

Chapter 6 - Graduation

"Today all of you are going to graduate. Since those who've become 15 years old are now officially regarded as adults, it's fine for you to form parties and challenge monsters, and if you judge that to be too dangerous, you can also earn your money by hunting. You have only one life. Cherish it. Anyway, congratulations on your graduation."

"That's quite the casual, simple graduation speech, isn't it?"

"It's better than him going on about it on end!"

After one year of prep school, our class has graduated. Since anyone would be able to graduate from the adventurer prep school as long as they didn't mess up quite drastically, the question of how we'd lead our lives as adventurers from now on was the most important one.

"What are you going to do, Bruno?"

"I've been scouted."

"Okay, that makes sense in your case."

In this year, Bruno had increased the different types of spells available to him even further. He's popular as someone who can be used in combat right away, and it looks like the party he'd be joining has been decided long ago.

"What about you, Klimt? You should be an immediate asset to any party as well, no?"

"That's..."

My mana pool has increased a bit as well, but it's still in the middle of growing. Magicians, even if they're elementary, are highly sought after, and different parties scramble for them, but for some reason not a single party has called out to me.

"My combat style consists of reinforcing my body with mana, and beating my opponent to death. Because I only use close combat, everyone is worrying too much that something could happen to me in the worst case."

Even if being an adventurer has nothing to do with social standing, in the unlikely case that I were to die...expecting retribution from the Earl Armstrong House, there's no party willing to take me in.

"It's truly troublesome."

I've got no choice but to somehow try to alleviate the worries of other adventurers since it's not like father or brother would hold them responsible for anything either.

"Want me to ask my party's leader? It's actually Bloody Candy-san. The party is called 『Twilight

of Dawn』. It's a quite famous party."

"For now I'll try to somehow handle it myself."

I'm not overly keen to depend on Bruno once again. I think it'd make sense for me to at least decide the party I'm going to work with on my own.

"Are you going to be okay?"

"I'll be in your care if things don't work out at all."

"Sure. If you've got any problems, feel free to talk me up."

Thus I turn down Bruno's offer and start looking for parties by myself.

* * *

"Humph!"

"Ooohh, you brought down another one?"

"Hey, you're quite good, man."

It's often said that it's easier to do something than endlessly ponder about it. Even the party search, which I've thought would be a tough challenge, is immediately resolved with the arrival of scouts. My new party is called 『Sword Strikers』 and consists of five swordsmen. I was immediately able to join after they concluded that I'd pose no problem as a combat asset.

Today is yet another day of me breaking the neck of a deer monster with a lariat after pouring mana into my arm in a monster domain located a little distance away from the capital. My new party members praise me, and also keep taking down monsters with practised moves.

So far I can't use any emission-based magic, but becoming independent as an adventurer comes first for now. I just need to wait for the time to come since my mana is still growing, albeit slowly.

"Klimt-kun, this is how far we go today. Get ready to withdraw."

"I can still keep going."

I appeal to the leader of 『Sword Strikers』 that I've got more than enough strength left to bring down another two or three monsters.

"I fully understand your wish to hurry in gaining achievements since you're a rookie, but rookies tend to ignore their physical exhaustion as they're too impatient. Some get injured, or in the worst case die, after forcing themselves while believing that they're still good to go. We'll raise the pace

little-by-little once you get used to the current pace in a little while. At a glance it looks like it's a detour, but in reality this way of doing things is the quickest shortcut."

"I see."

That's an experienced party leader for you. He's truly calm and composed.

"Okay, let's go back to the inn."

"Roger."

Having said that, including my share, the loot of 『Sword Strikers』 is quite something. Once we return to the village near the monster domain, we sell off today's spoils at a vendor directly managed by the adventurer's guild, and evenly split the pay among the members. Without telling me that I'd get less since I'm a rookie, I get an even share of the reward upon the leader's instruction, who also mentions that it's because I've properly done my share of work.

It's not that I didn't have any worries at first, but I must say, it's a very good party. Not just the leader, but all the other members treat me kindly. However, there's just one point that causes me to wonder.

"Now then, we've finished eating dinner, so Klimt-kun, it's time for you to go to sleep in preparation for tomorrow."

"Haah..."

"You're still young. You won't be able to grow up properly if you don't get enough sleep."

"I've heard sleep also affects the growth of mana."

"There's no nightlife to enjoy in such a rural village anyway."

"I'm looking forward to seeing how much money you can save until we go back to the capital."

『Sword Strikers』 always does its adventurer job while booking inns in rural villages in the vicinity of the capital. Even if that part's fine since it's true that there's more than enough game to be found in the countryside, I still wonder about them always telling me to quickly go back to the inn and sleep once we're done with a day's work.

