining someone you just met? That’s not very polite.”

Frenzied Sword gave a start.

According to the official information, an NPC would know if it had been examined if it was over 30 levels higher than the player using the function.

Han Xiao chuckled to himself. He had simply predicted Frenzied Sword’s course of action.

After learning of the beta test, Han Xiao had taken note of all the nearby starting zones on his map. The closest one was none other than Big Horn Mountain Village. It was only three days away, but Han Xiao did not want to leave the Western Capital as Germinal was actively looking for him.

While keeping track of the influx of posts on the forums, Han Xiao came across a thread created by a player called Sleepy Winter. It was a post about the benefits of exploration.

Han Xiao knew who Sleepy Winter was – a legendary pro gamer who was quite active in public forums. He liked to discuss strategies and create guides. He was a good man, handsome (beside the point), and naturally had a huge fan base. In the Chinese server, he had ranked consistently amongst the top 30. Han Xiao himself had only ever peaked at 47th, and during a period of time, he even fell out of the top 100. That lesson that he had learnt then was to stay away from girls (if you want to succeed).

Once, he had shared his thoughts regarding this with the 28-year-old owner of the convenience store below his apartment building who he was on friendly terms with. The bachelor had laughed him off.

“Cool story bro,” he said, “but I’d rather have a girl.”

To which Han Xiao had replied, “But which girl would have you?”

That was the day that Han Xiao lost his special discount at that store.

The rankings were not based purely on combat. In Galaxy, there were all kinds of competitions apart from fighting – from treasure hunts to monster killing, and even races! As Han Xiao had taken on a number of revenge assignments from other players, his combat ability was quite polished. Unfortunately, he had lacked in other areas – such as trash talking. He never forgot to practice it though.

After reading the thread, Han Xiao had guessed that there would probably be a few players who would make it to the Western Capital. As such, over the past few days, he had spent some time keeping an eye out for any at the city entrance. He was able to spot the party of four easily as their names were – to Han Xiao’s surprise – clearly displayed over their heads. Furthermore, three of their names were those of famous people.

Han Xiao was not sure if the reason he could see their names was that he, too, had an interface.

Nevertheless, it was a good thing. Just like how players could see the names of NPCs, Han Xiao could recognize them on sight.

The reason that he had decided to make direct contact with a player was to test out his NPC functions.

“Brave adventurer, do you have time to help me?”

A standard line for a quest-giver.

Frenzied Sword’s eyes widened.

‘To think that I’d get the chance to interact with a high-level NPC this soon! This place is the best!’

He replied, as calmly as he could, “I am willing to help.”

“I need a loaf of bread. Can you find one?”

A confirmation window popped up as soon as Han Xiao asked the question.

—

Do you wish to issue a quest to Frenzied Sword?

Y/N

‘It really works!

‘Hold on, why are there automated prompts for an NPC function? Maybe I can automate my own actions too?’

Han Xiao narrowed his eyes. Now was not the time to worry about those questions.

“Yes.”

A window appeared, along with some messages.

—

Please set the requirements and rewards for the mission. The amount of experience that you can hand out is limited based on your level, rank, influence, and myth.

Note: You can choose to give objects that you possess ownership of as rewards: money, items, experience, skills, etc.

The window was split into two sections. On the left side was a drop-down menu that allowed Han Xiao to select the quest type. There were a ton of quest types to choose from.

On the right side was for inputting the rewards. There were two lines: "Maximum Reward", and "Daily Reward Limit".

The Maximum Reward was currently set to 11,600 experience points. It also seemed to be provided by the system, meaning that Han Xiao would not have need to fork any out of his own pocket.

Daily Reward Limit referred to the amount of experience reward that Han Xiao could issue out in a day. Currently, it was fixed at five times the Maximum Reward (5 x 11600 = 58,000).

–

Maximum Reward: 11600 exp

Level: 24 (7200 exp)

Rank: E (300 exp)

Faction(s):

Germinal – Hated (1000 exp)

Division 13 – Neutral (400 exp)

Myth Level: 0

As Han Xiao tested the settings out, he discovered a limitation – if the current Maximum Reward did not meet the minimum amount required for a quest, he would not be able to issue it – a Rank A quest such as destroying the Germinal Organization would require a Rank A reward.

