

Chapter 13: Elysium Ascends

Days Later — November 29, 2022

“A-Are we really doing this by ourselves? Wouldn’t it be better if we formed a raid party to take on the boss?” a nervous voice asked, echoing through the corridor leading to a pair of massive, foreboding doors.

“I-I agree with Lisbeth. Lucan, this is too reckless!” another voice chimed in, anxiety thick in her tone.

“U-Um, are we really strong enough to fight a Floor Boss? I know we’ve leveled up a lot thanks to Lucan-kun, but... will that be enough?” a younger voice joined in, smaller and clearly worried.

“There’s no need to worry, everyone~ Lucan-Onii-chan will be fighting too! And he’s the strongest~!” a cheerful, almost sing-song voice said with blind faith.

“There’s no use arguing—we’re already here.” Another calm voice spoke next, grounding the rising panic.

“Fufufu, they sure are a lively bunch, aren’t they?” Cortana murmured beside me, amusement dancing in her voice.

“I know. Isn’t it great?” I replied with a smirk, arms folded as I leaned casually near the wall, watching the group of girls I had gathered.

A few days had passed since I’d first run into Lux and Silica. And in that time, I’d been quite the busy recruiter.

First up had been the quirky, loud-mouthed Lisbeth. After a short conversation and assurances from Lux and Silica, she’d agreed to join our group. I immediately set her on the path of a blacksmith—she still had some skill with a mace, but crafting would be her primary job. Every RPG team needed someone who could forge and upgrade gear. Back then she’d still had her natural black hair, but a playful comment from Silica inspired her to dye it pink.

Then came Asuna. I’d found her fighting solo in the labyrinth like some stubborn solo player, fending off mobs while keeping her cool. Naturally, I stepped in, wiped the field clean, and extended an invitation. She seemed hesitant—until I casually mentioned the existence of baths in-game. That had been all it took. She had all but dragged me towards our Inn and had not left the bath for hours looking like a new woman.

Finally, there was Yui. Sweet, digital, semi-sentient Yui.

Cortana had tracked her down and “liberated” her from Cardinal’s influence. With a few tweaks and the help of her Cyber Shroud, Cortana had made Yui truly independent. Now the two AI girls—one blue-skinned and sarcastic, the other sunny and adorable—acted as our personal fairy companions. And thanks to their access to the game’s full codebase, we quickly identified all the optimal quests and farming routes.

With all of my skills and perks being partially shared through the binding system, it didn’t take long for the girls to catch up in level. Their growth accelerated rapidly, and within a few days, everyone had reached level 30. Which, by all metrics, made them monsters compared to the rest of the server.

And so, here we were—standing before the boss room on Floor 1, several days before it would’ve been discovered in canon.

“Don’t worry,” I said, walking past the group to stand before the massive doors. “This is what we’ve been working toward. You’re all strong enough now. Just follow my lead, and we’ll turn this so-called death game into a tutorial level.”

Cortana fluttered above my shoulder, wings glowing faintly. “This’ll be fun~”

Yui, who had chosen a slightly different color scheme and was floating near Silica, nodded eagerly. “Let’s win together!”

I raised my hand, fingers poised to push the doors open.

“Ready?”

There were nods. Nervous ones. Determined ones.

But none of them turned away.

With a grin, I shoved the doors open.

Time to show the world what power *really* looked like. And to make Kayaba get grey hairs trying to figure out how we’re cheating his game.

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Inside the Boss Room — Illfang the Kobold Lord

There, standing in the center of the stone chamber, loomed Illfang the Kobold Lord—over two meters tall, covered in matted red fur, wielding a massive battle axe and a crudely shaped leather shield. His yellow eyes locked onto us the moment the door slammed shut.

“Alright, let’s do this. Silica, Lisbeth. I choose you! Deal with the adds.” I declared with a smirk, pointing forward like a Saturday morning cartoon protagonist.

“We’re not Pokémon!” Lisbeth shot back, visibly annoyed.

Still, she and Silica followed orders without hesitation, drawing their weapons—a mace and a dagger, respectively. The three Ruin Kobold Sentinels charged them with snarls, but they didn’t stand a chance. The two girls made quick work of the adds with well-aimed strikes, each mob bursting into pixelated dust as they fell.

“Whoa~ That was so easy...” Silica muttered, wide-eyed, staring at her dagger like it had just performed a miracle.

With the side mobs down, Illfang let out a roar and charged. I stepped forward and calmly raised my sword up, blocking his axe mid-swing.

Not even a tick off my HP bar.

“Switch. Asuna, Lux—your turn!” I called, hopping back.