Certainly, shops operating at night don't exist in the villages where 『Sword Strikers』 books inns, but...

"I'll go to sleep to be ready for tomorrow."

"That's how it should be."

Today as well I obediently answered that I'd go sleep at the inn, but since it's unavoidable for me to be curious what my party does while I'm sleeping, I just pretend to go sleep, and instead follow them as they leave the inn at night.

They continue walking to the end of the village while relying on the illumination of a single torch. Given that I don't have a light with me, I do my best to keep up so as to not lose sight of them.

After leaving the village, and furthermore following some deserted animal trail, I came out at an open place inside a forest. I can see a torch shining on the leader and the others on the other side of the space. It looks like they've arranged a meeting with someone in advance.

"Mountain!"

"Valley!"

"It's the same lineup as everytime, but using the password remains the rule either way. Come to think of it, is the young master sleeping peacefully today as well?"

"Well, yeah. He comes from a good family, so he's an obedient guy. Besides, outwardly we're a middle-tiered adventurer party with proper achievements. There's no reason for him to suspect anything."

"Really?"

"I mean we basically took in the young master of the Earl Armstrong House as protection against the guards. Even the guards would never suspect the party of a high-ranking noble's young son to smuggle illegal magic potions."

"That makes sense. The potions are produced in the mountains near the capital, and you guys take it with you into the city as adventurers to sell it off. With this method we won't be found out so easily."

"Yep. Anyway, pass me today's share."

"Okay."

Gunununu! And here I believed 『Sword Strikers』 to be a wonderful adventurer party! For them to smuggle illegal magic potions...unbelievable! What pisses me off above all that is how they've been using me.

No! They used the name of my home, the Earl Armstrong House!

At this rate it will hurt my father and brother's reputation! I'm deeply sorry towards the two who have listened to my selfish wish and helped me to head for the outside world!

Now that it's come to this, I'll arrest you people!

"Wait right there!"

"Who are you?"

"Bah! Isn't that the young master!?"

Leader, no, the smuggler has apparently realized my identity even within this darkness!

"So you invited me, thinking that the guards wouldn't suspect anything, allowing you to escape an investigation, as long as I'm in your party, huh?"

"Obviously, no? Any normal party would be troubled if they took you in and you died on them. Just consider yourself thankful for us having let you join."

"Ununu...!"

"Having said that, your luck ran out the moment you witnessed the trade, I suppose. Even if you might be a child of the Armstrong House, we need you to disappear now."

"You mean you're going to kill me?"

"We will kill you here, and get rid of the evidence by having a monster eat your corpse later on. Something like a noble brat dying after trying to do the impossible does happen every once in a while. It might earn us the hate of the Armstrong House, but it won't be much of a problem if we dissolve 『Sword Strikers』 and form another party thereafter."

"Earning all those achievements from scratch as a new party so as to not get suspected will be a pain, but...seeing how we're doing dangerous business anyway, we'd never cut corners in these matters."

『Sword Strikers』. I thought that all their members are serious adventurers, but for them to be so deeply involved with criminal acts...

The five members of 『Sword Strikers』, and the five people in charge of producing the illegal potions who are present here; in total ten people. At the very least five adventurers with skills that are above average, and there should be at least one magician among the production folks seeing how they're dabbling in the manufacturing of magic potions.

One vs. ten. Fighting just like that would likely result in me dying. In that case!

"Got the jitters?"

"You should have obediently stayed asleep in the inn. Realize that there are times where unnecessary curiosity costs one their lif...gahaa!"

"Rambling pointlessly also costs one their life!"

It looks like they've completely let their guard down as they felt safe from having the advantage in numbers. They sure hadn't expected me to launch a swift attack from my side. I charged at the one of 『Sword Strikers』 who held the torch at full speed, and knocked him out with a blow I had charged with mana.

Now that I've blended in among the remaining 『Sword Strikers』 members after the torch has gone out, they shouldn't be able to do much within this darkness. If they don't know my exact location,

they might hit their comrades if they swing their swords. Even the magician, who should be among the group of producers, might hit 『Sword Strikers』 if they unleash their magic imprudently, although I don't know how skilled that magician is. Still, there's no way that they'd attack their precious business partners!

"He's gone into hiding!"

"Hey! Don't use your swords! Or do you want to hit one of us!?"

As expected, the members of 『Sword Strikers』 don't know my current location, and can't attack as they fear to hit their allies.

"Leader! Grasping that guy's location with everyo...ugaah!"

Two down!

"With one blow!?! As thought, blows filled with mana are...uguuh...!"

