SOVEREIGN OF JUDGEMENT

BOOK 01

Today Again

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Sovereign of Judgement

(심판의 군주)

by

TodayAgain

(오늘도요)

Synopsis

One day, a survival game started.

I decided to call it the end of the world.

To survive until the end for revenge, what would I need?

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Prologue

You have no other choice.

Repeat. You have no other choice.

Instead of complaining, I advise you to throw another punch.

Yes, get angry.

And angrier.

Kill.

Only then will you kill.

**

Was it an alien invasion?

Or God’s judgement?

The end of the world (yes, I have decided to call it the end) came too suddenly.

Afterwards, everyone lived in Hell. No, our lives became Hell.

On an ordinary afternoon,

I was in school.

Episode 1: New World

Chapter 1: Ring Of Rebirth (1)

This child was a fighting genius.

He instinctively knew where to hit, how to hit, to hit or to shove, to take down, to break or to grab their hair without any training. Even with his young age, his small height and physical strength didn't affect his ability. He was simply a genius.

At age 5, he fought and won against an 8-year-old kid in a playground.

In grade 2, he found and won against three 4th graders.

At first, the child's mother was worried. She feared that her child would get seriously injured constantly fighting against people older than him.

This was a misjudgment.

In grade 6, he fought with five 16-year-olds who tried to rob him at a PC bang[1]. The child's eyelid ripped and spilled a lot of blood. However, the ones who really got hurt were the middle schoolers. Among them, one became blind and another died on the spot.

Since he was a minor, he didn't receive a criminal penalty even though he had committed murder.

However, his mother was stricken with fear.

A 13-year-old... a child who had just turned 12 in Western years[2] beat and killed a middle schooler that was much bigger than him. And he didn't kill him with brute strength. After investigating, it was discovered that the victim died of a concussion when the child threw him cleanly over his shoulder. However, the assailant had never learned judo before. It was then that the child's mother realized that his fighting ability wasn't simply extraordinary. If this child grew up, how dangerous would he be? Would he kill someone again? Would he live his life as a criminal?

The mother pleaded to her child as she cried.

Never.

Never again. Do not hit anyone.

If anyone hit him, to just get hit.

If he experienced something unfair, to just experience it. To think about the sin of killing someone.

To never hit anyone again.

That he was a deadly weapon.

Then the mother distanced her child away from any physical

activity and the child was unable to watch any sports at home.

The child whose mother was everything to him as he did not have a father faithfully accepted his mother's demand.

Afterwards, the child who was prideful and loved sports never asserted himself. During physical education, he would lie by saying he felt ill and quietly sat down.

Nonetheless, the child still grew tall and became muscular.

**

Choi Hyuk was in his second year of high school. He wasn't good at studying nor did he have a lot of friends.

181cm tall. His body was quite muscular, yet he did not exercise.

He never asserted his pride either. He would usually sit alone and blankly stare out the window. Then he would suddenly shake his head as if he had a tic disorder. He looked like an idiot. If someone picked a fight with him, he would put on a sloppy smile and say, "Sorry."

So he became the target of the school bullies.

Choi Hyuk transferred to this school during the first semester of his second year. Looking at his healthy figure, the bullies were

nervous that he would pick a fight but when they realized he didn't fight back, they started to harass him as if he owed them money.

There were three bullies in Choi Hyuk's class.

"Hey-Hyukie!"

The know-it-all bastard, Lee Mingi. Kang Minho nicknamed him 'know-it-all bastard' because he was a know-it-all even though he wasn't good at fighting. 170cm tall. Thin. This fellow would always greet Choi Hyuk with a fist whenever he met him. He claimed that because Choi Hyuk was big, he liked the feeling of hitting him.

Punch!

"Urgh!"

When Choi Hyuk lowered his head after getting hit in the guts, Lee Mingi put him in a headlock.

"Hyukie. What did you have for breakfast?"

He said affectionately while hitting Choi Hyuk's head with his fist.

"I couldn't eat today. Haha."

Choi Hyuk would go through this every day and every day he would put on a sloppy smile like today.

“Anyways, I saw that our Hyukie glanced at Minji when you came in today, do you want to fuck her? Should I let you fuck her~?”

Jung Minji. 170cm tall. She was popular because of her slim figure and innocent face. She was the only female student that would talk to Choi Hyuk. She was first in school as well as the class president. She was also the only student to bring up the topic of the harassment Choi Hyuk endured. Of course, she eventually abandoned him as well.

“Haha. No. It’s not like that.”

“What isn’t it? Hmm? What isn’t it? Huh? Aren’t you hard right now?”

Lee Mingi punched Choi Hyuk’s lower belly with his fist.

Since he didn’t have any friends, his classmates would act like they didn’t see anything. Until first period started, Choi Hyuk stayed in a slightly bent position and was dragged around in a headlock by the much smaller Lee Mingi.

After the first period ended, the boss, Kang Minho, called Choi Hyuk over.

“Hey. That.”

Kang Minho. 190cm tall. Thick bones and developed muscles. He was the best fighter in school after the Choi Junsung. He demanded today’s math homework from Choi Hyuk.

“Yeah. Here. Haha.”

Choi Hyuk awkwardly laughed as he handed him his homework.

“Did you show your work properly this time?”

Last time Minho copied his answers, he was punished by the teacher. That day, Choi Hyuk was called over by Kang Minho and was punched 3 times in the chest.

“Yeah. I personally answered them. Haha.”

“Good job.”

Kang Minho said before turning away. There weren’t many cases where he would personally hit Choi Hyuk.

When second period ended, the students became hungry.

“Gilsoo! Gilsoo! Where are you? Gilsoo. Here you are, you fucking bastard!”

Slam!

As soon as the teacher left, the fellow who made his way from his seat in the back calling out ‘Gilsoo’ and the one that hit the back of Gilsoo’s head was Bae Hyunsung. 175cm tall. Liked soccer and was agile. Was good at swearing and lost his temper easily.

The kid who got hit in the head, Yang Gilsoo, was ranked even lower than Choi Hyuk. 162cm tall. Dark skinned and thin. Would often tremble his hands.

“Fucker, buy me pizza bread.”

When Hyunsung said that, Mingi stuck next to him and added in.

“Me too.”

There would occasionally be days when they would give him money but seeing how they said, “Buy me,” it looked like he would be buying today as usual.

During the break after second period, no one would touch Choi Hyuk. So Choi Hyuk would blankly stare out the window. He was picturing Lee Mingi in his head. He recalled Mingi swinging his fist at him.

Unexpectedly, he wasn’t angry.

‘Why is his punch always like that?’

It was a simple question.

There wasn’t enough power behind Lee Mingi’s fist. It was because his footing was sloppy. When he swung his fist, his shoulder didn’t turn enough. There was nothing to say about his waist and his uselessly large swings couldn’t hit his target properly and would waste his energy. His wrist would shake as well.

Honestly, even though he was hit in the guts, it didn’t hurt a lot.

Like always, he would only act like it did.

‘At least Kang Minho’s fists are quite good… well…’

Kang Minho’s fists didn’t meet his expectations either. Choi Hyuk’s mind drew up the most effective punching method. His muscles that weren’t noticeable even when he took off his clothes wriggled. Even if he didn’t exercise, his muscles would develop when he imagines it for short periods of time

‘No… No, I can’t.’

Choi Hyuk slowly shook his head.

‘Not these thoughts again…’

To clear his mind, Choi Hyuk blankly stared out the window. Desperately. He looked at the blue sky.

However, he would eventually think of those thoughts again.

‘Would it really turn out to be a proper punch like I imagined?’

‘If I fought, would I really win?’

He would then become startled and shake his head again. With a guilty conscience, he desperately attempted to clear his mind.

‘Crazy bastard. Are you crazy? You’re a murderer. What do you mean fight? You have to atone your whole life.’

Choi Hyuk appeared to be foolishly looking out the window, however, there was an intense conflict raging inside him.

‘…Still… I’m curious…’

Choi Hyuk sat supporting his chin. His shoulder muscles wriggled and moved.

‘…Everyone looks so weak.’

Looking out the window, Choi Hyuk compulsively shook his head

again.

The class president, Jung Minji, looked at Choi Hyuk with a pitiable look.

‘If he didn’t shake his head so much, he might not have become a target…’

Then she looked back at her notes.

‘So irritating…’

Notes:

1] PC Bang – A place where you can pay an hourly fee to use a computer (usually for games)

2] Koreans are 1 when they are born, so people are 1-2 years older than their ‘true’ (Western) age.

Chapter 2: Ring Of Rebirth (2)

The third period was the same as any other day.

Suddenly, everything changed.

At first, Choi Hyuk thought that the student next to him was pushing him. That wasn't the case. The student was being pushed as well. The middle of the classroom distorted and the students were roughly pushed towards the walls along with their desks.

Shrieks, screams and smashing sounds were mixed together until it suddenly became quiet.

In the middle of the classroom, a ring that took up half the classroom started to appear. It was similar to a boxing ring, however, there was a semi-transparent wall that wrapped around it and it was floating at waist height.

As soon as the ring had completely materialized, the sounds erupted again.

"It hurts..."

Female students who had severely collided into something groaned.

There were many students that were easily injured as they didn't

exercise regularly.

Even in this situation, everyone looked for their phones.

“Ah… the frame cracked!”

Someone threw a fit. Behind him, others sympathized with him.

“Huh? Mine too.”

“Mine as well!”

There were only noises of people supporting their phones.

The classroom door wouldn’t open.

“It really won’t open!”

Although the know-it-all bastard, Lee Mingi, tried his best, the sliding door wouldn’t budge. It didn’t even wobble.

“Move.”

Lee Mingi was surprised at Kang Minho’s shout and moved aside.

At the same time Mingi moved aside, Kang Minho ran and kicked

the door. If Mingi didn't avoid it at the right time, he would have been hit instead of the door. Kang Minho raised his knee up to his chest before striking out in front of him. It contained the full force of 190cm tall man. However...

Crash!

The sound wasn't refreshing.

The sliding door didn't even move a bit.

'How could it be like that?'

Choi Hyuk was completely surprised. It did not follow the laws of physics. He felt an enormous sense of inconsistency.

It looked like Kang Minho's leg hurt as he walked with a slight limp. Although he quickly stood like nothing was wrong, his expression darkened.

"Quiet! Quiet! Stay calm. Kang Minho, go sit in your seat."

The stocky authoritative teacher who appeared to be in his forties tried to control the students. However, it wasn't an easy task to complete amidst the confusion.

"Teacher! Something's written in front of the ring!"

Once a student near the blackboard shouted, the students all gathered towards the front of the classroom. The ring was in the middle of the classroom and it was too cramped and chaotic for 30 students to gather around it.

Only after everyone had pushed him away with no concern did Choi Hyuk slowly make his way to the front. There were words written on the semi-transparent wall. Fortunately, there were no students taller than him besides Kang Minho, so he had no trouble reading from the back.

[The Ring of Rebirth]

1. Karma will be distributed when you climb into the ring.

2. The first person to climb up can choose their opponent. Unless someone substitutes for the chosen person, that person will stand in the ring.

3. Only when you kill more than one person on the ring are you permitted to leave.

4. You can kill up to five people.

5. You have no choice. Kill. Only then will you kill.

“Murder? Kill someone?”

A female student was astonished.

“Fuck, is this real? Goddamn, fucking damn. What a fucking scoop.”

Bae Hyunsung shouted with a loud voice.

“Quiet, quiet! Stay still until we fully understand the situation!”

Although the math teacher wanted to keep the situation under control, the female students protested.

“How are we supposed to understand the situation when our phones are dead?!”

The math teacher who wasn’t good at handling female students couldn’t find a solution. It was only chaotic, there was no one that was properly analyzing the situation.

Choi Hyuk quietly sat in a corner. At a glance, he looked like he was scared. However, his thoughts were complicated.

‘If what is written is true, what should I do?’

The students had already checked the windows. They wouldn’t open. Nor would they break. They didn’t even budge.

‘If I can’t leave here, will I starve to death? No, before I die how would I get rid of my piss and shit?’

It was a critical problem.

“Quiet! Bae Hyunsung, you bastard! Aren’t you going to sit?”

The math teacher seemed to have made up his mind as he personally grabbed the students’ arms and forcefully sat them down in their seats. He didn’t even let the female students off. Although Bae Hyunsung and a few others had a dissatisfied look, they still had the common sense to not pick a fight with their teacher. And the math teacher had a strong build.

A scene unfolded where students listened to their teacher, sat down in their chairs and conversed with each other. While constantly checking their phones.

‘I don’t think that it’ll be solved like that.’

Choi Hyuk’s heart slowly started to beat harder.

‘Would it really be solved by waiting? What if, like the words written on the ring, we could only leave by killing someone?’

Choi Hyuk forcefully tried to control his thumping heart.

‘Would I have to live by killing someone?’

Choi Hyuk couldn’t forget that day his mother cried endlessly. He never fought after that day. It came to a point where he would shake his head at the thought of hitting someone. It had already become not a belief or a decision but a hardened habit.

Choi Hyuk made up his mind.

‘If… everyone plans to starve to death, I will too.’

But, what if they didn’t? What would he do? Choi Hyuk hadn’t thought that far. Perhaps he had unconsciously avoided that thought.

However, his heart was constantly beating dangerously. His hands were trembling. Rather than fear or anxiety…

‘No…’

Choi Hyuk shook his head uncontrollably.

And the humans who could never stay put started to become interested in the ring.

“Can we really get in?”

Lee Mingi said while pushing down on the semi-transparent wall with both hands. When he pushed with his hands, the semi-transparent wall pressed down like a rubber ball.

“Fuck, I’m telling you that it’s as those words say! That we can only leave after we kill someone!”

Bae Hyunsung sought approval from Kang Minho.

Kang Minho didn’t say a word.

“Lee Mingi! Don’t touch that!”

The math teacher yelled at Lee Mingi. After glancing at the math teacher, Lee Mingi pushed the wall harder and said.

“We have to see what this is. And I have to go to the washroom.”

Swoosh.

After pushing the wall past a certain point, it suddenly let Lee Mingi in. As soon as Lee Mingi entered, the semi-transparent wall became clear.

“Lee Mingi!”

The math teacher sprang up but Lee Mingi was already in the ring. It was like he was standing on a stage. He calmly looked at his classmates before dancing frivolously.

Although the math teacher’s face became red with anger, he could not step into the precarious ring.

“You come out here right now!”

He could only shout. Lee Mingi acted as if he couldn’t hear him and continued to dance.

“Keke, this stupid bastard.”

Bae Hyunsung chuckled.

After dancing for a while, Lee Mingi tilted his head as he stopped. He blankly stood there staring into space.

“What is this? Power, Speed, Control…”

Lee Mingi who was mumbling to himself suddenly jumped in place.

Crash!

The students’ eyes looked up at the ceiling.

Lee Mingi just did an 80cm Sargent jump. It was on the level of top class basketball players.

Lee Mingi was surprised.

“Wow… I am exploding with power! Is this what they call

karma?”

Everyone became surprised. It was because, even though he was somewhat of a bully and a know-it-all, they knew he didn’t have that sort of physical ability.

The blank Lee Mingi suddenly smiled playfully.

“Ah, but. Since I’m in the ring, I will need an opponent. It’s weird just standing here. I’m going to test it out.”

With a slightly excited voice, Mingi indicated.

“Gilsoo, get up here.”

Everyone instinctively looked at Yang Gilsoo. The one who was ranked the lowest in the class.

At first, Gilsoo was still. However, suddenly, as if something was pushing him from the back, his feet headed towards the ring.

“Wow… Fuck… I’m getting goose bumps.”

Bae Hyunsung exclaimed.

“Huh? Huh?”

As if something was pushing him, Gilsoo was constantly being pushed towards the ring.

“No! No! Don’t!”

Yang Gilsoo’s face filled with fear. Everyone, even the math teacher, was stricken with fear as they blankly watched the scene in front of them.

At that moment.

Grab.

Someone grabbed Gilsoo’s waist.

“Everyone grab him!”

It was the class president, Jung Minji. She was trying her best to prevent Gilsoo from being dragged towards the ring.

Choi Hyuk followed behind her and pulled on Gilsoo. Only then did everyone wake up from their stupor and tried to help Gilsoo. However...

Crash!

Gilsoo was eventually sucked into the ring while everyone else

bounced off the transparent wall and rolled onto the floor.

“Eyaa… Gilsoo must be happy. Minji hugged your waist.”

Inside the ring, Mingi chuckled while spectating.

“Hyukie grabbed you after Minji. You have no real friends besides your fellow gopher, Hyukie, right? Or maybe not? Maybe Hyukie was coming onto her?”

Lee Mingi shameless put his arm around the trembling Yang Gilsoo who was stricken with fear. Very relaxed and natural.

However, the one who was the most frightened was, in fact, Lee Mingi.

‘It’s real. It really happened like it said it would…’

Lee Mingi tensed his trembling knees.

‘I don’t want to die.’

That was why the first person to enter the ring was the frivolously acting Lee Mingi. It was a simple calculation. Although he would act rashly as a bully, he knew better than anyone else that his fighting skills were nothing to look at.

If it was like the written rules, then no one would be able to leave unless they killed a person. It would be the end of him if he dawdled and was chosen by someone who was stronger than him.

So he was the first to enter and had chosen Yang Gilsoo.

‘It worked out well. It really did.’

On top of that, Lee Mingi currently had his arm around Gilsoo. The best position. He had already personally experienced his strength rise when he entered the ring.

‘Yang Gilsoo probably got stronger as well. Even if it is Yang Gilsoo, there’s no need for me to look down on him and suffer. Let’s do it in one shot. One shot.’

Lee Mingi slipped his arm that was around Gilsoo’s shoulders and wrapped it around his neck.

Crash!

“Gasp!”

He took him down onto the floor and fiercely started to strangle his neck.

Chapter 3: Ring Of Rebirth (3)

Someone screamed.

“Kyahhh!”

Lee Mingi was attempting to kill Yang Gilsoo in front of everyone. The malice he revealed made everyone astonished.

Gilsoo’s dark face was dyed red.

“What do we do… He might die…”

A female student was on the verge of tears. That was human nature. If Gilsoo was beaten and killed on some hill, they might have only clicked their tongue and felt sad for him. When they saw him dying in front of their eyes and since they didn’t know if the next person would be them, it felt more shocking and horrifying.

The small 162cm tall Yang Gilsoo was pitifully dying underneath Lee Mingi. Although the math teacher shouted, condemning him, Lee Mingi who was engulfed in excitement couldn’t hear a thing.

“Awk. Awk.”

Yang Gilsoo who looked like he was about to die grabbed Lee Mingi’s arms with his trembling hands. Then there was an unexpected change.

“Uh? Uh?”

Yang Gilsoo who was laying on the floor being strangled was getting up. He was pulling away Lee Mingi’s arms as he stood up.

Lee Mingi gave up strangling him and brushed away Yang Gilsoo’s arms.

Riip.

When his clothes ripped, it revealed a distinct mark on Lee Mingi’s arms.

An unexpected situation, everyone focused on the ring. Even Choi Hyuk.

“Euahh! You fucking asshole!”

Yang Gilsoo let out a horrible shriek as he rushed towards Lee Mingi. He was in a state in heightened adrenaline.

‘I beat Lee Mingi in strength. Look at that asshole cowering and running away. I can win. I can kill him. Asshole!’

The sorrow and anger that had built up for a long time exploded. He swung his fists as he ran towards Lee Mingi.

Crash!

Yang Gilsoo's fist was extremely sloppy. However, the fist had somehow managed to hit Lee Mingi's shoulder and he flew about 3 steps back. A ridiculous punching power.

Yang Gilsoo grew more confident as he rushed forward.

Choi Hyuk who saw this couldn't help but frown.

'No… you have to take a defensive stance.'

He could tell just by looking. That the sudden burst of confidence would lead to his defeat.

Yang Gilsoo may be stronger than him but Lee Mingi was faster. Lee Mingi's arms and legs were longer as well. He twirled around while avoiding Yang Gilsoo's brute force punches.

Punch!

He would land a hit whenever there was an opening. In Choi Hyuk's eyes, Lee Mingi's fists were pathetic but perhaps it was due to 'karma' that his fists were unimaginably strong.

Punch, punch!

However, it looked like Yang Gilsoo had great endurance as well since he was able to endure taking a lot of hits. Unfortunately, the problem arose from somewhere else.

“Pant! Pant! Haa... Mingi... asshole... just one hit... one fucking hit...”

Unlike Lee Mingi who avoided until there was an opening, Yang Gilsoo’s brute force punches quickly drained his stamina.

His fists hopelessly slowed down. On the other hand, Mingi’s movements became more relaxed.

Choi Hyuk couldn’t take his eyes off the fight. If it was like any other day, he would have already shaken his head to clear his thoughts but today was different. He was completely immersed in the raw desperate struggle unfolding in front of him. His long-suppressed talent and spirit longed to see more of the fight.

Lee Mingi who was carefully circling around a panting Yang Gilsoo suddenly burst forward and struck Yang Gilsoo’s face.

Crack!

Yang Gilsoo was too exhausted to dodge. He was hit straight on. Gilsoo’s teeth flew out and blood spurted from his mouth. A distinct stream of blood.

“Kyahh!”

Another scream erupted.

Afterwards, it was one-sided.

Punch! Punch! Punch!

Lee Mingi laid Yang Gilsoo down and crazily beat him with his fists. He was covered in blood.

“Sav…”

Yang Gilsoo’s faint pleading voice painfully pierced the spectators’ ears.

However, Lee Mingi constantly hit him again and again as he endlessly despised him.

“This crazy loser bastard. Embarrassing. Crazy Bastard. Overrating himself.”

At some point, Yang Gilsoo stopped moving.

Someone mumbled.

“He’s dead…”

Yang Gilsoo's corpse turned into grey ashes and was disappearing. Those ashes circled around Lee Mingi before being absorbed through Lee Mingi's nose.

A murder had occurred right in front of their eyes. A fearful silence came down.

Every scene of the fight imprinted into Choi Hyuk's memory in slow-motion.

Fresh blood. The last breath of a dying man. The chest that wouldn't rise again.

Choi Hyuk's memory was returning to his time in grade 6. Death. The middle schooler who had died too easily. The one who easily died was the middle schooler but his mother was the one who was actually torn up.

This was the first murder he had witnessed since then.

This time, it wasn't by his hands but someone else's.

However, the attitude of the murderer was too different from himself.

"Hoooo..."

In the ring, Lee Mingi stretched his waist as he let out a sigh. Lee Mingi felt a strong sense of excitement. He exuded a more composed demeanor.

‘I got stronger. Power is overflowing. Was it that the more people I kill the stronger I become?’

Lee Mingi thought.

‘I killed one… does that mean I can leave? No… no… was there any guarantee that this wouldn’t happen again? What happens if I leave and I have to fight someone stronger than me?’

Lee Mingi decided.

‘I have to get stronger now.’

His survival instincts pushed him into a corner. He had a hunch. A hunch that this murder game wouldn’t end here.

‘Since it said that I could kill up to 5 people… if I could get stronger.’

He had already killed someone in front of everyone. Nothing would change now. Lee Mingi decided.

‘Let’s fight once more. I need to pick a weak one, so I don’t get tired.’

Someone weaker than Yang Gilsoo... at the very least, there was no ‘man’ like that. Lee Mingi chose his target.

“Yoon Girim. Come.”

A crying female student raised her head up in surprise. Her face was completely pale.

At that moment, the students who were watching Lee Mingi realized. The meaning behind the [Ring of Rebirth]. Lee Mingi, he had definitely been reborn as a ‘murderer’.

Chapter 4: Ring Of Rebirth (4)

Thud.

The chosen Yoon Girim moved forward as if she was being pushed by something.

“No. No. Mingi. Mingi! Don’t do this! Please?”

However, he showed no mercy. The girl was slowly dragged towards the ring by an invisible force.

Everyone was silent.

‘What to do? What could I do?’ Those thoughts never entered their minds.

As if it was a nightmare, they blankly watched Yoon Girim getting dragged across the floor.

Like before, there was only one person who moved. The class president, Jung Minji.

Jung Minji grabbed Yoon Girim’s shoulder.

Everyone wondered.

‘You’re trying to pull her back? You failed last time with Gilsoo.’

However, she wasn’t trying to pull her back.

Jung Minji pushed against Yoon Girim’s shoulder and used that momentum to leap forward.

“I will fight instead.”

She declared just before making contact with the transparent wall.

Swish!

The transparent wall let her through instead of Yoon Girim.

Now then did everyone recall one of the rules of this game.

[The first person to climb up can choose their opponent. Unless someone substitutes for the chosen person, that person will stand in the ring.]

Jung Minji came forward as the ‘substitute’.

“Euaah.”

Yoon Girim who was being dragged forward flopped on the floor.

Jung Minji lightly jumped up onto the ring. As soon as she went on, she lightly checked her body condition by clenching her fists, swinging her arms and even running in place.

“Eiyahh~ Minji. You wanna fight me?”

Jung Minji didn’t reply to Lee Mingi. Lee Mingi smiled suspiciously. She was always like that. She would consistently ignore Lee Mingi. Whenever Lee Mingi saw Jung Mingi, he couldn’t stand the feeling that she was looking at him like she would a cockroach.

Lee Mingi slowly scanned her slim thighs and waist. He didn’t pay attention to outsiders anymore. The true nature of a person would be fully displayed once they had power. Lee Mingi said with a crooked smile.

“It’s good that you came. I’ve always wanted to fuck you... Let’s do a live show.”

Jung Mingi who was checking the changes in her body due to karma suddenly stiffened.

She smiled.

With an innocent and charming smile, she said with a slight lisp.

“Fuck off.”

**

Jung Minji and Lee Mingi’s fight was normal.

After getting stronger from killing Yang Gilsoo, every aspect of Lee Mingi, including speed and power, surpassed Jung Minji. Jung Minji kept a defensive stance until her collar was grabbed by Lee Mingi.

Lee Mingi became relaxed when he became certain Jung Minji was not his match. He grabbed her collar and attempted to rip her top.

“Minji~ Let’s take off your clothes.”

However, those were his dying words.

Crack!

Jung Minji’s hand stabbed into Lee Mingi’s temple. In her right hand was an awl she had taken from the tool box.

Skreek.

Jung Minji pressed her left hand on Lee Mingi’s shoulder and

pulled out the awl from his temple. It was stabbed in so deeply that they could hear the friction between the metal and his bones as she pulled it out.

"Huh?"

Lee Mingi tilted over after letting out his last breath. Wet blood oozed out of his temple before he turned into ash. With that, it ended.

"Hoo..."

Jung Minji let out a short sigh. Her shoulders shivered as if she was appalled by Lee Mingi's ashes permeating her body.

As if nothing had happened, the ring was clean.

The students fell into a state of shock once again. The awl they would always see in the tool box, if they stabbed that into someone's head, they would die. There was no one that didn't know this but the shock was completely different when they had personally witnessed it.

Jung Minji expressionlessly walked out of the ring.

"Th... Thanks, Minji!"

Yoon Girim who was still on the floor expressed her thanks to

Jung Minji.

However, Jung Minji coldly laughed.

“For what? What are you thankful for? You’re going to die anyways if you act like that.”

Yoon Girim’s shoulders stiffened. Jung Minji simply passed her.

Sliide.

The classroom door opened. She said without looking back.

“Do you think I stepped in to save you? Do you still not understand the situation? Kill while you can. The ones who die are in the wrong.”

Then she exited into the hallway.

Rumble!

Following behind her, students rushed to the door.

“What! It’s blocked! Open it!”

“Move!”

It became noisy but there was a transparent wall blocking the opened classroom entrance. They were still unable to leave.

“Assholes… you’re fucking loud.”

It was Kang Minho who had used the chance to enter the ring. 190cm tall. The student who was the best at fighting after Choi Junsung.

“Isn’t that right, Choi Hyuk?”

He picked Choi Hyuk who was known as the tall loser.

“Get up here.”

Choi Hyuk’s head creaked as it turned.

He had a strange smile on his face.

A single thought repeated in his mind.

‘Lee Mingi and Jung Minji killed as if it was nothing.’

If that was the case,

He who had killed a middle schooler 5 years ago,

Lee Mingi who had killed Yang Gilsoo and

Jung Minji who had killed Lee Mingi

were all murderers.

“Kek…”

A laugh sounded out.

‘… What the hell?’

A beast was born among chicks.

Whenever the beast touched a chick, the chick would easily crumble.

The ones who would easily crumble were them… was what his mother said.

That it wasn’t the weak who were bad but himself.

That was why the beast pulled out his teeth and lived among chicks with his arms tied behind his back.

While enduring as the chicks who didn’t know their place pecked at him and walked all over him…

But a chick had just called him out. He said that he looked weak and that he would kill him.

‘You? Kill me?’

“Hahahahaha.”

Choi Hyuk laughed. He felt refreshed. It felt like the chains that were tightly wrapped around him were breaking off. He was trying to kill him. He thought that since he was weak, he could kill him.

‘But are you really stronger than me?’

No matter what, he didn’t feel that he would lose.

It couldn’t be confirmed rationally. He last fought when he was in grade 6, it was too far in the past. All this could be an illusion. However…

‘I just need to confirm it myself.’

And.

‘The weak will die.’

He probably wouldn’t have any regrets.

Choi Hyuk walked onto the ring with his own two feet.

On the ring, Choi Hyuk’s arms and legs were slightly trembling. Kang Minho laughed when he saw this.

“This bastard cowering… fight with confidence. You’re the only one in the class in the same weight division as me.”

“Haha. Okay.”

Choi Hyuk continued to laugh awkwardly. His arms and legs were trembling from extreme excitement.

It was neither fear or anxiety.

Choi Hyuk was trembling in happiness.

Chapter 5: Ring Of Rebirth (5)

Kang Minho. He had the most outstanding physical traits in school. His 181cm height that made Choi Hyuk look small, thick bones and muscles developed through regular exercise.

However, Kang Minho was also no match against the 175cm tall Choi Junsung who didn't work out. From the start, Kang Minho didn't have the courage to fight with Choi Junsung.

That's right. Kang Minho with his incredible physical traits just didn't have the balls in critical moments.

Kang Minho wanted to appear more manly and intimidating but that was only his wish. He was the type who, in the face of real danger, would stay back and read the situation.

He called out Choi Hyuk because he wanted both safety and reputation.

'It'll be embarrassing if I beat a small fry to death. So Choi Hyuk who's big but weak is best.'

No matter how much of a loser Choi Hyuk was, it looked better killing him because he was tall.

At the same time, he thought.

‘But I don’t know how much stronger Choi Hyuk will get once he gets karma.’

Not long after he stood in the ring, he received something similar to a system message and karma was distributed to him. Because of this, he personally experienced how strong a body with karma truly was.

Kang Minho’s eyes became colder. He made up his mind.

‘I’m going to tackle him as soon as he gets in the ring and beat him to death.’

Kang Minho was planning on beating Choi Hyuk to death before he received karma and before he could adjust to his new strength. Since that was safer.

That was why, as soon as Choi Hyuk entered the ring with trembling hands.

The moment Choi Hyuk laughed, “Haha, okay.”

Crash!

Kang Minho charged. His strengthened body flew out like a cannon ball.

The students spectating the match responded late. A tackle as

fast as an Olympic gold medalist's. Before Choi Hyuk could finish speaking, Kang Minho's hands were already wrapping around his waist.

Kang Minho was assured of his victory.

Crush.

'What is this sound?'

However, at the critical moment, Kang Minho felt something was weird. A disturbing crush had sounded out too close to him.

'Where did this sound come from?'

With his face smashed in, Kang Minho, along with that thought, turned to ash.

Choi Hyuk's body reacted the moment Kang Minho lowered his stance and lunged. First, he firmly planted his left foot on the ground. Then used that momentum to twist his waist and his upper body was pulled forward. His right foot arched as he thrust his knee upwards and his right thigh exploded with power the moment it made contact with Kang Minho's face.

Bang!

He used his whole body to propel his knee up. No, it shot up.

Choi Hyuk's knee instantly smashed Kang Minho's face. Even Kang Minho's charge reinforced with karma was used against him as his face crumbled like tofu.

An explosive counter knee kick from Choi Hyuk who had never learned martial arts.

With that, it ended.

While absorbing Kang Minho's ashes, Choi Hyuk let out a small sigh.

"I won..."

It suddenly started and ended before he could do anything.

The adrenaline pumping through his veins had nowhere to vent.

He was dumbfounded at the quick conclusion.

His guilty conscience of killing a man collided with his cynical ego that believed that those who intended to kill had nothing to say when killed. However, he didn't feel it. It didn't feel real. Instead, a sense of disappointment swept over him.

Choi Hyuk read the message that appeared in front of him. It was like a system message from a game.

[Great Accomplishment! You have killed someone with karma before it was distributed to you. As a reward, you get 10 points to allocate however you want. Your karmic stat has increased by 3.] [You have entered the Ring of Rebirth. Karma has been distributed.] [You have killed someone! You have absorbed a portion of your opponent's karma. Karma point has increased by 1.]

————————-

[Choi Hyuk]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 5 +1 Up!

Speed: 7 +1

Control: 22 +1

Endurance: 7 +1

Stamina: 9 +2

Recovery: 10 +1

*Free Karma Points: 10

*Retribution Point: 4

————————-

On average, he had 10 for each stat. However, his control was extremely high to the point of being strange.

And the absorbed stats from killing Kang Minho were indicated on the side. Seeing how stamina was +2 while everything else was +1, it seemed like Kang Minho had high stamina.

The points would be distributed differently for each person.

And Choi Hyuk could feel the ‘thing’ had squeezed into his body. Something sticky like honey filled up his insides. It was an unfamiliar feeling but it wasn’t uncomfortable. It was probably ‘karma’ that was circulating his body as it bonded with his body more securely than his muscles and tendons and allowed him to move explosively.

His altered body. The adrenaline in his body. Choi Hyuk instinctively wanted to test his body, however...

‘That’s enough. Are you going just kill people now?’

His perseverance that he increased his whole life was barely able to suppress his instincts.

Choi Hyuk carefully examined the people surrounding the ring. Since he had killed someone, he could simply leave the room like Jung Minji. He just needed to step down...

‘But...’

His thumping heart grabbed at his feet. He wanted to fight more. He wanted to prove himself. On the [Ring of Rebirth], Choi Hyuk was unable to decide whether he would step off or not.

Just then, he saw Bae Hyunsung looking away. The last remaining bully.

How unlucky. His instincts started to justify cunningly.

‘He would probably kill someone and live… does that make sense?’

He felt offended. For the man who tormented Yang Gilsoo and him to live? By killing another student?

Grit.

“That makes no sense.”

Choi Hyuk knew. That he wasn’t an apostle of justice. That this was his self-justification to fight longer… he was aware of it. But before he knew it, he had already called him out.

“Bae Hyunsung! Come up here.”

**

“Sa…save me. Mm? Hyuk. I mean we were quite cool right?”

Bae Hyunsung went down to his knees and pleaded as soon as he got in the ring. But Choi Hyuk frowned.

‘What’s that?’

He caught sight of black and red flashes reflected in Bae Hyunsung's eyes. It felt sinister.

"I'm really sorry. It's really all my fault."

He was already in a bad mood because of the strange flashes of light but seeing Bae Hyunsung stoop so low, pissed him off even more. He didn't call him up here for this.

"Come at me. You're going to kill someone anyways."

"I won't! I won't kill anyone. I will just stay here quietly!"

Even though it was obviously a lie, since Bae Hyunsung was acting like this, Choi Hyuk was at a loss for words. Killing was Choi Hyuk's lifelong trauma. Ever since that incident, he avoided resorting to violence. His devious instincts enjoyed fighting not killing so when Bae Hyunsung begged for his life, even if he knew it was a lie, he didn't have the heart to kill.

"Ha..."

Choi Hyuk who felt stumped at what to do looked at the ceiling and sighed.

'Should I just leave it and get off. But... why is he like that? Isn't he planning on killing someone and leaving?'

He didn’t like this. He wished it would be Bae Hyunsung more than anyone else. If it was possible, he wanted to fight Bae Hyunsung who had suppressed him until now. However, looking at his state, he couldn’t act. While Choi Hyuk was troubling over this, a red light flashed in front of him.

A red light exploded from Bae Hyunsung’s body. Immediately after, Bae Hyunsung took out a carpenter’s knife he had hidden in his pocket and slashed at Choi Hyuk’s neck.

Bae Hyunsung prostrated and begged for this moment. He never expected Choi Hyuk to spare his life from the beginning. Since, if he was in Choi Hyuk’s position, he wouldn’t. He only waited for the moment his opponent let down his guard.

“Fuck! This fucking bastard!”

Bae Hyunsung swiftly slashed with his knife. However…

Crack!

The knife missed its target and instead, Choi Hyuk’s fist slammed right in between Bae Hyunsung’s chin and throat.

He had stepped back to avoid the knife and pushed forward before throwing a counterpunch.

Stretched out legs, his rotated waist and shoulder and his wrist that had endured the impact.

Perhaps it was due to his control stat of 23 but he was able to slam his fist straight into his target without wasting even the slightest energy.

Thud.

The stiffened Bae Hyunsung slumped down onto the floor.

"...What the fuck."

The sudden flash of red light. He might have reacted slower because he was surprised by this light.

'Just what was that?'

But the only person to see the light was Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk gazed at the collapsed Bae Hyunsung. He hadn't died yet. He hesitated again. It wasn't a situation where he died from fighting but where he would have to purposely kill him. Choi Hyuk looked at his surroundings. Students were shaking in fear. The math teacher's eyes were trembling.

Because his opponent crumbled so easily, Choi Hyuk's actions looked irrational. Nothing had changed in 5 years.

He was a monster, a killer.

‘…Too late…’

Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly. He strangled Bae Hyunsung’s neck.

A game where everyone had to become a killer to survive. Someone was going to kill Bae Hyunsung anyways. Or, Bae Hyunsung would regain his senses and kill. Perhaps it would be different if he didn’t call him out in the first place but he felt that leaving at this time would be more cowardly. Choi Hyuk strangled the unresisting Bae Hyunsung to death. It put him in a bad mood. He wanted to fight to his heart’s content but instead, he became more uncomfortable.

‘This is what you guys started…’

To brush off the uncomfortable feeling, Choi Hyuk made an excuse. Finally, Bae Hyunsung turned into ash as he was absorbed into Choi Hyuk.

[You have killed someone! You have absorbed a portion of your opponent’s karma. Karmic point has increased by 1.]

[Innate skill ‘Eyes of Distinction’.]

Messages that made it seem like he did a good job. They made

him more depressed.

‘I guess this isn’t the end?’

After looking at the messages, he didn’t think that this survival game would end in a day or two.

‘If it’s going to be this uncomfortable, I won’t feel happy about fighting…’

Then, his body stiffened as a sudden thought struck him.

‘Were we the only ones going through this damn game?’

Something felt wrong. Just how far would this supernatural phenomenon extend to? The school? Seoul? No…

‘…What about mom?’

Why didn’t he think of this sooner? Choi Hyuk’s mind was in a rush. She was probably at work right now. What if a ring like this one appeared there?

The hairs on his body stood on end. Choi Hyuk hurriedly got off the ring and ran out the classroom. The unpleasant feelings that wrapped around him evaporated as adrenaline poured into his body.

Chapter 6: Bonus Game (1)

After Jung Minji and Choi Hyuk had left the classroom, it became a desperate struggle with no regard for man or woman. As there already were fights with deadly weapons, the bloody battle continued with people wielding hammers and stabbing others with broken broom shafts.

In the end, the only ones left in the classroom were the math teacher, a male student who was shy but had a lot of friends named Min Byungsae and Yoon Girim who had previously been picked by Lee Mingi. A total of three people.

“Byungsae…

The math teacher called Byungsae out.

“Since you’re a guy…”

“…Te, teacher?”

The math teacher with a good figure got up on the ring and called Byungsae.

“I’m sorry…”

The fight ended easily. Byungsae turned into ash after the math teacher pressed him down on the floor and strangled him.

Yoon Girim who had seen everything was in a corner covering her ears trembling. The math teacher coldly gazed at her before exiting the classroom.

‘Save me… save me… this is a dream, right? Yeah, a dream. Please…’

Alone in a classroom where desks and chairs were scattered all around and tools and broken broom shafts were tossed here and there, Yoon Girim trembled as she cried.

**

Choi Hyuk’s mother was a person who couldn’t even kill a cockroach. When he was young, whenever a bug appeared in his home, Choi Hyuk would have to kill it instead of his mother. To the young Choi Hyuk, it was something he took pride in.

Because of that, Choi Hyuk had a hunch.

“Damn it… Fuck…”

The only place he could go after leaving the classroom was the gym. Everywhere else was blocked by an opaque wall. No matter how hard he pushed the opaque wall or how many times he kicked the windows of the gym, it was useless. There wasn’t even a single person walking outside the window.

The whole school was trapped in this damn game. There was a likely chance that it was the same outside.

Choi Hyuk assumed the worst case scenario.

‘If a ring appeared in the company mom works in… mom’s probably dead… no, she was murdered.’

In a situation where one could kill another, humans would always kill their opponent. Choi Hyuk knew this all too well as he had been bullied for a long time. Ethics and morals weren’t things all humans instinctively possessed. There would always be someone who would become endlessly cruel in a situation where there were no consequences.

There were probably bastards like that in his mother’s company. However, his mother wasn’t like that. It would have been better if she was… but Choi Hyuk knew all too well that his mother wasn’t that kind of person. If a situation like that arose… his mother would have been murdered.

Choi Hyuk’s heart burned black with anger and concern.

As he grew up without a father, the meaning of a mother was different from his peers. He grew up seeing his mother cry every night. His mother was someone who had brought him pain and sympathy but was also a comrade who he endured the harsh realities of life with. He had vowed countless times that he would never let his mother cry again and grew up reflecting his actions.

“Euaaahh!”

Choi Hyuk who was about to go crazy in frustration kicked the window rapidly. The window still wouldn’t budge. Words appeared on the window.

Yes, get angry.

And angrier.

Kill.

Only then will you kill.

“Ha…”

Choi Hyuk blankly stared at the words written on the window. It felt like freezing water was poured all over his head.

The message. The moment he read that message, he thought that his mother really had died.

He realized that this game wouldn’t end easily.

And that no one could be free in this game.

Just who was it? The one who created this damn game.

...Whoever it was. Choi Hyuk tightly clenched his eyes as he resolved himself.

“Okay. I get it.”

If what you want is for me to become a killing machine, I’ll become one.

If you want me to lie on my face and lick your feet, I’ll do it.

I will kill and kill and bow my head again and again and survive until end.

Then.

Then if I can meet you just once...

That time, I want to meet your faces and beat each and every one of you to death.

Choi Hyuk vowed.

When he opened his eyes, his face turned cold.

**

In the gym, the ones who had killed someone were guarded against each other as they kept their distance. Jung Minji glanced at Hyuk and was surprised but didn't say anything.

In the center of the gym, words appeared like a hologram.

[Bonus Game – Preparing]

1. Waiting for the previous game to end...

1. Break time. Prepare for the future.

At first glance it looked like it was telling them to rest but Choi Hyuk didn't think of it like that. Choi Hyuk clearly remembered. The message they sent him, 'get angry,' the ones who created this game wanted the competitors to become more intense and desperate.

'Prepare.'

Choi Hyuk kept thinking of that word. It was the only valid information in the message.

Choi Hyuk examined the gym. There were about 30 students and among those, he found that 4, including Jung Minji, were slowly searching the gym. They must have come to the same conclusion as Choi Hyuk. However, they were moving slowly.

'More and more students will come. Instead of trying to not alert others, it is better to move a step faster than the rest.'

Choi Hyuk didn’t delay any longer. Instead of caring about what others’ thought, he ran to the middle of the stage.

Thud!

The karma circulating in his body allowed him to jump up onto the stage in one shot. Choi Hyuk searched everywhere including the waiting room and behind the curtains. He searched as if he was smashing through a heap of items. It paid off.

“Ha... are they telling me to kill more people more easily?”

He found a Japanese sword behind the curtain. There was a long strap that could be tied on his belt.

“It’s a sword!”

As soon as Choi Hyuk who was making a fuss on top of the stage picked up a sword, the other students were horrified. They finally understood what kind of situation they were in. A great commotion rose. Everyone hurriedly started searching the first floor.

Choi Hyuk didn’t even look at the 1st floor. He jumped to the 2nd.

Swish!

Swiish!

Choi Hyuk ran across the 2nd floor rails and he swung each curtain in front of the long window aside.

Swish!

When he pushed aside one of the curtains, there were words written on the window.

———————

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #9]

If a person kills more than 5 people and awakens to a Innate skill but is not affiliated with a king, the person receives the rights of the ‘King without Subjects’ and 30 free karma points that can be allocated however they want.

———————

As soon as Choi Hyuk looked at the words, the words written on the window started to sway, then flew to his forehead and was absorbed. The window became clean once again.

Just to be sure, Choi Hyuk kicked the windows but like expected, it didn’t budge. When he looked out and saw that there was no one walking down the street, it gave him a very strange and quiet feeling.

Time passed quickly. As more and more students arrived at the gym, the fiercer the search became.

During that time, Choi Hyuk finished searching the 2nd floor. Additionally, he found a bastard sword, an estoc and 3 more hidden rules. Now the whole gym was chaotic. Students ran everywhere to look for weapons, defensive equipment and hidden rules. It wasn't just the students, even the teachers from the staff room were mixed together and a fight had broken out. There were even students who had just arrived at the gym and were running around without knowing why.

Choi Hyuk didn't show any interest to the chaos. Instead, he turned his attention to the ceiling.

There were steel structures on the ceiling that were like a jungle gym and he felt he could swing there to explored even further.

'If there are items hidden there, they must be extraordinary.'

The early bird gets the worm. Choi Hyuk grabbed a column near him.

He used his changed physique for 10 minutes. His karma reinforced hands held the columns like a clamp and endured his weight. Choi Hyuk crawled up the column and hung on the ceiling structure.

"Wow... shit. That bastard's crazy."

The school leader, Choi Junsung, looked up at Choi Hyuk in admiration. No matter how much stronger your body became due to karma, it wasn't easy to think of those ideas.

"I can't lose to him."

He followed Choi Hyuk and climbed up to the ceiling.

Chapter 7: Bonus Game (2)

"Heee~~~haaaaww!"

Choi Hyuk heard Choi Junsung's cheer. It seemed like after following him, he was the first to come across something. The best fighter in school, Choi Junsung, didn't lose his bright attitude when facing the chaos. As if there was no need to fuss about killing and getting killed. As if he wasn't going to die.