Asuna and Lux immediately darted forward, blades glowing with Sword Skills. A rapier for Asuna, a one-handed longsword for Lux. They attacked in tandem, seamlessly slipping past the boss's sluggish guard and flanking him from both sides.

The Kobold Lord didn’t even get a chance to enter his second phase.

He was stun-locked into oblivion.

Moments later, his form shattered into pixels, and a familiar blue message window popped up in front of Lux:

[CONGRATULATIONS!]

The girls remained still, weapons ready, blinking in confusion.

“I-Is that it?” Lux asked hesitantly, tilting her head toward me. “That was the boss... right, Lucan?”

Asuna, for her part, was already lowering her weapon, a soft smile blooming on her face. She hadn't smiled like that in days since first learning about baths.

Not able to hold it any longer, I suddenly laughed out loud surprising the others. "Hahahahaha, what do you have to say about that, Kayaba!?"

It was only to be expected to be honest. Thanks to my talents and cheats, all of us were at least 20 levels higher than anyone else trapped here. The Boss had no chance from the beginning.

I calmed down a moment later and saw everyone else looking at me a bit strangely but still with smile on their faces.

"Yeah, that was it," I nodded, finally answering her and walking up beside them as Silica and Lisbeth rejoined us. "You two were so quick you didn't even give him a chance to summon reinforcements."

"I knew you could do it~!" Yui cheered as she zipped around our heads, glowing wings flitting like firefly sparks.

"T-This is unbelievable," Lisbeth muttered, eyes still on the empty boss arena. "Only a week of grinding and we're already strong enough to solo a Floor Boss? That's... kind of underwhelming, actually."

"Come on, let's keep moving," I said, already heading toward the door at the rear of the room. "Word's going to spread fast, and I'd rather avoid getting swarmed by every curious, desperate, or annoying player on Floor One."

As I stepped forward, I felt a sudden weight land on my back, soft arms wrapping around my shoulders and legs curling around my waist.

"We did it, Lucan-kun~!" Silica cried with joy. "We actually beat the Boss! And it's all thanks to you~!"

She kissed my cheek impulsively, then froze in place as if realizing what she'd just done. Her face went crimson.

"Eeep!" she squeaked and buried her head into my shoulder like an embarrassed squirrel.

"Hahaha, I know, right?" I laughed. "We should celebrate."

"I like the sound of that." Asuna added, her smile warmer now, her earlier depression visibly thinning. Being one of the heroes who cleared a Floor Boss had clearly lifted her spirits. "Food sounds good right now."

“Sounds like a plan,” I said, shifting my arms to support Silica’s legs so she wouldn’t fall. That earned me another quiet squeak and a chorus of giggles from the rest.

With that, we stepped through the boss room’s exit, leaving the battlefield behind.

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That Evening — Urbus

After arriving in the town of Urbus, we wasted no time renting a large suite to rest in for the next few days. The first thing on the agenda? A well-earned feast—which we were enjoying now in full swing.

“To Elysium!” Lisbeth shouted, raising her mug of juice into the air with a grin.

“To Elysium!” the rest of us echoed with matching smiles before clinking our mugs and downing our drinks in a chorus of laughter.

Elysium. That was the name we’d chosen for our future guild—though we couldn’t officially form one until we reached the third floor. The name, of course, came from the Greek myth of the paradise where heroes were sent to be rewarded. It was fitting. I was Death, after all. A private joke between me and Cortana that had earned a giggle from her.

“One boss down, ninety-nine to go,” I said with a satisfied smile, setting my mug back on the table.

“...That’s right. This is only the beginning, huh?” Asuna muttered, a small frown creasing her otherwise lovely features.

“It’s gonna take forever, isn’t it?” Silica groaned, her pigtails bobbing as she slumped slightly.

“Gah, way to bring down the mood, Lucan,” Lisbeth said, lightly swatting my shoulder with a pout.

“Wahahaha—don’t stress it,” I said, waving their concerns away with a laugh. “I can guarantee we’ll be out of here in four months, tops.”

Four months was all the time I was willing to spend on this world before leaving again and I still needed to bring Suguha and Shino into the game too. Had to complete the set after all.

That earned a few surprised looks, but my confident smirk settled their nerves just like I knew it would. They already trusted me—fighting together in what they believed to be a real death game had done wonders for that.

“I believe you,” Lux said softly, her golden eyes serious for once. “We just need to keep pushing forward. We’ll be free before we know it.”

“That’s the spirit~!” Lisbeth cheered, raising her mug again with a wide smile.

Before we knew it, hours had passed—filled with food, drinks, laughter, and teasing. Eventually, one by one, we turned in for the night.

A different kind of celebration awaited behind closed doors.

It was time for me to reenact my actions from the hospital, only on digital bodies now.