Han Xiao's maximum reward of 11,600 meant that he could only issue E-rank quests. D-rank quests required a reward of at least 30,000 exp. The reward criteria also seemed to differ among the different quest types. No further messages popped up to explain this, so it seemed like Han Xiao would have to figure it out on his own through trial and error.

Han Xiao tried to issue himself a quest, but it failed.

"If only I could have some of that sweet experience..."

Although he now had the ability to hand out experience like water, he himself was only earning about 20,000 to 30,000 exp a day. Of course, there was no way that he would help someone else.

"Seems like I could use this to my advantage though..." Han Xiao's eyes began to twinkle. It was possible to use this function to manipulate players into doing his bidding. After all, players would do any quest if the reward was high enough.

Han Xiao suddenly had an epiphany. "I have to increase my maximum reward!"

In most games, it was the key, high-level NPCs who gave the hardest missions and the highest rewards. The quest function's system made perfect sense.

Han Xiao issued a regular mission to Frenzied Sword.

Frenzied Sword stared at the mission window with his mouth agape.

'What kind of high level NPC would ask for a loaf of bread and reward only \$1?'

"Hold on... he could just be testing me!"

Frenzied Sword recalled that in some of the games he had played before, there were indeed quests like this.

The more he thought about it, the more likely it seemed to him, so Frenzied Sword whipped out all seven of the bread loaves he had in his possession and put them into Han Xiao's hands.

"This is all the bread I have," he added sincerely.

Han Xiao was stunned.

'What's going on? Are gamers these days so excessive with doing quests?'

Nonetheless, a completion dialogue popped up when Han Xiao received the bread.

There were too many quest types to test out, so Han Xiao decided to try out the other NPC functions.

There was an icon in the shape of a person beside Frenzied Sword's name above his head. When Han Xiao focused on it, an RPG-style meter bar popped out. The bar was half red, half green, and with a needle at the center.

[Do you want to adjust Favorability with Frenzied Sword?]

"I can even do this?" Han Xiao was a bit scared to try. What if changing this also adjusted his thoughts?

"If I set favorability to maximum, will I... turn gay on the spot?"

"No no no no no – I can't risk that."

Han Xiao decided to test it by moving the needle slightly left to reduce favorability by five. He heaved a sigh of relief when nothing else seemed to change.

"This function isn't very useful..."

—

Your favorability with Han Xiao has dropped by 5.

Current status: Stranger

'What the-? Why would my favorability go down after quest completion?'

'What the hell?'

Chapter 58: Greatest Scam Ever

As Han Xiao was wondering if he could perform transactions with players, he began to laugh shadily.

“Hey kid, not bad. I only sell my goods to people I like, and I like you.”

Frenzied Sword’s jaw dropped.

‘My favorability dropped, but he still says that he likes me?’

—

Do you want to open up a shop to Frenzied Sword?

Y/N

‘Confirm.’

A shop window immediately popped up. The window was divided into two sections. The left section was titled ‘Item Shop’, and there was a system hint saying that it was possible for Han Xiao to put up items on display even if they were not currently on his person. The right section was titled ‘Skill Shop’, where Han Xiao could put his own skills up for sale. Han Xiao fiddled around with the settings.

—

Please set a price. You may select money, experience, or items.

You may also set buying requirements such as favorability, level, skills, class, etc.

So far, Han Xiao had been dealing in Aquamarine’s international currency—the Aquamarine Dollar. The ‘Inar’ was the standard universal currency. Han Xiao discovered to his surprise that the shop function allowed him to set the item price in any currency that he had ever come into contact with.

An idea suddenly came to Han Xiao. ‘I can set favorability requirements to manipulate—I mean—attract players to keep coming back for quests!’

Han Xiao was reminded of how he had spent long hours grinding out high difficulty quests just to achieve exalted status with the Alliance of Light—all for the sake of a battleship.

Now, however, the tables had turned.

‘This interface is the best!’

A shop interface popped up in front of Frenzied Sword. As he scanned through the items, his eyes began to widen in disbelief.