Creeak! Creak! The steel structure Choi Hyuk was hanging on creaked. Choi Hyuk turned his attention away from Choi Junsung and carefully searched the ceiling. And just then, he found a hidden rule.

———————

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #15.]

When a 'King without Subjects' sits on the throne, the person will be randomly given a D rank or greater weapon.

———————

'King without Subjects', this one was related to the first rule he had found.

And the treasure hunt was slowly coming to an end.

**

———————

[Bonus Game – Preparing]

The previous game has ended. Break time has ended. Preparing the Bonus Game…

———

When the ethics teacher entered the gym, the words in the center changed. The students who were wandering around the gym with no more items to find finally stopped.

Choi Hyuk stopped searching any further and checked his fruits of labor.

He didn’t find any defensive items, only weapons. On the left side of his belt hung three swords that would rattle every time he moved.

[Japanese Sword F rank] – Cutting, two-handed

[Bastard Sword F rank] – Stabbing and cutting, two-handed or one-handed

[Estoc F rank] – Stabbing, one-handed

And he had found 5 hidden rules. When he searched, he did come across quite a few of the same ones so, excluding those, he found 5.

———————

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #5]

The first to declare oneself as king will receive 5 karma points that can be allocated however they want.

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #6]

The first to serve a king will receive 3 karma points that can be allocated however they want.

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #7]

A king who has more than 100 subordinates will receive 10 karma points that can be allocated however they want.

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #9]

If a person kills more than 5 people and awakens to a Innate skill but is not affiliated with a king, the person receives the rights of the ‘King without Subjects’ and 30 free karma points that can be allocated however they want.

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #15]

When a ‘King without Subjects’ sits on the throne, the person will be randomly given a D rank or greater weapon.

———————

Throne Game that was written next to the hidden rules caught Choi Hyuk’s attention.

‘The current game is the Bonus Game. Then, is the Throne Game something else?’

If he used the hidden rules to guess, he thought that the ‘Throne Game’ was a game where people would declare themselves as kings and collect subordinates to take the throne.

‘The Bonus Game must really be a bonus game. It’s certain that the Throne Game will be the main one. I have to prepare ahead of time.’

What should he do when the Throne Game starts? Choi Hyuk analyzed the hidden rules.

Rules #9 and 15 were rules connected by the term, ‘King without Subjects’. And Rule #15 was a rule that Choi Hyuk had climbed to the ceiling to find. A rule that needed another rule to understand and was hidden in a hard to reach place… The reward would be a D rank or greater weapon.

‘Is a D rank or greater weapon really worth that much? Then I have to get it.’

Of course, he would lose something if he chose to do that.

The moment he decided to aim for Rule #9, ‘King without Subjects’, he had no choice but to give up the rewards from Rule #5, 6 and 7, ‘first to declare as a king’, ‘first to serve a king’ and ‘a king with more than 100 subordinates’.

However, Choi Hyuk decided resolutely. He had already resolved

himself to show his worth to the creators of the game and both the reward and the title ‘King without Subjects’ appeared to be decent. If he could obtain a D rank weapon from the interlinked Rule #15, then it would be more than enough to make up for giving up on the other rules.

‘3 people… I need to kill 3 more.’

The conditions to become a ‘King without Subjects’ were to kill 5 people and awaken a Innate skill. And he had already awakened a Innate skill.

Choi Hyuk looked at his status. He could bring it up with a thought.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 7

Speed: 10

Control: 24

Endurance: 9

Stamina: 12

Recovery: 12

*Free Karma Points: 10

*Retribution Point: 5

[Innate skill]

-Eyes of Distinction

————————

After killing Bae Hyunsung, all his stats increased by 1 except his Speed which increased by 2.

Although he did have 10 free karma points, he didn't distribute them yet.

And there was the skill, 'Eyes of Distinction'.

————————

[Eyes of Distinction]

You are able to see what intentions a person has.

– Black: Hostile Intent

– Red: Killing Intent

– White: Goodwill

– Yellow: Sacrificial will

————————

The red and black flashes of light emitted from Bae Hyunsung which made him feel uneasy was the effect of the 'Eyes of Distinction'. Back then, Choi Hyuk was seeing the hostile (black) and killing (red) intent of Bae Hyunsung.

'It's a good skill...'

At a time where no one knew what the other was thinking, this was an unrivaled skill.

Just when Choi Hyuk finished checking everything, the Bonus Game started.

**

The words written in the center of the gym became larger and slowly changed. Semi-transparent rectangular booths appeared in different locations throughout the gym. The students near them were pushed aside.

———————

[Bonus Game – Item Hunt!]

1. A golden opportunity to obtain an E rank item. Dropouts will be indicated with an ITEM mark.

2. If a dropout dies, the person will turn into an E rank item.

3. If a dropout kills someone, the mark will disappear and the dropout will be given karma points.

———————

‘Dropout? Who?’

It was currently puzzling. However, soon, its meaning became

clear.

Around 30 people were summoned, each into a semi-transparent rectangular box. And a clear ITEM mark was above each of their heads.

“Huh? Jinsu?”

“Girim!”

The students and teachers in the gym recognized the people who had appeared with an ITEM mark above their heads. They were those who didn’t fight until the end and were left in the classrooms.

Among them, was Yoon Girim who was in Choi Hyuk’s class.

There were the only non-murderers here...It meant that they had to kill the most innocent people here to obtain items.

**

People divided into two sides.

On one side were those who gave up. They were those who didn’t know what to do and had decided not to act. Although there were many of them, they didn’t have any influence on the situation.

And the others were split into two groups again.

A side that decided that they had to kill to obtain an item… and a side that resolved to not let their friends die.

The only ones who had a great influence over the situation were those on either side.

While those that had decided not to act spectated, the rest slowly surrounded the item boxes. There were even a few who impatiently attacked the boxes. But the boxes were extremely sturdy and the attacks didn't leave a mark.

"Has it not started yet?"

One's indifferent voice terrified another.

The dropouts inside the box were screaming something but their voices couldn't pass through the box.

"Guys! This isn't right! Teacher Kim! This isn't right, right?"

A teacher blocked their path and shouted but it had no effect.

"Fuck! Who here isn't a murderer?"

The words spoken by someone stabbed into everyone's chests.

“Fuckers… get away from Hyejin. Fuck! You! If you come a step closer, I am going to break your head in!”

A male student threatened the approaching students with a firefighter’s axe. He was enduring the attacks for his girlfriend who was trapped in the box but there were four or five students who were like distant vultures waiting for him to get tired and the box to disappear.

‘Minji! Minji!’

The class president Jung Minji looked at Yoon Girim who was mouthing her name. She suddenly became irritated.

‘Try to get out with your own strength!’

Jung Minji hated the weak. She loathed those who didn’t resist.

Because… she was in pain.

It was different from being kind. It was closer to an illness. Perhaps it was due to her natural-born empathy or through experiences. Whenever Jung Minji saw someone who was getting bullied or beaten, or crying in front of her… her chest ached as if she was the one being beaten. It wasn’t a figure of speech; she really was in pain.

Jung Minji hated that pain. And she hated the weak who caused her to suffer.

No matter how many times she stretched her hand to help, they didn't stand up for themselves... so she despised those that caused her endless pain.

'I wish that these weaklings would all die!'

This was her honest feeling. However, she could never turn her back on someone who was suffering. She hated that part of her... but there really was nothing she could do.

Jung Minji counted the people who surrounded Yoon Girim. 6 people. These people either had a sword or wore a chainmail. Jung Minji was better equipped. As a result of diligently moving from the start, she had obtained a shield, longsword and armor. However, she was outnumbered.

Jung Minji quickly scanned her surroundings to increase her numbers.

In the middle of all this confusion.

Swoosh.

Just then, the semi-transparent walls that were wrapped around the ITEMs disappeared.

And Choi Hyuk had to kill 3 people before the next game started.

Chapter 8: Bonus Game (3)

Who would they kill?

Of course, it would be the dropouts. They weren't distributed karma since they had not gone up onto the [Ring of Rebirth]. On top of that, if he killed them, they would turn into items.

The problem was who to target. Normally, they would choose people that they had never met before.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't target the dropouts.

'I'll kill the first one that receives an item and take it.'

It was a riskier strategy than facing the weak dropouts. But Choi Hyuk didn't want to personally kill the dropouts. It was because he believed that his mother would have faced the same fate. However, he needed items. And, for the hidden rule, he need to kill three more.

That was why he decided. That if someone killed another, Choi Hyuk would kill that person. He couldn't kill the innocent. He was confident he could handle that much risk.

If others saw him, they may denounce him as a hypocrite.

'So? What's wrong with that?'

Choi Hyuk just needed to set his own rules.

‘Aahhh!”

A teacher’s scream filled the gym. The people who watched from afar thought, ‘Ah, so that’s killing violently.’ A sound they thought they would never become familiar with rang in their ears.

Choi Hyuk looked towards that direction. The social studies teacher was stabbing a young unknown teacher with a spear. Still, since he was a grown-up, he didn’t wait in front of a box with a student inside. The teachers targeted and gathered around boxes with teachers inside and the moment the box disappeared, they would attack in an organized manner. In that sense, they were grown-ups.

“Cough…”

The spear pierced right below the neck. A fatal blow. Although he didn’t die instantly, the young teacher flailed around on the floor in his own blood.

At that moment.

“Huh?”

A golden hammer the size of a human appeared above the dying

teacher’s head.

Swish.

The hammer let out a mysterious sound,

Slam!!

And mercilessly smashed the teacher with a fatal wound.

Drip, drip.

Scraps of meat and blood splattered onto the clothes and the cheeks of the surrounding spectators.

The hammer, still in its smashing position, disappeared with another swish. In its place, a necklace appeared, floating in the air. The necklace automatically fell down towards the social studies teacher who had dealt the final blow.

The social studies teacher quickly grabbed the necklace and hung it around his neck.

He wanted to show a serious expression but the tips of his lips were slowly making their way up. The teachers who couldn’t obtain the necklace sent envious glares or went to hunt other dropouts. There were even some who glanced at the students.

Just then, Choi Hyuk charged.

Dadada, bam!

His footsteps rhythmically sounded out throughout the gym. He charged as fast as he could then with a bang, jumped up into the air.

Because the last footstep the social studies teacher heard was far away from him, he never thought that the footsteps were heading for him.

Choi Hyuk's karma enhanced body shot out like an arrow. The condensed power in his body exploded. Choi Hyuk's body jumped more than 8m forward. A world record class long jump. And it wasn't a simple jump, he also quickly drew his sword.

Choi Hyuk's ability allowed him to move in the best way possible. Even if he had never learned it before, he could control all his joints and muscles to move like an expert that had practiced for his whole life.

The critical moment Choi Hyuk drew his sword, the sword caught on its sheath and whipped forward in an instant. The quickest blow, quick draw. Until the moment Choi Hyuk's sword broke, the social studies teacher had no idea that Choi Hyuk had approached him. However...

Ting!

The Japanese Sword broke in half in midair. One of the pieces brushed past Choi Hyuk's palm and drew blood.

It was then when the social studies teacher finally turned and faced Choi Hyuk. The necklace on his neck flashed multiple times.

'Was it because of that item?'

Even with his incredible vision, Choi Hyuk wasn't able to see it properly. The moment it was about to hit, it looked like something flew out of the necklace and destroyed the Japanese Sword.

"This!!!"

The social studies teacher became enraged. He stabbed his long spear at Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk stepped to one side and avoided the spear. The difference between life and death could be a single step. Choi Hyuk stepped another step closer to the social studies teacher and threw a punch at his throat. That moment.

Punch!

His arm throbbed. The necklace around the social studies teacher emitted a dimmer light.

‘Luckily, it seems to be dependent on the attack.’

If it used the same strength it did when breaking the Japanese Sword, his fist would have been shattered. When he thought that, his whole body began to pump with adrenaline. ‘Danger’ was a feeling that Choi Hyuk hadn’t felt for a long time.

It was different from the boring fights against Kang Minho and Bae Hyunsung.

‘How long will that necklace last?’

Choi Hyuk grinned as he avoided another stab and punched out again. This time, he used less power.

Slam!

His left arm bounced off. However, he didn’t lose his balance.

The expression of the teacher had when facing the pressure emitted by Choi Hyuk’s penetrating style of fighting.

And Choi Hyuk’s eyes saw the light from the necklace around the teacher’s neck go out. Choi Hyuk instinctively knew. That he had used all his chances!

‘Checkmate.’

The social studies teacher tried to sweep the spear in front of him to gain some distance but Choi Hyuk took a hit to the shoulder and stepped closer. Facing the unexpected actions of Choi Hyuk, the teacher's response became a mess.

While Choi Hyuk used his left shoulder to continuously push the spear aside and limited the teacher's actions, he took out a long, thin estoc that was meant for stabbing. Then, he stretched his left hand to grab the teacher's collar and, at the same time, he raised his estoc behind his back and stabbed the teacher with a downwards stab. The sword had pierced above the teacher's collarbone.

"Urk, cough!"

All of this was smooth and natural like flowing water and he had suppressed the teacher with only the right amount of physical strength. The teacher had no choice but to gaze at the sword that was stabbed into his throat.

He turned into ash and was absorbed into Choi Hyuk.

"First one..."

———————

[Necklace of Protection]

Rank: E

Intercepts an opponent's attack within a certain range.

Remaining interceptions: 0/3

*You will gain an interception every 20 minutes.

——————————

When Choi Hyuk hung the necklace around his neck, the hammer appeared again in another area of the gym.

Swish.

Slam!!

This was the moment Choi Hyuk's next target was decided.

**

The total student population was 1,938 people. With teachers, that number exceeded 2,000 and among those, 812 had survived past the [Ring of Rebirth]. And 150 of them participated in the Bonus Game. The rest moved aside as they watched the desperate hunt. Unlike in the [Ring of Rebirth] where people had no choice to kill, many took a passive stance.

On the other hand, the ones who participated to obtain items or to save their friends became more immersed in the situation.

Chapter 9: Bonus Game (4)

7 minutes after the boxes disappeared, the majority of the dropouts had been killed.

It was a gruesome scene.

First, the dropouts were separated into two groups, one with friends that tried to protect them and others without. The dropouts with friends protecting them numbered 7 to 8. It was more than everyone thought.

The rest had to survive on their own.

The moment the boxes disappeared.

“Euahh!”

With a hurried scream, the friendless dropouts ran. The hunters tried to stop their paths but they rolled and pushed their way out.

The dropouts weren’t captured as easily as everyone expected. The hunters were people who had karma and were stronger than the dropouts but they were still students and teachers. They were people who would have a hard time catching a rabbit even while running after it with a sword. It was hard to kill those who struggled to live.

This was why a more gruesome scene unfolded. A round of mixed martial arts was 5 minutes. For the dropouts who didn't have karma to try their best to run and resist for that time, of course, they were at their limit. The dropouts' movements became sluggish while the hunters who were pissed became more heartless. A running dropout was hit by a swing of a spear and rolled onto the ground. Someone came running behind him, kicked his face, then grabbed his hair and sliced off his neck. Then the hammer would appear, smash its victim, splattering blood everywhere. Afterwards, an item would appear.

Madness.

The people who didn't participate but were spectating felt their knees tremble.

And this scene occurred throughout the gym. Many would chase after one and the lucky winner would obtain the item. However, not everyone was like that.

Although everyone had similar stats and karma, the difference between each other started to show and it was greater than the difference among level 1's in an AOS game[1].

There were 'players' who particularly shined.

First, the class president Jung Minji. She fought like she was the incarnation of Joan of Arc. Not only did she show that she was physically skilled but she even was outstanding at reading the situation and devising plans. There was no hesitation in her

actions.

The moment the box protecting Yoon Girim disappeared, she grabbed her, put her over her shoulders and charged. The 6 people who surrounded Yoon Girim all had dumb expressions like a dog chasing a chicken and couldn't react in time.

The place she was heading towards was next to Chu Youngjin who was protecting his girlfriend.

Punch!

The moment she slammed her fist into a student's throat who was approaching Lee Hyejin, his girlfriend, an alliance was formed. Jung Minji didn't stop there.

"Hey! Baek Saelom! Aren't you friends with Hyejin?"

Like that, she continued to call out specific people's names. Although there were some who looked away, there were also some who slowly entered the fray.

As she started to aggressively form a group, the hunters felt uncomfortable facing Jung Minji's group.

This game was a bonus game. Although an E rank item was enticing, there weren't many who were willing to risk their lives for it.

Of course, they were some who were still willing to kill even though they didn't have to put their lives on the line.

The third year, student representative Kim Piljoong was like that. He coordinated with his friend, Son Dukpil, and he differentiated people he knew and didn't know with a sword. He would save those who he was familiar with but kill those he had only met once. No one was able to block his arrows as he was skilled in archery. He killed 3 dropouts and their friends who tried to protect them. Son Dukpil would take care of those that approached and Kim Piljoong would shoot arrows from behind or stab with his gladius. Kim Piljoong had obtained a new bow, shoes and a shield. And among those, he gave the shield to his friend, Son Dukpil.

There was even a player who would run around swiftly cutting dropouts' necks. She was the one known as the Queen Bee among third years, Lee Hyunah. When she ran, her victims wouldn't be able to react as their heads dropped onto the floor. Even their blood took a while to flow. As if she was kind, she would save those with pretty faces and mercilessly kill those she deemed ugly. She gave swords to those she saved and ordered them to kill others. She had obtained a ring and a shuriken.

5 teachers died after getting hit by the gym teacher's iron mace. Among them, three weren't dropouts but those that hunted dropouts. The gym teacher Hwang Mangi didn't hesitate to kill his competitors. He had obtained a pill and armor.

Then there was Choi Junsung. As expected, he easily obtained

items. While dragging a long two-handed sword behind him.

“Wanna move?”

With those words, even competitors who had caught a dropout would move aside without a word. He was the rumored fighter of the third years so they didn’t have the courage to stand up to him. The first third year who lost his temper was cut in half by Choi Junsung’s lightning fast two-handed sword. Choi Junsung obtained a necklace, helmet and gauntlets.

Who to kill?

Your competitors or to quickly kill the dropouts?

And.

Will you kill only the dropouts or their friends as well?

Or, contrarily, will you kill the hunters and save the dropouts?

Who will you kill and who will you save?

Even in this simple game, there were a few options and the players who shined each had their own style.

Instead of a fight between justice and injustice, it was more a

fight between rules. And rules were something only the strong could create.

And among them, Choi Hyuk's rule was eye-catching.

'Kill the one who obtains an item.'

There was no one who specifically targeted those who obtained items. Because an E rank was powerful, no one wanted to fight against people with items with unknown effects.

While everyone else was fairly(?) killing dropouts and obtaining items, Choi Hyuk was the only one who solely focused on snatching the items after killing their owners. Because of this, Choi Hyuk's fights were especially fierce.

Since the necklace he had snatched first was useless as it was already spent, his second fight was fierce as well. His opponent wielded an E rank saber. Every time he clashed with the E rank saber, his F rank Bastard Sword would chip. If he was to receive a hit straight on, it was certain his sword would split in two. Also, the E rank saber increased its owner's power and speed, so it was difficult for Choi Hyuk to break through. Choi Hyuk sneakily moved back avoiding the slashes as he waited for his opponent to tire out and stabbed right when his opponent showed an opening. His Bastard Sword ripped through his opponent's armor and Choi Hyuk was able to seize a slightly curved E rank saber from his corpse.

Every fight would be the same, so it took quite a lot of time.

When he seized the Necklace of Protection and the saber, 6 minutes of the Bonus Game had already passed. And by that time, most the dropouts were chased down and killed.

While one side was hunting normally, Choi Hyuk was fighting fiercely by himself.

Smash!

At the same time Choi Hyuk seized the saber, another golden hammer fell to the floor. Shoes that would increase your recovery stat and jumping ability. The student who had obtained them was clearly aware of Choi Hyuk. It was because he had seen Choi Hyuk target other people's items. As soon as he received the shoes, he ran to the sides and hid among the spectators. However, Choi Hyuk chased after him. The item owner used his increased jumping ability to avoid Choi Hyuk but, eventually, Choi Hyuk's estoc pierced through his stomach. There were no exceptions to Choi Hyuk's 'Kill those that killed first. In the order, I see them' rule.

Everyone was filled with shock at the scene.

Especially the spectating students who thought they were a safe distance away, they couldn't help but be terrified of Choi Hyuk's determination as he moved in between them to kill his target.

"Haa... Ha..."

When he had finally killed his last target, Choi Hyuk's stamina was at its limit. The karma that was fiercely circulating his body stiffened or relaxed. It seemed he was feeling the effects of his stamina stat.

But still, perhaps it was due to struggling through fights or because of his rule, he wasn't as uncomfortable as he was when he killed Bae Hyunsung. It was better if his body was uncomfortable than his mind.

He calmed his breath and looked at his surroundings.

'What a mess.'

Everyone was flashing out a red (hostile) light. Some were even emitting a black (killing) light. Choi Hyuk could see it with his 'Eyes of Distinction'. Red and black lights flashed on his skin. It was an unpleasant and disgusting feeling.

Many were cautious or envious or hated Choi Hyuk. Although the student body president Kim Piljoong and the gym teacher Hwang Mangi had killed more people than Choi Hyuk, the one who was under the most hostility was him.

It was because, among the players who stood out, Choi Hyuk was a guy that they had never heard of or seen before and he was the only one who targeted those who obtained items. There was no one who doubted that the best fighter in school, Choi Junsung, would kill people. But when a person no one had seen before was

doing things even the best fighter Choi Junsung wasn't doing, he really popped. A lot of hate fell onto Choi Hyuk.

Except for Choi Junsung.

'Why is he white?'

Only Choi Junsung was emitting a white (goodwill) light to Choi Hyuk. When their eyes met, he would wave. For him to show goodwill when he killed people. For some reason, he felt worse. Choi Hyuk ignored him.

The only surviving dropouts were the four Jung Minji's group was protecting. Besides them, all the other dropouts either died or, with the help of their friends, killed someone and got rid of the ITEM mark.

As it was tough to face the 15 people in Jung Minji's group, the hunt for dropouts ended there.

Then, when no dropouts were killed for 2 minutes, the announcement for the next game appeared. There wasn't even a break.

'Damn... damn it all...'

'These fucking dropouts...'

Jung Minji who was unable to obtain any E rank items because she was protecting the dropouts was inwardly grinding her teeth.

However, she was the player who had formed a group faster than anyone else.

And that was how the [Throne Game] began.

Notes:

1] Aeon of Strife, probably better to think of it as a MOBA (MOBA is like an online battle arena).

Chapter 10: Throne Game (1)

The rules of the Throne Game were partially revealed.

———————

[Throne Game]

1. Think of five people. If you gain their support, you can become a king.

2. Those that become kings will receive 10 free karma points

3. Time limit: 1 minute

4. <Hidden>

———————

In under a minute, how many people could gain the support of five people in a single school?

A typical group of friends was made up of 3-5 people and there was bound to be central person in that group. There were more people who attempted to gain five people's support than they thought.

On top of that, the reward was 10 free karma points. Normally if someone killed a person, a total of 7 karma points would be distributed to each stat, so it was better than killing someone. Since the karma points were able to be allocated however they wanted, it might even be better than killing 4 or 5.

Also, because of the short time limit, there was a rushed side to it like a sale that was about to end.

The students and teachers who were confident in their popularity competitively thought of five people.

[Kim Piljoong wants your support. Do you agree?]

The friends who were asked received a short message.

These people exchanged glances with each other.

It was the same with the class president Jung Minji. However, the ones she thought of weren't those who trusted and followed her or those who were easy to deal with like Yoon Girim. She thought of nearby leaders who she was friendly with. She picked the third year who fought hard with a firefighter's axe, Chu Youngjin, the student who was known as the most handsome boy in her class, Kwon Saehyuk and the ethics teacher who helped protect the dropouts with Jung Minji, Park Solam.

Jung Minji said at the same time.

"Carefully think about what that the hidden rule is! 'Throne Game', do you think there will be endless thrones? We have to join our strength together."

The ones who heard her shout were speechless. She was saying that the number of thrones was limited and that the ones who

declared themselves as kings would have to fight each other in a battle royale.

'She thought that far as soon as the message appeared?'

They couldn't help but be surprised by her intelligence.

"Are you sure?"

The ethics teacher Park Solam asked.

"Rationally, half-half. Emotionally, 100%."

Jung Minji gave a short answer. Everyone took her words seriously.

Everyone had either fought together with Jung Minji or had seen her actions in the Bonus Game. If they couldn't trust her judgement, who could they trust?

If what she said was true, it was better to join up as one strong power than be separated into 6 different groups.

Eventually, Jung Minji gained the support of five leaders.

Pahhh!

Light shined from Jung Minji's body. It wasn't just her. Shining lights appeared throughout the gym. Among the 797 survivors of the Bonus Game, 42 had become kings.

They stared into space as if there was a message only for the kings. Kim Piljoong looked as if it was only natural, Choi Junsung looked like he was having fun and Jung Minji had a nervous expression, however, the majority had proud expressions as if they had become a special existence.

Then the announcement changed.

———————

[Throne Game]

4. Choose your king. Those who aren't kings must be affiliated with a king.

5. Time limit: 5 minutes. Those who haven't chosen a king will cease to exist.

6. <Hidden>

———————

At this moment, Choi Hyuk recalled the hidden rules he found during the break.

———————

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #9]

If a person kills more than 5 people and awakens to a Innate skill but is not affiliated with a king, the person receives the rights of

the ‘King without Subjects’ and 30 free karma points that can be allocated however they want.

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #15]

When a ‘King without Subjects’ sits on the throne, the person will be randomly given a D rank or greater weapon.

———————

‘Good…’

If he hadn’t found these rules, Choi Hyuk would have had to choose a king as well. However, he had found rules related to ‘King without Subjects’. And to achieve it, he had already killed 5 people.

Choi Hyuk crossed his arms and waited. Since the rule about ‘those who haven’t chosen a king will cease to exist’ didn’t apply to him who had found the hidden rules.

But, there was no way the other kings knew that. Choi Hyuk was the most outstanding player in the Bonus Game and it was obvious that no matter what kind of game the Throne Game was; it was necessary to have strong followers.

The first to approach was Jung Minji. Her group was made up of the friends and colleagues of the five who joined her at the start and it could be considered large enough to face off against the school president Kim Piljoong’s group.

“Hyuk. Join me.”

Choi Hyuk turned to look at Jung Minji. A smart and daring girl. The girl who had stood up for him by herself. The girl who had saved Yoon Girim who was abandoned by everyone else. But, she was definitely not a pushover. She was just strangely sensitive to the weak as she unhesitantly stabbed bastards like Lee Mingi with an awl.

She was charming. If he hadn’t found the hidden rules, he might have gone under Jung Minji’s command.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“I have some circumstances.”

Jung Minji’s expression didn’t change when she heard his refusal and she asked calmly.

“In the very least, I don’t want to become enemies with you. Who are you planning to join?”

Choi Hyuk replied.

“Don’t worry. As long as the situation allows it, I won’t be your enemy.”

Then Jung Minji silently looked at Choi Hyuk before extending

her hand. Choi Hyuk examined her hand. The Jung Minji reflected on his ‘Eyes of Distinction’ didn’t reveal any colors. Her suggestion wasn’t made with good or bad intentions. Like she said, she simply didn’t want to fight him. An objective judgement.

In this chaos influenced by madness and confusion, she kept her calm. For some reason, Choi Hyuk liked that calmness. Choi Hyuk grinned as he grabbed her hand.

Besides, there were many bastards to fight besides her.

As soon as she left, Choi Junsung approached him. He smiled brightly and abruptly tried to put his arms around Choi Hyuk’s shoulders. Choi Hyuk pushed him away before his arms could wrap around him.

He was the Choi Hyuk who had seen Lee Mingi put his arms around Yang Gilsoo and strangle him.

The fellow known as Choi Junsung looked like he had nothing to be scared of as he acted thoughtlessly.

“What.”

“Hey… Don’t be so cranky. You fight pretty good? Let’s fight together. You have to choose someone anyways.”

The best fighter in school Choi Junsung really liked Choi Hyuk. He who had no friends, only lackeys, felt that he had finally found

an ‘equal’. That was why, even though Choi Hyuk pushed him away, he didn’t feel bad.

And he never thought that Choi Hyuk would actually refuse him. It didn’t matter if he liked him or not. If a tiger was to choose a king, it would be another tiger. Choi Junsung was confident that the only tigers in this school were Choi Hyuk and himself.

“Screw off.”

So the next words were particularly unpleasant.

“What?”

“I told you to screw off.”

The only person who thought they were equals was Choi Junsung. Choi Hyuk thought he was nothing more than a ‘shitty bastard’ who only acted tough when he was actually weak.

Choi Junsung’s face distorted.

“Huh. What? So did you really side with that bitch? Fine. I get it. Ptu.”

Choi Junsung spread out his hands before turning around and leaving.

In between the white (goodwill) light his body was emitting, traces of red (killing) light squeezed through. The warm light had traces of clamminess to it.

'What? How can there be goodwill and killing intent? Is it saying that since he can't get me, he'll destroy me?'

Anyways, he was a funny guy.

That was how people with killing intent increased but Choi Hyuk didn't care. Didn't he resolve himself? That he would stand at the top. That he would show the most memorable performance.

5 minutes had passed.

When everyone else stood around the 42 kings, Choi Hyuk stood by himself.

Those who approached him with slight expectations all had cold water poured over them. They all thought one thing.

'Just who is he backed by to act like that?'

Choi Hyuk was a dangerous existence. They never thought of the possibility that Choi Hyuk wouldn't choose anyone and were curious who Choi Hyuk joined in secret.

Then there was a change.

Paah!

It was the same as when the kings were chosen. Choi Hyuk body emitted a light. But, the color of the light was different. Instead of a white light, a black light was emitted. And above Choi Hyuk's head, a hidden rule was revealed.

———————

[Throne Game, Hidden Rule #9]

If a person kills more than 5 people and awakens to a Innate skill but is not affiliated with a king, the person receives the rights of the 'King without Subjects' and 30 free karma points that can be allocated however they want.

———————

"Huuh."

Shouts erupted all around him. No way. For there to be a rule about a 1-person king? Although Choi Hyuk didn't know this, unlike the other rules which had multiple copies, there was only a single copy of the 'King without Subjects' rule. To everyone else, Choi Hyuk's ascension to 'King without Subjects' was something they had never expected.

'On top of that, 30 free karma points?'

In fact, if they ranked the people who had killed the most, the

school president Kim Piljoong, gym teacher Hwang Mangi and Choi Hyuk placed in the top three. For someone like him to receive 30 free karma points to use however he wished meant that he could act with an unequaled strength. And this place was a place where you would get stronger the more you kill. If there was this much difference from the beginning, it might be hard for them to catch up.

Their already heightened alertness against Choi Hyuk further hit their peak when the other rules of the Throne Game were revealed.

———————

[Throne Game]

6. There are 5 thrones. You cannot leave unless 5 kings remain.

7. The only way to end the qualification of a king is to kill them.

8. From here on out, followers are unable to defy their king and no king is able to kill their followers. If a follower's king is killed, the follower will join the enemy king's group.

———————

Those who had hastily become kings regretted it. It was as if they had voluntarily jumped into a game of death. There were about 30 kings like that while the other 13 had a burning desire to take one of the five seats.

At the same time...

Killing intent poured onto Choi Hyuk who was the strongest by

himself but had no strengths in numbers. Choi Hyuk could see the killing intent with his ‘Eyes of Distinction’.

His vision was filled with red lights. A disgusting sticky feeling. Choi Hyuk smiled like a beast.

While smiling, he specifically pointed out kings who were emitting red lights.

“You.”

The first person he pointed to was the student president Kim Piljoong. He had a ‘Who are you?’ expression.

“You.”

The second was Choi Junsung. He just shrugged his shoulders.

“You.”

The third was the gym teacher Hwang Mangi. His facial muscles rippled when he heard a student talking to him impolitely.

“You. You. You.”

The 6 kings Choi Hyuk pointed out were quite high ranked. At the same time, they were those who had the most killing intent

towards him. After specifically pointing them all out, Choi Hyuk declared while revealing his teeth.

"I'm going to kill you."

The other kings were speechless. Even Jung Minji's expression distorted.

Choi Hyuk unconcernedly started to distribute his free karma points. If he was to include the previous reward for [Danger], he had 40 free karma points. Choi Hyuk divided it up into 30 and 10 points and put them in Stamina and Recovery.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 15 (+5)

Speed: 19 (+5)

Control: 27

Endurance: 13

Stamina: 45

Recovery: 35 (+10)

*Free Karma Points: 10

*Retribution Point: 5

[Comparison to his beginning stats]

Power: 5

Speed: 7

Control: 22

Endurance: 7

Stamina: 9

Recovery: 10

————————

His other stats were higher than others anyways. Even if they were lower, Choi Hyuk was confident he would win. So he believed that the most important stats were Stamina and Recovery.

‘Since I don’t know how many I’ll kill…’

He planned on fully revealing his violent side in this fight.

‘Watch carefully.’

He was planning on appealing to the fucking bastards who created this game.

To what lengths this human known as Choi Hyuk could fight to.

**

[Settings (T/N: Information about how the system works)]

Power: 16 (+5) Stats raised with items will be indicated with a (+5). If you were to take away the increased stat, power would decrease to 11.

Below are the items Choi Hyuk earned in the Bonus Game

———————

[Necklace of Protection]

Rank: E

Intercepts an opponent's attack within a certain range.

Remaining interceptions: 0/3

*You will gain an interception every 20 minutes.

———————

———————

[Tireless Boots]

Rank: E

Recovery +10

Durability: 10/10

Allows you to run faster and jump higher.

———————

———————

[Fang Saber]

Rank: E

Power +5 Speed +5

Durability: 300/300

_____

Chapter 11: Throne Game (2)

Flash!

Lights flashed out everywhere as a king symbol appeared above everyone's forehead. And they were granted the names of the kings.

Jung Minji's symbol was a bloody knight, her king name was the Crazy Knight King.

Choi Junsung had an executioner as his symbol, his king name was the Slaughter King.

Kim Piljoong had a hunter as his symbol, his king name was the Hunter King.

And above Choi Hyuk's head was a black flag made from something that looked like the clothes of a death god. His king name was the King without Subjects.

As their symbols were larger and brighter than everyone else's, it was easy to find a king wherever he was. And you could tell who was under who's rule in an instant.

Those who declared themselves as kings numbered 43 and there were 5 thrones.

Each group started to distance themselves from each other. There were too many competitors to start fighting right away. A fierce psychological battle erupted between close groups. And that boring engagement... would have continued.

If it wasn't for Choi Hyuk.

While groups were wary of each other as they distanced themselves away, Choi Jung dashed. Towards the school president, the Hunter King Kim Piljoong.

Kim Piljoong's reaction was fast.

"Those with shields come forth, spearmen behind them. The rest get behind them and all of you get your backs against the wall."

Among the groups in the gym, Kim Piljoong's group was the truest to their name as well as the strongest. He wasn't afraid of Choi Hyuk. However, he was pissed.

'There nothing good being under attention from the start... tsk."

In a situation where everyone was trying to read what was on each other's mind, they would only become targets if they put under attention. If his battle line became disorganized when fighting Choi Hyuk, there was a possibility that another group would launch a surprise attack.

Kim Piljoong drew an arrow. The bow he obtained when he killed

a dropout, the ‘Returning Bow’, not only increased the speed of his arrows but his arrows would return to him after being shot.

‘I will shoot when he comes within 5 meters.’

No matter how good Choi Hyuk’s skills were, he believed that there was no way that he would be able to block an arrow shot from the ‘Returning Bow’.

But, Choi Hyuk switched directions before he came within 5 meters. He even sped up. With his 19 karma points in Speed and the speed effect of the ‘Tireless Boots’, Choi Hyuk sped forward.

Choi Hyuk’s target was never the Hunter King Kim Piljoong. Running towards Kim Piljoong was just a disguise.

His real target was the weakest of the six kings he pointed to. His symbol was a dhole.

Choi Hyuk didn’t know his name. Only that he was friendly with Lee Mangi, Bae Hyunsung and others who bullied him. His killing intent towards Choi Hyuk was his mistake.

He stared blankly as Choi Hyuk approached him. His eyes widened later as if he was surprised but it was already too late.

Tada, Slam!

Choi Hyuk's body flew 10 meters into the air. The moment his subordinates flinched, Choi Hyuk was already passing above their heads. When his target was fumbling with his sword, Choi Hyuk pulled his Fang Saber from its sheath.

Slash!

[First Kill! You were the first to kill a king. You have been given an additional 3 free karma points. Retribution points have increased by 3.] [You have killed a king. You have been given 2 free karma points.]

If he found a hidden rule about the first kill, he might have gotten a bigger reward but it wasn't a bad start.

Thud.

When Choi Hyuk landed, the group without a king stared at him with blank expressions. The king's symbol above their heads disappeared.

Choi Hyuk lifted his head and counted the numbers.

"One down. Five bastards left."

Choi Hyuk's next target was the next weakest one. It was normal in a fight against many to target the weakest ones first.

The fight began.

**

Originally, those followers who had lost their king would become affiliated with the enemy king.

However, it was different when their king was killed by the ‘King without Subjects’ Choi Hyuk. The followers who lost their king lost their affiliation as well and would join the first king who made contact with them. So, whenever Choi Hyuk killed a king, the place would overflow with new followers. The first to take them got them. When such a chance appeared in a game where you would die out if you couldn’t increase your power, the real competition between the kings began. The psychological battle quickly switched to battles and all-out wars.

A blood wind blew with Choi Hyuk at its center.

Choi Hyuk was intoxicated with the karma circulating his body. Karma was stronger than bones, tougher than muscles and more flexible than joints. The more karma he received, the more superior the karma that circulated his body was.

The karma from his 21 Speed stat immediately contracted to moved Choi Hyuk’s body. When others took one step, Choi Hyuk took two. In a fight, that one step difference could mean life or death.

Slash!

His opponent unconsciously took a step back as he saw Choi Hyuk approach but, with another step, Choi Hyuk slashed off his neck with his Fang Saber. Choi Hyuk quickly turned around and charged to his next opponent.

Slash!

It was a guy wearing an E rank armor. Choi Hyuk didn't aim for his armor but for his wrist.

"Gahhh!"

When his target screamed as he grabbed his bleeding wrist, Choi Hyuk used that chance to take out a thin estoc with his left hand and stabbed his opponent's neck between the folds of his armor. 30 Control. He didn't waste a single drop of strength with his Control stat that surpassed his Power and Speed. The karma stretched out and precisely stabbed with the sword.

"Grkk..."

Enemies were everywhere, he took one out but another enemy arrived raising his sword immediately after. Choi Hyuk grabbed and pulled the wrist that was holding onto the sword. As the man lost his balance, the Fang Saber sliced his throat.

The dead turned into ashes as they were absorbed into Choi

Hyuk. Then, Choi Hyuk's stats would increase once again. He was getting stronger in real time.

"Block it! Block it!"

Choi Hyuk's second target. The symbol of a wild dog, the Wild Dog King Song Minsik urged his followers crazily. Due to the rule that followers could not disobey their king, his followers blocked Choi Hyuk's path knowing all too well that they would die.

Taking advantage of the confusion, the Weed King Kim Taesik brought his followers to launch a surprise attack on the Wild Dog King. "Euah! What the!" shouted the freaked out Song Minsik who ran away. "Goodbye," said the tailing Kim Taesik. And behind Kim Taesik was the Crazy Knight King Jung Minji who attacked, "I'll use your items well." Jung Minji who wasn't able to obtain any items during the Bonus Game was first targeting easy kings with items.

Although they chased one another and tossed and turned, eventually only the strong would survive.

The Crazy Knight King Jung Minji (Class President, First in School) and the Hunter King Kim Piljoong (School President) were well versed in tactics. Their followers didn't lose formation in this confusing brawl.

"Go back a step!"

They would move back.

“Two steps forward!”

They would push away their enemies and stay in line. If they were to obtain shields, spears and swords and planned out new tactics, everyone and their dog wouldn’t be able to stop them.

That was the reason. Why Kim Piljoong was so overly confident.

It had been 20 minutes since the Throne Game had started. 20 kings had already been eliminated. Kim Piljoong’s group was still the strongest as well as the largest. Choi Hyuk killed 3 kings by himself but to Kim Piljoong, it was like he only killed pathetic ones who didn’t even know the basics. It was because of that. During the brawl, Kim Piljoong’s group came close to Choi Hyuk but Kim Piljoong wasn’t nervous in the slightest. He thought that he could just lazily clean up his surroundings and devour Choi Hyuk when he had the chance.

‘Killing a regular king gives you 2 free karma points... I wonder how much the King without Subjects will give?’

Instead, he was actually becoming more excited.

**

That moment, Jung Minji was in the middle of urging Yoon Girim.

“I did what I can. I’m pissed so don’t push it.”

“Bu…but…”

“Stop. Just shut up and kill. You trash.”

Jung Minji threw a student who was subdued by her group in front of Yoon Girim. Yoon Girim still hadn’t gotten rid of the ITEM mark. She wasn’t distributed any karma, wasn’t affiliated with anyone, couldn’t fight and was instead becoming a target for enemies. Jung Minji had a mind to kill Yoon Girim and obtain an item. However, whenever she saw her weak face, she couldn’t leave her alone. That was why she became angrier.

‘If I could have my way, I would like to do this to Lee Hyejin as well…”

Jung Minji glanced at Chu Youngjin’s girlfriend, Lee Hyejin. Currently, among the four dropouts, two had killed someone and had gotten rid of their ITEM marks. The only ones left were Yoon Girim and Lee Hyejin. However, Jung Minji found it uncomfortable telling Lee Hyejin what to do.

Unlike Kim Piljoong who was always famous as well as a leader and the school president, she was only a class president, even though she was a king of the alliance, she couldn’t help be careful around Chu Youngjin.

‘I can’t make enemies when I don’t know what kind of games there will be in the future.’

Chu Youngjin who was currently the attack leader of the group was crazy for Lee Hyejin. There was no reason to create grudges.

“Sob… sob…”

While Jung Minji was pondering over things, Yoon Girim had stabbed the subdued student in the neck while crying. The ITEM mark above her head disappeared. In its place was Jung Minji’s Crazy Knight King symbol.

Jung Minji didn’t want to see Yoon Girim’s crying face.

‘Fucking sensitivity…”

When Yoon Girim cried in this bloody battle reeking with blood, Jung Minji’s heart hurt. Jung Minji patted Yoon Girim’s head as if she was hitting her before turning towards the battlefield.

“Now, go fight.”

It was about time the fight would come to a lull anyways.

Even if she roughly counted, there weren’t even 20 kings remaining. As there was more space than before, it was much easier to keep each other in check. And due to the brawl started

because of Choi Hyuk, everyone's stamina was at rock bottom. After using Power surpassing their Stamina stat, karma would completely relax and they weren't able to move their bodies like they wanted to. It was similar to a muscle pain. Some would call it the 'Waiting Time for Re-use'.

Already, she could tell that the front lines weren't as fierce as before. Instead of fighting, it was more like they were acting like they were.

'If you die in this situation, Yoon Girim, you're a dumb bitch.'

When Jung Minji was finishing her calculations.

Murmur.

The front lines noisily murmured.

'What happened?'

In the middle of the commotion stood Choi Hyuk.

And a countless number of Hunter symbols were surrounding Choi Hyuk. Currently the strongest, Kim Piljoong's group... Their symbol was disappearing. Jung Minji's mouth opened wide dumbly.

"The school president is dead!"

Someone who was overcome with fear and terror screamed.

But that wasn't the end of the screams.

While Choi Hyuk was stirring up Kim Piljoong's group, Choi Junsung thought this was a chance and set up a small party and was devouring Kim Piljoong's outer lines.

So,

Choi Hyuk's eyes landed on Choi Junsung who was with a small group.

"Waaahhh!"

Another commotion arose.

Just how many did he kill to get so strong? Choi Hyuk's movements had already far surpassed that of a human. His body immediately accelerated that it was like watching a motorcycle hit zero-hundred in 2 seconds. Choi Hyuk's Fang Saber shot towards Choi Junsung.

Clash!

Sparks flew out like lightning. Choi Junsung's two-handed sword blocked Choi Hyuk's Fang Saber with lightning speed. However,

Choi Junsung's face became completely pale.

'Fuck... don't tell me that was just his strength without a skill?'

Choi Junsung was the man who followed Choi Hyuk up to the ceiling. There, he found an E rank skill called [Lightning Strike]. [Lightning Strike] could use any weapon to strike with incredible speed and it matched well with Choi Junsung's two-handed weapon. However, Choi Hyuk's running slash was equal to his [Lightning Strike].

Clang!

The swords clashed again. Choi Junsung's [Lightning Strike] was able to deflect Choi Hyuk's Fang Saber. On the outside, they looked equal. But, Choi Junsung's insides were burning. The skill consumed a lot of stamina. His tense karma already started to stretch out like rubber on a hot day. If he used [Lightning Strike] again in this state, he wouldn't even have the strength to run.

"Fuck! Block him!"

Choi Junsung used the subordinates who followed him here as a shield as he escaped.

Slash!

Crash!

“Gahhh!”

His subordinates died a gruesome death but because of them, Choi Junsung was able to escape to his headquarters. Even when Choi Junsung arrived at his headquarters, he didn’t have the courage to go save his dying subordinates.

The surroundings were still.

At some point, there was an empty space with Choi Hyuk in the middle.

He suddenly cut off the school president Kim Piljoong’s neck then Choi Junsung who dominated fights ran away with his tail between his legs.

“Haa… haa…”

In the center, Choi Hyuk was catching his breath.

After 30 minutes of fighting desperately, everyone’s karma had become stretched out and their legs were trembling. Steam even came up from Choi Hyuk’s body.

Choi Hyuk was recalling the fight.

‘So close.’

It was going great when he killed Kim Piljoong while his guard was down. The interception from the [Necklace of Protection] really showed its worth. Kim Piljoong couldn't block his attack when he ignored defense and rushed in.

'It would have been the best if I took down Choi Junsung as well.'

However, Choi Junsung was already locked up in his headquarters, completely alert. He had already used up the one interception he had and it was too much to fight him now.

Choi Hyuk wiped his head. Sweat dripped off.

Huh...

It was refreshing.

He wasn't fighting with the intentions to kill.

How far his body could move. Where he should stretch his arms or legs to. He moved that way up until now as if he was training and experimenting. Everything went the way he thought it would. Choi Hyuk's ability was finally able to stretch out its arms and let out a cheer.

Choi Hyuk looked at his surroundings. He had killed 4 out of his

6 targets. There were only about 17 kings left alive. They all looked like their stamina had reached their limit as they took this chance to curl up and rest.