‘I wonder if they’ll feel all the sensations or if they are muted. Shit, can we even have sex in this world?’ Were my thoughts as I followed the girls into my room, the girls already blushing shily and some even looking eager.

‘Oh well, I’m sure I could pull something out and make it happen.’ I thought with a shrug bringing Lux and Asuna for an embrace before the door closed behind us.

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A Week Later

Turns out that yes, you could indeed have sex in this game. At least that asshole Kayaba had managed to simulate all parts of life here.

Moving on, it hadn’t taken very long for the rest of the Players to realize they could now teleport to the second floor and figure out that someone had managed to defeat the 1st Floor Boss. The following day after our arrival, hundreds of Players had descended into the settlement we were staying at, everyone curious to meet who had done the deed.

Of course, they were all unsuccessful, since we had left first thing in the morning to continue the grind. Truly, it never ends.

We only stayed a few hours on the 2nd Floor to obtain the Martial Arts skill before booking it into the Labyrinth. And within an hour, we had run into the Boss Room—courtesy of Cortana and Yui, of course—and killed ourselves a cow.

With the defeat of the boss, we finally made it to the Third Floor, and I headed directly to the inn intending to rest a bit before heading out again. This floor had three important things we needed to do.

First was the Guild Formation Quest, finally allowing us to create Elysium. Second, this was also the place where Silica could get the pet-finding quest that would lead her to Pina later.

And finally—and most importantly—this floor was where I'd be recruiting my first NPC in this world into my harem.

I'm talking about none other than the dark elf beauty, Kizmel.

We just needed to participate in the Elf War Campaign, which would last until the 9th Floor.

While annoying—since it meant we'd have to stick to the story for a while—Kizmel was more than worth it in my eyes.

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A Month Later — Kayaba's POV

"HOW ARE THEY DOING IT!?"

A furious shout rang out in the small underground control room as a middle-aged man clawed at his hair in frustration, eyes darting wildly across the glowing monitors in front of him.

"Sword Art Online has only been live for **two months**, and somehow a group of **children** with zero technological background have already reached the **30th floor!**?"

A moment later, a cup of steaming tea was placed gently on the desk beside him, but Kayaba Akihiko didn't even glance at it. His fingers danced across the keyboard, pulling up logs, system reports, anything that might help him understand how this was happening.

"Still upset that a bunch of kids found a loophole in your perfect game?" asked a voice from behind, dry and just a little amused.

It belonged to Koujiro Rinko, his long-time colleague and the only other person who knew the full truth behind SAO's deadly nature. She leaned casually against the wall, arms crossed.

"There are **no** loopholes in SAO!" Kayaba snapped, finally pausing to grab the tea and take a sip. "If there were, *Cardinal* would have found them and corrected them. That's what it's *for*! They must be getting outside help—but *who?*"

Rinko let out a sigh. “If they were getting help from the outside, and they managed to break through your security and evade Cardinal... don’t you think we would already be in handcuffs?”

Kayaba didn’t answer. He didn’t want to.

“I’ve looked over their logs too,” she continued. “As far as I can tell, they’re not breaking any of the core mechanics. Sure, they’re gaining skills instantly and their EXP progression is suspiciously fast, but they’re still playing within the system’s limits.”

“They’re supposed to level like **everyone else!**” Kayaba roared, slamming both palms onto his desk, making the monitors rattle.

“If I could just locate them...” he growled. “If I could just get a lock on their signal, I’d go down into the game myself and eliminate them. But somehow—*somehow*—they’ve cloaked their presence not only from me, but from Cardinal as well.”

“The only reason I even know they exist is because of the automatic logs the boss rooms generate after a challenge,” he muttered bitterly.

“And as if that wasn’t enough...” he gritted his teeth, pulling up another report on the main screen, “a few weeks ago, SAO somehow received **new players**—despite there being *no new units of NerveGear* distributed or activated.”

He gestured to two figures frozen on-screen.

“One of them is playing as an elf. A race that shouldn’t even be available as a playable race! And the other is using a **class I never coded.**”

“It’s like they’re mocking me. *Every move they make... it’s deliberate.*”

Rinko moved beside him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“You’re going to give yourself a stroke if you keep obsessing like this.”

“I don’t have the luxury of resting,” Kayaba replied, shaking her hand off. “It’s time I started implementing the Knights of the Blood.”

He stood up from his seat and walked toward the capsule that housed his personal Full Dive unit.

“If I can’t find them with the system... I’ll need eyes on the ground.”

Kayaba and Rinko never noticed the small blue fairy that suddenly appeared on one of his computer monitors with a giant grin on her face before disappearing just as quickly.