“Godly equips!” he blurted.

“[Retractable Knife], [Incendiary Bullets], [73-Wasp], [Jackson Assault Rifle], [Bayonet Rifle]...”

Frenzied Sword was shaking uncontrollably. To him, all of these were 'godly equips' that would allow him to surpass any other player!

However, his expression changed when he looked at their price tags. It was as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water over him.

Even the cheapest of them, the [Incendiary Bullets], cost a hundred dollars each, while the [Lightweight Mecha Arm] required 10 favorability!

'This is daylight robbery! And how am I supposed to gain favorability with this NPC when completing his quests reduces it instead?

'No wonder this NPC's danger level is so high. It's definitely still too early to interact with him.'

But Frenzied Sword only knew true pain when he took a look at the Skill Shop.

[Basic Combat], [Basic Shooting], [Submission]... the sight of these skills caused Frenzied Sword to start drooling... until he saw their prices.

There was also a [Mechanic Class Change Tome], and an array of Mechanic skills, but none of them were as eye-catching as the [Energy Training Technique]!

"Godly skill!"

Han Xiao shook his head upon seeing Frenzied Sword's reaction.

"You aren't a Technician, so you are unable to learn it."

By now, Han Xiao had already been solidified as a Secret NPC in Frenzied Sword's mind.

'If I can make him my teacher, I will definitely become rank 1 in no time!

'But... I really wanted to be a Pugilist...'

That much was obvious from his in-game name.

'Damn it! This had better be worth it!'

—

Are you sure you want to become a Mechanic?

Y/N

"Yes!"

...

—

[Basic Weaponry] learnt. You have gained 500 exp, \$100.

Buying a skill was like paying for lessons, and Han Xiao's skill level would remain unchanged.

Of course, the skills that Han Xiao had chosen to put on display were the more common and easily obtainable ones—not that any player would know at this point.

...

Frenzied Sword's reaction to [Energy Training Technique] confirmed this. He obviously did not know that the skill was automatically given to all characters after the first advancement at Lv. 20.

It wasn't that Han Xiao was trying to scam him, though. On the contrary, he had purposely set its cost at a whopping 10,000 exp and \$3,000 just to make the shop look 'nicer'. He had also placed a requirement of 10 favorability on it.

"Oh right!" Han Xiao quickly reverted Frenzied Sword's favorability back to 0, which caused him to immediately have the wrong idea.

'I must buy more things from him in order to increase favorability!'

Suddenly, the NPC began to walk away.

"Where can I find you?" yelled a flustered Frenzied Sword after him.

Han Xiao thought for a moment before handing him a piece of paper with the workshop's address on it.

As Frenzied Sword watched him leave, he began to grow excited.

'This is my chance!

'With those skills and equips, I will definitely be able to climb to the top!'

Suddenly, his expression froze.

'I cannot let anyone find this Secret NPC!'

...

To a city as big as the Western Capital, a few beta testers were truly insignificant. For now, Han Xiao did not have any interest in them. The only reason he had come into contact with one was to test the NPC functions, and they certainly did not disappoint. Han Xiao was already thinking up ways to use them for scamming players.

'Frenzied Sword...'

As Han Xiao thought back to the player from before, scenes from another lifetime began to play out in his mind.

In his previous life, Frenzied Sword had been part of the first batch of professional 'Galaxy' players. As a Pugilist, he had taken the first competitive season by storm and won one of twenty-four spots to represent China internationally. This honor alone had cemented his status as a legend.

Unfortunately, this future Pugilist legend was now a Mechanic.

Han Xiao did not know exactly how Frenzied Sword's fortunes would play out in this timeline, but he did know one thing for sure: there would be no Frenzied Sword representing China in the near future.

The only reason Han Xiao dared to choose the Mechanic class was that he knew it would eventually become the strongest class. However, this was something that no other player could know. In fact, the class seemed so bad from the start that in Han Xiao's past life, numerous gamers, including pros, who chose the Mechanic class would give up their characters and restart in another class.

'I feel like I scammed him big time or something...'

Han Xiao shook his head.