However, Choi Hyuk never thought about resting.

“Don’t we have to continue? I still have 2 left.”

Choi Hyuk stared at the gym teacher Hwang Mangi. He took a deep breath before dashing towards him.

“Crazy!”

“Just what is this bastard’s Stamina?”

Cries erupted everywhere. To those exhausted people, Choi Hyuk looked like he had become even faster.

Since the beginning of the Throne Game, when everyone else’s stats were around 10 each, Choi Hyuk’s Stamina was at 45 and his Recovery stat was at 35 after using the free karma points he received as a reward.

And currently, his Stamina was at 83 while his Recovery was at 73.

Choi Hyuk put more strength into his sword.

Chapter 12: Throne Game (3)

[Choi Hyuk]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 54 (+5)

Speed: 58 (+5)

Control: 69

Endurance: 52

Stamina: 83

Recovery: 73 (+10)

*Free Karma Points: 8

*Retribution Point: 44

[Hwang Mangi]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 73 (+10)

Speed: 43 (+8)

Control: 33

Endurance: 42 (+10)

Stamina: 33

Recovery: 39 (+5)

*Free Karma Points: 0

*Retribution Point: 28

Hwang Mangi was strong. He had a Power stat of 73. Choi Hyuk's Power stat was 54, so if you only looked at their Power, he was stronger than Choi Hyuk. The 10 free karma points he received once he became a king and the 14 points he earned through hidden rules and killing kings were all put into his Power stat and even his E rank iron mace increased his Power by 10. As he was in the top 3 along with Choi Hyuk and Choi Junsung, his other stats were outstanding as well.

So it was fine as long as Choi Hyuk didn't meet Hwang Mangi's iron mace head on.

Whoosh!

Bang!!

Hwang Mangi's iron mace mercilessly smashed the gym floor. The cement exploded as he smashed it with his 73 Power.

However, Choi Hyuk looked at him with a pathetic expression.

Hwang Mangi's movements wasted too much energy because his Control was less than half of his Power. The karma that was contracting and increasing in his body was too rough. To the point where he couldn't control it.

An obvious blind spot after his full swing. Choi Hyuk pierced that opening.

“Uhuhuk!”

Still, it seemed that the gym teacher had good reflexes as he quickly reacted.

Cling!

The sword that had just slightly pierced Hwang Mangi’s armor slipped off. Hwang Mangi backed away with a pale face. His overflowing confidence went into hiding after a single exchange. Choi Hyuk’s high-speed footsteps were like that of a ghost’s. Most of the strong weren’t strong because they played fair but strong because they were still alive. Hwang Mangi who believed himself to be strong realized too late that he shouldn’t have had a direct fight with Choi Hyuk.

“Everyone block that bastard!”

Most of Hwang Mangi’s followers were teachers. Teachers Choi Hyuk was familiar with blocked his path and wielded their weapons.

Choi Hyuk showed no mercy to those who tried to kill him. A bloodbath occurred.

Hwang Mangi brought his royal bodyguards to target another king in the meantime.

“I have to quickly end this game.”

This was Hwang Mangi's conclusion. That he had to get rid off all the easy kings instead of Choi Hyuk. So that he could be in the last 5.

Bang!

Whenever he swung his iron mace, three or four exhausted students would be smashed apart. However, there was no way he would be able to endlessly swing his iron mace with a Stamina stat that was a bit more half his Power. At some point, Hwang Mangi became completely exhausted as he was busy running away with his royal bodyguards. One minute felt like an hour.

**

The moment Choi Hyuk charged at Hwang Mangi, the other king's fates were sealed.

Jung Minji ordered.

"Get up. Get them."

Currently, Kim Piljoong's group wasn't absorbed. If others didn't follow Choi Hyuk and increase their strength by absorbing other groups, they would be left behind.

Even the third year Queen Bee Lee Hyunah urged her group.

“If you rest cuz you’re tired, you’re dead.”

Choi Junsung was a bit more desperate. He was already heading towards the group next to him.

“Kill!”

The reason was the same as Hwang Mangi’s.

‘Fuck… I’m next if the gym teach dies. I have to quickly kill the rest and end the game.’

With different reasons, they started the final struggle. As an intense battle began while everyone’s stamina was at their bottom, the number of deaths began to pile up one after the other.

Everyone aimed to devour each other.

Slice!

The Assassin King Lee Hyunah was definitely fast and it seemed like she was getting used to a skill as her attacks were even becoming more stealthy. And that shined in this intense battle. While Choi Hyuk was chasing after Hwang Mangi, she had cut off two king’s heads. However, her stamina was also the problem.

“Pant. Pant.”

The moment she had grabbed her knees as sweat dripped down her body.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

A hatchet flew towards her. She tried to move once she heard the sound but her legs wouldn't react.

Thud!

"Ackk!"

The girl's followers surrounded her as she collapsed after getting hit in the shoulder.

"Lightning Strike!"

Flash!

A white lightning seemed to have passed as three people were sliced through their waists.

"Hooo… hooo… I feel like I'm gonna die. Sorry, nuna[1]."

The one who appeared was Choi Junsung. Though he was friendly with Lee Hyunah, he unhesitatingly stabbed the back of

her neck.

“I have enough problems of my own.”

Even Lee Hyunah who distinguished herself in the Bonus Game died in vain.

No one knew where Choi Junsung picked up an E rank hatchet from but his aim was incredible. After the encounter with Choi Hyuk, Choi Junsung hurriedly cleaned out the kings near him and picked up quite a few E rank items. He decided that if he survived this game he would need an item that would help keep Choi Hyuk at bay.

And Chu Youngjin’s girlfriend, Lee Hyejin, was unluckily tangled in. She was the only dropout who didn’t get rid of her ITEM mark.

“Are you okay?”

Chu Youngjin was protecting Lee Hyejin from the intensified confusion. The Crazy Knight King Jung Minji didn’t like his actions but overlooked it for now.

Lee Hyejin and Chu Youngjin were childhood friends. They grew up together like siblings under their parents who were friends with each other. The girl didn’t think of the boy beyond a friend and the boy had a one-sided love for that girl for a long time until they were finally together. A familiar tale that wasn’t very common in real life.

So to Chu Youngjin, it could be said that Lee Hyejin was his other half. In reality, if he were to remove all the memories including her, there wouldn't be many left. In every moment of happiness and sadness, in glory and despair, she was with him.

Chu Youngjin gazed at the trembling Lee Hyejin and Lee Hyejin met Chu Youngjin's gaze and nodded. In her eyes, Chu Youngjin could see a mixture of nervousness and warm trust.

She was always easily scared since she was young. It was the same when Chu Youngjin fell down a flight of stairs when he was seven. The one who was bleeding was Chu Youngjin but the one who fainted from the shock was Lee Hyejin. How shocked Chu Youngjin was when she suddenly fainted, how many times he teased her about it later, how she would sulk saying that she was scared of remembering the blood afterwards and how much effort he put in to calm her down...

To that girl, this situation was too brutal. Chu Youngjin found it too sad.

Just then.

Whoosh.

A hatchet flew and split Lee Hyejin's head.

"Huh?"

Drip drip.

Red blood splattered onto Chu Youngjin's uniform. Soon after, the blood flowing from Lee Hyejin's head covered Chu Youngjin's hands and soon soaked her shoulders.

"Huh?"

The moment when the light in her warm eyes that had met Chu Youngjin's gaze moments before disappeared... became an everlasting nightmare for Chu Youngjin.

Swish.

A golden hammer appeared. As if something shoved him, he was pushed a few steps away and his hand was no longer on her shoulders.

Slam!

Blood splattered everywhere.

When the hammer disappeared, Lee Hyejin was no longer there but a red longsword was floating in her place.

"Ah... Ahhh..."

Chu Youngjin became absentminded.

“Last item!”

Shouted Choi Junsung. He was rushing as fast as he could to grab the longsword.

Chu Youngjin unconsciously chased the sword that was his girlfriend. The hairs on his body stood on end and his eyes became bloodshot.

[Innate skill ‘Berserker’ awakened!]

A system message popped up but he didn’t care.

“Euahhhhhhhhh!”

Chu Youngjin shot towards Choi Junsung at the speed of light. However, Choi Junsung smiled as he held the longsword. Choi Junsung cruelly received the weapon.

“Lightning Stike!”

Chu Youngjin who had awakened the Raging Warrior was fast but he was overwhelmed with agitation and Choi Junsung’s [Lightning Strike] was fast enough to pierce that opening.

That was the moment Jung Minji appeared.

“Protect!”

The Protect skill built in her E rank shield, the ‘Shield of Protection’, activated. A grey barrier surrounded Chu Youngjin’s body.

Clang!

Choi Junsung’s [Lightning Strike] shattered the barrier but due to the barrier’s curvature, his sword slipped and wobbled. The red blade cut into Chu Youngjin’s shoulder but it wasn’t a fatal blow. However, it was Chu Youngjin who was the most surprising. Even as his shoulder was sliced into, he didn’t slow his speed. He ignored the sword stuck in his shoulder and shot forwards with even more strength. His sword embedded itself into Choi Junsung’s neck.

“Co…cough.”

Choi Junsung turned into ash. He died meaninglessly.

During that time, Choi Hyuk chased the escaping Hwang Mangi and eventually killed him. He killed him even quicker because he looked like he would beg for his life. And when he turned his head, he saw Choi Junsung die.

Chu Youngjin ripped out the girl, the red sword that embedded herself into his shoulder. He hugged the sword tightly and broke down sobbing.

Choi Hyuk silently watched the scene.

“...Is this the end?”

The Throne Game was coming to an end.

It took around 30 minutes to eliminate 26 out of the 43 kings but it only took 5 minutes to eliminate 13 out of the remaining 17. There were only 4 kings remaining. The Crazy Knight King Jung Minji, the Heckler King Kim Hyunbaek, the Slave King Song Simin and the King without Subjects, Choi Hyuk.

In reality, before Choi Junsung’s death, with the death of Hwang Mangi, there were 5 kings remaining. Choi Junsung was stabbed to death because of his pointless greed.

The distinguished kings struggled against each other and in fact, the more normal ones survived.

The announcement in the middle of the gym changed.

———————

[Break Time]

1. From now on, the kings and their followers can move

according to their free will.

2. You cannot leave the school until nightfall.

———————

The long brutal fight had finally ended. Out of the 797 survivors of the Bonus Game, 483 remained.

Notes:

1] nuna – what a younger male calls an older female

Chapter 13: Evening and Dinner

Since the corpses turned into ash, the gym was cleaner than he thought. Not only did the Recovery stat decreased the time it took to use Karma again but it was excellent for wounds as well. Most wounds would slowly close up. The seriously wounded would die of shock and turn into ash. As expected, didn't leave a single trace.

If not for the blood stained clothes, he would have thought that everything was a dream.

The sudden peace actually made people nervous.

The one who took the lead was Jung Minji. Although the rule about absolutely following a king's orders disappeared, no one could question Jung Minji's leadership skills. Out of the 483 people, Jung Minji had gathered 258. Due to the actions of the ethics teacher Park Solam, who was her follower, there were an especially large number of teachers in her group.

Jung Minji stood in front of the teachers and brought order.

[You cannot leave the school until nightfall.]

First, she checked that this included the surrounding school field as well. Then she divided everyone into teams and let everyone use the washrooms to wash themselves off. Afterwards, she raided the cafeteria and the snack store and ordered the distribution of food. The Slave King Song Simin followed Jung Minji's commands as well. Choi Hyuk didn't line up for food but took it directly,

however, he didn't take more than the distributed amount.

But the Heckler King Kim Hyunbaek was worried his leadership would be stolen.

"You don't know when things will happen and you want to mix together like this?"

"Then?"

"There's no need to do everything yourself. Just fairly divide the goods and let each group decide how to distribute it."

Jung Minji glared at Kim Hyunbaek before giving him provisions and supplies. Kim Hyunbaek smiled. He thought that Jung Minji was definitely a pushover. Even if she was like a ghost in the battlefield, she couldn't be heartless in situations like these.

'If it was me, I would have never divided it. Tsk, tsk. What's the point in having power? When you don't even know how to use it.'

Kim Hyunbaek secretly looked down on Jung Minji. Because of her, he was able to obtain several things. First, he understood Jung Minji's personality and he could show off his ability to his group. Since his orders weren't absolute, creating a public image was important. Unlike Jung Minji who distributed supplies sparingly, Kim Hyunbaek let his followers eat as much as they wanted that day.

After washing, changing clothes in the locker and eating, it was break time. As there was nothing to do, people suddenly felt everything was new. Everything happened in only a day.

“I can’t believe it… We killed people?”

They were all normal teachers and students this morning but now there wasn’t anyone here who hadn’t murdered before. It was scary. The shock came after everything had happened. They didn’t know during that time but the mushy feeling when a sword sliced into someone, the warmth they felt when blood splattered on their sleeves and the last breath of their victims were now coming back to them.

The thing they couldn’t handle.

“Don’t tell me, it’ll be like this tomorrow?”

“…Fuck. It might even be tonight.”

If they had something to do, it might not have been so overwhelming. But since they weren’t allowed to leave the school until night, their anxiety couldn’t help but rise.

When they were endlessly beaten, it was natural they would become desperate. The real moment their hearts felt like they were being scraped was when it was peaceful. Sobs sounded out around them. There were some looking for their dead friends and some who entered an empty classroom and wept.

It was night.

The student who waited at the school entrance let out a shout.

“The wall is gone! We can go out!”

People swarmed towards the entrance once they heard the shout. However, at that moment, a separate message was given to the kings.

[All troops are to standby until tomorrow morning.]

Choi Hyuk mumbled.

“Fuck… just what are they planning now?”

The message to standby wasn’t given to everyone but only to the kings.

“Everyone stop!!!”

A female voice resonated out from the school. It was Jung Minji. She ran as fast as she could and blocked the entrance with Chu Youngjin. Luckily, no one had left yet. It could be because the streetlights were all off. It would be scary to walk by yourself in a dark night. Too many people had already died.

“A message was sent only to the kings. ‘Standby until morning, those that leave will perish.

Jung Minji lied outright. There was nothing about ‘perishing’. It only said to standby. However, Choi Hyuk couldn’t help but be amazed at her quick thinking. They wouldn’t be well off if they refused the message anyways.

People were agitated.

“Why did only the kings receive it?”

They were suspicious. No, they didn’t want to believe it. The person who came out afterwards was the Slave King Song Simin.

“I got it too. It’s true.”

A heavy silence came over the noisy people. If another king came out and confirmed it, it would be almost certain. The person who messed it up was the Heckler King Kim Hyunbaek.

“I got it as well. But perishing is a lie. It just said to ‘standby’.”

Everyone became noisy once again. Jung Minji gave a death stare to Kim Hyunbaek. He only shrugged his shoulders.

“There really wasn’t anything about perishing?”

Those with foolish expectations asked. Jung Minji said strictly.

“No. It definitely said perish. Kim Hyunbaek, why are you lying?”

Kim Hyunbaek showed a speechless expression at Jung Minji’s question before raising his voice.

“What? Why would I lie?”

Kim Hyunbaek felt dejected. Because it wasn’t a lie. Because his reaction really showed that, some even thought, ‘It looks like he’s right?’

“I got it too. It said perish.”

As soon as three of the four kings said they would perish, the mood that felt like they would jump out at any moment died down. When Jung Minji said, “Let’s go in,” everyone started to make their way back. However, it wasn’t like there weren’t any more doubts.

“Ha! It’s easy to make someone a fool! I get it! I do! I’m sorry!”

It might have been partly because of the loudly shouting Kim Hyunbaek who made his way back to the classroom.

As the night deepened, Jung Minji came to Choi Hyuk,

“Can we gather for a second?”

The Jung Minji reflected in his eyes still continued to be colorless. No good or bad intentions.

“What is it?”

“I want to discuss just what kind of fucked up situation we’re in.”

For Choi Hyuk who wanted to know the mastermind behind this, it wasn’t a bad offer. He went to a classroom. The core members of Jung Minji’s group were already gathered. Even Song Simin and Kim Hyunbaek brought the core members of their groups.

Jung Minji spoke first.

“Two things caught my attention. First, the words written in the Ring of Rebirth. Kill. Only then will you kill.”

Some people nodded at Jung Minji’s words while others showed expressions that they didn’t understand.

“Why is it not ‘will you live’ but ‘will you kill’?

Jung Minji didn’t stop there.

“One more thing. Today’s message. All ‘troops’ are to standby. They called us troops.”

Choi Hyuk nodded his head. He had even seen the message on the window. The words that passed by like an illusion were ‘get angry’.

“They… I don’t know if they are gods or devils. Anyways, I think they are trying to make us into an army.”

She had already come to a conclusion.

“The Ring of Rebirth was for individuals. And they tested one’s talent for killing. They made us fight in groups and pick leaders in the Throne Game. Then what would be next? Just what would we fight against as an army?”

It was silent. Tomorrow… yes, just what would happen tomorrow?

Just then, Kim Hyunbaek’s voice sounded out. It seemed like he was drunk as he had a slight slur when he talked. The ones who searched the night duty room and found alcohol after hearing they had to wait until morning were Kim Hyunbaek’s group.

“Ah~ you really are a headache. I was wondering why you gathered us here at night. We will find out tomorrow morning so why are you in a panic already.”

Kim Hyunbaek swayed as he got up from his seat. Jung Minji asked.

“Kim Hyunbaek. You’re drunk?”

“Fuck. Kim Hyunbaek... Am I your friend? Even if I don’t expect to hear ‘senior’, this is a bit too much.”

He was already drunk. And the events today were so alien they already felt remote. Kim Hyunbaek started to show his real personality.

But Jung Minji didn’t blink an eye and demanded.

“Everyone’s sensitive. If you piss people off in your drunken stupor, they might really pull out their swords. Go out right now and stop the drinking party and sleep.”

Kim Hyunbaek who heard her words only lifted his middle finger before leaving.

“I’m leaving~ You guys can chat til morning!”

Jung Minji’s face became cold.

**

The gathering didn’t produce any real results. There was Jung Minji’s plausible conclusion but that was it. They lacked information. The meeting ended with an agreement they would gather again once they had more information.

Choi Hyuk returned to the classroom. Students had grouped up with their friends and spread out into different classrooms. Choi Hyuk was alone. He sat by himself as he recalled the events that occurred today. First, his status.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

*Human

*Karma Points

Power: 71 (+5)

Speed: 75 (+5)

Control: 86

Endurance: 70

Stamina: 0 (★)

Recovery: 90 (+10)

*Free Karma Points: 10

*Retribution Point: 59

[Innate skill]

Eyes of Distinction

[Accomplishments]

You have killed someone with karma before it was distributed to you

Qualifications of a Sovereign 1/3

———————

A long time had passed since his body filled with karma exceeded the human limit. He was curious what would happen if a stat hit 100 but it just returned to being a single digit and a star appeared next to it. It wasn't simply an increase in stats. It felt like a qualitative change in karma. Afterwards, even if he killed someone, the stat wouldn't rise. Was it because they weren't his match anymore?

And in the accomplishments section, a part about qualifications of a sovereign appeared. It was the reward for taking a throne.

[You have received a part of the Qualifications of a Sovereign.]

Like always, he couldn't figure out anything else about it. Just he felt a stronger belief in Jung Minji's words about an army.

He also received a weapon. His F rank estoc eventually broke during the fight and now he only had the Fang Saber and the new sword, Predator's Blade, left.

Choi Hyuk raised the pitch black blade. The dirty blade looked

crude but it was very sharp. It was the reward he received from one of the hidden rules.

———————

[Predator's Blade]

Rank: D (Unique, Growth-type)

Sharp and sturdy. The more blood it spills of strong foes, the stronger it will get.

Durability: 1,000/1,000

———————

Just looking at the rank, it was iffy. The reward was a weapon that was D rank or above but he received the lowest rank weapon he could get. On top of that, he didn't receive any boosts in stats either. It was a blade that looked to be worse than the E rank Fang Saber. However, Choi Hyuk was completely happy with the weapon.

'A sword just needs to be sharp and sturdy.'

And as it could get stronger by cutting down foes, it was first-rate.

Choi Hyuk recalled the feeling of killing a countless number of people. It was unpleasant. It was a conflicting feeling. It was great that he could fight to his heart's content but, at the same time, there was a psychological resistance. He felt guilty when he remembered his mother's crying face pleading him to not hit people.

No… because of that, he became even angrier. Like the creator of this game wanted.

‘I can’t change the past.’

Choi Hyuk ground his teeth. His mother could already be dead. Although she could be alive… it didn’t matter as he needed to become powerful enough to resist. Only then could he save or take revenge for her. He couldn’t just become a pawn on a chessboard and suffer without knowing. If that was the case…

‘Does that mean I need to become a killer? Do I just need to become an indiscriminate killing machine after discarding my previous self?’

Choi Hyuk shook his head. He would definitely get his revenge. However, a minimum rule, he needed one. It was hypocritical. But that was the mark his mother left on him. He couldn’t give it up.

Choi Hyuk then made a few simple rules. The minimum to remember his past self.

Who to kill?

‘Those who try to kill me. And those who brag about their strength in front of me.’

Luckily there was an overflowing amount of these people. To distinguish himself from others, he had no choice but to kill many… Even today, there was a countless number of candidates.

Now, who to save?

‘This… I don’t know. Those who are useful to me? First… Jung Minji?’

It was hard to set a clear standard.

Choi Hyuk closed his eyes.

‘Let’s do this slowly. Slowly.’

Since it seemed like his rule about who to kill would be enough for a while anyways.

The night was peaceful and sounds of chatter and laughter could be heard from various places. A person couldn’t cry for 24 hours just because something shocking happened to him. The functions of laughter were various and sadness would come and go like a wave. Even in the saddest funeral, the chief mourner would occasionally laugh before crying suddenly.

Perhaps it was because of that, the night after a day of slaughtering was surprising filled with laughter. And there was a commotion that exceeded those noises. Choi Hyuk frowned.

The loud singing of Kim Hyunbaek's drunk group.

'There's no need to kill those trash.'

Although he was pissed, the uncomfortable feeling that would come after killing them would be greater. Choi Hyuk stopped paying attention and turned his body away. At that moment, someone knocked on the classroom door. When he opened it, he found Jung Minji had come with Chu Youngjin. They were completely armed.

Jung Minji suddenly asked.

"We are on our way to Kim Hyunbaek."

Then she read Choi Hyuk's mood. To see if he was displeased or not. Choi Hyuk shrugged his shoulders.

"That has nothing to do with me."

Jung Minji nodded her head and left. Chu Youngjin followed behind her. Chu Youngjin emitted out a savage aura after Lee Hyejin died and showed absolute loyalty to Jung Minji who helped him get his revenge.

"Let's go."

Jung Minji ran in the hallway with that. Behind her, followed the elite unit in Jung Minji's troops.

"Huh? What's this!"

The members of Kim Hyunbaek's group who were drinking and singing suddenly became noisy. Crash! The sound of someone jumping over something. The groan of someone who was stabbed. A scream. And...

"Save me! I'm sorry! Minji! Okay!! Ah!! Ahhhhhh!!!"

Kim Hyunbaek's desperate scream.

It became silent soon after. The sounds of the occasional chatter or laughter disappeared. A night filled with terror.

Choi Hyuk looked out his window. He saw students who couldn't face reality and decided to defy the order to [standby] and run towards their homes. Choi Hyuk only guessed it then but he really never saw them again.

Choi Hyuk looked up at the moon.

A moon no different from yesterday's. A classroom no different from yesterday's.

However, what was in front of them was completely different

from yesterday.

A new world.

Episode 2: Exodus

Chapter 14: Encounter (1)

My mother worked at a design company. She liked to make everything. The fans and mobiles she made would always be my toys. I wasn't good with my hands. Instead, I would watch my mother as she made things. My mother would put snacks next to me as I watched her make pants and bags. I spent my childhood eating snacks while watching her quick hand movements.

When I was alone, I usually read books. Once I went into high school, my mother allowed me to use the T.V. and the computer... but I kept my habit in reading books. Although I read things like travel magazines, I would mainly read books on design, architecture and programming. Perhaps it was the influence of my mother but I wanted to be a person who made things when I grew up.

**

Choi Hyuk opened his eyes. Early morning. He slowly relaxed his heightened senses. He wrapped the Fang Saber and Predator's Blade he untied yesterday and put on the Tireless Boots. He took out a toothbrush and toothpaste from his bag and roughly brushed his teeth. He checked his smartphone just in case but his smartphone still wasn't working.

He stepped out into the hallway. He could smell something delicious.

And there was Jung Minji.

“You should eat before you go.”

She started to boil and fry the leftover food that she had eaten with her followers. Her followers returned in an orderly fashion.

The people who smelled the warm food naturally found their way to the cafeteria. Choi Hyuk followed Jung Minji to the cafeteria as well. All 452 survivors gathered in the cafeteria. Among them, 349 people were part of the Crazy Knight King Jung Minji’s troops and 103 were part of the Slave King Song Simin’s troops.

24 people deserted them at night and Kim Hyunbaek and his executives, in total 7, had died. The 98 people left from Kim Hyunbaek’s group were absorbed into Jung Minji’s troops. Above their heads was a symbol of a bloody knight.

7 of the deserters came from Jung Minji’s group, 15 from Kim Hyunbaek’s and 2 from Song Simin’s. Unexpectedly, Song Simin’s group had the least number of deserters.

While everyone was eating, an announcement appeared.

[The 24 who didn’t return in the morning. Perished.]

“As expected…”

People murmured to themselves. They would never see the 24 who had left yesterday night. And ‘deserter’... Jung Minji’s guess was right. They were making them into an army. Although, he didn’t know what the army was for.

Choi Hyuk just grinned.

Soon after, the mission for today was announced. No... a 30-day mission was announced.

———————

[Throne Game + Survive and Escape]

1. All of Gangdong district has become a war zone. You cannot go past Gwangjin bridge in the north and the stadium in the south.

1. On the 30th day, the location of escape code will be announced. Only the troop who has obtained the escape code may escape.

1. The locations of places with living supplies will be announced.

1. [Locations of supplies that are currently close to you]

1. D Mart

1. Herb Astronomy Park

———————

The locations of supplies were all within 30 minutes of the school.

“Survive...? Is it telling us to have a free-for-all for supplies?”

Choi Hyuk bit his teeth.

The somewhat lively atmosphere became chilly. To survive and escape… it may be as hard or harder than yesterday.

In this atmosphere, Jung Minji made an announcement.

She was troubled over it during mealtime but after seeing the new announcement, Jung Minji made up her mind.

‘The rule about absolutely following king’s orders is gone. Unlike the test yesterday, this time, they want us to really show our leadership skills. Then, I need to clarify the issue about Kim Hyunbaek.’

So that she could justify herself if a controversy arose. Jung Minji announced.

“As everyone knows, yesterday, Kim Hyunbaek died. No, Kim Hyunbaek and 6 executives of the Heckler troop died. In their drunken stupor, they molested a female student and committed other devious acts. They ignored our restraining order and even launched a pre-emptive strike. All 7 died in the fight. I am sorry we couldn’t resolve it peacefully.”

The cold atmosphere of the cafeteria calmed down a level. There were many points of suspicion. Who was molested? Did the Heckler King really launch a pre-emptive attack? Luckily, the fight began after Kim Hyunbaek took his close friends to drink

elsewhere. There were no witnesses. But who would speak out? After the survivors said so. They even said they were sorry they couldn't resolve it peacefully.

Only Song Simin raised his hand and asked.

"Did you have to kill him?"

"There was no other choice."

That was it.

Afterwards, their destination was decided. Jung Minji and Song Simin allied together and went to D Mart.

There were some who suggested visiting their homes but they were quickly shot down. As the sun rose, they could see the area in front of the school lay in ruins. Smashed cars. As if someone had gnawed on the bones, there were pieces of bones and flesh everywhere. It was unreasonable to split up and visit their homes in this situation. Besides one person, Choi Hyuk.

"Are you going to be fine by yourself? We don't know what it's like outside."

"It's fine."

"Okay."

Jung Minji wanted to be with the strong Choi Hyuk but once Choi Hyuk refused, she didn't ask again.

Choi Hyuk left the still eating troops of Jung Minji and Song Simin and walked out of the school entrance by himself.

As soon as he left the entrance, he ran towards his home.

**

Just what happened? In a day, the city lay in ruins. The more he ran, Choi Hyuk's worry for his mother turned to anxiety.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't find any traces of his mother in his home. Looking at the sink filled with dishes, it seemed like his mother never made it back home yesterday.

'Is this despair? Or hope?'

He couldn't guess. That it was hopeful since she didn't walk through the ruined streets. Or if she couldn't return due to a catastrophic event.

His heart raged with a burning anger and anxiety. Choi Hyuk swallowed those emotions down.

He walked down the stairs because the elevator was broken. He

left the apartment complex. And Choi Hyuk stopped when he felt a chill. A different air blew in the apartment complex. His 20/10 vision looked at his surroundings. There were one, two, three people looking down at him from the apartment windows.

And a disgusting smell.

He saw those people waving their hands, it was desperation. He could clearly see their meaning. ‘Leave! It’s dangerous!’

Choi Hyuk clenched his teeth. The reason why he decided to move alone was first to check if his mother was safe. But, that wasn’t all.

‘Throne Game + Survive and Escape, this time, two games are combined into one.’

If you only looked at the mission itself, you would think that this was mainly about the ‘Survive and Escape’ but it was definitely a continuation of the Throne Game. If that was the case, there was a need to faithfully uphold his role as the ‘King without Subjects’. To make the eyes of the creators who were hidden behind the scenes widen, to become the real winner, he couldn’t be lazy or compromise.

‘The fact that there is a rule about the King without Subjects means that there is a way to become the king of this game without any followers.’

Choi Hyuk threw away all the weak thoughts of ‘Maybe? Perhaps. Dangerous!’ It might even be somewhat overkill. However, the more he compromised, the more his goal would crumble.

Choi Hyuk jumped on top of a smashed car, much less ran away. He examined his surroundings with his keen senses. His eyes saw the ‘thing’ that was curled up between smashed up cars.

“Ruuuuuun!”

Someone’s scream. A sudden stench. Instead, Choi Hyuk raised his Predator’s Blade and charged forward.

A claw as sharp as a blade swept above his head. He still wasn’t able to clearly see the figure of the ‘thing’. However, it was big and fast. Ooze seeped out from its black skin. Even its smell was repulsive.

Choi Hyuk slashed the wall-like figure in front of him. Black blood spurted out. Choi Hyuk reflexively fell back and avoided the black blood. As soon as the blood made contact with the asphalt, it melted. Although he did try to avoid it, he was still splattered with blood. Perhaps, it was due to his 70 Endurance. The karma in his body grew hotter and evaporated the black blood. Though, his clothes were riddled with holes.

[Graaawr!]

The wounded thing screamed. A very low sound. It wasn't loud. The despair that sounded out below what a human could hear made Choi Hyuk's body shiver.

Puunch!

At the same time, Choi Hyuk's body bounced back. He was hit in the arm. Because he was reflexively able to avoid the claw, he was hit in the elbow. He was able to reduce the impact.

As he flew away, Choi Hyuk was able to see the 'thing'.

It was big. It seemed to be 2m tall and 5m long. Its back was hunched like a ferret's and its large head and horn was like that of a rhinoceros as well as ghastly claws and thick legs. Its killing intent filled his vision with red. It was literally a monster.

Only when he slammed into a ruined car did he stop. If it was like any other day, the impact would have instantly killed him. However, his 70 Endurance let him avoid any big injuries. He lifted his aching body and ground his teeth.

'It was hiding that much killing intent?'

The killing intent it was emitting was like a sunset as it covered his surroundings with a red light. But, when it was hiding between the cars, nothing was reflected by his Eyes of Distinction. Fucking bastard.

[Graaawrawwrawwwr!]

It roared as if it was trying to pressure him. But because of the low sound, it wasn't very loud. Instead, his whole body vibrated.

Clank!

The nearby windows shattered.

"Damn it."

Choi Hyuk's body leaned forward as if it was about to fall and he put strength in his ankles before shooting forwards. It just seemed unfamiliar because it wasn't human. Choi Hyuk had already understood its body structure.

Whoosh!

Its right claw missed once again. At the same time, it raised its left.

"I already saw that."

Choi Hyuk slipped through the armpit of its lifted arm. The Predator's Blade sliced its armpit and drank its blood.

[Graaahhhhh!!]

He didn’t pay attention to its scream and continued slicing its side. The monster jumped at him wielding its claw. Choi Hyuk avoided the claw with a paper-thin margin. Choi Hyuk didn’t lose his balance nor did he fall back but stood there as he watched the monster jump at him.

It jumped 5 meters into the air. Choi Hyuk met its eyes. Their killing intents tangled together.

Its heavy body fell to the ground. It wasn’t really an attack. More like a landing. But normally you would avoid whatever was falling down from the sky. Let alone a claw-wielding monster.

But Choi Hyuk used his keen senses to find an opening. He found a path where he could avoid being hit and picked a location where he would be able to endure its weight with his Power and Endurance.

Choi Hyuk jumped.

Stab!!!

A flesh wrenching sound was heard.

**

“Ahh…”

A 31-year-old unemployed Kim Chulho who lived in an apartment plaza was in despair. Another person died. He even shouted his lungs out to warn him of the monster but he died.

The monster that appeared yesterday night, the ‘Crook’. Ignoring the message in the morning was the source of his troubles.

———————

[Assemble]

Location. Shinmyung Middle School.

The attack of the Crooks is approaching. Gather and wait at the assembly area.

———————

“I am seeing things.”

Kim Chulho snorted as he turned on his computer.

“What? Why isn’t it turning on?”

And the television didn’t work either. He should have thought something was weird then. However, Kim Chulho went to the manhwa store to borrow a manhwa and rolled about in his home. He then ate food and slept early. And in that state, he was isolated in his home.

When night fell, hell broke loose. Kim Chulho woke up from the roars. They weren't loud. But whenever they roared, the apartment would shake. Although it was a strange day where his phone and television didn't work, there still were people walking and working like a normal day. And that day was destroyed in the end.

People were eaten while still inside cars. One would die with their every step. Even their screams were overwhelmed by their roars. Their souls might have even been eaten. His parents never returned. And the day brightened.

Kim Chulho felt like everyone besides him had died. Dread. Loneliness. It was when he was like that he saw a man. He felt so happy to see him. On top of that, he was really, really strong. He fought with the Crook. He even wondered if he was really human. The two swords at his side were strange and some sort of black flag like thing lingered above his head. But what did it matter if he was a human or not? Anyone who resisted the monster was on 'his side'!

But... he was squashed by the Crook. Kim Chulho despaired.

However...

The body of the Crook which seemed to weigh a few tons started to lift up. A boom sounded out and a human popped out from underneath. It was Choi Hyuk.

Spit!

In the apartment complex quiet as death, even the sound of someone spitting could be heard clearly.

Choi Hyuk cleaned the blade stabbed into the body of the Crook and shouted.

“Up there! Come down!”

Of course, no one answered. Kim Chulho foolishly stood there thinking, ‘He survived? He killed the monster?’

Then Choi Hyuk cut the Crook’s heavy head off and lifted it up high before throwing it on the ground. Its head was so big that it looked like it weighed half a ton...

Slam!

A sound of an explosion sounded out. Choi Hyuk stood on that head and shouted again.

“It’s dead so don’t worry and come down!”

Before he knew it, Kim Chulho was already on his way down.

Chapter 15: Encounter (2)

The three people who came down were the unemployed 31-year-old Kim Chulho, an elderly man and a middle-aged woman. Choi Hyuk listened to their situation.

Unexpectedly, the situation outside the school was completely different. First, there wasn't anything like the Ring of Rebirth or the Throne Game.

"Ring? I don't know about that. Just the television didn't work and some weird words appeared but nothing happened. In the morning."

"Once it became night, the monsters attacked. Like the one you fought just now."

"Besides that, there was a re~ally big monster. It only appeared for a second... I'm telling you it was the size of an apartment. I couldn't see it very well because it was dark... but light shined out from its eyes and mouth... yeah. A dinosaur. It was like a dinosaur."

"That exaggeration! I didn't see anything like that!"

"I didn't see it either..."

"I'm telling you I saw it!"

Choi Hyuk was deep in thought. How many slashes would it take to kill an apartment-sized monster? Would that be enough?

Anyways, that was all the useful information they had.

“I understand. I am going to Shinmyung Middle School. What are you going to do?”

The three looked at each other. In the end, the elderly man decided to stay in the apartment while the middle-aged woman and Kim Chulho followed him. It looked like the middle-aged woman held some expectations that her husband and child might be there.

They were currently imagining Shinmyung Middle School as a refugee shelter.

However, in reality, that place was a war zone.

**

There were quite a few people who found the message that appeared in front of their eyes unusual. Since it didn’t only appear for them. On top of that, all communication was cut and those who wanted to leave Gangdong district were blocked by a weird wall. A situation they couldn’t understand... That was why people gathered at the assembly area, Shinmyung Middle School.

Those who arrived at Shinmyung Middle School received a message.

———————

[Throne Game + Survive and Escape]

1. All of Gangdong district has become a war You cannot go past Gwangjin bridge in the north and the stadium in the south.

2. On the 30th day, the location of the escape code will be announced. Only the troops who have obtained the escape code may escape.

3. Occasionally, locations of places with living supplies will be announced.

———————

Besides the fact that they had yet to receive the locations of the supplies, the message was the same as the one the students received.

At the same time, they received a message and their bodies filled with strength.

[You have arrived at the assembly area. Karma has been distributed.]

At Shinmyung Middle School, there were many supplies necessary for battle. Food, weapons, item scrolls as well as a 3-day ‘Weakening Barrier’.

The ‘Weakening Barrier’ was especially important. While the barrier was in effect, abilities of monsters that entered the school

would be reduced to less than half. If that wasn't the case, with the stats of these people who had just received karma, they would no be able to avoid annihilation on the first monster attack. But, even these weakened monsters were too strong for these people.

When night fell, monsters came while these people were buzzing in confusion and anxiety. That was when hell broke loose.

"Gahhhhhh!"

"Aaaahhhhh!"

"This bastard!!"

The battlefield rampant with curses and screams.

The actions of the monsters, Crooks, were similar to wolves. They were shrewd. They never fought humans head-on. First, people blockaded themselves in the school. But the Crooks stepped on each other as they jumped onto the 2nd floor. Although they were distributed karma, the old and the weak who weren't mentally prepared were located on the 2nd floor.

It resulted in massive losses. As the people at the frontlines hurriedly gathered on the 2nd floor, the Crooks fell back to the field like a receding tide.

The Crooks excelled in psychological warfare. They all disappeared together and once people relaxed due to their absence,

they launched a surprise attack. This battle continued on the whole night. Now people no longer set up a blockade in the school building but rather herded them into the field and started a bloodbath. They had realized that instead of fighting in narrow hallways, it was more effective to fight in formation in a large area. One-third of the people died in vain before they realized this. Although it was a fight between around 2000 people and 60 monsters, currently there were 1371 people and 46 monsters left. Luckily, if not for the fact there were many men who had military experience[1], it wouldn't have been strange for them to be annihilated that night. An unorganized group was no better than delicious candy for them.

However, such dire situations were opportunities for outstanding individuals to showcase their talent.

"Fucking monster bastards..."

Kang Dongsoo was like that. He who had become acknowledged by everyone for his command felt that it was time to end the fight. Although they obtained a mystical power known as karma, after prolonged skirmishes and brawls, everyone was extremely exhausted. It was obvious that if this was to continue, they would crumble like a sand castle.

So Kang Dongsoo organized a suicide squad[2].

'While we still have strength, we need to clear out the Crooks and rest a bit.'

However, that wasn't easy.

'The biggest problem is that the Crooks fall back when they are at a disadvantage.'

The Crooks would fall back even if they were slightly disadvantaged. There was nothing they could do. Since they weren't faster than them nor could they leave the Weakening Barrier. The moment they left the barrier, against the Crooks that regained their true strength, humans would break apart like tofu.

There was another problem. The Crooks recovered much faster than humans. That was why they would run out of the barrier, recover then charge back in. The Crooks would become energetic while the humans became sluggish.

'I have to stop them from retreating.'

That was why the role of the suicide squad was important. The suicide squad's mission was simple. Secretly leave and hide and once the Crooks charged into the field, they were to cut off their retreat.

"We will end it with this! Let's go!"

"Go! Kill those bastards!"

"Oorahhh!"

The moment Choi Hyuk's group arrived at Shinmyung Middle School was when these 300 people of the suicide squad were desperately trying to block the Crooks' retreat.

"Gaaaah!"

"Stop them!"

"We can't let them pass!!"

The surround Crooks ferociously lashed out but like their name, the suicide squad blocked their retreat with their lives. Because of that, they were able to kill an additional 7 Crooks. However... the suicide squad was dying at a rate much faster than that.

Choi Hyuk looked at the scene and said one thing.

"...They're going to break through."

At the same time, his body shot forward. Kim Chulho and the middle-aged woman who were suddenly left behind in this dangerous place quickly hid.

'Fuck... This won't be enough...'

The leader of the suicide squad, Kang Dongsoo, felt nervous. It would be dangerous if this continued. They had to at least reduce

them to a single digit for them to be relieved but at this rate, there would be at least ten left.

He put more strength into it. Due to his insufficient Stamina, the karma relaxed but he gritted his teeth as he brought out more power.

“Stop them!”

Just when the shield user in front of him was pushed away, Kang Dongsoo stabbed the monster’s forehead.

Pusch!

It definitely was an E rank sword made from an ‘item scroll’. If it was an F rank weapon, it wouldn’t have been able to penetrate its skull and would have slipped off… the sword pierced its forehead.

“Dongsoo hyung[3]! Watch out!”

The suicide squad member behind him shouted out. He became startled. He looked and found a Crook charging towards him. It made his blood freeze. Facing a perilous situation, Kang Dongsoo’s cognitive ability exploded into full gear. The oncoming Crook seemed to move in slow motion. What was tragic was… that unlike his cognitive ability, his physical abilities didn’t improve.

Dongsoo tried to avoid it by rolling backwards… his speed

couldn’t match that of a Crook’s. In his focused state, Kang Dongsoo looked at the Crook as it slowly came closer.

‘So this is how I die.’

Just when all kinds of thoughts were flashing through his mind, something jumped over Kang Dongsoo. He couldn’t even see him in the slow motion he was seeing the world in, On top of that, he was swiftly wielding a blade. Slowly, the Crook began to split apart.

Splash!

The Crook that was split in two slipped past both sides of Kang Dongsoo.

“Wh...what? Who?”

Only then did he wake up from his stupor. However, the person, Choi Hyuk, had already moved on to the next Crook.

“What the... I feel lighter than before?”

Choi Hyuk who didn’t know the existence of the Weakening Barrier felt strange. He put a lot of strength into it since he thought they would be as tough as the one he killed at the apartment but if it was like this, he could use less strength.

“Good… Anyways, I should finish this as fast as I can.”

Choi Hyuk started to squeeze out the karma in his body.

One in the apartment, another just now, he had only killed two Crooks but his Control was already at 92. Every time he killed one, his Power would increase by 5, speed by 4 and the rest would increase by 3. Even his stamina that didn’t rise rose by 0.1.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 81 (+5)

Speed: 83 (+5)

Control: 92

Endurance: 76

Stamina: 0.2 (★)

Recovery: 96 (+10)

[Before killing monsters]

Power: 71 (+5)

Speed: 75 (+5)

Control: 86

Endurance: 70

Stamina: 0 (★)

Recovery: 90 (+10)

———————

With a Control stat that exceeded his Power and Speed, he was able to freely control the karma in his body. Therefore, it was possible to momentarily squeeze out the karma in his body. He thought of this after seeing Choi Junsung's [Lightning Strike].

'If you use Power exceeding that of your Stamina, your muscles will relax and you will have to wait until you can use karma again. And if your Stamina is similar to your Power and Speed, you can only go all out for 5 minutes. So it means that my consumption of Stamina is similar to before. But, Choi Junsung would pant after a single use of [Lightning Strike]. Why was that? Was it that if you used your Control stat to completely control your body, even if it is for one strike, you could bring out enough strength to make your body unable to use karma for a short time?'

Before he knew it, Choi Hyuk was figuring out the basics of the skills 'they' received. And that understanding was currently coming to play. Techniques he felt he didn't need when facing other humans. However, his opponents, this time, were monsters. He had prepared this move to make up for the difference in size.

On top of that, it provided the best impact in reversing the attitudes of people who were being pushed into a corner.

The problem was his Stamina... Choi Hyuk was most confident in his Stamina. And for some reason, they were weaker than the one he encountered at the apartment.

'7... no, if it's like this, I can use it 14 times.'

Choi Hyuk relaxed his strength a little more. Even though he said he relaxed, the karma in his body seemed to inflate to an abnormal degree.

Choi Hyuk's body momentarily exploded out as his blade swung downwards.

Splaash!

The monster's claw ripped apart. The D rank Predator's Blade didn't even chip after ripping apart its claw.

"Two down..."

Mumbled Choi Hyuk. By his calculations, he could still kill 12 more but there was a chance that he would in pain until tomorrow if he did that. So.

'Let's kill 8 more.'

'In a single strike.'

Choi Hyuk's blade seemed as if it was on fire.

Notes:

1] Korean men have mandatory military service.

2] Sorry I couldn’t resist xD

3] Honorific. Younger male to older male.

Chapter 16: Encounter (3)

There were 37 Crooks left by the time Choi Hyuk slew 2 of them.

However, the formation of the suicide squad was on the brink of breaking apart. Though you could say what difference would killing 8 more make in this situation...

'This one then that one.'

He had already picked the path and his targets so he just needed to place his blade in the right position.

This act closer to that of an art than a fight.

Puak!!

Kill the most dangerous in the cruelest way. Choi Hyuk sliced a Crook that was 1.2 times bigger than the others, the one that was definitely the leader, in two.

The bastard was split horizontally, splitting its upper and lower jaw. The ferocious Crooks were shocked as they looked over to see their leader split in two.

Choi Hyuk didn't lose that opportunity.

Pibik!

He lightly cut the ankle of the next one. He then tilted his body where his head was almost touching the ground and used the monster as a stepping stone to shoot towards his next target.

Stomp!

Puakk!

He even chose the precise area to slice. When he sliced off a head, he made it so that it would hit another monster's head. When he split a monster at its waist, he made it so it would obstruct the path of another.

The charging Crooks became tangled up and splattered with the blood of their comrades.

Pikpi!

He even left wounds on some of them so that it would be easier for others to fight them.

"Hooo..."