My opponents need to be careful of friendly fire, but since everyone's my enemy here, I just need to pummel them with my mana-filled blows as soon as I sense the presence of someone. With this, I've lowered their numbers by three!

"Hey! Tandolly! Help us with your magic!"

"Impossible! I might end up hitting you guys."

The leader of 『Sword Strikers』 asks the magician of the producer group for help, but he can't unleash his magic either since he might hit his allies. An excellent magician would have many ways to handle a situation like this, but a guy, who helps out with the production of illegal potions, can't be much of a magician anyway. An excellent magician can earn money and fame without resorting to such dangerous work.

It's not like there are no precedents of elementary magicians becoming criminals because of their unhappiness over not getting acknowledged despite being magicians. I have to be careful as well...

"Four down."

Only the leader of 『Sword Strikers』 is left now, but since the group of producers is still around as well, it'd be better for me to hurry!

"Don't think I'm like the others just because you're not visible in the darkness! There!"

"Humph! 『Rock Fist』!"

As might be expected of the leader. Even within this darkness he still precisely swings his sword at me, but I concentrate mana in my fist, and succeed in breaking his sword.

"My sword! Is this guy really a rookie adventurer!?"

"You let me into your party while thinking so, didn't you? Five down!"

With this all members of 『Sword Strikers』 have been knocked out.

"『Sword Strikers』 has been annihilated! He's totally aberrant for the likes of a rookie! Tandolly! No need to worry about friendly fire anymore! Finish him off!"

"Got it. This rookie seems unable to use emission-based spells. I can easily beat him."

One guy from the producer group orders the magician to kill me. However, considering that he hasn't used the 『Light』 spell so far, it looks like his ability as magician isn't all that great, just like mine.

"Let's go! Illuminate!"

Upon the magician's order, the other members of the producer group ignite their spare torches, and begin to search for me.

So he was a magician like me who can't use 『Light』, huh?

Once they finally illuminate me with their torches, a magic flame is already burning on the right hand of the magician.

"Being unable to use 『Light』...you're a poor excuse for a magician!"

"You're the last person I want to hear that from! You're just running around hitting people after reinforcing your body with mana!"

Since both of us aren't overly capable as magicians, there's no need for him to get so worked up.

"But! I have 『Fireball』! Eat this!"

He releases his spell after expressly telling me its name. It seems like he's not very accustomed to combat. Though it's not my place to talk about others either.

"A——haha! Turn into pitch-black charcoal!"

"That's impossible!"

Burning me to cinders with a 『Fireball』 won't work out for a magician with lacking abilities. Moreover, if he fires his spell after taking so long to do so, it's only natural for me to adopt countermeasures.

I've lifted up one of the fainted members of 『Sword Strikers』, using him as a meatshield. The magician's fireball directly hits my shield, but as I expected, it's power is kinda weak.

"As expected! It's just a puny 『Fireball』!"

"Are you a brute or what!?"

"That's nothing I want to be told by the likes of a magician who dabbles in crimes! I have no mercy when it comes to villains!"

"Eeei!"

The magician fires another 『Fireball』 in response to my provocation! But, I handle that with my meatshield.

Of course that's no plan which would work against a superb magician, but it's simple for me to take such a countermeasure against someone as unskilled as a magician as he is.

"Shit!"

"Okay, let's finish this!"

I toss my meatshield at the magician. Unable to dodge, the magician goes down alongside the 『Sword Strikers』 member. I think he'll be out of commission for a while. At the same time I close the distance to the rest of the producer group, and keep knocking them out one after the other as they are totally shaken by their magician, their strongest combat force, having been taken out.

It took me less than five minutes to win this.

"Pheew... All that's left is the manufacturing workshop for the illegal magic potions."

Since we're in such a remote place, I've got no choice but to wake up one of the production guys and have him spill the beans. I have to make sure to not make any mistake in the adjustment of my threatening.

"But before that, I need to confiscate their weapons and tie them up."

Winning a battle of one vs. ten isn't difficult, but dealing with the aftermath is a hassle in various ways. It's because I've got no comrades to help me out, but this isn't anything I can fix right now. After lighting up a torch I picked up, I began with the necessary work, but around the time when I was done with everything, day had already dawned.

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"And thus I destroyed all evil without a hitch."

"But, because of that, your party got dissolved, didn't it? Things simply don't want to work out for you, huh?"

One week after the arrest of the adventurer party that got involved in the smuggling and sale of illegal potions, I've met up with Bruno for the first time in a month. It looks like he's got a day off

from his work as an adventurer today, and thus he humors me by listening to all my complaints.