'Scam? Nah. He made the decision himself. On the contrary, if he can endure a few patches then he'll have me to thank... yeah...'

Chapter 59: B-Class Mission Triggered?

From enlisting in the Stardragon Army to joining underworld societies, there was no lack of work opportunities for players in the Western Capital. Even just by walking on the streets and interacting with NPCs, there were plenty of quests waiting to be triggered. From the money that they earned from these common quests such as "Find the Missing Purse", "Rescue the Cat Stuck on the Tree", and other collection missions, it became clear to Sleepy Winter that exploring had been the right thing to do.

Of course, as the Western Capital was a high-level zone, there were many places that the trio found inaccessible at their current level. Rainy Kim had been rejected at the gates of the Western Capital Academy while Twinkle Fried Rice had been held at gunpoint when he'd tried to enter District 1, almost giving away his first death.

The day after, the trio enlisted in the Stardragon Army, thereby gaining their first combat class: [Recruit]. After a couple of training quests, their Faction changed from [Stardragon] to [Stardragon Army], and they earned the rank of [Private].

Out of goodwill, Sleepy Winter messaged Frenzied Sword to let him know about being able to join the army, but Frenzied Sword only replied briefly in acknowledgement. For some reason, he seemed uninterested.

What Sleepy Winter did not know was that Frenzied Sword was preoccupied with trying to win Han Xiao's favor.

In order to test out the limitations of the quest function, Han Xiao entertained Frenzied Sword and issued him with all sorts of strange quests, such as [Kick Ten People in the Ass], [Strip a Patrolling Officer of His Shorts], [Remain in a Ballerina Pose for Five Minutes], and many more.

From these tests, Han Xiao learned that as long as the maximum reward was able to match the quest's difficulty, he would be able to choose any type of quest scenario that he wanted.

Meanwhile, things were a bit different on the receiving end. Frenzied Sword, who found himself only being assigned crude and twisted quests, gradually began to develop a sense of fear toward Han Xiao.

Nonetheless, he religiously completed all of the quests as the experience that Han Xiao rewarded him with was several times more than the standard reward. That alone was enough for him to ignore his own morals.

The quests allowed him to level up rapidly, and he used the earnings themselves to learn more basic skills from Han Xiao.

The beta test might have been unexpected for Han Xiao, but overall, it did not do much to disrupt his plans. The beta players were simply too scattered and few in number to have much influence on their respective starting planets. Twelve days was not enough time for them to level up significantly.

It would take longer for a breeze to develop into a storm.

In the long haul, however, the influx of players would be like a gold mine to Han Xiao.

Helping to strengthen Frenzied Sword was only the first step. Soon, his progress would definitely catch the attention of the other players and his own association. His association would certainly capitalize on it and release information on this 'secret NPC' in order to gain popularity. That was when the money and experience would start pouring in for Han Xiao. Frenzied Sword might have thought he was hogging Han Xiao to himself, but he was actually dancing in the palm of his hand.

...

[Official Launch Countdown: 126 Days 11 Hours 32 Minutes]

Aside from crafting [Incendiary Bullets], Han Xiao spent most of his free time browsing the forums.

Although it was usually buzzing with discussion and players would frequent it while their characters were dead or had set up shop, there were only beta players posting now.

"The women on Aquamarine are so beautiful!"

"Urgently looking for party members to fight the Sand Bandits. Location: Fallen Dragon Valley, Planet Longtune. Coordinates are..."

"A shot of Planet Brighton's magical floating city."

"I somehow transformed myself into some tentacled monster. How do I change back?"

"Damn it, teach me how!"

...

Most of the threads were posted to request help or share information. Some parties also used the forums as a means to record and share their progress.

There were over a dozen beginner planets of various civilizations available in the beta—magical civilizations, scientific civilizations, and religious civilizations, to name a few. The societal structure of each planet also varied.

The most popular planet seemed to be Planet Winterfrost, which was ruled by the void demon race. The planet also served as an outpost for the Destruction Army, whose aim was to 'destroy all civilizations'. In Han Xiao's past life, they were an enemy who had given him quite a headache.

As Han Xiao refreshed the forum page, a new thread caught his attention.

"First B-class quest!"