After killing three with a single slash and wounding four, Choi Hyuk was already at the rear of the Crooks. He had charged in facing them and ended up at the rear. There was only one Crook in front of Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk didn’t slow down as he raised his blade and the oncoming Crook tried to stop. But it was moving too fast that it was unable to.

[Kuahhahhh]

The Crook raised both its arms and covered its face. No matter how you looked at it, it was scared.

Choi Hyuk let out his breath and swung his arm. The Crook curled up more pitifully. But Choi Hyuk’s blade didn’t touch the Crook. Instead, he used the power behind it to swing his body around.

Stomp.

Choi Hyuk’s foot stomped on the Crook’s forehead and jumped up. Instead of slicing the frightened Crook, he decided to use it as a stepping stone.

The mobility of the oncoming Crook doubled with Choi Hyuk’s powerful leg strength allowed Choi Hyuk to jump over the charging Crooks and arrive in front of them again. The flow of the battle reversed.

Stomp!

Stooomp!

A horrifying sound sounded out twice. Choi Hyuk charged an additional two times. The fight ended with that.

[Kuaahh…] [Kahhh…]

The vigor of the Crooks died out the moment Choi Hyuk cut their leader in two. Afterwards, Choi Hyuk's merciless breakthroughs divided the Crooks and when the humans surrounded them, they were defeated one after another.

The Crooks who used charging tactics against the humans were, in reverse, defeated by charging tactics.

The Crooks that were still alive were bathed in the blood of their comrades and their own and were hurriedly being taken care of.

The flow of the battle had reversed in only a few minutes.

"Hooo… hooo…"

Choi Hyuk caught his breath.

He used more stamina than he thought. No… besides that.

'I'm not recovering as fast.'

Though others might not be able to notice, Choi Hyuk was someone who could observe his body better than anyone else.

The penalty for using power that exceeded his Power and Speed stat wasn't only a rapid decline in Stamina but also a temporary decrease in Recovery as well.

That wasn't all. Choi Hyuk stretched his wrists and his ankles. They throbbed as if they were on fire.

'I guess I need to rest the whole day.'

Overusing his Endurance stat put a strain on his body. His joints cracked. As even his Recovery stat decreased, it seemed he would have to rest the rest of the day if he didn't want it to affect tomorrow.

[Klahahahah kuh heuk... kuhuk...]

With its throat pierced, the final Crook drew its last breath. During the operation, 97 people died. Considering they were on the brink of annihilation, it was a great victory.

**

The post-war treatment.

Swish.

Thud!

The item scrolls were similar to the effect of the Bonus Game. When they used the scrolls on dead monsters, a golden hammer would appear smashing the corpse and leaving an item behind.

They used a considerable number of the item scrolls in Shinmyung Middle School to change all 46 monsters into items. The sight of golden hammers falling from everywhere was magnificent.

“We were able to keep our lives because of you. Thank you very much. We, the Shinmyung Stronghold, won’t forget your kindness.”

Kang Dongsoo offered Choi Hyuk to choose 8 items of the 46. To come to this offer, Kang Dongsoo and the seven leader figures of the Shinmyung Stronghold (that was what they called themselves) gathered together and debated for 10 minutes.

What should we do? Since we used our item scrolls, we should take a fee and reduce it to 5, shouldn’t we? No, we can’t be stingy after such a dangerous situation. Let’s go big and offer 10. What are you talking about? It’s fine to give him the 8 he killed. No, that’s not right. There’s a need to show goodwill to people as strong as him. We can’t just give him 8.

After going through the pros and cons, they decided to allow Choi Hyuk to choose whatever 8 he wanted.

Although he wasn't able to hear the specifics, Choi Hyuk thought the scene of their discussion was fresh. To hold a discussion in the middle of a field... to Choi Hyuk who had been through the [Ring of Rebirth] [Bonus Game] and the [Throne Game], it was something he couldn't imagine. Didn't the students who fought naturally end up creating dictatorships?

Their actions seemed cute in Choi Hyuk's eyes, even a little heartwarming.

Anyways, the results were a bit iffy. It was better than killing 8 by himself but not by much. If it was like the school, they wouldn't be able to say anything if he shouted, "The treasures here are all mine. Come out if you're offended!"

However, Choi Hyuk didn't feel like being greedy. He didn't even need to. 8 E rank items were enough. If he took any more, he wouldn't be able to use them all and just become baggage.

"Okay."

He willingly accepted their offer.

Choi Hyuk first picked an armor while he stretched.

The moment he encountered a Crook, he regretted not taking

armor from the school. There was someone who had an E rank armor among those he killed but Choi Hyuk only put two rings in his bag and threw out the rest.

'Since I didn't know there would be monsters then.'

He thought that he wouldn't get hit when fighting humans so an armor would only get in the way.

However, the current situation was different. The monsters were large and fast and had better fighting instincts than humans. The hit he took at the apartment and the few hits that brushed him during that battle, they were enough to make his body sore as if he had gotten into a car crash.

'I need armor to fight more aggressively.'

That was why Choi Hyuk chose a 'set of Crook Leather Armor' first.

Besides that, he chose the 'E rank, Flash Sword' that was like the estoc he used in the past. He then chose 3 ornament items that could raise his stats, the 'Handy Bag',a magical item that could store more things, a chest of Recovery Potions that healed his wounds and a chest of Karma Recovery Potions the reduced the time he needed to wait before using karma again.

"There are even these items."

Choi Hyuk's mood became better after placing the potion chest filled with 6 potions in his Handy Bag. He was worried by the fact that today's fight put a strain on his body but with these potions, he would be able to fight even harder. It was something that wasn't any worse than the armor. And there wasn't anything to say about the convenience of the 'Handy Bag'.

"It would appear occasionally... huhu."

Kang Dongsoo seemed to be sad at the loss of the potions as he looked at Choi Hyuk's Handy Bag. However, he quickly changed his expression and energetically asked.

"So, are you planning on staying here?"

"No. After resting and collecting some information today, I will leave tomorrow."

"Why?"

Kang Dongsoo was surprised. The outside with the Weakening Barrier would definitely be more hellish than here. He couldn't understand why a young student would go out alone in a place like that.

Choi Hyuk bitterly smiled. This was the difference in perception.

Choi Hyuk thought.

‘Survive and Escape. But is this a game where you can survive by locking yourself up?’

Choi Hyuk’s senses told him. That that wasn’t possible. Wasn’t it already shown in the Bonus Game? They said that it was break time but hid weapons and rules throughout the gym.

The ‘ones’ who created this game would no doubt want the game to become more intense and desperate.

‘There is definitely something hidden this time as well.’

And to catch the attention of ‘them’, Choi Hyuk had to take the lead.

Not surprisingly.

After choosing his items and investigating, Choi Hyuk was able to find a clue.

It was from a man who was barely able to escape to Shinmyung Middle School after encountering a monster on his way back from work.

“Shinmyung Middle School wasn’t the only assembly area. Dongjin Hospital, Hyunhae Department Store, there were people who said those were also assembly areas. And I saw this on my way

here. I think I saw the monsters' lair. Yeah. I definitely saw it. It's where the ecological park is located. There is a dark hole-like thing there. A hole appeared in midair. I saw some monsters coming out of it. Not Crooks, something else."

Choi Hyuk was able to find a clue on the location where monsters spawned.

The man asked after telling him.

"But why do you ask? Don't tell me you plan on going there?"

Of course, he was.

"Yeah, yeah."

Choi Hyuk loosely answered the man before returning to his spot and lying down.

This place even had a sleeping bag. No matter how he looked at it, this place had it much easier compared to the games the students had to endure.

'... Well, that's good.'

Choi Hyuk lied down and opened his status.

———————————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 5.8 (+5) (★)

Speed: 5.5 (+5) (★)

Control: 0.6 (★)

Endurance: 0.1 (★)

Stamina: 1.1 (★)

Recovery: 10.4 (+10) (★)

*Currently overused karma: 99(+10)

*Free karma points: 12

*Retribution points: 84

[Innate skill]

Eyes of Distinction

[Accomplishments]

You have killed someone with karma before it was distributed to you!

Qualifications of a Sovereign 1/3

First to kill a monster in a 1-on-1 fight!

———————

Following his Stamina, the rest of his stats passed 100. The moment they hit 100, they were refreshed and a star appeared next to them. Instead of increasing in quantity, it seemed like there was a qualitative change.

'Will there be another star if I pass another 100?'

The feeling of the karma that wrapped around and support his body was very pleasant. He felt like he would become addicted to it. Choi Hyuk called his previous stats 'no star' and his current stats '1-star stats'. He believed that since there was one, there would be another and more after that.

'How much could karma strengthen a human?'

Choi Hyuk was excited.

'I guess I need to hunt a ton of monsters.'

From what he tested at school, a 1 star stat wouldn't increase anymore by killing other humans.

'Though I don't know if it'll always be this way or if it's because I am the only with 1-star stats.'

Anyways, if he wanted to raise his stats in the meantime, he had no choice but to hunt monsters.

However, even if he killed monsters, the increases in his stats were too small. When he had no stars, his power would increase by 5 while his other stats would increase by at least 3... but after getting 1 star, it felt like his stats were increasing by 0.1, at most 0.2. At least his Power, Speed and Recovery all had integers next to them due to items or else it would have looked too pitiful.

Choi Hyuk decided to test something out.

'The stats increased by items are the same. Then I wonder what will happen if I invest some of my free karma points?'

Choi Hyuk invested one of his free points into Stamina.

[Retribution points aren't able to match the grade of the stats. The effectiveness decreased to 10%. Stamina 1.1 points - 1.2 points.]

"...Should have told me before."

Only a 0.1 increase. Choi Hyuk felt bitter but he decided to just think of it was the price for the lesson.

‘Retribution point…’

He didn’t know what it was for but it seemed like it really did have a purpose.

Because of this, he was able to decide his next goal.

‘First, let’s increase the grade of the Retribution points. Will it increase when it hits 100? Until then, I won’t use my free points.’

The first time he hunted a Crook, he received the [First to kill a monster in a 1-on-1 fight!] accomplishment and received 2 free points and 3 retribution points. From then on, he only received 2 retribution points per Crook kill.

‘8 more. After that, let’s investigate the location where the monsters spawn. And tomorrow, I’ll check Hyunhae Department Store as well.’

Choi Hyuk planned out what he would do tomorrow.

While everyone was busy trying to survive, he would look beyond that.

“Ohh god… Sungjoo! Ohhh…! Sungjoo’s dad[1]!!!”

That moment, a sad cry sounded out from somewhere. A familiar voice. It was the middle-aged woman he came to Shinmyung Middle School with in the morning. Kim Chulho and the woman had been hiding and had joined Shinmyung Stronghold.

However... it seemed like the woman failed to reunite with her family.

She wasn't the only one. Shinmyung Stronghold, which won the fierce fight, was like a mourner's house that night.

"Damn it!"

It was to the point where there were people who threw a tantrum and walked out.

Choi Hyuk briefly thought of his mother in this commotion.

What would it be like if his mother was at an assembly area like this one? Unlike the [Ring of Rebirth], there was a higher chance of her being alive.

'It could be... but might not be...'

He only thought to there when he closed his eyes. Because he couldn't let his resolution waver. Because there was no way to know right now.

‘I will catch their attention more than anyone else.’

He fell asleep hypnotizing himself. Though, it was not a very deep sleep.

His whole body tingled pleasantly.

Notes:

1] Koreans tend to be called ‘XX’s dad/mom’ when they have children.

TL/N:

The places the author mentions are real and while some, for example, Shinmyung Middle School, haven’t been changed, the names others, Hyunhae Department Store, Dongjin Hospital, were.

Hyunhae Department Store - Hyundai Department Store

Dongjin Hospital - Dongshin Hospital

Chapter 17: Encounter (4)

10:30am on the day when messages suddenly appeared. There were approximately 500, 000 people in Kangdong District. And in three days, only 350, 000 survived. Among those, the ones who hid in their workplace or homes numbered 120, 000 and 230, 000 gathered in the assembly areas. The assembly areas, large and small, numbered 54 places and there were troops like Jung Minji's from other middle schools and high schools.

Only 3 days. Only a short time had passed. A situation where people locked themselves up with no hope. A situation where supplies were insufficient and where you have to face the dangers in front of your very eyes. 3 days was enough for people to throw off their masks and reveal their true face.

After an intense battle, Shinmyung Stronghold was definitely better off than others. Chaos ensued for 3 days in places where they weren't able to defend against the monsters as well as Shinmyung Stronghold. The prejudice and fear they normally had exploded out.

"Fuck? Did you just say fuck to me? Who the hell do you think you are to swear at me?! Fucking bastard!?"

A situation where a gang of middle schoolers lynched a man they swore at occurred. One couldn't simply ignore their strength after getting karma. Eventually, the beaten man breathed his last breath.

It was a shocking event. In a situation where they couldn't rely on the police or the law, the adults recalled that 'teens these days weren't afraid of anything' in the papers and immediately turned to frantic fear and anger.

Even in this situation, the teens didn't behave properly.

"You killed someone?"

Just when another man ran up in surprise and asked.

"Fuck. What does that have to do with you, mister?"

Replied the immature teens. As if they hit a bee hive, the group began to stir up. "What, that bastard?" The fists of hot-headed men rained down. The middle schoolers tried to counterattack. Ackk! That moment, as if they added oil to the fire, a fight broke out. Fists punched out towards middle schoolers in every direction. A pitiful retaliation followed afterwards.

"Uackk! I'm sorry!"

"They are children! Stop it!"

"No! It wasn't me!"

As it was with mob psychology, the target of their anger wasn't clear. Their targets weren't just the kids who lynched the middle-

aged man but others around them. Teachers and parents got involved trying to stop the men who were engulfed in madness. Innumerable students were ripped apart. Afterwards, whenever students saw a man, they would lower their gaze. Irrational violence firmly carved itself into reality. Fear and taboos were created.

Each group had similar situations to this. Sometimes at selfish people who didn't participate in the battle against monsters, sometimes at the director of the daycare who left the children and escaped by himself, sometimes at foreign laborers... an indiscriminate slaughter occurred and innocent people lost their lives.

The people realized.

That in this place, loners meant death. And even if it was rubbish, authority was needed. As only when they stood up for the chosen authority could they ensure their safety.

Fear and taboo created order. Quickly, ranks were being assigned. In some places, gangsters and company employees, others, local company presidents and even the women's association, each with their own methods, dominated the people and created order and the people willingly accepted this. Also, depending on who and how they gained power greatly influenced the characteristic of the group.

It was like the age of civil wars. People who gathered in the assembly areas were busy establishing order and, like Jung Minji's troop, those who started with a battle royale instead of an

assembly area were trying their best to secure their first supplies and base.

During this time, there weren't many who thought to investigate Kangdong District and figure out the secret behind this game.

**

Early morning.

"Can I go with you?"

Kim Chulho, who Choi Hyuk saved in the apartment, grabbed Choi Hyuk who was about to leave. Choi Hyuk shook his head.

"You'll be a hindrance."

Kim Chulho's head drooped.

Choi Hyuk arrived at the ecological park. An intense battle was already going on.

A young man who looked to be in his mid-twenties held a sword and shield and was fighting monsters by himself. Though his movements were sloppy, he was strangely fighting well. As if he knew where the monsters would attack, the young man was steadily slaying monsters even as he stumbled.

The monsters here were weaker than the Crooks. They were [Bladed Starving Ghosts]. They were about waist tall, ran on two feet and instead of hands, they dragged 1.5m long blades behind them.

Crash!

When the giant blade of a Bladed Starving Ghost struck down, the young man would do whatever it took to deflect it with his shield. As their blades were huge, a large opening would follow the Bladed Starving Ghosts' attacks. The young man would use those opportunities to stretch out his sword and stab them.

"...He's strangely good at fighting."

Choi Hyuk remarked. 7 Bladed Starving Ghosts lay on the ground. Even though he said they were weaker than the Crooks, the young man's abilities were incredible. However, there were still 8 Bladed Starving Ghosts left. On top of that, there was a 2m tall monster behind them looking at the fight as if it was amusing. When he looked at the monster, a message popped up saying [Bladed Ghost].

On the other hand, the young man was completely exhausted.

The young man suddenly yelled.

"Help me!"

Choi Hyuk was quite surprised that moment. Choi Hyuk didn't reveal his presence and stood behind the young man. However, the young man had sensed Choi Hyuk's presence without looking back.

"Quickly!"

At the young man's request, Choi Hyuk unsheathed his blade and charged forward.

Splash!

Choi Hyuk rushed in a step quicker than the Bladed Starving Ghosts' blades. When he instantly killed five, the Bladed Ghost, who was sitting at the back, stood up.

2m tall with 2 legs and 4 blades instead of hands.

"Guahhh!"

As if trying to pressure him, it screamed unpleasantly and charged at Choi Hyuk with its arms spread.

Swish!

Choi Hyuk reflexively dodged the first slash. He couldn't even see the blade. Choi Hyuk was barely able to avoid the second and the third as well.

Choi Hyuk admired.

“Wow…”

It was the strongest monster he had faced until now.

Its physical abilities made it seem like it would easily slice up 10 Crooks. Its Power and Speed were much greater than Choi Hyuk’s. Its continuous attack with 4 blades was like a saw with no opening.

Choi Hyuk’s lips lifted up by themselves.

‘It’s fun…’

It was different from his past opponents where he could avoid by looking at their obvious movements. He had to have total concentration to avoid its attacks. It was too late if he couldn’t predict its attack pattern from its movements. Every time the blade dangerously passed by his cheek or knee, his spine would tingle in excitement.

Choi Hyuk fell into a trance as he avoided and deflected its attacks. Steam expelled from the monster as it attacked more ferociously. Choi Hyuk became more absorbed into the fight and was able to see 2, no 3, 5 steps ahead and narrowly avoided or blocked them.

Pshuuuuu…

The monster had increased its pace. However, after it let out all its steam, its vigor died down. On the other hand, Choi Hyuk had already read his opponent's attack pattern.

The exhausted Bladed Ghost kept wielding its 4 blades. That moment its first and second blade struck down and when it was about to raise its third. Due to exhaustion, its speed had slowed down a little. Choi Hyuk's eyes flashed. He squeezed out the karma in his body and slashed out with his Fang Saber with the shortest distance and quickest speed. A quick draw where the saber momentarily hung in its sheath before shooting out. The slightly curved Fang Saber exploded out of its sheath.

Slice.

A sound of cutting air.

He struck at the monster's neck with a focus on speed over power. However, just before making contact, a strength that felt like it would shatter the saber was added.

Choi Hyuk instantly added all his strength into his slash.

Riip!

The Fang Saber ripped apart the Bladed Ghost's neck.

Slash!

If the physical size wasn't too different, it only took a moment to be victorious.

[You have exceeded 100 Retribution Points. First to succeed in upgrading your Retribution Points! You have received another Qualification to be a Sovereign.] [You have dealt with a mid-boss. Granted 3 additional Retribution Points and 2 free karma points.]

———————

[Qualifications of a Sovereign 2/3 Effect]

Applying the effect of the King without Subjects.

-You can have 5 followers. Your followers' karma will increase by 20%.

-You can hide the symbol above your head.

———————

"Finally…"

He finally upgraded his Retribution Points. Choi Hyuk poured his remaining free karma points into Stamina. This time, his free points were applied without penalty.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 13.3 (+10) (★)

Speed: 14 (+10) (★)

Control: 23.1 (+20) (★)

Endurance: 2.6 (★)

Stamina: 26.7 (+10) (★)

Recovery: 12.9 (+10) (★)

*Retribution points: 1 (★)

————————

With the items he earned in Shinmyung Middle School, his stats became much more outstanding. However, Choi Hyuk felt a bit bitter.

“It was just getting fun…”

Choi Hyuk glanced over the Bladed Ghost with regret and stabbed its heart with the Predator’s Blade.

A message that never appeared before showed up for the first time.

[The Predator’s Blade absorbed the blood of a worthy opponent. Evolution 1/100]

“As expected…”

It was a message that never showed up when he fought the Crooks or the Bladed Starving Ghosts. It seemed like you had to be

at the Bladed Ghost's level to be a match for a D rank weapon.

The Predator's Blade quickly absorbed the Bladed Ghost's blood and the mummified Bladed Ghost turned to dust.

Flop.

The dust passed through the portal it was protecting and scattered.

"That... You have to destroy that."

The young man, who was there first, pointed at the portal. He had finished off the remaining 3 Bladed Starving Ghosts and sat his wounded body against a tree. The wounds would heal over time due to his Recovery stat.

Choi Hyuk didn't reply as he examined the portal.

The portal floated above a black altar. It was like a cave had opened up in mid-air. As he peeked into the portal, information appeared.

———————

[Long Distance Teleportation Portal]

A portal leading to the E rank Bladed Starving Ghosts' habitat. Revitalized every midnight.

*Destroy Target

———————

‘A destroy target…’

An ill-natured intent. There was nothing about destroy targets in the announcements. You could only find out on your own.

Choi Hyuk wielded his Predator’s Blade and split the altar.

Crash!

With a vibration, the portal turned into smoke and disappeared.

[First to destroy a target. Granted 2 additional free karma points.]

———————

[Additional Rule Revealed]

Every night, the number of monsters that cross over the portal increase by 20%.

———————

“Oh my god…”

While Choi Hyuk was still processing the meaning of the 20% increase, the young man screamed. It seemed like he saw the same thing. The young man started to mumble something.

“1.2 to the power of 29 is around… 200. 5, 000 monsters should have crossed over the first day… then on the 30th day… a million?”

The young man despaired.

“Fuck! I’m already depressed with just the ‘Wyvern of Destruction’! You’re telling me that hundreds of thousands are going to pour in in 15 days?! There are only 500 thousand people in Kangdong District!”

Choi Hyuk thought as he looked at the despairing man.

‘He’s quite fast at calculating.’

Then he turned around. The young man, who was despairing by himself, called out to Choi Hyuk.

“He… hey! Where are you going!”

“…Going to hunt monsters.”

Choi Hyuk absentmindedly replied. If he could, he wanted to fight one that was as strong as the one he fought just now. Only then could he take the lead. And could he evolve the Predator’s Blade.

It seemed like he would have to look for more information on

portals as he ran around.

“Wait! Let’s go together! I know the way!”

The young man shouted.

Choi Hyuk did stop but he was a bit doubtful.

‘How?’

It was only the third day and he was finally able to find one. He didn’t think that there would be anyone who explored Kangdong District (and was still alive) more than him. But he knew the location of another portal?

“Intuition! My Innate skill is Intuition! I already knew that you would come here! You have to go together with me!”

The questionable young man shouted more doubtful words.

However, Choi Hyuk saw the white light (goodwill) shining out of the young man.

‘He had good intentions. Is he not lying?’

If he had a Innate skill called Intuition like Choi Hyuk’s Eyes of Distinction... it would be an incredibly valuable skill in situations

like this where he lacked information.

Choi Hyuk decided to listen.

“So?”

Though he didn’t speak kind words.

Either way, the young man’s urgent expression became a shade brighter.

And that was how Choi Hyuk met his first follower, Baek Seoin.

It was on the third day when people gathered in assembly areas didn’t know that death was approaching by the minute.

Chapter 18: Berserkers (1)

Baek Seoin was at the veterans' hospital when it happened. Due to the sudden assembly announcement, crowds of people were gathering in the hospital parking lot. Though the assembly announcement Baek Seoin received indicated the hospital as well, the reason why he was there was a bit different.

He was in his father's ward. His father lay there suffering in pain without the ability to speak. The doctors said he couldn't last for much longer. His father who wasn't in his right mind. For the first time, Baek Seoin realized how painful the illness known as cancer was.

"Uh... ueh...."

He had leukemia. The common illness that hit his parent's generation who worked since young to support their children and their parents-and for the revival of their nation, cancer.

Baek Seoin never liked his father. Because the values of his paternalistic and worldly father and the more free-spirited Baek Seoin were too different, they would always fight at home.

At that time, to Baek Seoin, his father could have been somewhat of an enemy.

An enemy who would never break under his youthful follies. An existence who would last forever strong.

However, his father was currently so thin that he had a hard time speaking.

The insults at the previous president and the participation in rallies that would always become topics of dispute... even if those things happened, his father couldn't say one word.

He never knew that that would be so painful.

'Forgetting that my dad was human as well... I acted all cocky in front of him...'

A year after his father was hospitalized. Baek Seoin was in a state of deep depression.

His mother came to substitute for him.

"Oh. Seoin. Go home and rest."

"No. I want to stay a bit longer."

"You must be tired, you should rest."

"No, it's okay."

"Okay... but did you also see strange things too?"

“Yes. Hah… whoever they are, aliens or gods, couldn’t they have helped father if they had that much power?”

“Yeah… It did seem a bit scary. A surprise attack and an assembly area… It’s not like it’s the 6/25 incident[1].”

“Our assembly area is here anyways so it’ll be fine.”

“Yeah… Still, go rest a little.”

“Okay. Then I’ll come back after a drink. Father. I’ll be right back.”

That was how Baek Seoin left the room holding a drink.

Late at night. There were much more people waiting in the parking lot than before. There were even some who wanted to enter the hospital by passing through the security guards. There were even people who were speaking nonsense, something about seeing monsters. Perhaps he would have thought about it more seriously if he had seen the weapons inside the hospital. However, due to the fact they quickly hid them to prevent disorder amongst the doctors, Baek Seoin didn’t think much of it. Instead, he was busy worrying about his father.

Just when he had taken a sip of his drink, Baek Seoin suddenly had an ominous feeling. Cold sweat ran down his back and his heart raced.

‘Leave!’

It was as if he heard a scream coming from within him. He felt like he would suffocate.

[You have awakened the Innate skill ‘Intuition’!]

A message suddenly appeared but due to the fact his heart felt like it was being squeezed, he couldn’t pay it any heed. Baek Seoin was in a panic as he hurriedly left the hospital. His heart was pounding and his vision narrowed. He hid in a building nearby. Immediately, as if it was all a lie, his heart relaxed.

“What was that…?”

Just then. He heard the sound of a large explosion. Flames erupted in various places around the city and he started to hear desperate cries.

Craash!

A monster the size of an apartment that spewed flames from its eyes and mouth suddenly appeared as if it had dropped down from the sky. The tyrannosaurus-like monster kicked the building right next to the one Baek Seoin was hiding in.

Crash!

Baek Seoin's body stood up.

The scenes afterwards passed by as if in slow motion. The monster stomped towards the hospital and people dispersed like a swarm of ants. The monster blew flames and those flames spread out in a circle, completely burning people in its path. The advancing monster swung its tail and bashed its head on the hospital and meticulously burned the people under the wreckage. Behind it was a swarm of monsters that hunted and killed the escapees. People were popped like tomatoes and boiled in flames.

"Nnn... nnn!"

Baek Seoin cried.

Unable to do anything, he stifled his cries and could only let tears drop from his eyes. The monster that smashed the hospital suddenly disappeared. Just then, Baek Seoin received another message.

[You have survived a close call with the Wyvern of Destruction. Additional rule revealed.]

———————

[Additional Rule Revealed]

The Wyvern of Destruction will appear again on the final day. The Wyvern of Destruction will protect the escape code.

———————

That was Baek Seoin's story.

"My Intuition... It only cared about my safety... It didn't matter if my parents lived or died as long as I ran for my life."

Baek Seoin's eyes were bloodshot to the point as if they would drip blood.

However, he settled his emotions with deep breaths before calmly continuing.

"Currently, most people don't know that the number of monsters will slowly increase and that the Wyvern of Destruction will appear on the final day. At this rate, everyone will die. The Wyvern of Destruction is already unstoppable, if a million monster underlings charge as well, no one will be able to escape. We need to form a suicide squad that will destroy the monster-spawning portals ahead of time and kill the Wyvern of Destruction. And to do that, I need your help."

That moment, Choi Hyuk was deep in thought.

'The Wyvern of Destruction... How can I kill it?'

Was it possible to kill an apartment-sized monster with a sword? Perhaps it was not meant to be a monster to kill. Maybe they were supposed to lure it away and escape.

However, his fighting instincts knew no limits and he had a reason to fight.

'If I kill that thing, I will definitely catch their attention.'

Choi Hyuk resolved himself to kill the monster. It was fine if he looked for the method starting now.

"First, okay... Then show me the way to the portal. Let's see if your Intuition is real or not."

Choi Hyuk suggested. Baek Seoin revealed a slightly hopeless expression.

"Right now?"

"Yes."

"... My Intuition tells me that the monsters over there are going to be stronger than the ones here. Wouldn't it be better to look for more people before then?"

"It's fine."

"... What if I told you that, even if you don't, I get the feeling I will die there?"

However, Choi Hyuk just shrugged his shoulders.

“Let’s just think of it as a test. If you want to stay with me, it’s a bit troublesome if you die facing monsters at that level.”

It was checkmate for Baek Seoin.

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The foot of a mountain.

Leaning against an altar split in two, Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin were drinking a potion next to each other. The almost fatal wounds were washed away.

Around them, the corpses of 20 Crooks and a [Mountain Orc] who rode on a Crook wielding a hammer were sprawled on the ground.

Baek Seoin groaned.

“I almost died…”

However, Choi Hyuk who was still immersed in the pleasant feeling of the fight said nothing. Although it wasn’t a fight he thought he would lose, it was definitely more thrilling than the fight against the Bladed Ghost.

The Crooks were twice as hard to deal with than the Bladed Starving Ghosts. On top of that, there were more of them and Baek Seoin wasn't helpful as he was wounded. All he did was try not to die.

And riding on the leader of the Crooks, the mid-boss, the Mountain Orc, was terrifyingly fast and strong.

'If I didn't upgrade my Retribution Points, I might have had to run away without being able to kill them all...'

If that happened, then perhaps he wouldn't but Baek Seoin would have died.

Luckily the effect of upgrading his Retribution Points wasn't only letting him distribute the full karma point instead of 0.1. The moment Choi Hyuk entered the fight, he felt it. A more refined cognitive ability and quicker reflexes. The upgraded Retribution Points changed his neural network that was locked into the limitations of a human's into that of a superhuman's. Perhaps the type itself enhanced?

Even before that, Choi Hyuk was already a genius. With the addition of quicker reflexes and a more refined cognitive ability due to the upgrade in Retribution Points, he was like a fish in water. He was able to slaughter 20 Crooks and a Mountain Orc by himself.

The Crook Leather Armor and the Necklace of Protection did their job as well. Due to the attack-intercepting necklace and the

impact-reducing armor, he was able to fight even more aggressively. If not for them, even if Choi Hyuk didn't die, Baek Seoin definitely would have.

Choi Hyuk stretched his arm to stab the Mountain Orc. The Predator's Blade absorbed the blood of the Mountain Orc. Baek Seoin who watched this mumbled.

"Let's first secure supplies before fighting next time. What a waste."

Baek Seoin looked at the corpses of the Crooks that were wasted with regret. Choi Hyuk laughed. He had already somewhat acknowledged Baek Seoin. Although he wasn't strong, he wasn't weak either. Even if Choi Hyuk did help him a bit, eventually it all relied on his ability. And didn't he also have a useful ability called Intuition?

So he decided to confirm a few things.

"You said that your Intuition is only sensitive to your wellbeing."

"Yes."

"Then how do you know the locations of the portals?"

It was strange when he thought about it. Why would the Intuition that only activated when he was in danger lead him to danger? It was the same when they met. If it wasn't for Choi Hyuk,

he would have died fighting the Bladed Starving Ghosts.

Baek Seoin took a moment to organize his thoughts before explaining.

“It’s because I resolved myself to kill the Wyvern of Destruction. From that moment, I started to fight with my Intuition. I thoroughly ignored my heart that wanted to find and trust a safe group. After a day of looking for information and ignoring my Intuition, a new Intuition formed. It’s probably telling me a way to survive even after fighting the Wyvern of Destruction. I felt that I had to find a portal and fight and that someone would come. And someone really did come. That moment, I realized. That the only chance of surviving while killing the Wyvern of Destruction was you.”

While listening to Baek Seoin’s answer, Choi Hyuk thought about followers. An ability he received once he obtained two Qualifications to be a Sovereign.

Choi Hyuk liked Baek Seoin. He especially liked the ‘crazy’ thought of needing to kill the Wyvern of Destruction.

So he asked another question.

“Why?”

This ‘why?’ was asking why he was trying to kill the Wyvern of Destruction. Baek Seoin knew what he was talking about even

without any context.

His face distorted. His calm face was once again filled with an intense emotion.

"... I was always an unfilial son. So I'm planning to be unfilial one last time. Even if I die. That lizard bastard... I will definitely kill it."

Baek Seoin ground his teeth.

Choi Hyuk was able to understand him better than anyone else.

He liked his thirst for revenge.

The moment Choi Hyuk decided,

a message appeared in front of Baek Seoin.

[The King without Subjects, Choi Hyuk, wants to accept you as his follower. Once you accept, all your karma points will increase by 20%. Do you accept?]

Baek Seoin looked at Choi Hyuk with surprised eyes.

He examined Choi Hyuk's face, bit his lips once and nodded his head.

Flutter.

Above Baek Seoin's head, a fluttering flag appeared.

"Ah..."

Baek Seoin looked above his head. He was tightly biting his lips.

His eyes were filled with raging flames as he looked at Choi Hyuk and respectfully said.

"If we really hunt the wyvern... I will truly serve you as my king."

However, Choi Hyuk didn't care for those formalities and was only interested in his goals.

"You said we needed a suicide squad?"

"Yes. The number of monsters will grow, even tomorrow, it'll be too difficult for the two of us to clear the portals."

"Good... Then let's go fight."

Choi Hyuk lifted his nearly recovered body. Since it was obvious that if it was going to be harder tomorrow, it was best to destroy

more today.

However, Baek Seoin, who had almost died, couldn't help but forget the seriousness he had just now and groan.

"... Already?"

"You said let's hunt an apartment-sized monster."

Only then did Baek Seoin stand up.

Choi Hyuk grinned as he walked in front. Baek Seoin hurriedly shouted.

"I... Still, no matter how much of a hurry we're in, let's first secure some supplies! And eat!"

"Okay."

Choi Hyuk continued to walk. Baek Seoin hurriedly followed behind him. When he caught up to him, Choi Hyuk's steps were strangely light. Instead of being nervous, it was like he was happy that he was able to fight more.

Baek Seoin recalled the savage smile Choi Hyuk had during the whole fight.

‘A berserker crazy for battle…’

He somehow naturally came to that thought. A frightening person. However… that was why he trusted him more.

‘I can’t become a hindrance.’

To calm his fear, Baek Seoin raised his fighting aura and rage.

It was still far from night.

Notes:

1] Reference to the start of the Korean War. June 25, 1950.

Chapter 19: Berserkers (2)

Baek Seoin asked.

“But leader, why are you trying to hunt the Wyvern of Destruction?”

“Because I need to get the attention of the ones who created this game.”

“… Is there anything good in catching their attention? Normally staying in the middle is the best.”

“I don’t know if my mom is alive or not. Kangdong District closed down at 10:30am. She should have been at work. I need to go to her workplace in Kwangjin District.”

“… Hopefully, she’s okay… But what does that have anything to do with catching their attention?”

“Once I confirm if she’s dead or alive, I have to either protect or avenge her. For that, I need to become stronger and more unique.”

Choi Hyuk was calm.

Like a criminal on death row accepting the verdict. No… like a judge who raised his gravel to announce the verdict. He rid himself of useless emotions and only looked at the result.

Baek Seoin felt slight shivers down his spine.

He realized that behind Choi Hyuk who purely enjoyed fighting was a frighteningly cold and sharp rage.

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Groups were such a pain. If everyone was confined together and lived looking at each other face to face, all kinds of troubles were bound to arise. Not only were there simple complaints like ‘too smelly,’ or ‘too loud,’ but molestation, violence, isolation and other absurdities.

However, just because you didn’t like it didn’t mean you could just leave. Death would approach the moment you were alone. A monk who leaves the temple would live without a home or temple and eventually end up in a beast’s stomach.

But, even despite these circumstances, there would always be people who couldn’t stand to live among others while constantly considering other people’s feelings. And there were some who couldn’t endure it any longer.

That day, Lee Jinhee resolved herself not to fall asleep. She held two 30cm gladii in her bosom and waited for nightfall.

Her assembly area was the shopping center situated opposite of the Olympic Park Station. The monsters who were targeting this

place, the [Shadow Teeth], were very unique. They stood less than 1m tall and their whole body was surrounded by a black fog. They possessed great stealth abilities so people didn't notice when they passed by right in front of their eyes.

The only time they would show their appearance was when they slashed the neck of a sleeping person and drank their blood.

Every night, three Shadow Teeth would enter and each one would take one life and disappear.

Three at a time, one person each. That was the gist of it.

'You turn away from monsters even after seeing them because you're not a victim?'

Lee Jinhee ground her teeth.

The first day, no, up until the second day, there was a fierce battle against the Shadow Teeth. The Shadow Teeth wanted to slash people's necks and drink their blood. The surrounding people who saw them would scream and raise their weapons. A Shadow Teeth who was caught once couldn't hide again. However, even though they were small, they were monsters. If a fight broke out, the Shadow Teeth would at least take 5 people down with it on the road to death. The first person to noticed them would definitely be killed.

That wasn't all. If the fight was drawn out, the Shadow Teeth

would cry out a strange sound to call its comrades and its comrades who were waiting outside would enter and save the Shadow Teeth. There were times where people would die but they would be unable to kill the Shadow Teeth in the end.

There was no way to know how many Shadow Teeth were waiting outside. On the first night, they killed two but the next night, like the first, three entered the shopping center.

The second night after the chaotic first.

There was a disturbance that night as well but unlike the first, only two fights broke out. The other person died silently and when the people who slept next to him testified they didn't hear anything, Lee Jinhee just thought that was the case.

The situation became clear the third night. No fights broke out that night. But it wasn't like no one died either. Three corpses were found. And the ones who slept right next to them all testified saying they never saw the Shadow Teeths.

... It was a lie.

Just when did that rumor start to spread? She didn't know how but somehow everyone knew in just three nights... The fact that three Shadow Teeth would enter and that each one would kill one person. People would look the other way even if the person next to them was dying. Because the moment they took notice of it, the chance that the Shadow Teeth would go into a frenzy and kill them as well was high.

However, Lee Jinhee couldn’t stand those people.

“I’ll kill them.”

Of course, she was scared that she would die as well. However, she was someone who always fought with and challenged fear. She was the type who thought it was better to die than become a coward.

In a dark shopping center. The room Lee Jinhee was in was originally a PC Bang. In a room with no furnace, people were lying on sleeping bags on the cold, hard floor. Lee Jinhee was sitting next to the door holding blades. Most electronics were dead but simple ones like lights were still working.

“Fuck… That’s scary.”

In the dark hallway, a green exit light added to the bleakness of the night.

The light would occasionally flicker and each time, the shadows would waver. Lee Jinhee endured her increasing drowsiness and looked out into the darkness. Just in case she saw the shadow of a Shadow Teeth. However…

“Urk…”

A suppressed scream sounded out from inside the PC Bang.

Shiick.... Schiick.... Save.... Shiiick....

Rustle, rustle.

A hoarse cry for help was barely able to escape from the victim's ripped throat. She could hear him struggle with his suppressed body. A Shadow Teeth had passed by Lee Jinhee, without her noticing, and had gotten on top of a victim and slashed his throat.

Lee Jinhee got up abruptly. And she saw it. A person who was lying next to the victim waving his hand telling her to sit back down.

She ground her teeth.

Stomp.

She jumped swiftly like a cat. She grabbed the partition with her hands and jumped over it. She stretched her arms out holding onto the next partition before jumping over it as well. In two jumps, she had approached the Shadow Teeth. She held her two gladii in her hands and shouted out loud to wake the surrounding people.

"DIE!!!!"

[Kyahhhhh!]

The Shadow Teeth looked at Lee Jinhee and screamed.

“You scum! You fucking bitch!!”

The man next to the victim, who waved his hand at her previously, stood up in surprise and swore while running away. The people who were still lying down didn’t pay any attention to the commotion.

Kakang!

The Shadow Teeth’s claws and Lee Jinhee’s gladii tangled together. A scream. People who were still half asleep ran away in confusion.

The Shadow Teeth was cunning. As Lee Jinhee’s attacks were tough to deal with, it jumped up like a cat and attempted to escape, “Hak!” “Urk!” while piercing the necks of the escaping people on its way.

“Hup!”

However, Lee Jinhee was quite formidable. Her awakened karma added to her energy. In two jumps, she leaped over people and blocked the path of the Shadow Teeth.

[KiKik!!]

Lee Jinhee ferociously slashed her gladius at the flustered Shadow Teeth. The Shadow Teeth blocked it and

Slam!

Lee Jinhee's foot stepped on it.

"You're only a monster bastard…"

Lee Jinhee suppressed the Shadow Teeth and stabbed its neck with her blade.

[Grrk… Grrr….]

Lee Jinhee had gone outside on the excuse for reconnaissance and was even victorious against three Crooks. The weaker Shadow Teeth was no match for her.

"Hoooo."

Lee Jinhee let out a breath and stretched her back.

Soon after, criticism poured down on her.

"What the hell were you doing!!"

The man, who was lying down next the victim, shouted.

If a student who experienced the [Ring of Rebirth] saw this, he would be surprised. The strong in this situation was Lee Jinhee, not the man so the student wouldn't be able to comprehend the man who lashed out.

However, this place was a normal assembly area. A place where no one had committed murder. A place where even fighting monsters had a limit. There were still lingering signs of everyday life.

It was the same for Lee Jinhee. She was slightly taken back so she replied.

"What am I doing? I saved a person and killed a monster."

"Save? What the fuck do you mean by save! Don't you see there are wounded people because of you?"

The man who saw the flustered Lee Jinhee inwardly felt delighted.

'I have to take this opportunity to take her down a notch!'

Vigor was half the battle. The man flapped his arms as he increased his vigor.

“What are you going to do about the wounded people?! Huh?!”

There were many people who were wounded and were bleeding. They, too, looked at Lee Jinhee in resentment.

Lee Jinhee was at loss for words.

She knew there would be people unhappy with her actions but she never imagined someone so full of themselves that they would confidently lash out at her.

“... Then, are you telling me to let someone die?”

“So did you save him? Huh? Did you?!”

The man shouted at the top of his lungs. But it was the truth. The first victim who had his throat ripped by the Shadow Teeth had already died from shock.

“... So... What are you saying? Since you gave away someone else as food, the end? Are you saying that we are to shut up and let it happen?”

“What? This greenhorn bitch... Who are you to be so self-centered? You who walked around saying that you had to do parkour or whatever... What did you say yesterday? That you think we need to destroy some sort of portal? You crazy bitch, if you want to die, die by yourself. Why are you harming others in the process?”

The man let out all the animosity he accumulated. He felt disgusted by the young woman who kept going outside raising her voice. He couldn't forgive her useless sense of justice that almost led to his death.

While he was taking it out on her, he meticulously packaged his selfishness as consideration and her conviction as selfishness.

Lee Jinhee was unable to get out of the man's wasteful dispute.

"... I already told you! If we stay stuck in here like cowards, we'll die!"

"What? Cowards? Listening to this bitch... Do you think everyone here stays still because they have no courage? Don't you see because of your high and mighty justice that others are dying? That's not justice but simply you having no sense whatsoever. You bitch!"

"Haa..."

Lee Jinhee felt like her energy was escaping her. If you looked at it mathematically, it was true. If everyone stayed still, only one person would die, while if they fought, many would die. But...

"Mister, currently one person dies at a time. But will that be the case in the future? When we have lost our will to fight and when our numbers are much less than now? Will they still only kill one

person at a time then? Do you have no brains?”

Lee Jinhee became agitated.

However, the man didn’t tolerate it.

“What? Haa... This dumb bitch, do words not get through to you?”

If it was like any other day, the man would have grabbed her collar at this time. However, he knew very well that he wasn’t able to overpower Lee Jinhee. So he looked at the surrounding people and urged for their responses.

“Isn’t that right? It’s not just me who thinks this, don’t you all think this as well?”

As soon as he looked around, people who came to be on friendly terms with the man over the past few days all spoke.

Starting with,

“Young woman, your words are too harsh.”

“Just stay still. Stop inserting yourself into matters.”

“Why is she like that? Is she just looking for attention?”

All kinds of criticisms fell on her.

The man knew a lot about these people who stood for so-called ‘justice’. These kinds of people were weak against the pressure of many. They weren’t able to use their power. ‘Idiots…’

The man was experienced with the power of authority and Lee Jinhee was still young so she held onto upright values.

Her body trembled as her blood boiled but she didn’t go out of control. She suppressed her boiling anger in her chest. You couldn’t kill someone just because you were angry. That was what she thought.

‘… Okay. Then just live like that. Thinking that you’re safe because the person next to you died.’

She put away her gladii without another word. The man flinched when he saw her actions. Lee Jinhee revealed a grin as she packed up her things.

“… I just need to screw off right?”

“Look at this bitch? Compensate us before you go!”

As if he was dejected by his sudden flinch, the man forced an unreasonable demand.

‘Like hell, I’ll give you compensation…’

Lee Jinhee ignored him as she left the shopping center.

“Fucking bitch!” his voice that was filled with a sense of victory followed her out.

Lee Jinhee was boiling with anger. Still, she was able to barely contain it.

“Hoooo…”

She let out a sigh.

Stomp!

She started to dash forward.

She crossed the street and went down the tens of steps of the Olympic Park Station in a single leap. She didn’t let out a sound. She used the cat’s technique to alleviate the shock at the last moment and used her athletic ability to kick the ground and charge forward.

She had to run like crazy. If not, she felt that she would turn back and stab the man’s forehead with her gladius.

“Uahhhhhh!”

Lee Jinhee screamed as she jumped down from the subway station.

She was 20 years old.

She was experienced in parkour since her first year in middle school. An exercise where one would jump from one building to another and climb walls a few meters tall and lightly land on a palm-sized post. A freerun where she would instantly overcome all obstacles. A life enjoying the wild feeling of hitting the limits of human ability and leaving the territory of ‘safety’ behind. An experience that allowed one to look at the city from a whole new perspective.

She was so immersed in this feeling of freedom that she went to Seoul as soon as she graduated high school. It was to simply enjoy and practice parkour with more people.

She who wanted to be freer than anyone else. She who resented the fact she was unable to follow the male crews’ explosive dashes as a woman.

She was currently using the power of karma to exceed her limits. She was able to steadily increase her karma by killing monsters. There were no rough movements in her run.

She arrived at the underground in a single breath and was running along the tracks. As she ran jumping over 5, 10 ties at a time, she was finally able to cool off.

“Haaa....”

She stopped and sighed. As her head cooled, she became embarrassed.

“Ah... damn... What do I do now?”

She was happy she left after losing her temper but she had no plans. No place to go.