Certainly, I've got the achievement of exposing their wrongdoings, but it's also the actual reason for the first party I've joined to have disbanded in less than a month. Afterwards I got questioned by the adventurer's guild for a long time, and when I searched for a new party, I was always told that they didn't need a guy who'd suddenly crush his own party for such a reason.

Why do I have such bad luck despite having supposedly done the right thing?

"Well, I'm on your side since I also feel like it's a glorious achievement."

"It's all about people thinking that they'd need to deal with various complicated issues since I'm related to nobility!"

I've entered 『Sword Strikers』 without knowing anything. But, even among the guards and the adventurer's guild there are some people who don't believe that part. They think that the Earl Armstrong House itself might actually have been involved with the smuggling and sale of illegal potions.

Of course they'd immediately know that this wasn't the case if they checked, but there's quite a few nobles thinking that it'd be nice if it was true, and since those nobles were loudly fanning those suspicions, it caused trouble for father and brother in the end as well.

"Some nobles were maneuvering around, in the hope that they could rise in power if the Armstrong House were to fall over this scandal. In the end it took time and effort to dispel all doubts."

Still, they somehow managed to get rid of the suspicions. Another reason for this having been blown out of proportion was the fact of me being the rookie adventurer who caught his fellow adventurers dabbling in illegal actions, although it'd be truly a great achievement under normal circumstances.

"Nobles have it really hard."

"For that reason, the achievement has been evened out by the bad rumors. It's as if my meritorious deed never happened. That's what I've been sarcastically told by the higher ups in the adventurer's guild."

"How nasty."

"Still, it's a probable story."

"Candy-san!"

"Ye——es! You having a day off, Bruno-chan, naturally means that I have a day off as well. So, when I was aimlessly wandering through the city, I spotted you two."

Since we're currently sitting in an open-air cafe, it's not strange for Bloody Candy to find us.

"You see, 『Sword Strikers』 has been doing its work properly for the sake of their camouflage."

Since they're gone now, I feel like wanting to complain to you as well, Ron-chan."

"Ron-chan...it is?"

"Amstrong, that's why Ron-chan. No good?"

"If you're fine with it..."

"Totally."

In truth I wonder what to think of such a nickname, but once I see his (?) gaze, I end up unable to object. Although Candy-san isn't a magician, he has a presence that's far beyond that of the members of 『Sword Strikers』.

"But, Candy-san, 『Sword Strikers』 are criminals."

"The other people are well aware of that. Ron-chan's actions were correct. Since he arrested them after finding out about their wrongdoings, people other than adventurers praise Ron-chan for this achievement. But, the top brass of the guild, which lost income through the disbandment of 『Sword Strikers』, isn't all happy with it, and the nobles want to use it to sabotage the Armstrong House. In other words, everyone has their own little circumstances."

I suppose, nothing less of the leader of a famous adventurer party. You can't underestimate his ability to gather information.

"Also, no party wanting to take in Ron-chan as member stems from everyone wanting to avoid troublesome things. Even well-running parties often fall apart over small things."

I'm a seed of trouble since I hail from the Armstrong House, eh...?

"Even though I've actually left home..."

"You might think so, Ron-chan, but it's questionable whether other people assess it in the same way, right?"

"I can't deny it..."

Even though I've come to the outside world at long last, I cannot afford to trouble my father and brother any more than this...although they praised me for the case this time...seeing as I can't work as an adventurer, I might have no choice other than going back home.

"Ron-chan, you're a strong, fine man, so it's wrong for you to be so depressed. Since you've suppressed the members of 『Sword Strikers』, who were known as middle-tiered adventurer party, and a group of potion makers, who had an elementary magician among them, all by yourself, it proves that you've got ability. It'd be okay for you to come to us."

"Really?"

Candy-dono says that he's going to accept me with my complicated circumstances. I wonder what

he's aiming for.

"It's not like I have any particular motives in this. I mean, Ron-chan, you'll be a good combat-asset, and you've got a promising future, too."

"My family is the Earl Armstrong House, though."

"So what? Kicking up a fuss over something of this level is the fault of the geezers over at the adventurer's guild, right? I wonder whether it simply means that they've grown old and senile? Birthplace, upbringing, gender, or age don't matter for adventurers. All that counts is ability. Though, in our youth we've criticized the elders above us who would pay attention to the common rules while saying so. Anyway, if you feel like it, Ron-chan, you're welcome to join us."

"Gladly!"

"That's what I wanted to hear. I look forward to working with you from now on, Ron-chan."

After the disappearance of the 『Sword Strikers』, I've been in danger of becoming an unemployed adventurer, but after being invited by Candy-dono, I joined 『Twilight of Dawn』, the party formed by him.