Han Xiao narrowed his eyes. He recalled that the first B-class mission had only appeared after the official launch. How could someone have unlocked such a high class mission during the beta test?

Curious, he entered the thread to see that it was already erupting with discussion.

"Who are you trying to fool? I haven't even seen a D-class quest yet."

"Are you dumb? He posted pictures as proof!"

"They must be fake! Why is there only a quest name but no quest information?"

"Nice try, clown. Who would want to share their quest information with you."

"It must be super hard. I'm still at the beginner zone. Does anyone know how to get out?"

"The poster is the official account of the Throne of Gods guild. They're legit. It should be true."

"Does anyone know which planet this is?"

"All of you are noobs."

"Sorry, my dog ran over my keyboard."

...

Han Xiao chuckled. In his nostalgia, he continued reading through all the banter before finally checking out the contents of the original post. There was only a cropped screenshot of a quest name.

—

B-class Quest: [Investigate Zero]

Han Xiao scrolled up to check the poster's name.

'Throne of Gods?'

The Throne of Gods was a prestigious guild that boasted a line-up of renowned gamers. They were so big that they even had their own line of goods.

In his previous life, Han Xiao had once taken up an assignment to strip their leader and take pictures of him in various embarrassing poses. He had then posted them on the forums with the title: "Shocking! Why would the leader of the Throne of Gods..." and charged a fee for viewing. While Han Xiao had earned his money, he had also ended up being chased around by the entire guild for an entire month.

'Ah, I miss player killing...' Han Xiao sighed as he turned around to look at Frenzied Sword, causing him to freeze up.

Han Xiao shook his head.

If things went as they had previously, the Throne of Gods would join the Germinal faction to become the biggest player guild on their side. It was already looking likely.

Germinal must be hellbent on getting him this time, for even beta players to be able to acquire the mission to look for him.

For the average player, it would be impossible to evade the notice of Division 13 while trying to locate Han Xiao by themselves. Normally, it would take a large amount of people to even have a chance of succeeding. However, the Throne of Gods did not seem to lack manpower.

As he considered the situation, Han Xiao finally decided on which Germinal base to act upon next.

...

The Throne of Gods guild had 15 players in the beta test. It was a team of core members led by both the leader and the vice-leader. Before the beta test started, they had already decided to list science as a preference.

Their reasoning was simple—since the world of Galaxy had a 'galactic' setting, science would definitely be a core driving force of the game. As such, they were all able to start together on Aquamarine and had also quickly purchased a map to begin exploring.

The leader, Jupiter, was the one who decided to join the Germinal Organization. Their starting zone had also been close to a Germinal base.

Jupiter thought that the Germinal Organization was probably the strongest faction on the planet as they able to stand strong against all of the nations on their own. Choosing them had nothing to do with favoring their ideology or anything like that. After all, their only priority was to get stronger.

And reality did not betray their expectations. After joining Germinal, they were brought to the Dark Crow Valley Base where they underwent tough training to become low level grunts.

The biggest gain that they received there, however, was none other than the B-class quest, [Investigate Zero].

The only information provided by the quest was that the target, Zero, was currently residing within Stardragon.

At present, the 15 members were having a top-secret meeting to discuss how they would complete the quest.

"This is our first B-class quest," said Jupiter in a low voice. "As there doesn't seem to be fighting involved, with our level, we have a good chance of succeeding. The rewards are extremely good. With them, we will definitely be able to become the number one guild!"

“All we know is that Zero is in the country, but Stardragon is just too big,” added Poseidon, a core member of the guild. “The beta test period is too short, so I think that we should only aim to complete the quest after official launch. Now, we should just do some preliminary investigation.”

Everyone nodded in agreement.

“The quest information only tells us that Zero is an enemy of the Germinal Organization. If we manage to kill him, will there be a bonus reward?”

“Nice thinking, as expected of our leader.”

“But that would most likely be A-class difficulty,” pointed out Poseidon.

“There’s no impossible quest in a game. We just have to find the way,” answered Jupiter matter-of-factly. “The official launch is one week after the end of this beta test. During this period of time, we will also have to discuss the matter with the rest of the guild.”