“Ah... Why did I come here?”

In a straight tunnel like this, it was difficult to escape from monsters. On top of that, she had shouted out loud as if she was advertising her location.

Fortunately, there were no monsters around her but it was a situation where she could have died. She felt chills going down her back.

Her mother’s words were repeatedly playing in her mind. “You, you! You’re going to get in big trouble because of that temper! This girl.”

Lee Jinhee scratched her head.

“Sigh…”

She had no choice but to keep walking.

It was too late to go back now so she thought she would look for another assembly area at the next station.

“Do I have to stay quiet there… Ah… I can’t just kill them all, what do I do?”

She kept walking while thinking pointless thoughts.

“Huh?”

She suddenly heard noises and smelled the distinctive stink of monster blood.

At the same time, in the darkness, sounds of fighting and shouting approached her.

“Leader! I’m dying!”

“…”

“Leader!!! Leader!! Say something… Uak! Ah damn. You there,

not leader! You! Behind there! In hiding! You're there right? I think you are. I get that feeling! Hey! You hear me? Can you at least help me!"

It was an earnest cry for help. Lee Jinhee hesitantly stood up.

'What the? Don't tell me... he's calling out to me?'

That moment, as if he had heard her thoughts, she heard the faint voice again.

"You! You! You're right! No... You are correct[1]! Please save... Gak!"

As if he was hit at the last moment, he let out a suppressed cry and she heard banging and sounds of something getting jammed.

Though she wasn't sure what was happening,

Lee Jinhee instinctively ran towards the sounds.

Notes:

1] Baek Seoin was speaking casually in the beginning but changed to formal to beg for her help.

Chapter 20: Berserkers (3)

Four days later.

Jung Minji and Lee Jinhee were sitting down across from each other.

Chu Youngjin was silently standing behind Jung Minji.

“So… You’re saying that the rumor about the enormous monster wasn’t a rumor.”

“Yes. There are two conditions to win. One is destroying all the portals and suppressing the monsters. And the second is to either kill the Wyvern of Destruction when it appears on the final day or at least keep it busy. If we fail to do either of the two, it is impossible to obtain the escape code.”

Lee Jinhee’s explanation. Jung Minji tapped the table with her finger. Her troops had already destroyed a portal nearby. However, that was it. She feared that the number of monsters would grow and wanted to destroy more portals but she was met with opposition so she put it on hold for now.

‘So that wasn’t a completely wrong choice. Since we are able to penetrate past the growing number of monsters. However, if the Wyvern of Destruction shows up on top of that, it becomes too difficult… So it’s not a situation where we can’t survive just by staying put.’

Jung Minji had almost decided. She asked her last question to confirm.

“You said that the King without Subjects sent you? Can you prove that?”

The same time she asked.

Flutter.

A black flag fluttered above Lee Jinhee’s head. It was without a doubt Choi Hyuk’s symbol. Jung Minji smiled.

“I have heard about the prestige of the Berserkers. Anyways... A King without Subjects having followers, how ironic. I understand. I will accept your offer. From now on, our troops will try our best to destroy the portals. And we will dispatch our elite troops in a week. The assembly area was...”

“Hyunhae Department Store. We looked around and currently they have the most power. There are a few troops gathered there.”

“Not far. Good.”

Jung Minji held out her hand. The two shook hands.

Lee Jinhee left Doonchon High School with light steps. Jung

Minji's troops who have distinguished themselves recently would be of great help.

In a week, Jung Minji, who had left Hanyoung High School, took over Doonchon High School as well as the shopping center across from the Olympic Park Station where Lee Jinhee was at previously.

"Hmmm... I wonder if that shitty man is still there?"

She didn't care as she looked around Doonchon High School before running off to the next location.

A week after the game had started.

During that time, they destroyed 12 portals but the fight was becoming more and more difficult. Tens of thousands of monsters started to pour in each day and the number of monsters they didn't kill grew. Currently, it was almost too much to destroy one portal in a day. Choi Hyuk became much stronger than Baek Seoin's expectations but one hand couldn't fend off ten.

To do away with this situation, like Baek Seoin suggested previously, Choi Hyuk decided to form a suicide squad and had dispatched Lee Jinhee as a messenger.

"She runs fast..."

Jung Minji stared at the Lee Jinhee who easily jumped over

buildings. Her movements didn't waste any energy. She was able to jump over a 4 or 5 story building with just two steps on the wall and she would overcome or brush past obstacles like the wind. This wasn't something one could do just because they had karma. Others wouldn't have been able to control their strength properly and would have smashed into walls but she controlled her movements flawlessly. Lee Jinhee disappeared from her sight in an instant. A speed even monsters wouldn't be able to follow.

"... Good, I decided. Youngjin senior. Call the kings please."

"Yes."

Jung Minji's troops currently consisted of students from their alma mater, Hanyoung High School, students from Doonchon High School and the people who assembled at the shopping center across from the Olympic Park Station.

She was able to become the leader of these three groups with her daring, precise decisions and reckless show of power. However, it wasn't like her position was stable.

Currently, at Doonchon High School, there were three people who had the title of a king besides her.

First, the Slave King Song Simin who had allied with her since Hanyoung High School.

And Doonchon High School's student body president, the

Student King Min Kyungchul.

Lastly, from the shopping center, the Pig King Ma Dongshik who obtained a Qualification to be a Sovereign and became king after habitually forcing people to take sides.

Ma Dongshik was the man Lee Jinhee previously fought with.

Jung Minji sat down in a circle with the three kings.

She announced her plans on dispatching troops to destroy portals and forming a suicide squad to support Choi Hyuk.

“Sure, why not.”

The Slave King Song Simin, like his reputation of being Jung Minji’s yes man, immediately agreed. When others asked him why he would always agree to Jung Minji’s plans, he would half-jokingly say that he was not the Slave King for nothing and smile. He was insulted, saying that he had no guts but he had lots of friends and was equally well-known for being a good-natured person who took great care of his people.

On one hand, the Student King Min Kyungchul was quite cooperative with Jung Minji but there were many times when he couldn’t understand her.

“I understand that there will be a huge loss… but how much are you thinking of…”

“As many portals as we can. And dispatching all available elite troops. The goal is to minimize the casualties on the last day.”

Jung Minji already wholeheartedly decided to cooperate. Even if there were losses on her side, it was to reduce the number of casualties overall.

This kind of decision was made because of her personality. If the door to hell opened on the final day and countless people were slaughtered by monsters and the Wyvern of Destruction, she had no doubt that she wouldn’t be able to endure her (fucking) sensitivity to others’ pain. If her troops who had power could do something, then she believed a weight would lift from her shoulders. From a broad perspective, her decision could seem selfless but, on the other hand, it was also selfish.

Min Kyungchul couldn’t understand her. Even if he believed it was for a great cause, wasn’t it natural to make sure your forces were safe first?

He couldn’t oppose her outright but he showed a disgruntled expression in silence.

“How about, instead of that, we act like we are doing it? It’s not like we’re the only ones doing it.”

It was the Pig King Ma Dongshik who wanted to oppose her.

“We’re not the only ones… wouldn’t everyone have the same thought? If it’s like that, even a possible plan will fail. If that’s the case, everyone might die. Among them could be lost family members. Someone has to actively take the lead.”

“That’s why… Why does that someone have to be us… If we want to take the lead, then everyone should… That’s my thought.”

While he talked, Ma Dongshik read at Jung Minji’s mood. Jung Minji was a bitch younger than Lee Jinhee who fiercely talked back at him a few days ago… His insides squirmed at the fact he had to treat her with respect, however, she wasn’t someone he could handle. When the people in the shopping center endured saying that they wouldn’t fight the Shadow Teeths, she raised her sword. ‘Then instead of the Shadow Teeths, will you fight with us?’ she calmly asked with eyes overflowing with bloodthirst. She seemed experienced in killing people. After that, Ma Dongshik only watched out for Jung Minji’s mood.

‘However, no matter how I think about it, this is wrong.’

It wasn’t like they were playing hero, there was no need to take the lead and fight a bloody battle with the monsters.

Jung Minji motionlessly stared at Ma Dongshik. In her mind, she already looked down on him. He wasn’t someone who would listen to words.

Also, she didn’t think that she could beat him with logic. Since, from the start, this was a decision she made for herself. She never

once thought that she was righteous. If she did, then she wouldn't have killed people without hesitation. She couldn't help but simply act on her irrational emotions and nature.

Since she had power, she decided to use it. For her wellbeing.

She, who was motionlessly staring at Ma Donshik, opened her mouth.

"I didn't call you all for a meeting…"

With her words, the atmosphere grew cold. She had gathered the kings not to discuss these matters but to announce it. At least, it was different from her original demeanor of listening to their opinions after their groups merged.

The Slave King Song Simin only rolled his eyes. The Student King Min Kyungchul frowned and tightly sealed his lips.

Ma Dongshik froze momentarily before finally opening his mouth.

"… I… understand. However, please think over the number of dispatched people. There are families who were finally able to reunite with each other, we can't have them go into mourning so suddenly, can we? Let's have it so that only one person from each family be dispatched."

Ma Dongshik spoke out for the adults who were his main

supporters.

And that was the reason why Jung Minji was so passive all this time.

When the survivors of Hanyoung High School and Doonchon High School gathered at the shopping center with the adults, there were quite a few people who found their family members among them.

Those with families couldn’t help but act more protective. They were able to unite their strength to destroy the portal near them but that was all, nothing more.

Also, unlike the naïve students who were used to announcements and regulations, the adults were much more self-assertive and were able to laugh their way out of proposed regulations and moved only for benefits. It was hard to control them at her will.

That was the reason why Jung Minji, who wanted to fight the monsters more aggressively, couldn’t help but accept the opposition and endure until now.

However, now that she had heard about the Wyvern of Destruction, Jung Minji resolved herself to no longer care about their circumstances.

Though it seemed it was complicated and time-consuming to make people act according to your will, sometimes it was very

easy. Even if there was a resistance, if you pushed it hard enough, it would eventually fall. Only 3 weeks were left. She was confident in suppressing all resistance during that time.

"No. Then what about the students who couldn't find their families? We won't treat those with families any differently. With strong karma, even the elderly can run around. Haven't you observed this in the past few days?"

Ma Dongshik's face distorted at her words. Jung Minji used this chance to pour more cold water.

"Don't be mistaken. If you're weak, you die. It's that kind of game. It means that not fighting won't be great forever."

Ma Dongshik wanted to let out his anger and slam the table but he desperately endured it. He was barely able to suppress his anger and force a smile.

He lowered his head.

"Haha... Yes... You're right. I understand."

The first thing he did after being absorbed into Jung Minji's troops was take out the hidden stash of alcohol for the students from Hanyoung High School. During the drinking session, he clearly heard what happened to Kim Hyunbaek who opposed her. Ma Dongshik would always remember that example.

Jung Minji carefully examined Ma Dongshik's expression. Ma Dongshik was barely able to squeeze out a smile as cold sweat dripped down his back. Finally, Jung Minji nodded her head.

"I look forward to working with you."

And that was how the troops assembled at Doonchon High School started their preparations for war.

**

As time passed, the fact that the rules of the first game were quite varied were revealed.

The places with the most numbers would usually be assembly areas that were normally targeted at adults.

After them were all the high schools, middle school and the library where the [Ring of Rebirth] appeared. Places with a high density of people and people who weren't too young. These two things could be seen as the conditions for the [Ring of Rebirth].

Besides them, there were more customized rules.

Such as the modified assembly area method applied to the students of the Korean National Sport University next to the Olympic Park.

They were given the option to choose a weapon and goblins appeared inside their school. They were monsters who had the fighting ability of an average adult. Only after they disposed of them was karma distributed to them. [Qualifications to be a Sovereign 1/3] and [Knight Captain] was given to the person who had the most kills.

There were even rules that only applied to veterans of the Korean War and the Vietnam War. They were given weapons and distributed karma with no strings attached and there was an assembly area just for them. They even received a friendly announcement, [When you hunt monsters, karma will increase].

Although the veterans weren't all familiar with each other, once they gathered together, they looked like an army. Veterans who knew better than anyone else what a real battle was like, when these grandpas learned of the pleasure in becoming as strong as superhumans, exceeding their former physical prowess, they fought even more vigorously than the monsters.

They became a prominent force that controlled Kangdong District.

However, there was a group composed of only three members who were equally famous.

Warriors who went around the entire Kangdong District and fought at the very front. While everyone was fighting to defend their assembly area, with only three members, this group smashed apart monsters' headquarters. Crazy warriors soaked with blood that wouldn't dry.

People called them, ‘Berserkers’.

Especially the leader of the Berserkers who wielded a pitch black sword, Choi Hyuk. He became the center of an unbelievable rumor that he could smash apart most groups by himself.

“Hooo…. I feel like I’m really going to die without Jinhee here.”

“Did you ever feel like you were going to live?”

Baek Seoin who complained and Choi Hyuk who nonchalantly accepted them were once again wading through a forest of monsters to destroy a portal today.

[Kuakk!] [Giik!]

Choi Hyuk had memorized the different vital points for each monster and now monsters were unable to endure a single attack.

However, Choi Hyuk’s expression wasn’t good.

‘… We aren’t able to catch up the speed at which the monsters are growing. There’s a limit to killing one monster at a time.’

No matter how much he tried, the best he could do was kill one monster with a single strike. A restriction that felt like a natural limit. However, he wouldn’t be able to break through the growing

number of monsters with that speed. What was more,

‘It’s completely illogical to try to hunt the Wyvern of Destruction.’

No matter much stronger he became, it was impossible to slay an apartment-sized monster with a blade that was slightly longer than a meter.

‘As expected… I have to try it.’

Choi Hyuk recalled the skill he obtained recently. A skill he couldn’t currently use.

‘… Soaring Slash.’

Choi Hyuk tightly grasped the hand of his blade.

Chapter 21: Berserkers (4)

———————

[Soaring Slash]

Rank: C

Release a blade condensed from karma.

———————

The only skill Choi Hyuk had, Soaring Slash. Its description was simple but it was an incredible C rank skill.

The most players could obtain from the [Throne Game] were E rank weapons and skills and the Predator's Blade he received as a reward from a secret rule was the only D rank weapon which was a level above the others.

It was similar to that. The regular items and skills that would drop from killing normal monsters in the game, [Survive and Escape], were E rank while to the special ones who hunted mid-bosses would normally receive D ranks.

But since 'Soaring Slash' was a C rank, like the Predator's Blade, it was a reward that exceeded the norm.

So Choi Hyuk wasn't able to use the skill yet.

[Failed. To use C rank skills, you must have at least one stat and Retribution Point at C rank (3-star).]

Choi Hyuk recalled the moment he obtained the skill.

That day was the day he met Lee Jinhee.

**

Four days after [Ring of Rebirth]. They were on their way to destroy their third portal. Although he was low on stamina, he thought that he could end the day after this. However, his opponents were stronger than he thought.

“Leader! I’m going to die!”

Choi Hyuk was clearing the monsters approaching Baek Seoin but due to the monsters who went around him, Baek Seoin was in a critical situation. However, he was unable to recklessly go save Baek Seoin either. If he did, then the monsters he was currently blocking would gather around Baek Seoin as well and that could put him in more danger.

There were around 40 monsters which were similar to the number of monsters at the previous portal... but it was different. Usually, there would be one type of monster protecting a portal but this place had various monsters and they moved according to the mid-boss’s orders. They were monsters that used tactics.

On top of that, to hide this fact, only the mid-boss and around 10 large [Boulder Bears] were guarding the front of the portal while

the rest waited in ambush. “Huh? What the? Something feels off?” Baek Seoin hesitated but Choi Hyuk didn’t pay him any heed. And they were currently in a difficult fight surrounded by a combination of tanks, close ranged and long ranged attackers.

‘We can’t continue like this. I have no choice.’

Choi Hyuk resolved himself. He was worried about Baek Seoin but he decided to believe in him.

‘Since he has Intuition, he probably won’t die.’

He felt that dragging the fight any longer would be more dangerous. Choi Hyuk decided to take the chance that more monsters would gather around Baek Seoin and attack the mid-boss.

The mid-boss had the appearance of a 3m tall bat but since it was wary of Choi Hyuk, it never stepped onto the frontlines. An annoying existence that only controlled monsters from behind and cast debuffs on Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin.

Choi Hyuk instantaneously overloaded his karma. If he did this, his Stamina and Recovery would rapidly decline but he had no choice if he wanted to offset the debuffs and surprise it.

Choi Hyuk took a deep breath.

Bang!!

He kicked off the ground.

“Are you okay?!”

The moment Choi Hyuk shot up was the same moment Lee Jinhee ran over to save Baek Seoin.

Stab!

Lee Jinhee stabbed the head of the monster that was targeting Baek Seoin. She then swung Baek Seoin who lost strength in his legs after taking a hit and kicked the wall. She jumped over the heads of the incoming monsters.

The scene of Choi Hyuk piercing the forehead of the giant bat was reflected in Lee Jinhee’s eyes.

“Wow…”

A perfect takeoff, the artful movement of putting all his strength into the tip of the blade. She was truly amazed.

Thud. The moment she landed on the ground, the flow of the battle had already reversed.

The monsters became a herd of sheep with no shepherd. Choi Hyuk chose the most effective method and branded the heads,

throats, chests and joints of the monsters with his blade. He was like a lion that had pounced on a herd of sheep.

Lee Jinhee couldn't take her eyes away from Choi Hyuk. There were plenty of movements that she wanted to film and repeatedly view and practice.

"Uhh... I'm fine now so can you let go?"

She didn't even hear Baek Seoin's words. Even while carrying Baek Seoin and stepping on the swinging arm of a Boulder Bear, rolling to avoid a charging Crook and kicking off the subway wall to reach the edge of the battle, she never took her eyes off of Choi Hyuk's fight.

The situation finally settled.

Choi Hyuk was reading a message.

———————

[Additional Rule Revealed]

After half a month, the monsters start to move in a more organized manner.

———————

[First to defeat an army-like group of monsters. Calculating... You have obtained more than two additional rules. Cleared more than five portals. More than one Qualifications to be a Sovereign...

Satisfied the conditions. Granted the hidden reward, a C rank skill ‘Soaring Slash’.]

Two peculiar messages appeared.

Lee Jinhee approached while Choi Hyuk was deep in his thoughts. Along with the haggard Baek Seoin.

Only then did Choi Hyuk remember he was helped and gave his thanks.

“Ah, than…”

However, Lee Jinhee cut him off and said.

“Hyung! You’re the best! How did you do that?”

“… Hyung[1]?”

Choi Hyuk was taken back. A girl who looked like she was in university was calling him hyung…

“Yeah. Yeah. Hyung. Hyung, teach me! Especially that takeoff you used to kill the bat monster! That was amazing!”

Lee Jinhee who was a parkour otaku[2] was deeply moved by Choi Hyuk’s concise movements which used his momentum (mobility)

to the maximum. Though it was different from parkour, it was cool.

Not dashing in an open area but a dash that narrowly brushed passed monsters by a paper-thin margin, a non-stop dash where if there was no room, he would make it by cutting down and pushing monsters away! Not running around the outside of a group of monsters but freely moving within! Strength!

However, Choi Hyuk was dazed.

"... I am hyung?"

"Or course! The one who's better is the hyung! I'm asking you, please teach me!"

The conversation between Lee Jinhee who had her eyes wide open asking Choi Hyuk to teach her and Choi Hyuk, a genius who didn't know anything besides 'just do it, went nowhere.

At some point, they ended up talking about the 'Wyvern of Destruction'.

"What? You're going hunt an apartment-sized monster?!"

Lee Jinhee's eyes shined brightly. This time, it was worse than before.

“As expected… Hyung! I respect you!”

To challenge an apartment-sized monster… Lee Jinhee panted heavily from the excitement.

‘Okay! Weren’t we the ones who climbed walls with only our hands? If we have karma, shouldn’t we be able to take down an apartment-sized monster?’ were Lee Jinhee’s thoughts. ‘This is a revolution!’

Like this, that day… Choi Hyuk obtained a skill and a new follower.

**

“Ha…”

Even when he thought about it now, she was a weird person. Lee Jinhee.

However, he had to end the fight now, so he cleared himself of distracting thoughts and yelled.

“Mid-boss, portal, confirmed!”

“Come back before I die!”

Baek Seoin said as he smashed the head of an oncoming Crook. Baek Seoin became experienced after fighting monsters for a week. He was currently able to fight normal monsters without difficulty.

“Speed, Vigor.”

Choi Hyuk coolly activated the skills of the [Ring of Speed] and the [Ring of Vigor] he obtained. Each increased his Speed and Power by 10% for 1 minute. There was no additional consumption of Stamina.

Karma condensed throughout his whole body.

Grip.

Choi Hyuk gripped the [Fang Saber].

Bang!

He shot forward at full speed.

As there were too many monsters stationed around the portal, it was impossible to kill them all. So starting two days ago, when he saw the mid-boss and the portal, Choi Hyuk would charge forward, smash the two and escape.

Choi Hyuk charged forward.

He jumped off the shoulder of a Boulder Bear, stepped on a Crook's head and jumped over a Bladed Starving Ghost while pushing away its blades. The monsters that were caught by the Fang Saber spurted blood.

Ingrained in his movements were parkour moves Lee Jinhee showed off. Lee Jinhee accused him of being a cheat for being able to copy, no improve her movements with a single glance but he didn't care.

Choi Hyuk instantly broke through the monsters.

Crack!

First, he slashed with the Fang Saber and split the portal then unsheathed the thin Flash Sword.

[Kuahhhh!]

Crab? No, a crayfish-like mid-boss. Choi Hyuk easily avoided the mid-boss's attack and stabbed his Flash Sword between the folds of its exoskeleton.

Pkkht. Pkkht. Pkkht.

Not just once, he circled around it stabbing multiple times. The attacks of the mid-boss couldn't even touch Choi Hyuk.

[Kkrr…]

After the Flash Sword severed its joints, all it could do was cry.

It lost its mobility and was completely defenseless.

Crack!

He took aim at its wide chest and stabbed it with the Predator's Blade. The Predator's Blade which was stabbed vertically was even able to pierce its hard exoskeleton.

[The Predator's Blade absorbed the blood of a worthy opponent. Evolution 13/100]

He had killed 20 mid-bosses up until now. Among those, the ones he fed to the Predator's Blade were 13. There was still a long way to go before it would evolve.

"Tsk."

Choi Hyuk clicked his tongue once then turned around and yelled.

"Retreat!"

Even retreating wasn't easy. A tiring task of shaking off an

endless amount of monsters.

Baek Seoin and Choi Hyuk would take a step back and stab one,

then take two steps back and split another,

four steps and five. That was how they slowly sped up their escape.

The corpses of the monsters extended in a long line-until, at one point, it stopped.

**

“Wow... You were a monster before but now that you evolved your stats again, is it completely different?”

Baek Seoin said in admiration.

It was as he said. After he had evolved even his Retribution Points to two-stars two days ago, there was a huge change in his stats.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 10 (+10) (★★)

Speed: 10 (+10) (★★)

Control: 54 (+54) (★★)

Endurance: 18 (+18) (★★)

Stamina: 18 (+18) (★★)

Recovery: 0 (★★)

*Retribution points: 0 (★★)

*Free karma points: 50

————————

[Compared to the stats he had around the time he met Baek Seoin]

Power: 35.3 (+10) (★)

Speed: 36 (+10) (★)

Control: 45.1 (+20) (★)

Endurance: 25.6 (★)

Stamina: 49.7 (+10) (★)

Recovery: 35.9 (+10) (★)

*Free karma points: 4

————————

As his stats and Retribution Points passed 200, they evolved into two-stars. After that, a lot of things changed.

On top of that fact his stats wouldn’t increase when he killed normal monsters (he decided to call them 1-star monsters for convenience), even when he killed mid-bosses (he called them 2-star monsters), his stats didn’t increase automatically.

Before, if he killed something, all his stats would go up by at least 1. Even his Retribution Points would go up by 1.

However, it was different now. When he killed 2-star monsters, none of his stats or Retribution Points would increase and he would only earn a single free karma point.

What was more, he even needed to spend free karma points to raise his Retribution Points now.

Because of this, besides the stats increased through items, Choi Hyuk's real stats and Retribution Points were all 0.

After evolving his stats, he had killed 6 2-star monsters but all they became were 6 free karma points. Fortunately, as a benefit of killing mid-bosses, he was granted 2 free karma points per kill and for evolving his Retribution Points to 2-stars, he received 4 free karma points for a total of 50.

And, after obtaining 2-star stats, the stat increases from 1-star items became nullified.

Because of this, he distributed the accessories and enchanted items to his followers or put them in his Handy Bag and created new D rank items. From this, he was able to keep all his stats besides Recovery at 2 digits...

All things considered, things weren't easy.

Choi Hyuk grumbled.

“It’s too hard to develop.”

The hurdles he had to jump over to increase his stats and Retribution Points all of a sudden became too high.

To achieve 1-stars, he needed 100 points.

200 points for 2-stars.

Then didn’t it mean that he needed 300 for 3-stars?

To increase a necessary stat, even if he hunted a monster, he would only earn a single free karma point.

On top of that, killing ordinary 1-star monsters was useless.

“I know right? It’s like the tutorial has finished.”

Baek Seoin smiled as he said strange things.

“… Tutorial?”

“Yeah. If you looked at it like a game, we should now be choosing our classes. Which means that we can’t increase all our stats like before.”

Sensible words. However…

“It’s still hard. It’s not like there are a lot of 2-star monsters.”

“That’s because leader became too strong by himself. My stats increased after I met you… but aren’t they still less than a quarter of what your stats were back then? So, it’s like this. Currently, the [Survive and Escape] game is a tutorial but leader’s stats exceed its level. I bet even the creators never imagined that there would be someone who easily clears monsters with just 1-star stats and reached 2-star stats long before the game ends.”

They weren’t very encouraging words.

“Anyways, it’s hard to use Soaring Slash.”

A 3-star stat and 3-star Retribution Points. Those were the conditions to use Soaring Slash. He needed 600 karma points. Even if he included the amount he currently had, he still needed to kill 170 more mid-bosses. It might be possible if he tried his best and his stats increased significantly through items but… at this rate, it was impossible. Due to the increasing number of monsters, it was taking longer and longer to kill a mid-boss.

However, even if that was the case, he needed Soaring Slash if he wanted to kill the Wyvern of Destruction.

‘Release a blade condensed from karma.’

Wasn't that sword energy? If he could slash 5 meters away with sword energy, Choi Hyuk thought it was possible to take down the Wyvern of Destruction.

He was deep in his thoughts.

Baek Seoin merrily said.

"Don't worry. My Intuition believes in you, leader."

"That Intuition... doesn't it not care if I kill the wyvern or not as long as Baek hyung isn't in danger?"

Lee Jinhee's way of talking rubbed off on Choi Hyuk as he now called Baek Seoin, Baek hyung.

At Choi Hyuk's keen words, Baek Seoin changed the topic.

"Ahahaha. Aren't you hungry? Nearby supply locations... Let's see... It's Kangdong Library! It just came down. Let's obtain the supplies and call it a day! Haha!"

Baek Seoin laughed wholeheartedly as he led the way.

Pfft.

Choi Hyuk laughed once before following behind. Since it wasn't like he could do anything by worrying about it now.

The sun was setting.

Notes:

1] Hyung is what a younger man would call an older man but Lee Jinhee is a girl (which means she should have used 'Oppa') so Choi Hyuk was taken back. Also, she's older than him.

2] Parkour otaku means she is extremely obsessed with parkour

Chapter 22: Berserkers (5)

Late at night, Hyunhae Department Store, employee's break room.

A man woke up from his nightmares. The moment he woke up, his body bounced up and he slashed out with his sword.

"Ue... Uackkk!!"

Crash!

"Haaa... Haaaa..."

The man broke into a cold sweat as he looked around his surroundings. The room was dark and no one was there.

"It was a dream..."

The man lowered his head and calmed his breath.

The man's name was Ryu Hyunsung. He was the [Knight Captain] of the Korean National Sport University.

Ryu Hyunsung pulled out the sword deeply embedded in the floor. Nights like these were when he thought it was good that he decided to use a room all to himself despite the dissatisfaction among his colleagues. What kind of gruesome tragedy would occur

if he slept next to others... even thinking about it sent shivers down his spine.

"How embarrassing... It's not like it's only happened once or twice..."

When he said that, he started. It wasn't a day or two... but if he thought about it, it had only been a week.

On an ordinary day, monsters suddenly appeared. His colleagues, juniors and professors were driven into a corner and ripped apart.

Ryu Hyunsung was a national level sabre fencer. He lived half his life as a swordsman but had never even cut a chicken's neck. That Ryu Hyunsung was bathed in blood again and again. If someone was to pick the top three people who killed the most monsters, Ryu Hyunsung would definitely be on that list. That was why it was more exhausting for him than anyone else. The times he didn't know when or where fangs or claws of monsters would strike. In a completely nervous state. He clenched his teeth and fought against monsters that were stronger and faster than him.

But, the horrible and tiresome feeling only lasted for a moment. Ryu Hyunsung's conscience quickly adjusted to this hell. However, occasionally, his unconsciousness would shudder at the terror and horror. The nightmares were proof of that.

"Huuu..."

Ryu Hyunsung stood up and hung his sword on his waist.

He became accustomed to examining the condition of his equipment in the morning as if he had done it his whole life. If he looked back, it had only been a week... but his university life of ordering jajangmyeon and baigan liquor[1] seemed to be from a previous life.

Ahh, for that to be all.

“Is it human blood now?”

He bitterly laughed at himself as he stretched his body.

His body that was previously trembling from the nightmares had already become calm. Even his heightened senses were becoming dull.

It probably wasn’t a unique morning that only Ryu Hyunsung experienced.

As everyone did their best to calm their panic and confusion to endure this hell.

**

To anyone, monsters were entities that brought fear and horror.

Even the students who experienced the [Ring of Rebirth] and the [Throne Game] panicked and received heavy casualties when they first fought against monsters.

Existences that were larger and more experienced than humans. When facing their killing intent straight on, there weren't many who could keep their minds straight. Perhaps the people who defended the assembly area while it was under the Barrier of the Weak were able to endure it but the students who didn't have a designated assembly area and the exploration teams who went out to find supplies all fought with their lives on the line.

When they were finally able to calm down after enduring these nightmarish days, the people realized. In a reality where monsters were eating humans, humans weren't necessarily all on the same side.

"Sa... save..."

"Shh-Shh- It's okay. It's okay."

Puscht!

Blood spurted out.

"Hey... You! Bastards! Are you even human?!!!"

“Quiet, quiet.”

Puscht!

“Woah! They were on their way back after collecting supplies. They have the Barrier of the Weak?”

What would people’s reactions normally be when they spotted a team of wounded people who fought monsters?

Of course, there were people who helped. However, there were plenty who ignored them. Among them, there were even those who ‘hunted’ them. They would earn karma as well as items. They were people who thought it was better than fighting monsters. Those who didn’t see others as fellow humans.

Because people were humans, they sympathized with each other. It was an instinct. However, just who was considered a ‘human’ depended on the individual.

It even happened during peaceful times.

There were many, many people who nonchalantly stole from others. And beat them. And could still stand tall and shout, “This bastard is unbelievable!” at the victims. Adults did, obviously, but there were even occasional cases where young students would kidnap someone weaker than them then torture and kill them.

The reason why they could do that? Because they were born

psychopaths?

No. It was simply because these people didn't consider others as fellow humans. Because 'Us' and 'You' were different. They were existences who could pour boiling water on you to see what happens but could also go crazy and even cry when 'their' friends bled even a tiny bit.

The assembly areas were deeply divided.

As they needed to fight monsters, there was a side who wanted to unite everyone's strength even if it was hard and a side who took an uncaring attitude as if nothing mattered as long as they were alive and safe. On top of that, there were villainous cockroaches who only took care of their people and saw others as people who existed only to give them karma and supplies.

And like always, the bad became more eye-catching and grew at a faster pace than the good. There were cases all around where people killed others and in less than a week, assembly areas no longer trusted each other.

This situation became a major obstacle for Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin who needed to unite everyone to hunt the Wyvern of Destruction.

On top of that, a newly discovered rule.

[Supplies will reduce significantly every 10 days.]

The currently insufficient supplies would become even smaller. Then, the number of people would inevitably get smaller.

Who would be left behind? There were suggestions of throwing out the weak but that was rejected. If they started to cast out people who were on ‘their’ side, cooperation would become forever impossible.

Then what solution was there that would reduce the number of people but still keep themselves united?

There was one.

So Choi Hyuk thought.

‘All the better.’

“These bastards are unbelievable! Just who do you think you are to come crawling here like that?”

The ones who came and held Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin, who came to get the supplies, back were a group of gangsters who took the KTT building near Gildong Station as their base. An assembly area with an especially large amount of gangsters. They dominated that place and ruled as kings.

“Oh? Someone else came. Then let’s split it evenly.”

Said Baek Seoin.

That was Choi Hyuk's group's rule. It didn't matter who found the supplies first, they would always split it evenly with everyone. However, the gangsters had a different rule

"Ha? What? Look at these fucking bastards."

The gangsters surrounded Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin. Choi Hyuk clearly saw the dark red light they were emitting. They planned on killing Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin from the start. To steal their karma and items.

"... What the. We're in a dangerous situation but my Intuition isn't activating."

Baek Seoin laughed.

Choi Hyuk laughed as well and looked at the symbol above the gangsters' heads. A symbol of an axe. It seemed like there was a leader who earned a Qualification to be a Sovereign.

Choi Hyuk counted his opponents. Twenty people.

Who would he keep alive and get information from? What path would be the simplest?

That moment, another party appeared. They were old men whose assembly area was quite a distance from here but perhaps they came all the way here because they lacked supplies.

"Hey, you punks. Put your hands away."

Around ten grandpas. The Association of Comrade in Arms. War veterans who fought in the Korean and Vietnam War.

"Who are these fogies?"

Even though the gangsters swore, their spirit died down. They too have heard about the bravery of these grandpas.

"Now, now. You, civilians, leave. Think of yourselves as lucky. And you punks. We knew that your assembly area was near here but since we came from a long way, let's split it evenly."

A grandpa wearing sunglasses offered.

They weren't intimidated even though they knew they were close to the gangsters' headquarters. Well, they were men who lived their whole lives like that. People who have walked down Jongno Street all knew this. These old men who went through hell never shied away from anything.

"The fuck..."

The team leader of the gangster exploration team thought. This was their territory and that if they backed down now, it would be incredibly humiliating. So he allowed them to use ‘them’. The things they stole from the empty police station.

Bang!

“It has nothing to do with you so go on your way.”

The gangsters took out their guns. If one reached 1-star stats, they would have physical abilities close to that of a superhuman’s but it wasn’t to the point of blocking or dodging bullets. They would still be affected by bullets.

But the grandpas just laughed.

From their Handy Bags,

Cachink,

Thud,

They took out pistols and even a makeshift flamethrower created by remodelling a rifle and a gas tank.

When all hell broke loose and people were panicked, the ones who robbed the police station and the reserves before anyone were these grandpas from the Association of Comrade in Arms.

The grandpa wearing sunglasses said craftily.

“What did you say? I couldn’t hear properly cuz I’m old!”

“… Urk…”

“Can’t you speak? Then I’ll say it again. You civilians quickly run away. And you, we split the items 2:1, of course, we’re 2. Okay?”

And that was how the gangsters and the grandpas started to negotiate again.

Choi Hyuk who was looking at them laughed.

“Puhahaha.”

Instantly, everyone’s gazes fell on Choi Hyuk.

Stomp!

Choi Hyuk disappeared. Their eyes widened.

A method to reduce the number of people while internally staying united.

There was a historic method. That was, go to war with powers who were preventing unification.

Notes:

1] Jajangmyeon – a common Korean Chinese noodle dish. Baigan Liquor – Chinese Liquor

Chapter 23: Berserkers (6)

Just because your eyes are open doesn't mean you see everything.

One of the main reasons is saccadic movement. People's eyes make 3-4 rapid jerk-like movements every second. Even if you think that you are concentrating on one thing, your eyes are constantly moving. The length of time your eyes are fixed and are taking in information is about 0.1-0.3 seconds. Excluding that, while your eyes are making rapid (saccadic) movements, you are in fact not taking in any information.

Along with that, within a 180-degree field of view, only the middle 2 degrees can be constantly maintained. If something was even 2 degrees away from the center, your vision would plummet by 50%.

Choi Hyuk laughed loudly. Everyone's gazes turned towards him. They were like 'What the?' In that short period of time, there were some whose eyes were locked onto Choi Hyuk and others whose eyes suddenly looked at a gangster or a grandpa. And then,

Bang!

Without any notice, Choi Hyuk jumped forward.

The people whose eyes were looking at something else obviously weren't able to follow him. Even the people who already had their eyes on him lost him.

Choi Hyuk didn't jump in a straight line but up, in a parabola. Eyes had more difficulty tracking vertical movement than horizontal. Choi Hyuk, who jumped up, was instantly 2 degrees away from the center of their vision. His enemies tried to follow Choi Hyuk's movements but the eyes have a 0.1-0.2 second delay. Even if they wanted to follow him, 'tracking' was comparably slow when targeting a moving object, while 'saccadic movements' limited their field of view.

A swiftness that aimed for both weaknesses of the eyes and the mind! The result was brutal.

Boom!

A sound that was too frightening to believe. The sight that was captured by their eyes was a cloud of blood exploding like flour.

The endurance of the gun-holding gangster wasn't even 1-star. The moment Choi Hyuk's fist imbued with 10 (★★) Power and 10 (★★) Speed stats made contact with his face, it literally turned into powder.

Four gangsters held guns in the beginning and since one had just died, three were left.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't need to prioritize the gangsters who held guns.

Crack!

Slam!

With a single jab, another man's neck bone shattered and with a kick, another one's chest collapsed. Only then did the gangsters hastily start to react.

While leaning forward slightly, Choi Hyuk glanced at his enemies. As his Retribution Points were already at 2-stars, Choi Hyuk's eyes, which had already exceeded the limits of humans, were incredibly fast and precise as they distinguished their enemies. Instant saccadic movements. Instant perception. The gangsters felt their hairs stand on end.

'Our eyes met...!'

At the same time, everyone thought they had met eyes with Choi Hyuk. A predator looking at its prey.

Bang!

Someone shot their gun in a last-ditch effort but Choi Hyuk had already run to the side. Once again, he disappeared from their vision.

'Huh?'

The gangsters looked like they were bewildered spectators at a magic show.

“Uaackkkk!”

Was there anything scarier than an enemy you couldn’t clearly see? Choi Hyuk’s movements had a strange movement. They weren’t able to properly lock onto him. The moment they thought they caught up to him, he was already two steps away, killing one of their comrades. Would an ant being squashed by a child feel the same way? A certain fear and despair they hadn’t felt when they fought monsters overcame them.

Bang! Bang! Baang!

Guns fired off in a last-ditch effort.

The grandpas of the Association of Comrades in Arms moved back to avoid stray bullets but Choi Hyuk was calm even at a close distance.

And that was the same for Baek Seoin.

Pew!

A spark flew off in front of Baek Seoin’s eyes. The intercepting ability of the [Necklace of Protection] he was given had activated. A bullet bounced off. Although it would only activate three times every hour, that was more than enough in this situation.

Ffftt!

The shield Baek Seoin threw slammed into a gangster's face. The teeth of the gangster who shot the bullet sprayed out. Bits of flesh were still attached. Baek Seoin charged forward. He stabbed and sliced at the gangsters with his longsword. He was a warrior who had 1-star stats. Gangsters who had maybe 1 or 2 1-star stats or none at all were no match for Baek Seoin.

"Sa... save me."

After Baek Seoin finished off 3 people, Choi Hyuk had already ended the situation. He had beaten everyone to death with his bare hands.

The gangsters couldn't even leave behind their moans. They only ended up as brutally beaten corpses. A strange silence fell.

The only living person was begging Choi Hyuk for his life.

Choi Hyuk's left hand was tightly clenched around his neck. He was young. He seemed to be at most twenty or perhaps he was even the same age as Choi Hyuk. He was the youngest among the gangsters.

He begged with a face splattered with tears and snot.

“Please…”

Choi Hyuk asked.

“Headquarters?”

“KT… The KTT building. I’m sorry. Please…”

Choi Hyuk indifferently let the pleading man down. Choi Hyuk wasn’t moved because the young gangster was young. He was Choi Hyuk’s age. Choi Hyuk himself believed he was all grown up. Then, the young gangster too was all grown up.

So Choi Hyuk tilted his head.

“When you came at me shooting guns, did you not think of the consequences?”

The young gangster opened his mouth as if wanting to say something but.

Crunch.

Choi Hyuk’s hand was faster. He was unable to let out a word and slammed into the ground, leaving him with a shattered neck.

Baek Seoin who was watching this slightly frowned. However,

that was all. He didn't say anything. Though Choi Hyuk's ruthlessness didn't fit well with Baek Seoin's morals... he didn't think Choi Hyuk's judgement was wrong either.

'What's it to me when the world is ending.'

Baek Seoin was originally an emotional man. He was even quite the worrier.

However, once he resolved himself to avenge his parents, he decided to think more simply. His values were slowly changing.

'It's easier if they die.'

Above all, it meant that they wouldn't be held back by them again.

A sudden thought even crossed his mind that it might be good to use this situation more aggressively to their favor.

**

"Let's split it evenly."

Choi Hyuk calmly said.

"No, we have way more people...!"

A grandpa wanted to express his dissatisfaction.

“Uh, okay. Let’s do that. You’re quite amazing for a young fellow. It’s like what I’ve heard.”

The sunglasses wearing grandpa who was the leader held the others back.

Choi Hyuk wordlessly took exactly half of the supplies.

Rations, clothes, toiletries, Weakening Barrier, item scrolls, amongst others.

At the same time, Baek Seoin was scavenging items off the gangsters.

“Ah damn… He has a Speed Enchant. What a waste for it to end up with a guy like him.”

As a follower of Choi Hyuk who goes around killing monsters by the hundreds, Baek Seoin almost had a complete set of items. No matter how many new items came out, he didn’t really feel like replacing them.

However, enchants were an exception.

Enchants were unique items. They were presented in a jewel-like

shape and the moment you used it, it would be drawn on your skin. In other words, you couldn't forcefully steal it.

Baek Seoin needed a Speed Enchant. So he felt sad to see the Speed Enchant drawn on the dead gangster's arm.

Enchants were very valuable.

They were limited to 5 stat-increasing items, a fact they figured out as they equipped various items. It meant that if you had a sword, armor, necklace, ring and shoes that increased your stats, you couldn't have anymore.

However, enchants were an additional way to increase your stats. You were able to overlap up to five enchants of the same grade as your Retribution Points. And the more enchants you overlap, the bigger the bonus.

For example, Choi Hyuk had 3 Control Enchants, 1 Stamina and 1 Endurance.

———————

[Control, Stamina and Endurance Enchants]

Rank: D

A combination of 3 Control Enchants, 1 Stamina Enchant and 1 Endurance Enchant. Bonus +3

Control: +54

Stamina: +18

Endurance: +18

———————

Besides them, Choi Hyuk only had 2 rings to increase his stats. He still needed 3 more but he held off looking for them since D ranks were hard to find.

———————

[Ring of Speed]

Rank: D

Speed: +10

You are able to use the skill [Speed] once a day. For 1 minute, Speed increases by 10%.

There is no addition consumption of Stamina.

———————

———————

[Ring of Vigor]

Rank: D

Power: +10

You are able to use the skill [Vigor] once a day. For 1 minute, Power increases by 10%.

There is no addition consumption of Stamina.

———————

There was an addition skill included in the rings but still, while

his rings increased his stats by 10, including the enchant bonus, each enchants increased his stats by 18.

As enchants simply helped you plan out your stats unlike items where you had to look at their different functions, it could be said that getting the necessary enchants took priority over items.

Baek Seoin who had 2 Speed Enchants, 2 Stamina and 1 Endurance wanted to another Speed Enchant to increase his survivability. As there were times when his Intuition would activate but he was too slow to react.

And since the Speed Enchant he had been looking for was engraved into a dead gangster's arm, he couldn't help but explode in anger.

"Ah damn... There isn't anything to use this time as well."

They had piles of items but none were useful. As they were a waste to throw away, they simply collected them.

"Huh? Wait."

That moment, a great plan crossed Baek Seoin's mind. Baek Seoin looked over at Choi Hyuk and the Alliance of Comrades in Arms. They were about to split ways.

Baek Seoin called for them.

“Grandpas! Please wait!”

The grandpas, as well as Choi Hyuk, looked back at him with strange expressions. Baek Seoin approached Choi Hyuk and whispered.

‘Are you going to go wipe out the gangsters now?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Then let’s take those grandpas as spectators.’

‘…Why?’

‘Since we need to start showcasing our power. Why would people fight the Wyvern of Destruction? Because there’s a chance if they fight with us! Let’s promote ourselves once. The grandpas were already one of the groups you wanted to win over anyways. Jinhee probably went over to see their leader.’

‘… Okay. But would they want to watch us fight?’

‘We should give them some gifts.’

‘Gifts?’

‘Yes. Let’s give them some of the items we don’t use. You were planning on distributing them later anyways. I mean I think it’s good if we have good relations with these grandpas anyways.’

Choi Hyuk thought that Baek Seoin’s words made some sense. He nodded his head.

“Okay.”

As soon as he agreed, Baek Seoin took the lead.

“Grandpas! We are going to go clear up the punks now and we were wondering if you would like to watch us?”

“… Why would we?”

“You probably haven’t heard yet but we requested an alliance to your leader. We were hoping you would watch our skills and discuss it with him later.”

The sunglasses wearing grandpa didn’t feel inclined at his words.

“We already know that your skills are amazing…”

“Hey, that was nothing. Ah, and afterwards, as a show of friendship, we won’t let you leave empty handed.”

Those were the decisive words.

"… Then shall we go?"

"Okay! Then let's go!"

As soon as the grandpa agreed, Baek Seoin led the grandpas. Choi Hyuk had already started walking way ahead of them.

The sunglasses wearing grandpa was slightly taken aback so he asked.

"We're going right away?"

"Yes."

As Baek Seoin answered simply, the grandpa slightly tilted his head.

At this point, the grandpa thought.

'Don't tell me… we are going like this? The two of them? No way. They probably have forces elsewhere.'

Though the grandpa felt this wasn't the case when looking at Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin's unyielding steps, he tried his best to believe that was the case.

Chapter 24: Berserkers (7)

Baek Seoin and Choi Hyuk's plans were similar yet different.

Unlike Baek Seoin who only thought to increase their fame, Choi Hyuk was also thinking about 'reducing the numbers'.

[Supplies will reduce significantly every 10 days.]

Soon, it would be the 10th day.

'People will kill and be killed anyways.'

Choi Hyuk only thought to that point. To him, the lives of the group of gangsters and people who cooperated with them weren't anything special.

If Baek Seoin expected to quickly infiltrate and assassinate, Choi Hyuk was expecting an all-out war.

**

"Hey. Where are your comrades?"

When they saw the KTT building, the steps of the grandpas of the Alliance of Comrades in Arms slowed. They were a bit nervous as they had yet to see their comrades. However, Choi Hyuk didn't even look back. Instead, Baek Seoin turned around and explained.

“Don’t worry and just spectate from a distance. Don’t go anywhere.”

Then he followed Choi Hyuk while waving his arms. The grandpas who were left behind were dumbfounded. Did that mean that there would be more comrades or not?

The grandpas discussed amongst themselves.

“What do we do?”

“... Don’t tell me... they are young’uns who don’t even value their lives? They didn’t look that way...”

He didn’t care.

Choi Hyuk confidently approached the front of the building. Baek Seoin caught up to him and whispered.

“Are we not going to sneak in?”

Choi Hyuk didn’t say a word as he turned around and looked at him with a dumb expression. As if he was saying, ‘Sneak in? Why would I do that?’ Baek Seoin became slightly uneasy.

“If we just fight them outright, it becomes hard to distinguish between friend or foe.”

“Friend or foe? There are only two of us.”

“No. Not that. It’s not good to just kill people who are forced to cooperate with the gangsters.”

“Cooperators… are they any different from the gangsters?”

At Choi Hyuk’s question, Baek Seoin was at a loss for words.

Choi Hyuk gazed at Baek Seoin’s face and nodded.

“I don’t kill people who aren’t cooperators.”

“…”

Baek Seoin closed his mouth.

If they used Choi Hyuk’s method and just pushed forward, civilians wouldn’t know what was happening and would oppose Choi Hyuk. Baek Seoin didn’t think that killing those people was right.

‘However…’

There wasn’t a suitable reply. ‘Were cooperators really without guilt?’

That was a long-time worry of Baek Seoin.

For example,

To live, to support their family, were people who cooperated with the Japanese Empire without guilt.

There were businessmen who would sell out their fellow Koreans and send them to coal mines or sell them as comfort women. There were even landowners who offered bribes to the Japanese Empire and overworked their farmers under their protection. Did they have sins? Then what about the people who used their parents' hard earned money and had no other job except working as a public official of the Japanese Empire?

If there was a difference in limits and it varied on their circumstances, just what standards did he need to have?

'I did it to live.' 'Everyone else does it as well.' How far could these excuses be used? Then what about the people who couldn't even do 'what everyone else was doing' and starved to death?

A head-aching worry. Baek Seoin would always trouble over this but he could never find an answer.

However, Choi Hyuk was different.

“Baek hyung. I’m telling you this just in case you’ve misunderstood something.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t look back and said.

“What we are doing isn’t kindness. We’re doing it because we need to and because there just so happens to be a group who picked a fight.”

“Ah…”

Baek Seoin lowered his head.

‘… I was too soft.’

He inwardly engraved the word ‘revenge’ into his heart once again. As soon as he did so, many things became simpler.

Perseverance. Eating bitter bile and sleeping on rough straws.

That was what revenge was. You weren’t supposed to forget your rage. You had to grow your malice before goodwill.

Those who lowered their heads because they were scared of the gangsters wouldn’t really be of much help when fighting the Wyvern of Destruction.

In a situation where supplies were insufficient and people were fighting amongst each other, it would be difficult to unite everyone. It was better to reduce the numbers when they had the chance.

So… As long as their opposing groups had numbers, they would wipe them out.

More than what they thought.

‘It will be a bloody battle…’

Baek Seoin ground his teeth. His face stiffened and he followed behind Choi Hyuk.

**

As soon as they approached the KTT building, 5 guards who were lying in ambush jumped out.

Among them, only one wore armor and just by looking at his figure and his hair, it was obvious he was a gangster.

He asked.

“Why are you here?”

Choi Hyuk replied.

“To hunt gangsters.”

An absurd reply. It was even childish. However, in this situation, being simple was more effective.

As soon as Choi Hyuk spoke, he watched his opponents with his Eyes of Distinction. He read his opponents’ reactions.

‘One red (killing intent), 2 black (ill will) and 1 white (goodwill).’

“What… This f…”

Slice!

The armor wearing gangster emitted a red light. Just as he was about to spout a four-letter word, his head was sliced off with Choi Hyuk’s blade. Blood spurted out like a geyser.

“… Uackkk!”

There was one person who reacted late that attempted to run away.

“Hiiiiek!”

Another who sporadically swung his sword.

Slash!

The body of the man, who attempted to attack him, split in two along with his sword.

Piiiiiii!

An escapee blew a whistle. Piiiii! Piiiii! People who were watching this scene through a window inside the building blew their whistles as well.

Choi Hyuk looked at the last remaining person.

The man who looked to be in his thirties was the only person who emitted a white light. Currently, faint traces of black were mixed into the white light. It seemed he was wary of him.

When Choi Hyuk lifted his sword and looked at him, he trembled before asking.

“You… you’re here to hunt gangsters?”

“…”

“I want to join!”

Only then did Choi Hyuk finally nod his head.

**

There were about 1,300 people who chose the KTT building as their assembly area. Among them, 500 were gangsters while 800 were normal people. It seemed like all the gangsters near here had gathered.

Although gangsters had many problems with the law and morals, as they were experienced fighters, they were quite courageous even when fighting monsters. A world where you become stronger as you live. This actually made them more passive.

Not too many days had passed when the gangsters became the king of this place. And then, they revealed their true nature. If there was a woman that caught their eye, they would rape her and they would even beat people to death when they were drunk.

Tyrants.

However, they weren’t fools. They didn’t only resort to violence. They treated people who cooperated with them nicely and even gave them chances to get stronger by taking them out for reconnaissance. During this time, they murdered people and even gifted them the women they kidnapped to slowly turn them into ‘accomplices’.

Now, the only normal people left in this assembly area were those who were the same as the gangsters and those who looked the other way and only cared about their own safety. Those who weren't either died resisting them or risked their lives and went out to find a new assembly area.

Choi Hyuk didn't know everyone's circumstances.

And honestly, he didn't need to know. He was only after numbers anyways.

Choi Hyuk shouted at the gathering people.

"As the gangsters here attempted to kill me, I am just here for payback. Those who aren't part of this, screw off!"

To the people who ran over here after hearing the guards outside had died couldn't help but find all this sudden.

A short silence fell.

Some burst into anger while others read the mood.

The ones who were reading the mood looked around to see if Choi Hyuk had any reinforcements. No matter where they looked, they couldn't find any.

Only then did people react to nonsensical Choi Hyuk's

declaration.

“Is he a crazy bastard?”

“He’s the one who murdered people!”

The jeers and rage of hundreds of people were much more chilling than one would think.

The man in his thirties who Choi Hyuk had saved just now was trembling behind Baek Seoin.

‘Ah damn… for there to be only two people…’

He felt regret. However, he shook his head.

‘Damn it. I can’t do anything about it. Instead of getting killed by these people, I’d rather die fighting these fucking gangsters.’

While the man was at a crossroads, Choi Hyuk grinned before charging forward.

His eyes could see people emitting red lights as bright as the sunset.

“Ahhhh!”

“Sav… Save me please!”

It was filled with screams and tears.

The fight that occurred outside the building took 30 minutes and it continued inside the building. Choi Hyuk hunted and killed the people who attempted to run. He even killed those who kneeled and begged for their lives.

Even if they emitted a white light, he killed them.

‘You were quiet when I looked weak but now that I look strong, you beg for your life?’

Although they weren’t hostile, Choi Hyuk was someone who was merciless to his enemies.

‘They won’t be useful in future battles.’

Sphhlt!

There was only one type of people he saved.

“Ahh! You bastard!!”

“What, you fucking bastard!”

One youth gave up on fighting Choi Hyuk. Instead, he stabbed the backs of the gangsters, filled with resent.

The color reflected in his Eyes of Distinction was a pale black. He had a bit of hostility towards Choi Hyuk but it wasn't excessive.

'He knows how to fight and he isn't an enemy.'

Choi Hyuk didn't kill that youth and moved on.

It was simple to tell who was on his side. Eyes of Distinction and the direction of their swords. The choice to abandon their weapons had already passed by when Choi Hyuk told everyone who wasn't part of this to leave. Now, the direction you swung your sword determined if you were friend or foe.

Choi Hyuk's rule that depended on their swords slowly spread.

Of course, there were exceptions.

"Huh... Fuck, why me..."

He was someone who stabbed his comrades to live. After seeing how Choi Hyuk left certain people alive, he stabbed his comrades and felt that he was safe. However, Choi Hyuk clearly saw the red light. He pierced the Flash Sword through his heart.

'What the? You die even if you kill the gangsters?'

‘Just what is the criteria?’

The people who saw this scene fell into a state of confusion. Choi Hyuk didn’t care to address this confusion.

Even then, there were numerous people who came out and started to stab the gangsters out of their own free will.

Slice! Stab! Stab! Slash!

Choi Hyuk was a death-producing machine. It seemed like he killed a person every second.

Wherever he was, there was a stream of corpses trailing behind him and around him, people started to kill the gangsters.

At that time, Choi Hyuk found the leader. He was abnormally large and above his head was a large axe symbol.

He came down escorted by his bodyguards with a distorted expression and swore.

“This motherfuc… You son of…”

Of course, he wasn’t able to finish his words.

Sliice!

Slaash!

Swish!

Choi Hyuk made his way towards him as he swung his Fang Saber.

Unlike monsters, humans were thin and long, so if he swung properly, he could even kill multiple people with one swing.

In three slices, the leader, along with his bodyguards, split into two.

As soon as the leader died, the axe symbols around them disappeared.

But, nothing would change. As Choi Hyuk was planning on indiscriminately killing people who were outside the standards he made himself.

He killed and killed. It was to the point the durability of the Fang Saber hit bottom and shattered.

Only when there weren't any more people to kill did Choi Hyuk raise his head. Blood splattered on the hallways, the stairs and the walls. At some point, a pool of blood had formed in front of the

building.

People gathered around Choi Hyuk.

The ones who were still alive were the ones who swung their swords in the other direction. Around 200 people.

Choi Hyuk examined them with his Eyes of Distinction.

They only emitted a mix of white and black light or a pale black light, none possessed red (killing intent) or dark black (hostility). He had already killed those people.

'Of course, it won't be precise.'

Choi Hyuk felt his skill was a bit lacking. It was difficult for him to accurately judge if someone would be useful or not during a battle just by knowing what intentions they had towards him. All he had was a hunch that 'they probably weren't'.

'Still, it's better than nothing.'

Anyways, he was able to make a rule without much difficulty because of it. Who to kill and who to leave alive. Though he did kill most of them, he still had a rule.

Choi Hyuk was currently satisfied with that.

That was how the fight ended. It only took an hour.

**

“Grandpas. Here, receive your gifts.”

Baek Seoin brought some of the items he placed in his Handy Sack after emptying out the building.

Because of the extremely brutal fight, his previously shameless face had stiffened.

“Uh… Okay… Sure.”

As he received the Handy Sack, the grandpa thanked his sunglasses. If not for them, he might have shown the scared expression on his face.

A one-sided battle, No, a massacre.

Though they were people who had seen this in wars and had even participated in it…

‘No, it’s on a different level.’

The grandpas of the Alliance of Comrades in Arms felt chills go down their backs.

It was a world where everyone had exceeded the limits of a human. A generation where running 100 meters in 8 seconds and long jumping 8-9 meters weren't brag worthy.

However, these grandpas felt like carrots being diced in a blender. They had seen a true monster.

Just how cute was the nickname, Berserkers, compared to the real thing?

Though they knew they weren't enemies, they felt pressure just by being near Choi Hyuk. They wanted to leave this place as soon as possible but they felt uneasy and were wary of Choi Hyuk so they just stayed put.

But, it was time for them to return.

The sunglasses wearing grandpa hastily said.

"You worked hard. Then, we'll take our leave."

Even his speech become polite.

"Okay, take care. Ah, and -"

Baek Seoin called out to the grandpas who were about to leave. With an overly threatening expression.

“Please discuss when you return.”

It looked like he was trying to smile but perhaps it was due to the stiffness he felt after the battle, the tips of his lips distorted weirdly.

“Ah… I’ll make sure to do that.”

The grandpas broke out in a cold sweat as they hurriedly left.

Not long after a wild rumor spread throughout Kangdong District.

‘The leader of the Berserkers, Choi Hyuk, annihilated an assembly area!’

Chapter 25: Wyvern Of Destruction (1)

The number of monsters Choi Hyuk killed in a day was absurd but it still wasn't enough to reverse the flow.

If Choi Hyuk tried his best, he would barely be able to hunt 400 monsters a day.

At first, he would be able to kill one every second but as his stamina decreased, the speed slowed down as well. When he started to get out of breath, his performance would drop rapidly and if he was surrounded by monsters in that state, he would die. He always had to check his condition and retreat when it was appropriate.

On the other hand, the number of monsters was piling up.

After 10 days had passed, situations started to arise where Choi Hyuk was unable to destroy a portal every day.

The number of monsters that crossed through the portal would increase by 20% every day. This was an exponential growth. Even if he killed continuously, it was becoming harder and harder to catch up that increase.

On the 10th day, 20,000 monsters poured in from the 33 portals. With the help of his allies, they were able to reduce that number to 20 on the 15th day, but even then, approximately 30,000 monsters poured in every day.

On the 15th day, the streets were filled with over 130,000 monsters. It was the main reason why it was becoming more difficult to fight them.

However, that wasn't all. The amount of supplies would reduce by a third every 10 days.

Instantly, supplies that were originally able to feed 500,000 people could only sustain 170,000. But, there were 300,000 people still alive on the 10th day. During this time, due to the amount of supplies, they didn't starve to death but faced with survival, intensified the temptation of the groups.

The key reason for their temptation was the portals.

And this temptation became a framework for Jung Minji.

'While we go out and destroy portals, those who just sit there, only caring about their safety have no right to supplies!'

It was a strategy that was necessary for destroying portals but, at the same time, it was risky. It was because normally, assembly areas set up Weakening Barriers, which makes the monsters two times weaker, but to destroy a portal, they had to step out and fight against the full strength of the monsters.

Because of this, the number of deaths and victims continued to increase in groups allied with Choi Hyuk. And those assembly

areas who only sought after supplies were becoming more secure. While there were people who fought for the safety of everyone, there were others who just wanted a free pass.

Eventually, faced with this crisis, Jung Minji raised her sword. It was a clever move that would relieve the dissatisfaction of the groups who destroyed portals onto others.

She dispatched an envoy to a neighbouring assembly area. The rule she imposed was simple.

‘Tomorrow. You are to spearhead the fight to destroy a portal. Or you give up your right to supplies.’

Her proposal was ignored. And the next day, that assembly area turned to ash. They weren’t able to endure the attack of her troops who were tempered through fights against monsters. And Jung Minji didn’t accept surrenders.

“Do we kill them all?”

“Kill them all. Except for those who are less than 14 years old.”

“How do we determine their age?”

“Just… If they look young, let them live…”

“Let the children live… then what about their parents?”

"... Kill their parents."

Jung Minji easily empathized with the weak. She wasn't confident in being able to kill those who surrendered so she left Chu Youngjin in command.

Even when she hardened her heart, she was still unable to order the death of the children. Of course, instead of being respected, her ambiguous attitude brought sarcasm. To some, she was extremely merciless and to others, she was half-baked.

Still, her decisive actions displayed a surprising amount of power. The neighbouring assembly areas who were shocked at her merciless slaughter decided to take part in fighting the monsters.

The other 6 powers who were allied with Jung Minji also took similar actions.

At that time, two rumors about slaughter were spreading like wildfire.

Choi Hyuk and Jung Minji's slaughter.

Because of this, the allied forces were able to take advantage of this fear to win over other forces more easily.

Not long after, everyone had started to destroy the portals in

unison. Due to this, they were able to reduce the number of portals to 20... but the number of casualties were significant as well.

And the number of monsters were still growing.

250,000 survivors. 130,000 monsters.

It was already an established fact that at some point, the number of monsters would exceed the number of people.

**

After fighting monsters, Choi Hyuk would always train.

“Soaring Slash!”

When he shouted the skill, the karma in his body would automatically move. The karma that enhanced his bones, joints and muscles gathered at his hand. By using the pressure of the gathered karma, he was able to transform it into a sword... but eventually, it wasn’t able to even reach half the blade before returning to its previous state.

[Failed. To use a C rank skill, you need at least one stat and Retribution Points to reach C rank (3-star).]

And a message would pop up.

Choi Hyuk sighed as he examined his status.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 0 (★★)

Speed: 0 (★★)

Control: 114 (+114) (★★)

Endurance: 18 (+18) (★★)

Stamina: 18 (+18) (★★)

Recovery: 0 (★★)

*Retribution points: 0 (★★)

*Free karma points: 68

———————

As there weren't many worthy opponents, even though he killed all those monsters and people, he wasn't able to grow that much. All he earned were 18 free karma points from killing 6 2-star monsters.

That was only because he received an additional 2 free karma points for killing 'mid-bosses' or else he would have only earned 6 points.

And Choi Hyuk changed his items... He got rid of the items that increased his Power and Speed and pushed Control.

Because of this, his Power and Speed became 0.

Of his newly equipped D rank items, 3 were new and he traded for the remaining 2. Control was a relatively unwanted stat so it wasn't hard finding someone to trade.

As they were all normal D rank items, the items Choi Hyuk earned weren't unique. He even had two 'Rings of Concentration'.

———————

[Ring of Concentration] x2

Rank: D

Control: +10

You are able to use the skill [Concentrate] once a day. For 1 minute, Control increases by 10%.

There is no additional consumption of Stamina.

———————

———————

[Necklace of Concentration]

Rank: D

Control: +10

You are able to use the skill [Concentrate] once a day. For 1 minute, Control increases by 10%.

There is no additional consumption of Stamina.

———————

———————

[Longsword of Desperation]

Rank: D

Control: +20

Durability: 271 / 300

———————

———————

[Shoes of a Dancer]

Rank: D

Control: +10

Your reflexes are slightly faster.

Durability: 48 / 50

———————

A set of items with only Control.

Choi Hyuk had decided on Control after racking his brains over it.

‘It is impossible to get a stat and my Retribution Points to 300 by the 30th day.’

The number of monsters was continuously increasing. And the number of mid-bosses increased accordingly. However, as there

were too many underlings, it was becoming more difficult to hunt down the mid-bosses.

He needed 418 more points but at his current rate of 18 points every 5 days, he would only earn 54 points.

‘Killing those who aren’t a match won’t even give me the slightest benefit…’

At this rate, it would be impossible to use Soaring Slash. But, if he didn’t have Soaring Slash, he didn’t have a blade made of karma and if he didn’t have that, he didn’t have an area attack… which meant that he wasn’t able to make a breakthrough and decrease the number of monsters and that meant it would be impossible to kill the Wyvern of Destruction.

As a result, his last resort was enhancing his Control. He had pretty much staked everything.

‘Will it work? No, it has to.’

Up until now, it was best to increase his stats harmoniously. Control or Endurance, as long as they were able to handle his Power and Speed, it was enough. What would he do with Control that well surpassed his Power and Speed?

But, Choi Hyuk’s thoughts were completely different. The clue was provided by Baek Seoin.

He said.

‘I know right? It’s like the tutorial has finished… If you looked at it like a game, we should now be choosing our classes. Which means that we can’t increase all our stats like before.’

After reaching 2-stars, the increase in points rapidly decreased. Only 1 free karma point. His suggestion could be correct. That you shouldn’t focus on every stat but choose to focus on certain ones.

That meant that a Control stat that exceeded Power and Speed was definitely useful.

There was also another evidence. That was Choi Hyuk’s senses.

The more he increased his Control stat, the more easily Choi Hyuk could manipulate karma. It was especially different when he exceeded 100 points of the 2-star stat.

Now, he wasn’t only able to control his Power and Speed. He was able to control his karma.

‘Like this.’

Choi Hyuk focused on the karma in his arm. His arm inflated to twice its size. In that state, he punched a car.

Baaang!

It wasn’t pushed back but exploded as if it was hit by a bomb. As it wasn’t satisfying enough, this time, he slammed a wall of a building with his palm.

Thud!

An entire side of a wall exploded. The impact from his palm was enough to visibly shake the 4-story building.

“Ahh…”

However, Choi Hyuk’s arm wasn’t unscathed. An obvious result as the explosive force exceeded his Endurance.

Choi Hyuk’s face distorted and retracted the karma concentrated in his arm. It felt like his arm had fractured but with his current Recovery stat, he would naturally recover in 5 minutes.

But, Choi Hyuk didn’t rest. This time, he held a sword with his left hand.

“Concentrate!”

The skill embedded in the Necklace of Concentration and the Rings of Concentration, [Concentrate].

Each one would increase his Control stat by 10% for a total of

30%. 148 Control!

In this state, Choi Hyuk once again attempted the skill.

“Soaring Slash!”

Instantly, the karma in his body automatically moved. It moved beyond his hand and towards the sword. However, the result was the same. Once again, it wasn’t able to reach half the blade before returning to its previous state.

However, Choi Hyuk’s original motive wasn’t to succeed. He remembered the pathways and direction the karma moved in.

“Huuuu…”

He calmed his breath.

‘I need to see results this time.’

Choi Hyuk personally moved the karma with his 148 Control stat. Choi Hyuk, who remembered how the karma was pushed back when it reached half the blade when he activated the skill, squeezed out all the karma in his body and compressed it. He then sent it to his hand. The karma that was compressed to the point it was hard, tangled up as it made its way to his hand.

“Grkkk….”

It felt like his arm would explode. However, Choi Hyuk continued to push the karma. The karma passed through the handle of the sword and filled up the blade. And just when it reached the point the skill couldn't pass,

"Gah!"

Choi Hyuk used all his strength to push the compressed karma up. Karma shot up like a geyser. Bang, bang! It felt like fireworks were shooting out of his hand. And then,

Swish…

"Ah…"

Choi Hyuk clearly saw it.

It was only for a split second but a blue blade had formed. Karma that filled up the sword had emerged.

And,

"Urkk…"

A side effect. Exhaustion and injuries from forcefully pushing karma.

Flop.

Choi Hyuk who had lost all strength in his body collapsed. His hair was dripping with sweat. However, the tips of his lips curled upwards.

His guess that he could make a blade made of karma without the assistance of a skill... was right.

Chapter 26: Wyvern Of Destruction (2)

There were 7 groups who were allied with Choi Hyuk.

Three were very aggressive -Jung Minji's troops, The Alliance of Comrades in Arms and the Knights of the Korean National Sport University.

And although they lacked the explosive power of the aforementioned three, the other four allies were robust – Shinmyung Stronghold, Kangil Riverpark Stronghold, Seonsa Hyundai I'Park Stronghold and lastly, Cheonho Hyunhae Department Store Stronghold.

These strongholds were a large scale force centered around company employees and independent businessmen allied with students and people preparing for examinations.

On the 16th day, all allied forces assembled at the Hyunhae Department Store. They had initially discussed the formation of a suicide squad but the appearance of new rules made it so that they had to unite together.

———————

[Additional Rule]

Every night, the number of monsters that arrive through the portal increase by 20%.

———————

———————

[Additional Rule]

After half a month, the monsters start to act in groups.

———————

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[Additional Rule]

Supplies reduce significantly every 10 days.

———————

The additional rules that seemed the test the limits of humanity.

There were more than enough reasons to unite. To face the increasing number of monsters that will start to act in groups, humans had to be more tightly unified.

And another deciding reason was the reduction of supplies, to be exact, the limited supply of the Weakening Barrier. Food could be handled with emergency rations, adjustments of rations and from the stores that haven't been emptied out yet. The number of people was also decreasing. However, if the Weakening Barrier collapses, there was no way to fight against the hordes of monsters.

Because of this, the more groups there were, the faster the consumption of these Weakening Barrier. There was a need to gather together and reduce the consumption of these barriers.

So all the forces, a total of 130,000 people, started to gather towards Hyunhae Department Store.

The reason they chose Hyunhae Department Store was simple.

There was a healer here.

**

There were a few large hospitals located in Kangdong District – Sungshin Hospital, Kyung Hee University Hospital, and Hyang Hospital.

On the first day, a game that was modified for these hospitals commenced.

A rule was given to the medical team.

[You are unable to leave unless you kill 3 patients.]

A rule was given to the patients.

[You are unable to leave unless you kill someone.]

After confirming the fact that they really couldn’t leave, chaos erupted. Still, no one immediately started to kill each other. Unlike the schools, the hospitals endured it a while longer.

However, four days... that was the limit. It had been a while since the food supply had been emptied out. The scene of monsters wandering around at night. These people who were starving and stressed became extremely sensitive.

The first to be killed were the critically ill patients who couldn't resist.

The first time would be difficult but the second and third were easy. In one night, the dignity they had kept all this time collapsed. The medical team grouped up and attacked the weak patients. It was the same for the relatively healthy patients. And they left the hospital as a group. The hallways were filled with screams and profanity. Those who wanted to kill and those who resisted as well as those who wanted to stop them tangled together. While the people who wanted to kill and the people who wanted to stop them got into a fight, an incident occurred and someone died.

Eventually, someone had died.

Bae Jinman was a respected doctor. He wielded a baseball bat at his juniors and even those he could call his disciples who were pushing their way through the hallway.

"Bastards! You call yourselves doctors?"

At the criticisms and the resistance of the respected doctor, the doctors who were pushing their way through retreated. A reason being the swing of the baseball-loving doctor was quite impressive.

After chasing the group away, Bae Jinman entered the critical care ward he was looking after. He locked the door and moved the beds to block the door.

The patients who laid on these beds looked at the doctor in fear. However, Bae Jinman smiled.

“Don’t worry.”

He looked after the patients.

After 5 days had passed, only dropouts remained. Those who had ensured their safety by hiding. Those who were unable to kill others. More than ten of these people were spread throughout the hospital as they held the guard against each other.

Bae Jinman exited the critical care ward and he took care of the remaining people. In a hospital without any food, he nursed these patients alone.

After a week, a message appeared.

[Calculating your Retribution Points... Type. Healer. Patients Killed 0. Has continuously looked after the patients. Meets the requirements. Granted the ‘Guardian Trait’.]

At the same time, the around 20 patients he looked after turned

into lights and were absorbed into his body.

“Uh… Huh?”

Every time a light was absorbed into his body, his Retribution Points and karma increased. Especially his Control and Recovery stats.

However, Bae Jinman wasn’t happy. In his eyes, he only saw the figures of the patients who had disappeared.

“So…”

Tears welled up in his eyes.

“So they ended up dying in the end…”

He slumped onto the floor and bawled. A body that had not eaten or had drunk anything, he sobbed his heart out but only a few drops of tears would drop at a time before drying up.

And that was the birth of the only healer in Kangdong District.

**

Guardian, Bae Jinman’s blessing has been cast.

“Get up!”

With his shout, a hazy light shined above the heads of the 40,000 people assembled in front of Hyunhae Department Store.

Lalala.

It was almost as they could hear the music. Without realizing it, these people started to mumble to the tune. Though it was as hazy as a fog, the small lights above countless people’s heads were connecting to each other.

They felt a feeling of unity and fellowship that one would feel at a huge concert. They all mumbled and watched as these lights connected with each other. An exceptional scene that brought tears to their eyes.

The skill [Get up] was a support skill that would increase one’s courage, awareness as well as their sense of comradery.

As the skill was cast on tens of thousands of people, its effect was slight. However, as these people experienced the same scene at the same time, they did feel a sense of security and kinship. And one couldn’t ignore the sense of comfort it gave them as well. To these people who continuously lived in a cruel environment with their lives on the line, the comfort felt from [Get up] was much greater than expected.

Just as the scene was about to end, the leader of Shinmyung

Stronghold, Kang Dongsoo took the lead. He was chosen to be the commander of their first expedition. They had decided that they would form an expedition team every day and that the position of commander would switch between the leaders of the various allied forces.

Kang Dongsoo shouted.

“We have 13 days left! There are currently 19 portals left! Currently, around 40,000 monsters are pouring through them every night! The situation looks bleak! I even feel that our demise is imminent. However, will that truly be the case? Will our strength only amount to that? Is this all the strength we humans who rose to the top without hides or fangs have? Let’s show them how strong we are! To them! And to those unknown bastards who created this fucking game! And above all, to ourselves! It is time to show our strength!”

“Ouahhhhh!”

Due to the high amount of karma, there was no need to use a microphone. Kang Dongsoo’s words that were shouted from his guts clearly embedded themselves into each of the tens of thousands of people’s ears.

When the cheers hit their peak, Kang Dongsoo shot his hand up and shouted.

“Remember! The shielders block the front! Then the spearmen stab and the swordsmen end it! Ranged attackers will stay behind

the lines and follow the vice commander's orders! The detachment will support the crumbling frontlines! Let's go! For victory!"

"Ouahhhhhh!"

"Vanguard!"

At Kang Dongsoo's command, the vanguard charged forward. The area of the expedition was the point near three portals.

It was the place Lee Jinhee scouted in the morning. Countless monsters were gathered in the Amsadong Pre-historic Settlement Sight.

The large-scale troops started their expedition to reduce the number of monsters and to destroy the portals.

**

Crash!

Humans and monsters were crashing into each other.

After 17 days, the abilities of these people had increased insignificantly. On average, at least two stats had reached the 1-star. As they were still in the process of increasing all their stats, it wouldn't be long until all their stats reached 1-star.

However, humans were still unable to face against the monsters one-on-one. Still, due to the use of a variety of tactics, 3 people show the power of 10. The only problem was that the monsters were using a variety of tactics as well.

“Ackk!”

A 2m tall, 5m long crook charged forward. It was difficult for the shielders to block it. If the shielders were unable to endure and were pushed back, the whole line would break down. Then the Bladed Starving Ghosts would that opportunity to slash at them with their long blades and the Shadow Teeth would penetrate their lines.

“Push them back! Push them back!”

If the monsters penetrated their front lines, they would stab with their spears, slash with their swords and the returning shielders would push them back. It was an intense fight.

There were areas where humans had the advantage. Due to their tall body structure, they were quite agile and were quite talented in using formations in group battles. However, as the monsters had much better stats overall, all they could do was not be pushed back and endure.

“Keuk!”

A person’s head was cut off by the blades of a Bladed Starving

Ghost... and that very ghost was stabbed with a spear...

Even while taking loses the vanguard was advancing one step at a time.

“Endure! Follow them! You can’t fall behind! If we fall behind, the suicide squad will die!”

That moment, Choi Hyuk and a suicide squad made up of 100 members were doing their best to open up a path. A dream team made up of Choi Hyuk and only the most elite members of each of the 7 groups, excluding their kings. They were powerful members whose stats have all already reached 1-star.

In addition to that, Choi Hyuk distributed the E rank items he had collected up until now.

The 100 members of the suicide squad were warriors who had the skills, karma and the items to call themselves strong.

And with Choi Hyuk at the front, they were a crushing force. In a triangle formation, they penetrated the main force and opened up a path. Then the vanguard would follow. Of course, that wasn’t easy.

“Are we still not there yet? At this rate, we’ll be exhausted before we even reach the portals.”

Lee Jinhee who didn’t slow down and slashed the necks of the

Bladed Starving Ghosts asked with a tired expression.

“We have to go a bit further. We have to stand at the center of the main enemy forces.”

Baek Seoin explained.

Currently, the main force was in a HakIkJin[1] formation surrounded by monsters.

10,000 members of the vanguard troops were treading forward penetrating the enemy forces. Perhaps it was due to the fact that this place had 3 portals but the strength of the monster army was formidable. It looked like there were more than 30,000 monsters. It was a number that the vanguard couldn’t handle by themselves. Still, the main force was on standby as the vanguard tried their best to pierce into the center of the enemy forces.

For that one moment.

Choi Hyuk had finally reached the center and took out a Weakening Barrier scroll.

“Barrier, activate!”

At his shout, the scroll burned up and a snow-white cover spread out in a circle.

Whoosh!

The moment the cover passed over a monster, it would falter. In the case of the crooks that moved quickly, there were some that smashed their heads on the ground. As their physical abilities dropped to half in an instant, their movements became all tangled.

Kang Dongsoo who saw this from afar smiled. However, he said in a teasing tone.

“Ha... why does a fellow who doesn’t have many men have so many Weakening Barrier?”

While everyone was having difficulty with the amount of Weakening Barrier scrolls, Choi Hyuk, who had monopolized the supplies, had 10 Weakening Barrier scrolls.

As soon as the suicide squad was formed, Choi Hyuk took out the Weakening Barrier scrolls not for defense but instead, for the offence. Like now.

“All troops! Charge!”

At Kang Dongsoo’s command, the main force that was in the HakIkJin formation rushed towards the monsters’ headquarters. The monsters that had their abilities reduced to half were not a match for them.

As Kang Dongsoo started his charge, Choi Hyuk and the suicide

squad started their real mission.

“Suicide squad! Destroy the portal! Battle of speed! We ignore those who fall behind!”

Kiririk!

His karma explosively compressed and expanded. The Predator’s Blade was splitting the monsters in two.

Swoosh! Stab! Stab!

The spear thrown by a javelin thrower from the Korean National Sport University pierced two Bladed Starving Ghosts like a kabab.

Thud! Thud!

Lee Jinhee lightly jumped up and, without intending to land on the ground, stepped on the monsters as she stabbed the foreheads of monsters.

Bang!

Baek Seoin’s shield bash shattered the face of a large crook.

The attack of the suicide squad had begun.

Notes:

1] A crane wing formation developed by Admiral Lee Sun-sin who developed the renowned turtle ship.

Chapter 27: Wyvern Of Destruction (3)

To hunt the Wyvern of Destruction, they needed to fulfill three conditions.

Two had to be satisfied by Choi Hyuk. The other one was added by Baek Seoin.

Choi Hyuk compressed his karma and coiled it around the Predator's Blade.

The first condition was a blade of karma.

Five mid-bosses at the 2-star level reflected in Choi Hyuk's eyes. A shadow monster-a dusk teeth, looked to be the commander as it stood in the center flanked by two mountain orcs and two bladed ghosts.

There was an increase in mid-bosses along with the increase in monsters.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The two mountain orcs charged forward riding crook leaders. Choi Hyuk swiftly rushed in front of them. At the same time, he exploded the coiled karma wrapped around the blade's edge. The exploding karma spun around as it propelled itself away from the blade.

Swish-

A faint blade made of karma. In fact, it was more like a faint haze than a blade. However, its effect was surprising.

The moment the oncoming crook leader was about to stomp on Choi Hyuk's shoulder, the Predator's Blade slashed out in a crescent.

Slash!

An exquisite arc made by a single blade. Just as the two mountain orcs riding their crook leaders at full speed and Choi Hyuk were about to collide, his blade slashed out a single time.

First, the neck of the crook on the left was sliced along with its rider's waist, then the blade continued to draw a diagonal line from the chest to side of the orc on the right until the last crook's head fell.

A slanted crescent was drawn.

Leaving the crescent drawn by his blade, Choi Hyuk's body passed between the monsters.

Thud-thud. Pshhh.

Black blood splattered out into the air and onto the ground. He

took four down with one blade. If it wasn't for the karma reinforced cutting force, it wouldn't have been possible.

The karma gathered at the tip of the blade slowly contracted and returned to his body. The exhausted karma dulled as if filled with lactic acid.

"Hooo..."

Cho Hyuk let out a short breath. The single slash consumed a lot of stamina. To the point it would have been better to just attack twenty times.

Still, Choi Hyuk once again coiled the karma around his blade. To fight the Wyvern of Destruction, he had to polish this technique.

It was already much more natural than before. His previous method of recklessly compressing karma and pushing it up his blade consumed so much stamina that he had lost strength in his legs. However, the situation became better when he started to coil the karma around his blade.

'It's still far off.'

To fight against the Wyvern of Destruction, he had to extend his blade by 5m. And he had to be able to maintain it. He couldn't even begin trying to maintain it but attempting to lengthen the blade was doable.

‘More… more.’

Choi Hyuk wrapped more karma around his blade. Even during this time, his feet didn’t stop moving as they dashed towards the monsters.

“Kuaahhh!!!”

“Kreeah!”

The two bladed ghosts screeched in an attempt to put pressure on Choi Hyuk. The 2m wolf-like shadow slightly moved back. It looked like it was trying to avoid him.

But Choi Hyuk was one step faster.

Palalak!

The karma wrapped around his blade unravelled. He consumed all his karma; ‘The fight will end soon anyways.’ Choi Hyuk poured in all his remaining strength.

Swish!

The blade emitted a clear sound. The almost transparent haze of karma extended 1m past the blade.

Slice!

The extended blade sliced the two bladed ghosts and even the dusk teeth that had moved back. The dusk teeth looked like it was a shadow but as soon as it was split in two, its blood and guts splattered out as it collapsed. He split 3 monsters in two in a single exchange.

“Huuuu…”

Choi Hyuk let out a larger breath than before. His body felt heavy as if it was submerged in water.

“Kuek!”

“Die!”

Portal destruction complete!

Sounds of fighting sounded out from everywhere. The battle progressed smoothly.

Choi Hyuk slowly dragged his heavy body and stabbed the monster corpses. The Predator’s Blade drained the monsters’ blood.

———————

[Predator's Blade]

Rank: D (Unique, Growth-type)

Sharp and sturdy. The more blood it spills of strong foes, the stronger it will get.

Durability: 726/1,000

Evolution: 29/100

———————

The second condition for hunting the Wyvern of Destruction was evolving the Predator's Blade.

Though he didn't know what kind of monster the Wyvern of Destruction would be, it was clearly stronger than the mid-bosses. Looking at the current situation, it looked like F rank was equivalent to no-star, E rank was 1-star and D rank was 2-star. If that was the case, to fight the Wyvern of Destruction which was at least a C rank, he needed a C rank weapon.

Choi Hyuk indifferently gazed at the Predator's Blade as it drained the blood of its enemies and turned them into mummies. He still needed 71 more.

"Since I took out 7 today... at this pace, it'll be possible."

Normally it would be hard enough trying to take down 2 a day but now that there was an army it would be much easier. An expedition made up of 40,000 people that faced off against the monsters while the 100 members of the suicide squad made a path towards the portals. Due to this, Choi Hyuk had the time to fight

while testing his karma blade in real combat.

"Huh?"

After calming his breath, Choi Hyuk saw items that had appeared between the dead corpses. They were items he was seeing for the first time. A transparent quartz rod and a wooden ball. When he closely examined it, information appeared.

———————

[1-Person Escape Code]

The owner of this code is able to escape on the final day.

———————

———————

[Dragon Hunting Weapon – Vine Cannonball]

A cannonball packed with magic. Use it with 'Dragon Hunting Weapon – Extraordinary Dragon Cannon'.

Tough, thick vines will grow in the place of impact. They react to dragon blood and will bind the dragon. If a few overlap, they can make a dragon momentarily falter.

———————

Choi Hyuk, who examined the items, smiled bitterly.

"This is good news and very bad news…"

There were three conditions that needed to be met to hunt the Wyvern of Destruction.

First was completing the blade of karma and the second was evolving the blade. Then there was the last condition. The additional condition that Baek Seoin said they absolutely needed...

An ‘army’ that would fight until the end.

The addition of Dragon Hunting Weapons was welcomed as they would be a way to fight against the Wyvern. However... for there to be a 1-person escape code... it was the worst.

Just then, he heard commander Kang Dongsoo’s orders.

“Push! Push! Last one! Push with all your strength!”

Following Kang Dongsoo’s orders, people used their last remaining strength and pushed against the monsters. They pushed with shields, stabbed with spears and slashed with swords.

The ranks of the monsters collapsed and were hopelessly pushed back as their commanders had almost all been wiped out. There were even some that looked at their comrades before running away. These monsters that were slowly being pushed back had at some point all started to run away.

Uahhhh!

The roars of the humans shook the ground. They used the last of their strength to bang their weapons together and slam the ground. Some were so agitated that they even started the chase the fleeing monsters.

“Stop!! Stop the chase!”

Kang Dongsoo shouted. As they had surrounded the monsters with the HakIkJin formation, they definitely had the room to chase them. However, Kang Dongsoo decided to stop here.

It was because everyone’s stamina had reached their limits. If they were to fight in this condition, casualties would quickly pile up.

People who were extremely exhausted paused and gathered their breath. There were some who held their knees and panted.

They saw the scattered monsters fleeing in front of them. The people once again roared, forgetting their exhaustion momentarily.

Uoahhhhhh!!

4 hours of fighting. Three portals were destroyed. 20,000 monsters were wiped out. On the other hand, 3,000 humans died and 2,000 were critically wounded to the point that their recovery stat would be of no use.

It was a great victory.

**

The guardian Bae Jinman greeted the expedition in front of the Hyunhae Department Store. The first thing he did when they arrived was examining the wounded.

He started to treat those who had critical injuries like cut limbs or split heads. There were plenty of people who had lost fingers but they were pushed to the back.

Paah!

Light emitted out of Bae Jinman's hand as the wounded's arms and legs regrew.

"No matter how many times I see it, it's amazing."

Lee Jinhee who was observing from afar remarked.

"It looks like it's harder to regrow limbs than cut them off... I'm telling you, he treats hundreds of people a day!"

An exposition was tacked onto her admiration.

“They say that when he regrows limbs, he uses the retribution points of the wounded. To regrow one limb, they say you have to spend 100 Retribution Points. And a portion of the consumed Retribution Points is used to help him grow.”

“Really? It’s still amazing…”

“Well… he’s the only healer. Even though I’m not completely certain, I bet he has more karma points than our leader?”

As he said that, Baek Seoin glanced at Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk was deep in his thoughts.

Baek Seoin abruptly asked.

“Is it because of the 1-Person Escape Code?”

Choi Hyuk nodded.

The 1-Person Escape Code was quite a serious problem.

Originally the rule stated that [Only the troops who have obtained the escape code can escape] which meant that escape codes were only given to troops, meaning only those who had received the king title would be able to obtain them. A rule that made it so that the members of the troops cooperated with each other. That rule had become the foothold in uniting everyone’s strength.

However, in this situation, these [1-Person Escape Codes] could become the poison that could destroy these troops. If one took extreme measures and ignored their assembly area and troops, couldn't they just hide on the outskirts of the war zone (Kangdong District) and use it when the time came?

It felt a bit better knowing that the drop rate was low but he couldn't help but trouble himself over it.

'There is no way I can kill the Wyvern of Destruction without an army backing me up."

This fact was something Choi Hyuk was becoming glaringly aware of. Without an army, he might collapse trying to pierce through the monsters. However, a temptation that could break apart that army had appeared.

'And I still wasn't able to solve a bigger problem.'

Choi Hyuk closed his eyes in deep thought.

Baek Seoin said.

"First, it's not like we can do anything about the 1-Person Escape Code right now. Isn't there a problem we have to settle beforehand?"

Choi Hyuk replied, nodding his head.

“We have to persuade the kings.”

The other kings still didn’t know Choi Hyuk’s other objective. They were only told that the suicide squad’s role would be to destroy portals and grab the Wyvern of Destruction’s attention. They were under the belief that the suicide squad would keep the wyvern busy until they obtained the escape code and once they did, they would retreat. If that happened, Choi Hyuk, who planned on killing the wyvern, would be isolated.

Because of this, he had to persuade the kings. Either persuade them to kill the wyvern together or at least, make them stay and fight longer. However, there wasn’t a suitable method. Was there any reason to put others in more danger and fight the wyvern?

‘I wish I could just kill them all myself…’

Choi Hyuk felt frustrated. He thought that he wouldn’t have to painfully rack his brains over this if his opponent was instead an incredibly strong human-like monster. Too many enemies. And to fight against such a large opponent… problems he couldn’t handle himself cropped up one after another. However, politics wasn’t Choi Hyuk’s strong point.

Choi Hyuk looked to be in pain as he knitted his brows. Looking at him, Baek Seoin smiled.

“Why are you worrying about it yourself when you have such great followers?”

Baek Seoin tapped his own head.

“I already had a plan when I said we needed an army.”

Choi Hyuk looked blankly at Baek Seoin. Now that he thought about it, the first one to suggest an army was Baek Seoin. He would obviously have some thoughts on this matter. However, Choi Hyuk, who never really had a friend, never had the idea of asking someone for help. He only tried to solve everything himself.

So, to Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin saying that he could do it was like a breath of fresh air.

As if he was captivated, he asked.

“How?”

Baek Seoin replied right away.

“The Crazy Knight King.”

“Jung Minji?”

“Yes. We are going to persuade her.”

Baek Seoin revealed a hidden smile.

Chapter 28: Wyvern Of Destruction (4)

The Slave King Song Simin and Yoon Girim.

Jung Minji had rescued Yoon Girim who was about to become an item during the Bonus Game, but even afterwards, Yoon Girim had trouble getting used to fighting. However, these days, she was very bright.

Jung Minji found Song Simin and Yoon Girim talking in the hallway. They were so affectionate that they didn't even notice Jung Minji approach them. Jung Minji briefly looked at Yoon Girim's smiling face. It was the same smile she remembered. It was very beautiful... so unpleasant.

"Yoon Girim."

"Oh? Minji?"

Yoon Girim was surprised when Jung Minji called out to her. Song Simin awkwardly greeted Jung Minji. "Ahahaha, hello." Jung Minji lightly nodded and replied, "Yes. Hello." And then, she immediately turned her gaze towards Yoon Girim.

Yoon Girim was afraid of her. She couldn't even meet her eye and kept her head lowered.

At her actions, Jung Minji became even more uncomfortable. She said in a strict voice.

“Yoon Girim, lift your head.”

“Uh… uh?”

Yoon Girim opened her eyes from nervousness. Jung Minji stared into her eyes. Yoon Girim didn’t know what to do. Just as Yoon Girim was about to break out into cold sweat, Jung Minji said,

“You doing well?”

“Huh? Yeah… because of you…”

“You say you’re doing well?… You’re doing well, huh…”

Jung Minji briefly thought over those words. And then, she coldly said,

“I heard you ran away last battle but you’re doing well?”

Yoon Girim’s gaze once again fell to the floor. However, Jung Minji didn’t have the slightest thought of letting her go.

“Yoon Girim, look up. Are you going to look away when you face monsters?”

Yoon Girim couldn’t lift her head at Jung Minji’s words. Her chin

was trembling. Tears were welling up in her big eyes. Jung Minji only silently looked at her.