“In any case,” added Shiva, the vice-leader, “with the backing of our gaming organization, we are the ones with the highest chance of completing this quest.”

“That is true,” agreed Jupiter.

“It would be faster if we made use of the other players,” suggested Poseidon.

Jupiter’s eyes lit up.

“Good idea. Let’s release Zero’s face and put up a reward for any valuable leads.”

Rich guilds had their way of doing things.

Chapter 60: Sudden Assassination!

‘The Throne of Gods sure has deep pockets! If only I could find Zero...’

The reward on Zero’s wanted poster was extremely alluring, but Frenzied Sword knew that as he was operating alone, it would be like trying to search for a needle in a haystack.

While it might have been a pity, it did not bother him too much. Frenzied Sword’s eyes filled up with fire as he took another look at Han Xiao.

‘As long as I latch onto this guy, I will level up faster than anyone!’

Initially, performing all the strange quests that Han Xiao gave him did give him a sense of aversion. However, he gradually discovered that they were not that bad after all—at the very least, they were interesting to do. Compared to hunting monsters, running around to carry out these ‘errands’ was much simpler. Of course, this came at the expense of his morality.

One day, he realized that his mind was becoming more open, and he had an epiphany: ‘shame is but an obstacle to human evolution!’

‘Me, a pervert? No no no, I have simply transcended! I have found the way!’

“Does that guy like you or something?” asked a bemused Lu Qian as she pointed at Frenzied Sword. He was staring at Han Xiao dreamily from the entrance of the workshop.

“...”

“He seems pretty sincere. Why don’t you give him a chance?” she teased, giggling.

It was the first time that she had spoken normally to Han Xiao since the misunderstanding.

Han Xiao rolled his eyes and reached out to tickle her, causing her to yell out and dodge, startled. Hugging her sides with crossed arms, Lu Qian watched Han Xiao closely with puppy eyes in anticipation of his next attack.

Her grandfather’s attempts at playing matchmaker had initially caused her much headache. However, she soon discovered that there was no cause for concern as Han Xiao was not particularly interested in her. To be more specific, he did not even seem to be interested in women at all! Although this eased her worries, it also raised other concerns.

A woman’s heart is unfathomable. Pay her attention and she might become wary of you, but neglecting her won’t do either.

Unfortunately, one’s looks also play an important factor. If you are good looking enough, you won’t have to worry about it.

Lu Qian’s casual attire was revealing a tantalizing view of her front, but it did nothing to stir Han Xiao’s heart. Having been working for up to 15 hours almost every day recently, crafting had become the only thing that he could think about.

Sometimes, he even found himself designing guns and weapons in his dreams! And the scary part was that once, when he woke up, he realized that the designs were all practical! This served as a wake-up call to Han Xiao, and he would think back to fond times with Mei Mei, Mei Mei, Mei Mei, and a dozen or so more ex-girlfriends to regain his senses. (These names all sound the same, but they are different characters in Chinese)

A man may die, but he must go down with his bird.

Han Xiao ignored Frenzied Sword. By his calculations, the beta test would end in a day. The only reason Han Xiao had chosen to make contact with a player was to test the NPC functions.

Suddenly, the interface lit up.

—

You have triggered the sudden quest: [Assassination]!

Quest Hint: The assassin is closing in!

Completion Requirement: Survive the encounter.

Quest Reward: Unknown

Han Xiao's face stiffened.

The attack could happen at any moment!

"Damn it! Old Lu is not home now!"

For the quest to have triggered despite Feng Jun and his men keeping watch in the neighborhood meant that the enemy definitely had some kind of special ability to invade without getting detected! There was a high chance that it was a superhuman!

Han Xiao immediately dashed into his room to retrieve his equipment. It was vital to avoid dragging Old Lu and Lu Qian into the mix as it could jeopardize his plans to unlock the hidden scenario that he had come here for all along.

Facing his attacker head-on was also more of his style.

Frenzied Sword chased after Han Xiao.

As they ran, Han Xiao began to feel like someone was watching him.

The temperature of the air suddenly began to drop, causing Frenzied Sword to rub his arms in fear. Even he could feel the murderous intent in the air.