Yoon Girim and Jung Minji were in the same class three times. Although they weren't best friends, Jung Minji had quite detailed memories of her. During peaceful times, she was such a lovely girl with no shadows.

One summer day, during middle school, Yoon Girim told Jung Minji,

"Minji, you must be happy that you're so pretty."

With an expression void of any jealousy. No, instead, as if she thought, 'for such a pretty girl to be my friend!' she showed a boastful expression as she looked at her with a bright smile.

That damn friendly smile.

Jung Minji was endlessly jealous of her beautiful smile.

Even though she possessed such a smile, currently she was in a trembling state where she couldn't even meet her eyes... Because she was so absurdly weak, Jung Minji felt angry.

Jung Minji clasped Yoon Girim's cheeks with her palms. Yoon Girim trembled like a chick. A beautiful yet pitifully weak life that received endless amounts of love. Jung Minji pushed her face together so Yoon Girim's eyes had gathered.

“Yoon Girim. If you don’t kill, you’ll die. Are you scared? If there’s something you’re scared of, kill it. Don’t just tremble like a bitch. Do you think they are going leave you alone just because you smile friendly or because you tremble?”

Unlike her usual cold self, she poured her emotions.

“Girim. Nice Girim. You have to live. Right? You have to make those damn things unable to kill you. Right? How long are you going to lean on others? Do you think men are going to help you until the end? Hmm?”

Every time Jung Minji said, “Right?” her voice would get louder. Yoon Girim only trembled.

“So, sorry.”

What was she apologizing for? However, Yoon Girim apologized with a mosquito-like voice.

Jung Minji bit her lips once before moving back.

“You shouldn’t apologize to me… Haa… Whatever.”

Then Song Simin closely stuck to Yoon Girim’s side.

“Haha, don’t worry too much. I will protect Girim.”

Step.

Clank.

However, the moment Song Simin approached, Jung Minji reflexively took a step back. Chu Youngjin who was behind her like a shadow stepped forward with a sword in his hand.

An awkward moment passed by.

However, Jung Minji acted as if nothing happened as her face returned to its cold appearance. Song Simin smiled even brighter to get rid of the awkwardness.

Jung Minji looked at Song Simin before nodding with an expressionless face.

“It’s a relief that the Slave King will protect her. I am always thankful.”

“No need. Instead, it is me who is able to live safely because of you.”

“I’m glad then.”

Jung Minji nodded her head and passed by the two. Even the moment she was passing them, she kept an appropriate distance.

As she was Jung Minji who had taken the throne through spilling blood, besides Chu Youngjin and a few elites, she didn't give anyone her full trust. Especially if they were other groups and even Song Simin who was her long-time ally wasn't an exception.

"I say, she's one sassy queen."

Song Simin shrugged his shoulders before comforting the crying Yoon Girim.

"Whew... Girim. It was scary, right? The Knight King was saying that because she was worried about you. Still, it was scary. Even I was about to piss myself. Still, it's okay."

Song Simin hugged Yoon Girim as he patted her back whilst Yoon Girim tried to hold back her tears.

"Hello."

"Ah, yes. Hello."

Baek Seoin passed by them after giving them an awkward greeting. Song Simin smiled with an embarrassed expression as he pulled Yoon Girim closer to cover her tears.

**

Baek Seoin started to move seriously on the 24th day. There were only 6 days before the game would end. He chose a time when it wasn't too relaxed yet not too constrained. It would be difficult if someone changed their decision but there was enough time to adjust. It was a time Baek Seoin carefully chose.

Though he boasted in front of Choi Hyuk, in reality, he had a lot of worries.

Of course, he decided to leave it to his analysis. He believed that he could definitely persuade Jung Minji. However, weren't people unpredictable? Even his Intuition was useless. As his Intuition only activated when his life was in danger.

So Baek Seoin's heart was beating furiously on his way to meet Jung Minji.

'Thank God.'

It was good that he coincidentally watched Jung Minji and Yoon Girim's conversation. Baek Seoin became more confident in his plans.

"Why should I?"

So when Jung Minji said these words, he was able to keep his calm.

"Because we are able to save more people."

Baek Seoin smiled calmly whilst Jung Minji frowned.

“Do I have to save people?”

A faint ridicule was blended in her voice. However, Baek Seoin replied with confidence.

“The number of people who haven’t joined Hyunhae Department Store must not be small, correct?”

“So?”

“Have you ever… thought about this? As to where all the preschoolers and elementary schoolers are?”

“…”

Jung Minji closed her mouth. A chilly expression appeared. He couldn’t tell what she was thinking right now.

But Baek Seoin recalled the fussy reaction she showed Yoon Girim. Wasn’t she unable to simply watch these weak people she despised? Even when she acted coldly in real life, he heard that she was always giving Yoon Girim preferential treatment.

And another thing. He remembered that she ordered to ‘exclude those who were less than 14 years old’ during the slaughter she led.

He had dug up a lot of rumors related to that incident.

So Baek Seoin believed his words would get through to her.

“The proportion of adults in this assembly area is unusually high. There are barely any children. However, there were originally over 50,000 children in Kangdong District. When the game started, these children were at their preschool or elementary schools, and the majority say that they never returned home. Though there were a few who returned home or were left alone but... most of them never returned. Now, where do you think these children went? Did they all die?”

“... What is it you’re trying to say?”

“Lee Jinhee discovered this when she went out for reconnaissance. There was a group that protected many elementary schoolers and preschoolers. Their leader said different rules were given to the children. Meaning, there was a way for these children to live. Though the detailed rules were different, anyways, the majority of the children hid in the sewers before the monsters started their attack. That leader was trying his best to find and protect these children, as they had all scattered, there wasn’t a suitable method to find them all. These children will probably hide in the sewers until the end of the game. Now, let me ask you this. Would these children, these children who are living in the sewers eating rats, be able to obtain the escape code on the last day?”

“...”

Jung Minji was silent. With this, he smoothly connected the ‘ki’ and the ‘seung’. Then, with a sense of surprise, he would introduce the ‘jeon’[1].

“But, didn’t we find a new rule? [On the final day, anyone can transmit a rescue signal.]”

Jung Minji immediately refuted.

“… At the same time, [On the final day, the monsters will start a large-scale invasion.]”

Baek Seoin shrugged his shoulders.

“Then, I guess it’ll be hard for these children to live. They might pitifully send a rescue signal but who would even care?”

That moment, Jung Minji inwardly thought.

‘Bastard…’

If Baek Seoin didn’t say that then Jung Minji would have been able to keep her calm. However, when he involved ‘children’ in this, her imagination had already pictured children getting slaughtered by monsters.

Throb.

Her heart tugged as if a rough blade was pushing its way between her ribs. However, when she thought of how to rescue these children, she didn't know where to start. How many more did she need to kill? What did she have to do and what did she have to sacrifice to persuade the other kings? Jung Minji bit her lips. She replied mixed with bitterness.

"... The children were distributed karma as well. There is no reason for them to be weak. They are no different from adults."

Baek Seoin stared into Jung Minji's eyes. He could see her pupils trembling. Checkmate. He completed 'kiseungjeon'. And Baek Seoin was setting up 'kyul'.

"Really? Do you think that simply because children received karma that they would be able to fight like us? Hmmm... Maybe they will. Perhaps they will lift their shields and swords that are bigger than them and organize an army to fight the monsters. Since kids these days are scary."

Baek Seoin's lips revealed traces of ridicule.

Jung Minji was silent for a while.

Her mind was picturing the final day. Rescue signals shooting up from everywhere. Groups who ignored them and retreated with the escape code in their hands. Rescue signals shooting up behind

them... those damn rescue signals... and the children... a scene where the children were being slaughtered by the monsters.

Throb.

Jung Minji closed her eyes. Baek Seoin was suggesting that they should fight longer instead of escaping.

'But why?'

If they were to rescue on top of escape, they had to keep the Wyvern of Destruction busy longer. And didn't that responsibility fall onto Choi Hyuk and the suicide squad?

'Why are they putting themselves in danger? Don't tell me they really want to save the children? No way.'

No matter how she thought about it, Choi Hyuk wasn't such a kind-hearted person.

Jung Minji's mind became filled with confusion. However, the thing that was greater than the confusion...

Throb... Throb!

The pain in her chest.

‘Damn it.’

Grit.

Baek Seoin could hear Jung Minji grind her teeth. And at that moment she opened her mouth.

“…So what is your plan?”

A smile appeared on Baek Seoin’s lips. It was his victory.

Notes:

1] 기승전결 kiseung-jeon-kyul –Ki is the start of your story. Seung is the progression your story by increasing the listener’s immersion. Jeon is the change and reversal. Kyul is the end.

Chapter 29: Wyvern Of Destruction (5)

Jung Minji walked at a quick pace. A meeting with the allied forces was held that night.

"... Your motive is good... but do we have the time?"

The one who replied was the one who led the Alliance of Comrades in Arms, General Cha Taeshik.

No one else said anything but they all had the same thought. No one could say, "I don't care if those children die or not."

However, there were still 7 portals left. 55,000 monsters poured in every day. Even though they went on an expedition every day, the number of monsters were slowly approaching the number of humans. At this rate, they may not be able to reduce the portals to less than five by the final day.

It was because the locations of the portals weren't specified. Even though Lee Jinhee heroically went out for reconnaissance, there were days when she couldn't find a single one. Also, perhaps it was because he wasn't in immediate danger but Baek Seoin couldn't locate the portals with his Intuition.

If there were 5 portals remaining on the final day, there would be almost 100,000 monsters pouring in.

However, if monsters appeared by the 'masses', they couldn't

even imagine how difficult of a fight it would be. Also, that word was vague. Masses. Just how many were there it to be called masses?

As leaders of their respective groups, they couldn't help but become passive facing these conditions.

Jung Minji said.

"... This might not be the end."

At those words, everyone directed their gazes at Jung Minji.

"The fact that the police and the military have disappeared, everyone is aware of this, correct?"

That was right. Right after the game started, for some reason, the reserve force and the police stations were empty.

"Do you remember the fact that games vary depending on their target? Then the police and the military. What kind of game would they have to play? Where are these people who seem to have evaporated from Kangdong District?"

The mood turned solemn at Jung Minji's words. It was already the 24th day. While living with their lives on the line every day, they didn't have the time to look at things in a broader perspective.

A new, but obvious, question came across their minds.

‘What was it like outside of Kangdong District?’

“Everyone should know how the guardian Bae Jinman awakened as a guardian.”

At Jung Minji’s words, everyone’s gazes turned to Bae Jinman. He had his eyes closed, deep in thought.

“What we learned from this was that these games are much more complicated than we initially thought. At first glance, it might seem like we only need to kill and survive but that is not everything. It’s the same with the issue regarding children. Why did they give them a separate rule and make them live in hiding? Why is it that they are able to send rescue signals on the final day? Are these children really discardable?”

Jung Minji made a slight pause before continuing.

“If the guardian disregarded the patients like other doctors and if because of this, we didn’t have a healer in Kangdong District, do you think we would have been able to retaliate against the monsters as united as we are now? Like I said before. There is a high chance that it won’t end with us just escaping Kangdong District. In fact, couldn’t these children actually be a key to survival?”

Hmmm...

Silence fell.

“We have to save the children. Not simply to survive this place but they will definitely be useful in the long run. Getting out of Kangdong District isn’t everything.”

However, they weren’t able to decide so easily. The cause became more resolute but it wasn’t concrete enough. It could be but wasn’t there also a chance it wasn’t?

This time, Jung Minji called out to specific people.

“Leader Kang Dongsoo. Aren’t there a lot of parents under your command who have lost their children?”

“...”

“I also heard that the whereabouts of Leader Seon Jisoo is also unknown.”

“Ah...”

There weren’t many survivors who worked and lived in Kangdong District with children less than 14 years old. As there was an increase of dual-income families and younger couples who worked away from home, a lot of the parents were outside of

Kangdong District.

However, that didn't mean that they could ignore the number of parents in Kangdong District who hoped to find their children. As there was no way, they gave up and fell into despair, living in a world without their children.

Jung Minji provided specific motives to them with her comments. Of course, she had some bait prepared for General Cha Taeshik of the Alliance of Comrades in Arms who had an aloof expression and the Knight Captain of the Korean National Sport University, Ryu Hyunsung, who was deep in thought.

For this, Jung Minji had to take a loss. She bit her lips and decisively announced.

"And my troops will spearhead the operation."

The heads of these leaders instinctively raised. They looked at Jung Minji with surprised expressions. She had just volunteered for the most dangerous mission.

"And I will not forget the people who help me."

As soon as she said that, the guardian Bae Jinman opened his eyes and stood up. He nodded his head.

"I will stand next to you. I, too, will not forget those who help us."

Choi Hyuk raised his hand.

“I agree.”

Jung Minji was known, even among the allied forces, to be domineering. With one move, she had gained the support of the strongest fighting power, Choi Hyuk, and the only healer, the greatly influential Bae Jinman.

These two had lowered their heads. (Of course, Choi Hyuk was different.) And she declared she would take the most dangerous role. They calculated. They wouldn’t take any losses from helping them. It was also for a good cause.

“Since you are all so determined, of course, I need to partake in this. Wouldn’t this also be patriotism? Huhuhu!”

“I am ashamed. We will go with you.”

Starting with General Cha Taeshik and the Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung, everyone declared they would participate in rescuing the children.

‘Like expected, it was good to persuade Jung Minji.’

Baek Seoin who stood behind Choi Hyuk exclaimed to himself. Choi Hyuk turned around to look at Baek Seoin and nodded once.

Afterwards, another discussion ensued.

“But isn’t there another issue? The 1-person escape code.”

This problem was a headache to the leaders who had gathered here. Since, in the perspective of these leaders, it was better for their groups to remain as they are than disperse. There also weren’t many 1-person escape codes either.

“It’s a problem. However, there isn’t a suitable method to handle it. There is no way to know who obtained an escape code… it seems like the only way is to brand those who use the escape code as traitors.”

Everyone nodded their heads at Leader Kang Dongsoo’s words.

“Still, it looks like a sense of camaraderie is forming.”

They fought together and had always won. And they couldn’t ignore the impact of Bae Jinman’s blessings that were akin to large concerts. They had no choice but to use this to crackdown down on traitors.

“Okay. Everyone, make sure to do a roll call every day as well.”

Everyone agreed to General Cha Taeshik’s suggestion.

That was the conclusion of important discussions. While the situation was becoming slightly disorderly, General Cha Taeshik asked Choi Hyuk.

“But what do we do about the Wyvern of Destruction? The King without Subjects was supposed to handle it but if we try to rescue others as well, it will take a lot of time. Is it possible to keep it up for that long? Though we will try to clear out as many monsters as we can…”

Baek Seoin replied in Choi Hyuk’s place.

“There’s no problem! If there’s a chance, we’re planning on just killing it. Isn’t that right, leader?”

Choi Hyuk gave a short nod.

“Wahaha! As expected, the young are spirited!”

He laughed loudly, throwing his head back.

No one believed that Baek Seoin’s words were the truth.

**

The next day. The results of the meeting were announced. The forces under Jung Minji’s command caused an uproar.

“No, why did you decide that all by yourself?”

The Pig King Ma Dongshik protested to Jung Minji.

“In the very least, aren’t you supposed to tell us beforehand?”

Ma Dongshik’s face had turned red. He was someone who cared about his safety to the point of even criticizing Lee Jinhee for attacking a shadow teeth. As someone like that, he was unable to take this situation.

However, Jung Minji’s expression did not change.

“I am sorry I was unable to tell you in advance. However, this is something we must do.”

“So why are you deciding this all by yourself? Good. Okay. Let’s let the issue about rescuing children slide. Since I’m also an adult. But to be the spearhead? You mean just the troops under the Crazy Knight King, right? We aren’t going to do it.”

Jung Minji shook her head.

“Of course, Leader Ma Dongshik’s forces are included. It’s including all six forces that are with me.”

A heavy silence. The other leaders who followed Ma Dongshik showed flustered faces.

“No, why? Why do you decide our lives all by yourself?”

Ma Dongshik was angry to the point of being unable to suppress it any longer. He felt this was irrational.

Jung Minji’s eyes turned cold.

She didn’t look back. This would be the last time she would grab hold of them. Even if their solidarity broke apart, she had to make them go on this mission.

“That’s right. However, everyone here owes me a life debt.”

Jung Minji stared at each and every king gathered here.

“Pig King Ma Dongshik. Do you think you would have been able to block the invasion of shadow teeths without my intervention? Do you remember the 400 shadow teeths that were hiding near your assembly area while you sacrificed three people every night?”

Ma Dongshik momentarily flinched.

“It’s the same for all of you. My followers have always fought on the frontlines. And there’s no one here who hasn’t benefited from this. Do you think, without me, you would be able to join Hyunhae Department Store? And now you guys want out?”

Jung Minji's eyes were like those of a crazy bitch. These people who knew that she would indiscriminate purge the opposition when she was like this quickly avoided her eyes. It was the same for the agitated Ma Dongshik. It was like cold water had poured on him. 'I went too far after becoming agitated.' He regretted as he trembled while tucking his hands.

However, there was a single person who did not avoid her stare. The Slave King Song Simin. He, instead, was smiling brightly.

"Ahh... though it's a bit suffocating... I actively support you. Even though we're the spearhead, with the support of the Weakening Barrier and the support of the other troops at the back, we shouldn't have too many casualties. Above all, it's an honorable deed."

Jung Minji's yes man. It was definitely something he would say.

Creak.

Jung Minji slightly nodded towards Song Simin before getting up. Then she lowered her head.

"Once again... I apologize. This will not happen again after this mission. We are going to dissolve our alliance and with an indebted heart, I promise I will wholeheartedly cooperate with you at least once."

An uncomfortable silence.

After creating an atmosphere that felt like she would kill anyone who opposed her, she suddenly asked for a favor. Though they were taken back, they couldn't show it. Shame, their hurt pride, fear, worries about the future, absurdity. With a mixture of these emotions, the kings under Jung Minji's command were unable to say a word.

They had no choice but to do what the strong ordered them to do.

"... Alright."

The kings exited the meeting room with stiff faces. It wasn't acceptance but submission. Jung Minji was aware of that.

'It's fine. Since this is the last time.'

Even if it was submission, it was fine as long as they moved. As long as she could rescue children with these actions, it helped bring peace to Jung Minji's heart.

'Anyways... Look's like I'll be able to sleep tonight.'

She had nightmares ever since her talk with Baek Seoin.

After all the other kings had left, the last one to stand was Song Simin. He comforted Jung Minji.

“It’s because everyone was surprised. I will try to talk to them.”

After smiling friendlily, he hurriedly left. Soon after,

“Ah~ Dongshik hyungnim[1]! I was so surprised! Don’t be so stiff and how about we go have a drink?”

The cheeky voice of Song Simin was heard.

The Slave King Song Simin who had accompanied her since Hanyoung High School. He had fully revealed his unique sociability during this time. The size of his troops had increased and he had good relationships with other kings. He was a lubricant-like existence who complemented the cold Jung Minji.

Once even his voice became distant, a stillness overcame the meeting room.

“Ha…”

Jung Minji buried her head into the desk.

“I’m tired…”

**

The 29th day.

There were 4 portals remaining.

A pitch-black night. Everyone was sleeping except those on night watch.

Choi Hyuk stood alone on top of Hyunhae Department Store.

Seoul, a place that used to light up colorfully at night, however, now, no matter where he looked, it was pitch-black. There was no light brighter than the moon. And because the moon was unexpectedly bright, he was able to differentiate the pitch-black darkness and the waves of the Hangang River.

And there was another place that was emitting a faint light. Above Choi Hyuk's hand.

Woong, woong, woong...

A mysterious symbol that wasn't engraved on the Predator's Blade previously was emitting a light.

A blade of karma had wrapped around the entirety of the blade.

It wasn't the hazy appearance of the past. It maintained a transparent sword appearance while being fluid-like, as it flowed slowly. It was 5 meters long.

Choi Hyuk slowly raised the Predator’s Blade above his head.

Shah-

He lowered it. Even though he was moving very slowly, the sound of it slicing the air echoed out from the rooftop. And the blade didn’t disappear as it flowed leisurely.

Choi Hyuk smiled.

The preparations to hunt the Wyvern of Destruction were complete.

Notes:

1] Hyungnim is what a younger male would call an older male.

Chapter 30: Wyvern Of Destruction (6)

On the morning of the decisive day, an announcement was made at 6 a.m.

———————

[Throne Game + Survive and Escape]

1. In two hours, Weakening Barriers will be nullified. Kings are able to send rescue signals.

2. Location of the Escape Code: Myeongil Neighborhood Park.

3. The Wyvern of Destruction has been summoned.

4. 500,000 monsters have infested the entirety of Kangdong District.

5. Only kings or individuals who are not affiliated with any forces are able to obtain the escape code.

———————

'... So difficult.'

He hadn't thought that they would nullify the Weakening Barriers. The number of monsters that were added was formidable as well. He estimated that, including the monsters they weren't able to kill, there were over 700,000 monsters. It was certain that this would be a tough fight.

Choi Hyuk looked at the announcement and then armed himself before making his way to the rooftop. As soon as he stood on the top of Hyunhae Department Store, he could see the hordes of

monsters that filled Kangdong District. In the very least, it was fortunate that the Weakening Barriers were still working and that the newly invaded monsters were acting on their own and not in groups.

When he looked towards the distant Myeongil Neighborhood Park, he saw an enormous monster. It was the size of a 20-floor apartment building and looked like a tyrannosaurus with flames coming out its jaws and eyes.

“You… think you can really beat that?”

Jung Minji stood next to him as she asked. Choi Hyuk glanced at her before replying.

“Yeah.”

As if she wasn’t satisfied with his simple reply, she made him promise.

“… You must do it. Since you’re the one who manipulated my damn personality… Since it’s already like this, I’m going to save as many as I can. No matter how bad the situation gets, I’m not going to back down… so do it right.”

Jung Minji was definitely unique. Even though she herself was strong, the ones who moved her heart were the weak. ‘There needs to be at least one king like this,’ Choi Hyuk chuckled inwardly.

“Don’t worry. That thing is going to die by my hands.”

He declared as if he wasn’t affected by the imposing figure of the Wyvern of Destruction.

Jung Minji giggled. Choi Hyuk tried to recall if she had ever laughed. She did. In the past, when it was still peaceful, though it wasn’t often, there were still times when she laughed. He seemed to recall that there were quite a few male students whose hearts fluttered at her laugh. However, this was the first time he had seen her laugh ever since the situation changed.

“You’re strong. It’s cool.”

The moment she said that, she wasn’t the Crazy Knight King. She was simply Jung Minji, the 2nd year class 7 president. It was as if a flower was blooming on this grey morning.

Choi Hyuk saw Jung Minji wrapped in white light with his Eyes of Distinction. It was the first time she, who had always been colorless, had shown goodwill.

“See you later.”

Jung Minji turned around and left, waving her hand behind her back,

**

The one who had obtained the 1-person escape codes moved in a systematic manner. One would be a traitor if he did it by himself but if others did it as well, it would become a rational decision. 10,000 people secretly communicated with each other. What was more surprising was that no one knew that these 10,000 people organized a plan. There were some who knew but chose to let it slide due to friendship and some who knew and might have been killed when they fought monsters.

Approximately 20,000 people had obtained the 1-person escape codes and among them, 10,000 had already escaped early in the morning. Those who found out were either killed or won over and because of this, the 110,000 soldiers in Hyunhae Department Store had low morale.

Grrrr. Grrrk!

Kaaah.

While these 110,000 gathered, monsters crowded around the outside waiting for the Weakening Barrier to nullify. They were like vultures waiting for rotten meat.

Pitter-patter.

At a time when they were gloomy, rain started to fall. Due to the transparent wall that covered Kangdong District, the rain did not drop onto the ground. Only, they heard the loud noises of raindrops hitting the wall and saw streams of rainwater flow

down. They simply saw a sky dyed in water.

Even the guardian Bae Jinman's [Get up] wasn't very effective that day. The existence of traitors that had left had left a huge impact on their unity. It was already going to be a difficult fight... but now they felt like they were fools for remaining and were struggling with a sense of defeat.

The 100 members of the suicide squad stood in front of the discouraged army. Bae Jinman had finished drinking a Karma Recovery Potion and was preparing for another blessing. This one was different from last time. It was a blessing meant only for Choi Hyuk.

"Karma Grant."

Bae Jinman poured all the karma he possessed into Choi Hyuk. Bae Jinman's powerful karma stimulated Choi Hyuk's karma.

[Your Power, Speed, Stamina, Endurance and Recovery have been increased by 100 each for 12 hours.]

The message that appeared made Choi Hyuk's eyes bulge. He had already heard Bae Jinman's explanation beforehand but for it to be this impressive.

"Now I can't do anything for the next 12 hours."

Bae Jinman, who had spent all his karma, said with a haggard

face.

“Good luck.”

Choi Hyuk deeply bowed his head.

He then raised his head and turned around to face the 110,000 soldiers. He raised the Predator’s Blade that had evolved to C rank.

Swish!

A 5-meter-long blade of karma extended past the blade. The symbol engraved on the Predator’s Blade emitted a light as if it was burning.

Everyone gazed at the blazing blade and carved Choi Hyuk’s figure into their memories.

“Let’s go.”

Though he didn’t say it in a loud voice, Choi Hyuk’s works clearly rang out to the 110,000 people gathered in Hyunhae Department Store.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk kicked the ground and dashed out of the Weakening

Barrier. There were a few monsters hanging around.

Slash!!

The 5-meter-long blade of karma split 10 monsters into two.

Boom!

Choi Hyuk slammed onto the ground with his momentum. The asphalt cracked as if a cannonball had exploded.

“Let’s go! For survival!”

Wahhhh!

First, the 100 members of the suicide squad charged forth. Their roars were unbelievably loud.

Uahhhhhhhhh!!!

Behind them, the whole army shouted even louder than the suicide squad and charged forward. With Choi Hyuk’s actions, their morale had boosted a little. Their last battle for their survival had begun.

**

It was a battle of speed.

Before the Weakening Barriers became nullified, they used up the remaining Weakening Barrier scrolls unsparingly to open a path.

Even though there were 700,000 monsters, they were scattered while the humans were united as an army.

The actions of the suicide squad were once again remarkable. They drank Karma Recovery Potions like water and used all their strength. After being tempered constantly for 30 days, the suicide squad members' karma levels were over 2-stars and were easily tearing monsters apart.

A nonstop attack. The army of humans that charged forward at full speed while in formation were able to splatter the blood of the monsters that attacked individually onto the asphalt.

They arrived at the Myeongil Neighborhood Park in about 30 minutes. The mood was good up until here. It even seemed like their low morale had recovered.

However, their spirits were crushed with a single blow.

Thud! Thuud!

Their bodies bounced up from the sheer force of its steps.

[Kuaalaalaa!!]

The Wyvern of Destruction looked up at the sky and roared. The air shook and their hair fluttered.

Crash!

It smashed its head onto Kyunghee University Hospital that was situated in front of the park. The building smashed apart as if it was hit by a rockslide.

The high-spirited army stopped in their tracks. People fell in shock.

Clack, clack, clack...

Their teeth chattered and their weapons trembled. For such a large building to be smashed apart just like that...

Kirik!

Keurik!

And behind the Wyvern of Destruction, more than 100,000 monsters made their appearance.

“Ah... Fuck...”

“I should have escaped… Should have escaped… I also had a 1-person escape code… Fuck…”

The soldiers lost their courage.

That moment, a swish of a sword strangely grabbed their hearts.

Swish…

It was Choi Hyuk.

“Suicide squad, prepare to charge. Support troop, deploy the Extraordinary Dragon Cannon.”

His voice was clearly heard even in this commotion. However, these people who were stricken with fear couldn’t react. Choi Hyuk frowned.

“Get a-hold of yourselves!!”

Bang!

Choi Hyuk’s karma-enhanced voice sounded out and smashed onto their chests like a cannonball. Only then did the support troop start to deploy the ‘Dragon Hunting Weapon – Extraordinary Dragon Cannon’. It was a 4-meter long cannon-like object.

Its silver barrel was packed with unknown engraved symbols. It didn't have wheels but the bottom was rounded like crescents. It was unknown how it slid towards the direction it was pushed but because of this, two people were able to push it with no problem.

The support troop was the troop that operated the 20 or so 'Dragon Hunting Weapon – Extraordinary Dragon Cannons'. There was a total of 80 people.

Once they regained their senses, their bodies moved according to their training.

"Vine cannonball loaded!"

"Loaded!"

"Shoot when ready!"

Bangbangbang!!

The Extraordinary Dragon Cannons spat flames.

Bang! Bang!

The cannonballs exploded on the Wyvern of Destruction's body. Vines grew from the where the cannonballs hit and entangled its body.

[If a few overlap, they can make a dragon momentarily falter.] This was the description of the Vine Cannonball. The wyvern, hit by 20 cannonballs, faltered momentarily. However,

Thud!

[Kualaalala!!]

The Wyvern stomped the ground and used its strength.

Riip.

The vines ripped apart like paper and fell to the ground.

[Kuaalaalala!!]

Instead, it seemed like it only made it angrier.

“Continue to shoot!”

Urged the support troop leader who used to be an artillery officer.

The Wyvern of Destruction lowered its stance and advanced slowly even as the vines held it back.

Choi Hyuk could clearly see its motives. It was planning on gathering its strength and breaking out in one go.

It was clear that if that thing charged forward their ranks would be smashed apart.

‘I have to stop it.’

“Hooo….”

Choi Hyuk took in a deep breath. The karma in his body twisted into spirals. He had obtained this secret method by repeatedly using the skill [Soaring Slash]. Though he didn’t meet the requirements to use it, he traced the movements of the karma until the skill failed.

[Soaring Slash] was a skill that elongated karma and released it like a whip. From there, Choi Hyuk imitated the technique of elongating karma, but he didn’t stop there. He twisted the elongated karma into spirals.

He sent the long spirals to the Predator’s Blade.

Pabang!

The tip of the spiral unravelled and formed the blade of karma. However, before the karma completely unravelled, he recalled the unravelled karma back while twisting it. The elongated karma spiraled up from his hand to the blade then back to his hand to

form a single shape and during this time, he kept twisting and unravelling the karma. A technique that required a ridiculous level of control. Its effect was as powerful as it was complicated.

Swish.

A 5-meter-long blade of karma formed from the Predator's Blade. The karma wrapped around the blade while unravelling and twisting itself.

Even though the transparent energy was moving in a complicated manner, it still retained its shape. It looked calm on the outside but it was filled with energy about to erupt.

The energy of the Predator's Blade, which had transformed into a C rank, mixed with Choi Hyuk's karma and flowed around the blade.

'I can slice into it.'

Choi Hyuk looked at his status for the last time as he resolved himself.

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 203 (+76) (+100) (★★)

Speed: 203 (+74) (+100) (★★)

Control: 0 (★★★)

Endurance: 100 (+100) (★★)

Stamina: 100 (+100) (★★)

Recovery: 10(+100) (★★)

*Retribution points: 0 (★★)

*Free karma points: 0

———————

His Control actually hit 3-star.

He changed his equipment and put everything into Power and Speed. He even used the difficult to find [Enchant Change Scroll] to change his enchants to Power and Speed.

Lastly, with Bae Jinman's [Karma Grant], he was able to increase all his stats, excluding Control, by 100. It seemed like the effect didn't apply to his Control which was a 3-star stat.

This time, he examined the evolved Predator's Blade.

———————

[Greedy Predator's Blade]

Rank: C (Unique, Growth-type)

Sharp and sturdy. The more blood it absorbs of strong foes, the stronger it will get.

Drain: Absorbs the blood of enemies to replenish its owner's karma and heal their wounds. Able to absorb 5L of blood per second.

Durability: 9,998/10,000

Evolution: 0/100

———————

The reason why Choi Hyuk didn't invest any points into Stamina and Recovery was because of the evolved Predator's Blade. The new 'Drain' trait was the greatest present when facing a long and difficult battle against the Wyvern of Destruction.

After finishing his inspection, Choi Hyuk saw the wyvern's bulging calves. It looked like the thickness of its ankles was the size of a house.

Choi Hyuk used its enlarged calves to speculate its anatomy. It wasn't something he was actively thinking of but was an observation that extended from his instincts.

And he figured out its weak points. If you were to look at it as a human, it would be its tendons and Achilles heel.

"About 10…"

Choi Hyuk dashed towards his first target. The Wyvern of Destruction was concentrating all its strength into its calves to break out of the downpour of Vine Cannonballs.

Its vulnerable ankle concentrated with power.

Slash!

The blade of karma slashed out.

Kyajajak!

One swing of the 5-meter-long blade was enough to wipe out a 5 pyong room.[1] Following Choi Hyuk's blade, its grey flesh split apart like a ravine and black blood gushed out.

[Keulak?]

The Wyvern of Destruction immediately wobbled.

Thuud!

As it wobbled, it hurriedly stomped its uninjured left foot.

A single blow from an ant-sized human was able to make a monster the size of a high-rise apartment wobble. The people who saw this couldn't help but shudder.

However, Choi Hyuk clicked his tongue.

"As expected... I couldn't cut it off with one slash?"

Cho Hyuk had targeted its ankle tendon. Its flesh was sliced into but he was unable to cut its tendon.

“If one time isn’t enough, I’ll do it until it is… Suicide squad! The target is its left foot! Spread out and attack!”

Choi Hyuk’s orders exploded out.

Uoahhhhh!!

The suicide squad spread out. At the same time, Choi Hyuk was a step faster as he charged towards the wyvern’s left foot. The flustered and hesitant Wyvern of Destruction.

Bangbangbang!

Flames shot out of the Extraordinary Dragon Cannons above it.

The Wyvern of Destruction’s attention was wholly on the suicide squad. Jung Minji didn’t miss this opportunity.

“All troops-Charge!!!”

Jung Minji unsheathed her sword and bypassed the Wyvern of Destruction. 200,000 monsters were lined up in front of her.

“Charge! Charge! Do not fall behind!”

The other forces were right behind them as they charged.

Choi Hyuk, 100 members of the suicide squad and 80 members of the support troop VS The Wyvern of Destruction.

110,000 humans VS 200,000 monsters.

A gruesome war had begun.

Notes:

1] 16.52 m^2

Chapter 31: Wyvern Of Destruction (7)

“Team 5! Go up!”

At Baek Seoin’s shout, team 5 of the suicide squad jumped up. However, there was one member who was too late.

Puakack!

The wyvern’s swinging tail was like a train travelling at full speed, comparable in both its size and power.

The member was crushed like a mosquito. The protect order from his armor and his 2-star Endurance stat were useless.

Fighting an apartment-sized monster was similar to fighting a calamity.

Only when you looked up until your neck felt like it was about to break could you see its face and flaming jaws.

To humans, fighting was looking at each other, gathering your spirits, and bashing into each other. However, what they were experiencing now were feet that fell down above their heads like a landslide. When the steep cliff turned around, its tail would come forth like a tsunami.

That was why the role of the commander was very important.

“Team 1! Team 3! To the left!”

The suicide squad that was near the wyvern couldn’t see its overall shape. All they could see was one leg and the tip of its tail.

Because of this, the existence of a commander who stood at a distance was crucial. And Baek Seoin was the right man for the job.

Baek Seoin grit his teeth as he performed his role as a commander. The reason for gritting his teeth was simple.

“Fucking bastard…”

It was because the wyvern was his sworn enemy that killed his parents. His anger had become even colder and sharper as he carried out his commands.

“Team 7! Jump in! Left foot!”

Team 7 charged in at his orders. The members of Team 7 lashed out at the wound left by Choi Hyuk’s blade. They were all armed with blunt weapons. However, when they hit the wound, it only let out a slapping sound, it didn’t seem like it actually hurt the wyvern.

“Kuaahhhh!”

Except for when Chu Youngjin hit it with bloodshot eyes.

Bang!

The sound his iron mace made when it hit was different. Scraps of its flesh exploded out.

And at its impact, the wyvern momentarily flinched.

Jung Minji had thoroughly resolved herself for this expedition. She had sent the strongest of her elites, Chu Youngjin, to the suicide squad. Chu Youngjin, who activated the Innate skill [Berserker], was able to double his Power and Speed.

However, it was still far from being enough.

[Kualaalaak!!]

Stomp! Stomp!

Shocked by the sharp pain, it stomped its feet like lightning. Baek Seoin's orders couldn't match its quick movements. 3 members of Team 7 became blood splotches at its feet.

But, the bigger problem was that the wyvern charged and attacked the main army. To the army, it was as if a fortress had suddenly fallen from the sky.

Baaaannng!

The large wyvern was swift as well. The moment one foot contacted the ground, it rotated its body and cleared its surroundings with a swing of its tail.

Crash!

In an instant, more than 100 people became plastered onto the ground.

“Charge the Ice Cannons! Fire!”

Bang, bang, bang!

Light beams shot out of the Extraordinary Dragon Cannons.

Crackle, crack!

The wyvern was, for an instant, frozen from head to tail.

“Team 9! Assemble the Extraordinary Dragon Battering Ram!”

Baek Seoin frantically ordered. The members of Team 9 each took a barrel-like object from their Handy Bags and assembled them together. A long, thick spear was formed after connecting 10 of these barrels. The 10 members of Team 9 stood on either side of

it and held it up.

[Dragon Hunting Weapon – Extraordinary Dragon Battering Ram], a spear made to slam into a dragon, was prepared. It took 30 seconds to fully complete it.

Choi Hyuk had taken action to gain that time. He was the only warrior who could clearly see the wyvern's movements up close.

[Kualaak!]

The Wyvern of Destruction tried its best to smash the ice that covered its body. Crack! As the ice started to crack and fall apart, Choi Hyuk jumped onto the ice.

Bang!

On top of the shattering ice, Choi Hyuk madly charged. Avoiding the avalanche of falling ice, Choi Hyuk stepped and jumped as he made his way up.

And just as the wyvern was about to lift its head and shake its body.

Craack!

A long, thin blade of karma swept at the wyvern's neck. Because of his insufficient strength, he wasn't able to cut the nerve, but it

was definitely painful.

[Kuaaaaaah!!]

As if hit by lightning, the wyvern jumped up and took a few steps back.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

One step, two steps, each step crushed a few tens of people, but the wyvern did retreat away from the main army.

And Team 9 who held the Extraordinary Dragon Battering Ram charged forth and slammed it into the wyvern's right heel.

Boom!!

At the same time, the magic implanted in the Extraordinary Dragon Battering Ram exploded out. Instantly, the wyvern's right foot was pushed back. It wobbled. However, the thing swung its tail to regain its balance and, instead, shot flames at Team 9.

Blaaaze!

"Uack!"

"Keahhh!"

One member was unable to avoid the flames and let out a wretched scream before turning to ash. Even the members who avoided the flames caught on fire so they drank a Recovery Potion and rolled on the ground.

[Grrr!]

The Wyvern of Destruction stared at the suicide squad who had spread out to avoid its flames. It was 40 minutes into the fight. During this time, they made it wobble and cry out so it seemed to be injured but... the Wyvern of Destruction was quite unscathed. Didn't humans cry out in surprise when they were poked with a needle? It wasn't very different for the wyvern.

The wyvern was quite annoyed and angry.

Thud! Thud! Slaamm!

It charged forward and ran through the suicide squad. It was unbelievable that an apartment-sized monster was able to move so quickly while swinging its tail. Baek Seoin didn't even have the time to call out orders. Even the blocking attempt from the Extraordinary Dragon Cannon came too late. The suicide squad scattered to avoid it while the support troops switched the cannons to stealth mode then spread out and hid.

Grit.

Baek Seoin ground his teeth.

[Kuaaah!]

The wyvern cried out.

But, even during this time, Choi Hyuk was faithfully attacking the Wyvern of Destruction. He was with Lee Jinhee, making their way up its back.

“Leader. Do I really have to do this?”

“You said you wanted to conquer an apartment-sized monster.”

“Ah… damn… that…”

“Hold tight.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t even bother to listen to the rest of her excuses. He raised the Predator’s Blade extended with karma and sliced the wyvern’s thigh.

[Kuaaahh!!]

It slapped its thigh with its tail. However, Choi Hyuk and Lee Jinhee had already hidden inside its flesh that was dug out like a

trench.

“Uack! I almost became a flattened bean!”

“Just hold tight and keep slicing. If we keep doing this, we should be able to slow it down.”

“My sword probably won’t even slice it well. Leader, you should just do it.”

“If I stay here, the ones outside are all going to die. And look.”

Choi Hyuk raised his blade to show a blade of karma that was as dim as a candlelight.

“I don’t know if it’s because we’re inside the monster but it’s unstable. If you understand, good luck!”

Choi Hyuk didn’t wait for a reply and ran down the wyvern’s body.

“Uahhh…”

Fortunately, since Lee Jinhee was experienced in parkour, she was confident in hanging on.

‘Wait? If I didn’t know parkour, would I not have been dragged

here in the first place?'

With mixed feelings, Lee Jinhee stabilized her body with her two feet and started to carve the wyvern's flesh. She first needed to create a stable foothold.

"Ah damn... The blade doesn't even cut. Its. Flesh. Well."

Stab! Stab! Stab!

She let her anger out on the wyvern but it only resulted in her hands hurting more.

**

The main army thought optimistically of the suicide squad's fight since, from the beginning, their intention was to hold the wyvern back, not to kill it. Everyone besides Choi Hyuk thought that this was the case. Although there were times when the fight would splash onto them, it wasn't to the point where they couldn't handle it. It was still acceptable.

"Push! Soon the Weakening Barriers will become nullified!"

Kang Dongsoo shouted.

1 hour and 40 minutes had passed since the announcement had popped up. There were still 20 minutes left before the Weakening

Barriers would become nullified. Though the Wyvern of Destruction wasn't affected by the barrier, they had to at least kill more of the 200,000 monsters before the barrier lost its effect.

This desperation united them.

It was the same for those kings under Jung Minji who didn't want to spearhead the operation.

"Bastards!"

Even the extreme self-preservationist, the Pig King Ma Dongshik, stood on the frontlines with a shield and axe splitting monsters' heads. The Student King Min Kyungchul charged forward with the elite troops and broke through the enemy lines. The king who used to hide in the assembly area and whine to Jung Minji supported their backs. They even created a retreat route for Min Kyungchul who headed deep into the enemy lines.

All of them had become warriors who were used to fighting. They fought together as one. The past 30 days might have helped them differentiate when they should be political and when they should be wildly fighting.

"Damn it! You're telling me I have to fight again after doing this shit? Fuck, just wait and see what happens if you forget your promise! Fuck!"

The Pig King Ma Dongshik loudly mumbled to himself so others

could hear. With an “Urk!”, he pushed back a Bladed Ghost and embedded his axe in its head. Even 2-star monsters became weaker inside Weakening Barriers.

“Hey, hyungnim, are you a tsundere? Why are you like this when you were eventually going to do it anyways?”

It was the Slave King Song Simin who was shamelessly passing by. Song Simin held a large shield and behind him stood Yoon Girim with a determined expression. She held a two-handed sword that was as long as a spear.

“Why is she fighting next to the Slave King when she’s with us?”

An executive of Jung Minji’s troops, Kwon Saehyuk, clicked his tongue. However, Jung Minji looked at it optimistically. Since Yoon Girim became brighter and was even able to fight well when she was with Song Simin.

Song Simin would block with his shield and Yoon Girim would stab from behind. It looked like Song Simin trained her well as her unhesitating actions were quite good.

While Jung Minji was vacantly looking at her, Song Simin gave her a wink.

Everyone was fighting with their lives on the line. Even the cowardly Yoon Girim.

“Now that’s more like it.”

Jung Minji who was sweating profusely in her helmet smiled.

Three hours had passed since the war began. The humans had just obtained the escape code. They automatically obtained the escape code when they stepped into a suspicious looking golden puddle located in the center of the park.

[Escape code obtained.]

A light came down from the sky along with the message. A small wing was added onto the king’s unique symbols. In Jung Minji’s case, a blazing wing appeared on the right side of the bloody knight.

“Hoo…”

Jung Minji caught her breath and lifted her right fist.

“Uahhhhh!”

The escape code. For the past month, everyone only had the escape code on their minds.

‘I have to leave this horrific Kangdong District.’

‘Who knows, it might be peaceful outside of Kangdong District.’

‘I wonder what happened to my friends?’

They had finally survived and grasped the escape code in their hands.

The progress of the war was looking good.

The army of 200,000 monsters had scattered and the suicide squad was still blocking the Wyvern of Destruction. 13 people had died in the suicide squad... If you looked at how there were no casualties for the last 2 weeks, it was a big loss but in the grand scheme of things, it was quite small.

‘Time to go back.’

That was the thought on everyone’s mind.

And.

Riing! Riiing!

With the sound of a siren, red lasers shot up from different places. Everyone knew without being told.

“... Rescue signals.”

Were there still this many survivors? Red laser shot up from all over Kangdong District. With the ominous sound of the siren and red flashes, Jung Minji's heart tightened in terror. Signals that erupted from everywhere. Cries for help. This was able to make Jung Minji feel like she was in hell.

She couldn't delay it any longer.

"Let's go."

Jung Minji unsheathed her sword and took the lead.

"Urk... Ah, fuck..."

Even though the Pig King Ma Dongshik ground his teeth, he still followed behind. He even shouted with great force.

"Let's go! To save everyone!"

The forces under Bae Jinman's command stood next to Jung Minji. They were the spearhead. The army of 90,000 who had survived the fierce battle advanced towards the nearest rescue signal.

'You better endure.'

Jung Minji glanced at the suicide squad fighting the Wyvern of

Destruction one last time before charging through the monsters.

The fight was much harder than they had thought. The Weakening Barriers had lost their effect and they were completely exhausted after fighting for such a long period of time. They were diligently drinking potions but there was a limit to that.

Obviously, there were a variety of people who sent rescue signals. There were children who were hiding in the sewers but there were also adults who hid in assembly areas only caring for their own safety and delinquents who hunted humans rather than monsters.

The army quickly began to tire.

“This, it’s too difficult to go around all of Kangdong District,”

Suggested the Student King Min Kyungchul.

“We already talked about this.”

“… The losses of our troops are the highest. And, honestly, I don’t know why we need to spill blood for those pathetic bastards.”

Min Kyungchul said roughly while pointing to the rescued people. The children were fine but there were guys who called themselves adults who were passive towards fighting. They only asked, “So aren’t we going to get the escape code?” with obvious intentions.

“There are children.”

“… So let’s just search half the district. This isn’t something we can do with our strength. Even if we rescue people, they don’t help with our overall strength.”

Frustrated, Min Kyungchul looked at Song Simin. He only shrugged his shoulders.

Park Solam who was Jung Minji’s executive and dedicated supporter, stepped forward. As an ethics teacher, she received a lot of respect from students.