As they walked down an alley, Han Xiao's sense of danger began to escalate from a tingle into an alarm.

Darkness was already creeping upon the unknowing pair. Before they realized it, they were transported into a world devoid of sight and sound. Strangely, however, this pitch-black darkness made Han Xiao feel extremely safe and comfortable, as though he were back in his mother's womb. All that remained was an overwhelming allure to fall into eternal slumber.

An illusion!

Han Xiao forced his eyes open.

—

You are under the attack of an illusion. As your INT is higher than 50, you are able to resist its effects.

The darkness around Han Xiao began to shatter as the effects of the illusion faded.

As Han Xiao regained his senses, he discovered that there was a man standing five meters away with a gun pointed directly at him. The assassin was wearing a victorious smirk.

Click.

He pulled the trigger.

Han Xiao's eyes widened.

'How am I supposed to dodge a shot at point blank range?'

People often say that time slows down in the face of danger. What happened next was on a whole new level.

In the face of imminent death, the world around Han Xiao suddenly began to slow down. The expression of panic on Han Xiao's face was replaced by a look of absolute coolness as his mind cast aside all unnecessary thoughts and emotions in order to process the situation.

'It's not over yet!'

The flow of time resumed.

In the very instant that the bullet left the barrel, Han Xiao activated [Strafe], causing his entire body to seemingly fade and reappear.

[Strafe]'s effect allowed the user to move anywhere within a three-meter radius, but it was not exactly 'instant'. While any movement using [Strafe] would seem extremely fast, moving a shorter distance would be even faster. Han Xiao was able to dodge the fatal shot by moving just 2 inches.

The bullet grazed past the side of his face; all it caused was a searing sensation.

The assassin's expression changed.

'How could he have dodged my sure-kill shot?'

With his illusory powers, Norsa had successfully carried out over a hundred assassinations for the Germinal Organization. So far, it had not mattered whether his targets also had superpowers. However, according to the intel given to him, Zero should at most be at the level of an elite agent! How could someone who relied on machinery to fight be able to break free of his illusion?

The intel was completely off the mark!

As Han Xiao dodged, he whipped out both Berserk Eagles from his waist and activated [Overload] as he fired a volley of deafening shots. The recoil from the shots was so powerful that it caused his hands to shake.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

All of the shots found their mark on Norsa's chest.

A perfect counterattack. Han Xiao's skillful usage of the Strafe might not have seemed difficult, but it would not have been possible to pull off without the wealth of combat experience that he possessed.

Norsa began to stagger backwards. He had used energy to protect his body—otherwise he would have been shredded to bits. Coughing up a mouthful of blood, he immediately summoned whatever energy he had left to back up and flee.

Han Xiao narrowed his eyes and gave pursuit as he loaded a gun up with [Incendiary Ammo] to fire a shot in the direction of Norsa's escape.

The ensuing sea of fire forced Norsa to stop in his tracks. Gritting his teeth, he turned around to face Han Xiao.

Norsa's eyes began to glow with a mysterious seven-colored aura.

—

You are under the attack of an illusion. As your INT is higher than 50, you are able to resist its effects.

Bang!

Han Xiao unhesitatingly fired a single, precise shot that drilled a hole through the assassin's throat.

Norsa clutched his neck in horror.

'My illusory powers have never failed me! Why is he unaffected?'

Han Xiao strode forward to smack Norsa onto the ground with both guns. He then pressed them against his chest, pinning him to the ground.

Bang!

The sound of the shot was dull.

As the incendiary bullet penetrated Norsa's body, his internal organs were immediately set ablaze. He began to flail his limbs wildly—but only for a moment.

—

You have killed the Germinal Organization Executor, Norsa (Lv. 25 Superhuman), earning 7,500 exp.

You have completed the sudden quest, [Assassination]. You have been rewarded with a Character Summoning Card.

Han Xiao steadied his breath. Blood had stained his mask and was dripping down his face onto the floor.

It was silent, apart from the crackle of the flames.

Norsa's death freed Frenzied Sword from the illusion. His jaw dropped upon noticing the aftermath of the battle.

'What the hell just happened here?'