“Student King Min Kyungchul’s words are valid. However… isn’t this the time to use a bit more strength? Are there any forces besides ours who can rescue the isolated children?”

As she said that, another executive, Kwon Saehyuk, added in.

“The Crazy Knight King’s decisions haven’t been wrong until now.”

The members of her troops who were with her since Hanyoung High School had complete trust in her. Since she was the one who survived after taking down a countless number of strong individuals.

It was these people who made Jung Minji's dictatorship possible. Jung Minji's bodyguards. Their strength was extraordinary.

"Haa..."

Min Kyungchul only sighed.

"I'm sorry. I will definitely repay this favor."

Jung Minji sincerely said to Min Kyungchul. Min Kyungchul replied with a complicated expression.

"Do what you want."

Their small break concluded. The troops once again prepared to march. The sky was still red. The sky was embroidered with red lasers and the siren continued to ring.

Jung Minji felt like she would go crazy just listening to the sirens. One's rescue signal would bring out a certain girl inside her. A girl covered with blood who didn't receive any help. A foolish bitch who waited for someone's help. She recalled the despair of a damned bitch.

Jung Minji felt like her mind was becoming distant. She couldn't stop it. No matter how shitty it was, she had to go save them.

"Minji, are you alright?"

That moment, Yoon Girim approached her.

Park Solam and Kwon Saehyuk who always kept a close guard around her were unconcerned with her appearance. Because of that.

“Here, drink this.”

When Yoon Girim handed Jung Minji a water bottle she was about to drink and when Jung Minji grinned before gulping down the bottle and even the next scene, they were all too natural.

“You fought well.”

Perhaps this was the first compliment she gave Yoon Girim… and her last.

Jung Minji lifted her head to take another drink.

Cough!

“Huh?”

Jung Minji felt like her throat was burning. A burning something spewed from her mouth.

“Cough…?”

Bloody foam rose up from her mouth. She lost all strength in her legs.

“Yoon Girim?”

The ethics teacher Park Solam was taken back. A long spear-like sword pierced through her throat.

Splash!

Blood splattered into the air. It felt unreal.

‘Ah… Yoon Girim backstabbed me.’

Only then did Jung Minji realized what had happened.

The Slave King Song Simin held the blood-stained longsword as he patted Yoon Girim’s head. He shouted.

“You can’t let one bastard we discussed in the morning get away!”

Yoon Girim stood next to him as she shouted at Jung Minji with bloodshot eyes.

“You told me to kill whatever I was scared of!”

It was the words Jung Minji had said to her. Jung Minji wanted to reply but her throat felt like it was melting and no voice came out.

‘So I was that scary… damn bitch.”

Thump.

Jung Minji’s body fell to the floor. The rain-stained sky reflected in her eyes.

There was no one who could help her.

‘So tiresome.’

She thought about when she sent her one and only father to a mental hospital and afterwards when she reported her uncle who had sexually assaulted her. Even then, it was like this.

Because there wasn’t anyone who would help her, besides herself…

Her biggest enemy was her foolishness that was waiting for someone’s help.

‘You did good. Bitch…’

It wasn’t certain if she was saying that to Yoon Girim or herself. She wanted to say those words but the sounds escaped through the side of her throat.

Then she suddenly felt at peace. ‘Whatever, the world’s fucked up anyways,’ and her thoughts travelled to Choi Hyuk and the 100 members of the suicide squad… before cutting off.

Slide.

The troop that was known to be dominating even among the allied forces. Jung Minji’s troops had somehow increased to 5,000 people, but now the bloody knight that stood above their heads disappeared.

“Retreat! Retreat!”

And the forces under Jung Minji started to retreat. This happened 4 hours after the war had begun.

The exodus (mass departure) had begun.

Chapter 32: The King Without Subjects

“What? Just what happened?”

“Just shut up and follow. We’re all fucked.”

“Jung Minji died? Why?”

“Ah geez…!”

“I mean it doesn’t make sense.”

“Haa… Song Simin betrayed her.”

“Song Simin? But, what about her guards? He went passed them?”

“Yoon Girim backstabbed her.”

“Yoon Girim?!”

“Ah geez…! Don’t talk so loud. Can’t you read the mood?”

“… But how does that make sense? Why would Yoon Girim? No, is that even possible? Jung Minji’s Endurance was pierced?”

“Yoon Girim’s always around Song Simin these days. She probably reached 1-star and Jung Minji’s Endurance probably didn’t hit 2-star yet… With stat buffs from items, do you think she won’t be able to pierce that? You can’t even endure D rank (2-star) weapons with 1-star Endurance.”

“But still… What about her Recovery stat?”

“She specifically cut her throat. Blood was gushing out. The speed of her brain shutting down was probably faster than her recovery.”

“… Fuck…”

“It’s not like it’s a game… If your vitals are pierced, no matter how strong you are, you’re dead. Because Jung Minji knew that, she always brought guards with her… Chu Youngjin going to the suicide squad probably had a lot to do with it. If it was Chu Youngjin, he wouldn’t have taken his eyes away even if it was Yoon Girim.”

“Fuck… Her death was so sudden.”

“Shut up and get your mind straight. We don’t have the escape code anymore. That was granted to those with the symbols of the kings.”

“Ah, right!”

“That’s why, let’s quickly follow them!”

“You… Don’t tell me you’re going to stick to Song Simin?”

“It’s fucked upbut what can I do? Other troops are full and I don’t know any of them. Song Simin is probably the best choice.”

“Ha… still.”

“Hey! Geez! If you’re going to be like that, why don’t you just go to Kang Dongsoo!”

“… Fuck…”

With Jung Minji’s death, 5,000 people had lost the escape code. Jung Minji’s former followers had no choice but to defect to other troops and around 3,000 followed Song Simin. People he had secretly planted beforehand had persuaded others. From the start, the majority didn’t know what exactly happened and those who did justified themselves.

“I gave you a chance. Didn’t I tell you? That she wouldn’t listen to the whole ‘half of the district’ shit.”

Song Simin said while looking at the Student King Min Kyungchul.

Min Kyungchul bitterly nodded his head.

"... Yeah."

Jung Minji's troops dispersed and many groups followed Song Simin's lead and broke away from the war.

This scene made other forces fall into a state of confusion.

"What the? What's happening in the front? Did something happen to the Crazy Knight King?"

"Was it an ambush? Monsters? There's a hole in the spearhead!"

To the forces who were behind them, it looked like the spearhead was ambushed and had become chaotic.

Just then, hordes of monsters appeared. Few tens of thousands. This many wasn't a big deal but with the chaotic spearhead, the hordes of monsters seemed larger and more overwhelming. They believed that what they saw wasn't everything.

The solders fell into a state of fear. Their karma was almost spent, the ranks were disordered and their spirits had hit rock bottom.

A frightened army was no army. Just like the times when a few hundred soldiers armed with cannons and guns defeats an army of tens of thousands with melee weapons.

Even if they considered that the fact they became stronger over the past 30 days, they were still ordinary civilians who had never killed not too long ago. They weren't able to calm themselves after becoming panicked. They just couldn't muster up the courage to fight.

Commanders were also unable to understand the situation.

"Damn... just what the hell happened? Just what happened for them to be routed? Shit... if we take a wrong step, we'll all die. Let's retreat!"

The Alliance of Comrades in Arms were the quickest to come to a decision. Once they decided to retreat, other forces started to follow suit. A long line of groups started their retreat.

"No! If we retreat, what happens to the suicide squad?!"

Bae Jinman proposed they help the suicide squad, however, the forces under his command refused.

"Right now, we need worry about ourselves. Other troops are leaving. We can't be the only ones who go back!"

The group of humans couldn't come back after falling into a state of confusion. Like flames, chaos bred more chaos. There wasn't even a chance to do anything. It all happened in an instant.

‘How did it become like this so suddenly?’

Even among Bae Jinman’s troops, there were some who fled from the ranks. They had already obtained the escape code. They didn’t fear becoming outcasts. If people fled, others would flee as well. Kangdong District was already bustling with monsters. Mass panic spread rapidly.

However, Bae Jinman didn’t give up. It was his personality.

“We still need to go back! I’ll even go back by myself!”

“I’m sorry.”

The person who directed Bae Jinman’s guards crammed Bae Jinman under his armpit. Bae Jinman, who had lost all his strength after Karma Grant, couldn’t resist.

“Retreat!!”

Eventually, even Bae Jinman’s troops retreated. If they properly understood what was going on, they would have gone to the suicide squad… but the situation had progressed so ridiculously.

**

The support battalion who pushed back the surrounding monsters, the support troops who shot the Extraordinary Dragon

Cannons and the suicide squad all fell into state of confusion. As the main army retreated, more and more monsters gathered nearby. Of course, they didn't know why.

"Block them! If the monsters reach the support troops, we're done!"

The distinction between troops began to fade.

It was a free-for-all. The support troops started to shoot cannonballs at the oncoming monsters and not the wyvern. Even some suicide squad members turned around to block the monsters.

"Fuck! We have to retreat! Call the King without Subjects!"

"He won't listen! That bastard's done for!"

There were even some troops who left Choi Hyuk who was fighting the Wyvern of Destruction behind and retreated.

"Hey! What the fuck! You can't leave in the middle of a fight! What about the King without Subjects?!"

"I called him but what can I do if he doesn't listen?"

"Let him be! He said he'll hold the wyvern back!"

Among the suicide squad, a portion stood next to Choi Hyuk until the end and another portion, due to them holding the wyvern back, hurriedly retreated.

It was utter chaos, however, that didn't affect Choi Hyuk as he became more immersed into the fight.

'If I want to create an opportunity to attack, I need to move one step faster.'

Just as he thought this, Choi Hyuk discovered a new method. He tossed away his method of using karma like muscles. He shot a string of karma at a target and contracted it like a rubber band.

[After endless consideration, you have realized a new way to use karma. Retribution Points increased by 10.]

Choi Hyuk didn't even read the message.

Swoosh!

Following the contracting karma, his body shot forward and his vision instantly shifted. His body was so fast that it left afterimages.

Crash!

The wyvern's foot stomped down too late. Choi Hyuk sliced into

the wyvern’s ankle.

‘I need to be faster.’

This time, Choi Hyuk elongated all the karma in his body and coiled it up. The coiled karma circulated his body.

[After endless consideration, you have realized a new way to use karma. Retribution Points increased by 30.]

Swoosh!

The coiled karma gathered below his feet and, like a spring, bounced Choi Hyuk high up into the air.

Swish!

He released karma around the Predator’s Blade and formed a blade of karma.

His 3-star Control stat let him freely manipulate karma. Choi Hyuk’s movements slowly broke past his physical limits.

He wasn’t an existence who moved with his arms and legs anymore and had became one who moved with karma. Karma wasn’t supporting his body anymore, instead, his body was supporting his karma. The karma in his body continuously changed its form.

At some point, Choi Hyuk had forgotten the world. His eyes didn't see the escaping suicide squad members nor the ones who staked their lives to fight the monsters. His ears didn't hear the shouts of Baek Seoin. Choi Hyuk had completely erased everything besides himself and the Wyvern of Destruction.

Pabapak!

Boom!

Zip!

Choi Hyuk's movements kept getting quicker. Just when you thought he jumped up into the air, he was already on the ground and when you thought he slashed the wyvern's left ankle, he was already hanging onto its right thigh.

Batatak! Bam!

Chiiiiii!

The wyvern's black blood continuously dropped onto the ground. It was a black rain.

However, the wyvern's stamina and recovery abilities were incredible so the rate it was wounded and the rate it healed were similar.

[Kuaalaalaalaa!]

The Wyvern of Destruction blew flames and Choi Hyuk actually headed into the flames. The fog-like karma that was released from the Predator's Blade protected him from the flames.

Puah!

Choi Hyuk pierced through the flames and had jumped up to the wyvern's head which was lowered to blow flames. He stabbed its eye with a transparent blade made of karma.

[Keahhhhhh!]

A frightening cry. Blue flames surged out of its wounded eye. Choi Hyuk who had been shaken of by the wyvern's shaking head landed on the ground and immediate drank a Karma Recovery Potion. The karma that had become heavy and sluggish became taut once more.

Just like how Choi Hyuk's eyes only saw the Wyvern of Destruction, the wyvern only concentrated on Choi Hyuk. It vented its rage and resentment. The moment Choi Hyuk was hit, the fight would end but Choi Hyuk wouldn't give it the chance.

Black rain continued to fall. The asphalt dissolved and the dirt beneath melted into glass.

How many hours or days they fought, Choi Hyuk had forgotten everything.

The more he fought, the more he admired the wyvern's strength. The bastard didn't fall. The wounds he inflicted had all healed. Its attacks were so swift and precise that his hair would stand on end even as he dodged it.

So Choi Hyuk realized his own strength. His strength that was able to go toe to toe with the wyvern.

A fierce joy wrapped his body. For a fight be this exciting.

Choi Hyuk fully demonstrated his abilities. He found new ways to fight as he fought. He developed and utilized better methods of manipulating karma in real time.

Fight! Let's fight more!

Thump! Thump! His heart beat rapidly. The Predator's Blade sliced into its flesh. The blood that flowed from the wound was absorbed by the Predator's Blade. The already black sword became darker.

As it absorbed the blood, the burden on his body and the exhaustion of his karma were relieved. Adding to that, Choi Hyuk drank another Karma Recovery Potion. Ping! Then, he once again shot forward and carved the wyvern's thigh.

A heightened excitement that made him feel as though he could fight for days! The cells in his body seemed to awaken.

After a time, the wyvern's recovery started to slow. More and more wounds accumulated on the wyvern. Its blood flowed out like waterfalls. The clothes Choi Hyuk wore had become destroyed and a portion of his hair and brows had been burnt to crisp.

The wyvern became sluggish but that was the same for Choi Hyuk. The Predator's Blade's bloodsucking ability and potions were maintaining his karma and body but their effect was slowly decreasing due to possible overuse.

'I have to cut its bones.'

Choi Hyuk felt it was time to win. Now, when the karma that filled the wyvern's body had weakened.

Could he cut it? No, he had to. If they continued to draw out this fight, the one to collapse first would be Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk calmed his breath.

'Stronger...'

As he resolved himself, he discovered a different method.

He compressed his karma into his lower abdomen, the so-called

dantian. He coiled and twisted all his karma and placed it where the dantian was located. The centrifugal and centripetal forces created by his karma opposed each other in his dantian. His karma wriggled like a newborn star. A beating heart of karma!

[You have discovered the fundamentals of the karma organ yourself! Retribution Points increased by 50!]

Choi Hyuk was unaware how ridiculous his current actions were. His mind was only filled up with thoughts on how to take down the wyvern.

Choi Hyuk released a small portion of his condensed karma. The thinly stretched karma attached itself onto the wyvern's right leg. Its left leg was in the air, ready to stomp on Choi Hyuk.

Bang!

The moment he was about to recall the release karma, he leaned his body forward.

Pak!

He disappeared, leaving an afterimage. It was like short-distance teleportation. Choi Hyuk's body closed in on the wyvern's right foot. He manipulated the karma in his dantian again.

Bang!

The karma released from his dantian was like compressed gas as it shot past his arms and out his sword. It returned the instant it shot out.

Unlike the previous blade of karma that flowed slowly, this one was like a torrent, it accelerated as it shot out.

Riip!

The ligament of the wyvern's right leg was cut.

[Kuaalaalaa!!]

The wyvern let out a cry. As if an enormous mountain was falling, it fell to its knees. Stepping on its thigh and back, Choi Hyuk jumped up to its neck. As it had already consumed a huge amount of karma, the karma that had protected its skin and bones had become faint.

Choi Hyuk pushed the karma that was gathered in his dantian towards his wrist.

"Guahh!"

As he endured the pain erupting from his wrists, he swung his sword at the wyvern's neck. The moment he swung, a tempest broke out from his hands. The blade of karma spread out like the

rays of a morning sun.

Chop! Slash!

The wyvern’s head was as large as a 3-story building.

Booom!

Its head fell to the ground. Its flesh was ripped and bones were shattered.

[An unbelievable achievement! Granted 200 Retribution Points. Granted 100 free karma points. Obtained Qualifications to be a Sovereign 3/3. Granted Sovereign Trait.]

———————

[Congratulations to the King without Subjects for his Sovereign Awakening]

A sovereign is originally a position for those who command a massive army and leads a nation.

However, the path of a sovereign is also reserved for those who overturn situations as a one-man army.

This is the rule of the King without Subjects.

The most difficult trial the King without Subject faces to obtain his Qualifications to be a Sovereign.

We pay our respects to you who has tread that hardship.

-You are able to accept an unlimited number of followers.

-You have obtained the qualifications to be the representative of humans

——————————

[As a reward for the corpse of the Wyvern of Destruction, the [Flame Wing tribe's Karma Heart Discipline' has been passed down.]

A constant flow of messages. They weren't the frightening messages of the past. In fact, the sovereign awakening message was even courteous.

"Hahaha..."

Choi Hyuk couldn't contain his laughter. He flopped onto the ground laughing. A black hill was collapsed in front of him. Choi Hyuk had personally taken down that mountain, that enormous dragon. He laughed again.

He was happy.

It was the first time he had such an enjoyable fight and it was also the first time he felt such a happy victory.

Choi Hyuk looked up at the sky. The rain-stained curtain that covered the sky. The gradually fading wyvern corpse. Everything was pleasant.

‘I won! I beat my opponent who I thought I would lose to! I was stronger!’

Choi Hyuk had never truly felt danger his whole life.

When he fought 5 middle schoolers as an elementary schooler and when he received a blow from Kang Minho before he was distributed karma, even when he first fought a crook, he never thought he would lose.

However, this time was different. He fought desperately and won.

Choi Hyuk himself didn’t know that he was this strong.

“Ouahhhhhhh!!!”

Ecstasy surged out from deep within him as he let out a roar. He wanted to boast and only then did he look at his surroundings. He wanted to share this joy. He was proud of and felt close to the suicide squad just because they had fought with him. He felt like he could even bombard them with kisses on their foreheads.

‘A trait of the sovereign is that I can accept an unlimited number of followers, right?’

If it was possible, he wanted to accept them all as followers. He just wanted to. Since he was just so happy.

However,

“… Huh?”

He couldn’t see anyone no matter where he looked.

Everyone had died. Corpses of monsters and members of the suicide squad were scattered everywhere. Besides the panicked members of the suicide squad, support battalion and support troops who retreated, the remaining loyal members had all died in battle.

However, it was hard for Choi Hyuk who had forgotten his surroundings and was immersed in the fight to figure out what happened. He only thought everyone had died.

“… Everyone’s dead? Lee Jinhee!! Baek Seoin!!!”

Choi Hyuk called out for his followers. As expected, there was no reply.

“Ha…”

All of a sudden, Choi Hyuk felt lonely. This was very unfamiliar feeling.

Though he was victorious and had awakened as a true

sovereign…

He was still the ‘King without Subjects’.

“… Everyone’s so weak…”

His bitter words echoed out through the corpse-filled ruins.

Just then, a woman fell from the disappearing wyvern corpse.

“Cough! Cough! Cough! Wh… what the?”

The woman who seemed to have passed out and had stood up while coughing was Lee Jinhee. She had continuously chopped the wyvern’s flesh inside its thigh.

Choi Hyuk vacantly looked at her. Then,

“Whoa! Looks like you won?”

Baek Seoin ran towards them from afar. As Choi Hyuk stared at him,

“I got a bad feeling and hid in the middle of the fight. Just in case you misunderstand, it wasn’t just me! Did you know because of your fierce battle, even the nearby monsters fled?”

The master of survival, Baek Seoin, laughed awkwardly.

Choi Hyuk's lips reeled up to reveal a smile.

Finally, there was one more survivor.

"Grrr!"

Though Choi Hyuk didn't remember, there was a warrior who hung onto the wyvern's leg until the end, Chu Youngjin. Although his organs were injured after getting kicked by the wyvern, he was able to survived with the power of [Berserker]'s 'regenerative' ability. Choi Youngjin slowly lifted his body.

"Haha..."

Choi Hyuk laughed. He didn't know what happened. He didn't know why the suicide squad was annihilated but, in any case, he wasn't alone. This fact alone made him happy.

Choi Hyuk said with an embarrassed expression.

"I won."

It was a voice filled with pride, like the ones of his fellow high schoolers.

The King without Subjects who everyone thought would die had survived. Stronger than before.

Author's Notes:

1. I am sorry I am late. It was hard to cut it into parts so it became longer. It's 8,500 characters. T^T

2. There were a lot of comments yesterday. I would like to think that it is because of the affection you have for my work. Looking at the comments about the setting, I came to the conclusion that my explanations were lacking. I elaborated a bit in this chapter but I am unsure if how well it came out.

There is one thing I would like to request.

I would like my readers to refrain from using crude words. It is because there is no phrase more frightening to a writer than "Don't read if you don't like it."

Since I am quite mentally strong, I don't get very depressed from criticism. This is because I know that I won't be able write beyond my writing skills even if I torment myself. Only if I can improve, I will try to do so even if it is one step at a time. Thank you for all your suggestions and advice.

3. I slightly change the motif of each episode.

New World's was 'Battle Royale' and Exodus's were 'The Romance of the Three Kingdoms' and 'Game of Thrones'.

The next episode is planned to be of the martial arts genre. Please look forward to some cool action scenes.

However, this work will eventually be a story of a sovereign. Please look forward to that as well.

4. Once again, I am sorry for releasing this chapter late.

Episode 3: Age Of Ghosts

Chapter 33: Break Time (1)

“Did you hear? They say people came out from Kangdong District!”

“Really? Are they okay?”

“Search for their pictures. They are so savage.”

“Just what happened… Holy shit. They have swords and armor…”

“Whoa… They say that people came out from Seongbuk District and Mapo District too. Just what happened inside?”

“That we don’t know…”

“Then I wonder if the missing military will come back?”

“I don’t know… Fuck, I just wish all this ends quickly. No one is able to do anything and the world is becoming a mess.”

**

Choi Hyuk was completely exhausted but due to Baek Seoin’s Intuition, they were able to escape without difficulty.

As soon as they escaped from Kangdong District, a message appeared.

[After a 3-day break, your mission will begin.]

To be happy about having a break or to despair at the fact that they had another mission...

“Ah, what. There’s more?”

Lee Jinhee, who was sort of hoping that everything would end after they escaped Kangdong District, kicked the ground in irritation.

“Of course. Do you think they gave us this power for nothing? They probably gave it to us because there’s some reason.”

Said Baek Seoin as if it was obvious, however, his voice couldn’t help but contain a bit of disappointment.

Chu Youngjin didn’t say a word.

The scene of the city in front of them... was unfamiliar.

“This place is fine.”

Stated Baek Seoin. Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Really…”

When Choi Hyuk scanned the city, he couldn’t help but think that perhaps his mother was okay after all.

“Uhh? He’s…”

“The King without Subjects.”

As Choi Hyuk’s group exited the transparent wall, the people nearby started to murmur. Choi Hyuk’s group had escaped a day later than the others. It was partly due to the fact that they started late and also because they had to take a longer path to avoid monsters.

“I don’t see any policemen or soldiers.”

Baek Seoin was right. They didn’t see any military power that could maintain order. At least, the fire department seemed to have taken that role. However, they weren’t able to properly control the situation. There was no way that civilians without any firearms could face warriors who had karma. Even if they tried to investigate what had actually happened, the survivors would get pissed off if they didn’t receive food, clothes, living quarters and other things.

The kings of each group had gone to a meeting with the president last night and hadn’t come out yet.

“Jung Minji’s words might actually be right.”

Choi Hyuk recalled Jung Minji’s speculation that the police and military might be on their own mission. Just where were they and what were they doing? It could even be that the mission they would receive after the break would have something to do with them.

Thinking about it, Choi Hyuk felt bad. It was expected. For Jung Minji to die and for her death to be so unpleasant.

When Chu Youngjin first told him that Jung Minji might have died, Choi Hyuk felt his mind go blank.

He was indifferent about the deaths of others until now. He didn’t really feel sad. Perhaps his indifference was because he didn’t think others as his equal which was why their deaths never heavily impacted him emotionally.

While the annihilation of the suicide squad did send ripples in his heart, he was more dispirited than sad. An ‘everyone is so weak…’ loneliness.

But, Jung Minji’s death was different. He couldn’t believe it and when he heard it, he was really shocked. It was because Choi Hyuk had accepted her as his equal. It wasn’t because she was good at fighting but because she was strong as a person.

She was able to see things that he couldn't see and was able to move people in ways he couldn't. When he cooperated with her, Choi Hyuk felt his back was covered. For her to have died in vain, Choi Hyuk felt sad. He had thought that he would be able to continue to cooperate with her in the future...

However, Choi Hyuk hurriedly forgot about his sadness. As there were much more pressing matters.

"What are you all going to do?"

Choi Hyuk asked them...

"I don't have anywhere to go."

Baek Seoin's reply.

"I'm going to come back after seeing my mom."

Lee Jinhee.

"... I have nowhere to go."

Chu Youngjin.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head and said.

“I have to go somewhere so I’ll be back. Let’s meet back here tomorrow or the day after.”

“Where are you going?”

“To find my mom. At Seongbuk District.”

“Ah…”

Baek Seoin wordless grabbed Choi Hyuk’s shoulder, hoping for the best.

The group went on the main road between the tents. It became noisier where they passed. People who were walking hurriedly made way. Public officials who watched this tilted their heads in curiosity.

Choi Hyuk occasionally felt fear and anxiety in the people’s gazes.

‘Yeah, you guys probably have a guilty conscience.’

However, he decided not to care about it now. His mother was first.

Choi Hyuk separated from his comrades and kicked the ground.

Bang!

With a single leap, he was able to jump tens of meters.

“He got even stronger…”

Said someone with a terrified expression.

“Wha.. What the!”

The spectating public officials had lost sight of Choi Hyuk and were looking around frantically. In their eyes, it looked like Choi Hyuk had just vanished.

**

When he arrived at Hyehwa Station, he kicked the ground.

Crash!!

The ground exploded. The surrounding people freaked out as they moved back but Choi Hyuk didn’t have the time to care about them.

“Fucking bastards…”

On his way to Hyehwa, he was quite happy. The city was quite

unscathed and the hope that his mother was still alive inflated in his chest.

However, when he arrived at Seongbuk District, he felt suffocated. A transparent wall. It was the same as the one he saw in Kangdong District. It meant one thing – his mother had to participate in the game of death.

It felt like his stomach was being scraped with a blade. Would he even be able to find any news about her? Would she have died without leaving any traces?

His imagination went off and Choi Hyuk was about to go crazy.

He frantically looked for someone and asked.

“Have you seen someone called Choi Miyeon? She’s in her mid-forties.”

When he spoke her name, a bitter taste rose to his mouth. His mother who had cared for him as a single mother. This was why Choi Hyuk used his mother’s last name instead of his father’s without anyone’s knowledge.

The person who shared his last name. His only family. Even while he said her name, he was already partly in despair.

However, he received an unexpected reply.

“Choi Miyeon... Choi Miyeon? Huh? Where have I heard about her? Choi Miyeon... mid-forties... Ah! Are you talking about the saintess?”

This was the reply of the first person he asked.

If there was the Guardian Bae Jinman of Kangdong District, then there was the Saintess Choi Miyeon of Seongbuk District.

Choi Hyuk was able to find news about his mother without much difficulty.

**

A [Ring of Rebirth] had appeared in Choi Miyeon’s office.

“Assistant Manager Kang... please come up.”

Lee Kyungsoo, who was a new recruit, called out to Assistant Manager Kang. Though Assistant Manager Kang would beat and push Lee Kyungsoo around in and out of the company, physically, he was no match for the new recruit.

While Lee Kyungsoo was over 180cm tall and a martial artist who had practiced kickboxing since young, Assistant Manager Kang was a clumsy person who had just barely exceed 160cm and had no history of playing any sports.

“Uh… Uh, why are you like this? Kyungsoo! It’s me, your hyung! I’m Assistant Manager Kang.”

Thud, thud. As he approached the ring as if being pulled by something, Assistant Manager Kang pleaded for mercy.

“Shut up and just get up here…”

Lee Kyungsoo had no thoughts of letting him go.

Swoosh! Thud!

However, a person pushed Assistant Manager Kang away and jumped up onto the ring.

A woman in her forties. It was Choi Miyeon.

“Ah… Chief Designer, why?”

Lee Kyungsoo who had no intentions of killing a woman fell into a dilemma. To this Lee Kyungsoo, Choi Miyeon sternly said.

“Don’t do this.”

“Even if you say that… there’s nothing I can do if I want to live. And Assistant Manager Kang has nothing to say even if I beat him

to death. Please go down. Ah... you can't go down? Ah fuck, why did you have to come up...!"

Lee Kyungsoo was suddenly irritated. He felt that he wouldn't feel guilty if he killed Assistant Manager Kang but why did Chief Designer Choi Miyeon have to step in? She had even treated him nicely up until now.

"Let's not fight."

"Ah, then what do you want me to do?! Do you want all of us to just die?"

"Yeah. Let's do that."

"What?"

Lee Kyungsoo looked at Choi Miyeon as if she was crazy.

However, Choi Miyeon tried to persuade him with a strong belief.

"I have to kill someone else to live? Then does that mean I should live following the rules like a chess piece? No. We are not puppets. Instead of being forced and living as a puppet... let's just die as humans."

Her voice was low and her eyes were like burning like embers.

Lee Kyungsoo was completely speechless. After being momentarily at loss for words, he opened his mouth full of sarcasm.

“You do that. I don’t want to die.”

And as if he was a bit uncomfortable, he added.

“It’s not my fault. One side has to die when they come up. I never called chief out.”

Lee Kyungsoo swung his fist. As he was trained, it was a blow that contained both karma and skill. However, Choi Miyeon’s reaction was quicker. She avoided his fist, grabbed and pulled his arm and put him down.

Crash!

“Uk? Uk! Let go!”

“I’m not going to let anyone fight.”

Choi Miyeon’s technique was so exquisite that Lee Kyung couldn’t get out no matter how he tried. Every time he tried to escape, the pressure only became stronger. She was strong but her skill was overwhelming.

‘What kind of woman…’

Lee Kyungsoo, whose pride had taken a blow, tried even harder but it was to no use.

An hour had passed with them thrashing about.

A new word appeared above the ring.

[Draw]

Ting!

Choi Miyeon and Lee Kyungsoo were both pushed out of the ring at the same time. People looked at this scene with dumbfounded expressions… It was unreal.

That petite Chief Designer Choi Miyeon who never stopped smiling… suppressed a robust man to the point he couldn’t do anything?

However, even in this situation, there was someone who moved quicker than anyone else. It was Assistant Manager Kang. The Assistant Manager Kang who was about to die by Lee Kyungsoo’s hands and was saved by Choi Miyeon, precisely that Assistant Manager Kang.

“Min Sori! Get up!”

He shouted out like lightning as soon as he entered the ring.

She was the youngest and smallest cute female employee. Min Sori's face paled.

"Move!"

Swoosh! Thud!

But Choi Miyeon entered the ring again. Even while panting, she suppressed Assistant Manager Kang for another hour.

[Draw] [Draw] [Draw]

"Ah! Really! Chief, why are you doing this!"

As time passed, people started to get heated up. They were hungry. They wanted to go to the washroom. They wanted to sleep.

However, Choi Miyeon kept her mouth shut. Even when her internals were injured and blood seeped up to her mouth or when her hair was pulled out and the corner of her eye was ripped or when her ribs were broken, she stubbornly held on and dragged it out to a [draw].

'I still have it.'

She faintly smiled. When she was young, her father would often beat her mother. Choi Miyeon put her life on the line as she tried to stop her father. This was the only time when she had ever faced another person.

‘Now that I think about it, Hyuk might have gotten it from me.’

When she thought about it now, it was possible. When she looked back at how she held her father back even as her body became bloody at such a young age, it was possible. It was the same now. Even Lee Kyungsoo who was known to be good at fighting couldn’t do anything to her.

And that was how 24 hours had passed.

[24 hours have passed since the first match. No more time remaining. A hidden rule has been applied. Choi Miyeon, 11 draws. 7 people attempted to fight, 23 spectators. Calculating karma… final victor Choi Miyeon. Granted a guardian trait.]

That moment, the 30 people who were left in the company turned into light. The shining lights flowed into Choi Miyeon.

Like the hospital, there was a hidden rule in the [Ring of Rebirth].

“Why… why?”

However, she was unable to accept this result. She wanted all of them to survive not just herself.

**

Choi Hyuk heard this story in front of his mother's grave.

At Marronnier Park, there was a burial mound made after removing the paved road. In front of it was an enormous shield. 'The Guardian Choi Miyeon sleeps here after saving Seongbuk District' was engraved onto the shield.

"It seemed the fact that she lived through the deaths of others... always weighed on her mind."

The one who told him the story was one of her admirers.

She who had a guilty conscience for surviving by sacrificing the life of others had used her life to save even more people on the final day. When the Wyvern of Destruction appeared in Kangdong District, a Flaming Devil appeared in Seongbuk District. Choi Miyeon had held the devil back by herself.

At first, her admirers didn't know how she was going to face the devil by herself. Only when they saw the frozen devil and her body collapsed on the ground did they realize she had used her self-sacrifice skill.

The devil didn't die but it was unable to move until everyone had

successfully escaped.

To Choi Hyuk.

It was… very like his mother to die that way.

“Uahhhh!!!”

Choi Hyuk fell to his knees in front of his mother’s tombstone and howled in sorrow.

Embarrassment and guilt overcame him. However… a rage beyond that was devouring his heart.

Thump, thump.

Every time his heart beat, rage gushed out instead of blood.

Though her admirers were gathering near his crying figure… Choi Hyuk wanted to break each of their necks.

‘Why is it that my mother died and you lived?’

To Choi Hyuk, hundreds of millions of these bastards were nothing to his mother’s life. Nonetheless, he forcefully swallowed his rage. Weren’t they lives his mother had died to save?

However, the swallowed rage burned his throat and his chest. He felt like he would die. He wasn't able to breathe unless he settled this rage.

'Ah...'

...Now that he thought about it, there was a great target to take it out on.

'Yeah... if the main army didn't retreat then the suicide squad wouldn't have been annihilated. And who retreated the army? Who left the suicide squad out to die? Someone has to pay for it... This is just an appropriate payback.'

It was a decent cause.

Grit.

Choi Hyuk gritted his teeth as he stood up. The admirers who looked at Choi Hyuk with sad eyes all wanted to say something. However, Choi Hyuk left before they could open their mouths.

As he jumped up onto the roof of the Arko Arts Theater, Choi Hyuk inwardly repeated three words like a spell.

'Get angry. Kill. Only then can you kill.'

'Kill. Kill... Kill them.'

Chapter 34: Break Time (2)

It was the same around the world. 5% of the global population experienced the game of death and among them, only a fraction survived. All military and police personnel had also disappeared.

There was a difference between how those who experienced the game of death and those who did not viewed the world. If one side had experienced hell for the past month, the other side had not. In their world, there was great cellphone reception and no ring suddenly appeared in their schools or offices. Only the military and police had disappeared, they lived in a world of common sense without the presence of karma or monsters.

Of course, the absence of the military and police left a huge hole.

There were even sayings that violence was the foundation of countries. Within specific regions, there was no way to create a country without being the strongest or at least one of the strongest. People followed a country's order because they had the power to forcefully penalize them.

That was why the disappearance of the most fundamental foundations of creating a country, the police and military, left an enormous impact.

However, the world didn't suddenly become lawless like in 'Mad Max' and 'Fist of the North Star'. There were some countries like that but in the very least, Korea wasn't one of them. While it was chaotic, sufficient order was present that people still went to work.

These ‘normal people’ who never stood out. However, the ones who preserved this world were these very people. They wished for basic order as soon as possible. Normally they were invisible like air but now that the lid was opened, there were plenty of them. While there were ruffians who wanted to wreck havoc, it wasn’t easy against so many of them.

Countries that had established themselves had the capacity to maintain order. At the end of the Han dynasty, when He Jin, the Ten Attendants and the Yellow Turban Rebellion ran amuck, and even when Dong Zhuo, Lu Bu, Cao Cao and Yuan Shao caused a mess, the Han dynasty did not collapse. It was like that in the past and Korea did not collapse after a month without the police or the military.

Though, to do so, the president had to suffer through quite the headache.

The first thing he did was organize the firefighters, then he reorganized the public officials and made a new military force. “But the weapons have disappeared along with the military!” “Get whatever’s left over and if that’s not enough, arm them with clubs! And if there still aren’t enough, create more! Start producing guns tomorrow, stat! Get your minds out of the gutter!” “Yes!” “Impose martial law and start recruiting reserve troops in order.” “Yes!”

While he was executing those plans, survivors appeared from the locked down Kangdong and Seongbuk districts. They were areas covered by an opaque wall that made it impossible for them to look inside or even enter. Areas that left citizens uneasy.

The president had the responsibility to look into the situation. He called the leaders of the groups over to the Blue House and held a meeting. As the leaders also had to understand what happened outside their areas, they willingly agreed.

**

Choi Hyuk sent Baek Seoin a message. It was a skill he learned after awakening as a ‘sovereign’. He was able to converse with his followers wherever they were.

-You remember how you said you thought that the main army retreated?

-Yes.

-Did you find out what happened?

Baek Seoin hesitated slightly. Choi Hyuk’s voice seemed serious. He seemed so menacing that it was worrying. However, he eventually opened his mouth.

The betrayal of the troops under Jung Minji’s command. Especially the betrayal of Song Simin and Yoon Girim. As it was already an open secret, it wasn’t hard to find out.

-... So that’s what happened. Are they at the Blue House?

Choi Hyuk hung up. Baek Seoin hurriedly called out to him.

-Wait!

-What?

– Don’t tell me you’re just going to kill them right when you get there?

Choi Hyuk didn’t reply. He currently wasn’t normal. He was simply going to the Blue House because they were there. He didn’t have any plans on what he would do when he arrived. It was highly likely he would ‘just kill’ them.

He was silent.

-How many are you going to kill?

-The kings who were under Jung Minji and Yoon Girim.

-And if there is someone who tries to stop you?

-...

Choi Hyuk didn’t reply. However, wouldn’t he kill them as well?

-Then what if the president stops you?

Grit.

Choi Hyuk ground his teeth. His insides were boiling. He started to breathe raggedly, before asking with a slightly trembling voice.

-So what is it that you want to say?

-It's fine that you want to kill them. But we need to at least follow the basic rules and procedures.

-Rules and procedures? There's something like that in a world like this?

-Then you have to make them yourself.

-...

-... Even if the result is the same, there is a difference between having the kings on our side and not... Please give me a day. I'll plan something out.

-How?

-Please wait. I'm on my way. Go to the Blue House with me.

Baek Seoin appeared with a bag full of expensive liquor.

Choi Hyuk didn't have any trouble entering the Blue House as the Guardian Bae Jinman, General Cha Taeshik of the Alliance of Comrades in Arms, the Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung, and others could confirm his identity.

That night, in celebration of Choi Hyuk's return, they shared the liquor amongst themselves.

Then they had a deep conversation with Baek Seoin. He gained their sympathy while understanding the situation. The mood that night was excellent.

"If there are kings from other areas I should notify, who would they be?"

This was the last question that he asked before they were about to leave with bottles of liquor in their hands.

**

The next day.

The meeting took place that day as well.

When the president confirmed that they had superhuman abilities, he had no choice but to try to gain their cooperation. He

attempted to appoint them as generals so as to resolve the situation and the meeting dragged on endlessly as they adjusted the specific details and discussed what they should do next.

"So… what you are saying is that opaque wall could appear again?"

"Yes… As someone who participated in the game, I feel that's possible. The game hasn't ended. In fact, there was even an announcement about a 3-day break. It ends tomorrow."

"… By any chance, if the wall appears again, can the survivors hop over and help them out?"

"That's impossible. We weren't able to re-enter once we came out."

"… This means that if new survivors appear, we need someone to control them."

"Yes. That is correct."

The kings who spoke with the president had already been decided – Song Simin of Kangdong District, Min Jaram of Mapo District and three or four others. Besides them, the other kings only silently listened.

The reason was simple.

Their conversation felt so distant from their reality. The break only lasted 3 days. No one knew what kind of game would start afterwards. The majority of kings felt dizzy listening to their talks of trying to maintain order.

In fact, General Cha Taeshik of the Alliance of Comrades in Arms's 'draft all citizens plan' seemed more realistic. Of course, the president's reaction to that was lukewarm.

So, when Choi Hyuk came out, many kings felt excited. They were able to figure out that something was about to unfold from their talks yesterday night. Though they didn't know exactly what would happen.

That moment was when the president was about to appoint Song Simin to the role. As Song Simin was very cooperative, the president couldn't help but try to appoint him first.

"Then how does Leader Song Simin think about taking the role of maintaining order in the metropolitan area?"

"I oppose."

Choi Hyuk came forward.

Choi Hyuk calmly and respectfully started to speak.

“The president probably is unaware of this but inside that opaque wall is hell.”

Many kings nodded at his words.

“Monsters aren’t the only problem. Humans killed each other frequently.”

This time, even more kings nodded their heads.

“Song Simin was one of them. He betrayed his comrades and schemed to retreat by himself. At that time, he even killed the respected leader, Jung Minji. On top of that, due to their reckless retreat, many people died in vain. The suicide squad who kept the final boss at bay was annihilated. Even I was about to die.”

“Mmmm…”

The president was silent.

Choi Hyuk asked him.

“You aren’t planning on having these people, who fled and left their comrades behind, to take up office, are you?”

General Cha Taeshik added in.

“That’s right! Loyalty is the most important thing during a war!”

The Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung and Bae Jinman chimed in.

“We oppose.”

The president read the atmosphere. He never thought that they would oppose him so directly. He was still the president...

But, that wasn’t the end.

“There is also the grudge Song Simin and I personally need to resolve. It would have been good if we could resolve it after the meeting but since it looks like we’re going to be here the whole break, I will just publicly resolve it now.”

“Pardon? Just what...”

The president felt shivers down his spine. The situation was progressing strangely. However, Choi Hyuk wasn’t looking at him anymore.

“Song Simin.”

“Hey, Choi Hyuk! It looks like there is a misunderstanding...”

Even in this situation, Song Simin smiled friendlily.

Choi Hyuk said one thing.

“Don’t smile, Fucker.”

Song Simin’s face stiffened awkwardly.

“And Ma Dongshik, Yoon Girim, Min Kyungchul and all the kings who were under Jung Minji’s command. I don’t know why you killed her. But, you know…”

He placed his hand on the table as he stood up.

“Don’t you think you need to take responsibility for the deaths of the suicide squad?”

While the kings who were under Jung Minji’s command could only blink, he continued.

“Come out. Let’s end this our way.”

The tension in the room rose. His actions were beyond common sense. To act that way at the Blue House and in front of the president.

If it wasn’t for Baek Seoin going around, explaining the situation and gaining their sympathy last night, someone would have already tried to stop him. However, the majority of the kings were

taking a wait-and-see attitude. ‘What to do?’ Some thought that Choi Hyuk’s actions were too severe and couldn’t understand him. But, they concluded that this was something the ‘people in question’ needed to resolve. Though they were a bit dazed.

Song Simin spoke informally.

“What kind of crazy things are you saying? And in front of the president! If there is a problem, then solve it formally! Let’s stick to the law and have a trial with a judge or something!”

However, his words were so feeble that it might have been better not saying them at all. The word that pierced through their current identity crisis. ‘Law’. Choi Hyuk instantly smashed apart that delusion.

“Law? Puahahaha!”

Choi Hyuk laughed out loud.

An echo.

The meeting room resonated with his laughter as if they were reinforced with karma. The chairs and desks trembled. The president’s face became pale.

This changed the mood.

The other kings were in a state of confusion up until now. Once they had escaped hell, a world that looked complete unscathed was revealed right in front of them. Different from inside where they were kings, the outside still had a functioning society and even a president. Their attitudes reflexively changed back to the ones from before the slaughter game. They felt embarrassed to come forward and they felt like they needed to respect the existing order and power.

Because they felt like they had to act that way, they felt more awkward and frustrated.

Those feelings were all blown away with Choi Hyuk's laughter.

The other kings gradually started to laugh as well. The red haze that had obstructed their vision had instantly cleared up.

The law he said! How amusing that word was.

The law he said! Weren't they kings?

"Wahahahaha!"

The kings started to laugh, shaking their shoulders up and down. The president quickly understood the situation.

'I... let tigers in.'

The people, who were gathered here, weren't people he could control.

Even still, the president said.

"Wait, please wait. Leader Choi Hyuk. I understand your feelings but please believe in the country. If there are any grudges, we will properly investigate and help resolve them."

He knew that this was forcing it but he had no choice. If he didn't do anything now, it was obvious that the survivors would disregard the role of the country. It meant that a country would form within the country.

This was exactly what Baek Seoin was aiming for.

The Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung stepped forward. Just like the conversation he had with Baek Seoin last night.

"I'm sorry, Mr. President. However, this is something that occurred outside the country's reach. This is our problem and it is right that we solve it our way."

They were immature words. It was like children fighting among themselves and saying, 'This is our problem!'. However, these immature words were primitive yet powerful.

'We solve our problems our way.'

At these words that seemed to lodge into their hearts, the kings nodded. The mood seemed to solidify.

"..."

The president was pushed into a corner. The armed security guards nervously looked at the president. He held them back... Force them with firepower? That wasn't an option. Perhaps this situation was expected the moment they refused his request to unarm themselves. They didn't fear bullets. On the other hand, the president was extremely scared of their physical abilities.

'So this is it...'

Perhaps this was an evitable result from the moment the military and police disappeared and tens of thousands of survivors flooded in. A world only for the strong that the government couldn't control. Their order.

Choi Hyuk separated from the president and stared at Song Simin.

"Don't spout useless shit and come out."

Choi Hyuk said without a single trace of a smile.

"Or... should we see some blood right here?"

His menacing voice seemed to drip with blood.

“… Fuck… I had no choice!”

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“No-It’s a very simple problem.”

He unsheathed his sword and aimed at Song Simin.

“If you’re right, then beat me.”

That moment, the kings who didn’t originate from Kangdong District felt strange. Including Song Simin and Yoon Girim, there were 8, on the other hand, wasn’t Choi Hyuk by himself? Why was it that they felt so pressured fighting him?

That secret was revealed soon after.

“… Fuck, get him!”

Along with Song Simin’s frantic last-ditch effort, the other kings raised their swords.

“Soaring Slash.”

Choi Hyuk swung his sword twice.

The air rolled like waves. The waves followed a path and sliced the necks of the kings. As if drawing with a red paintbrush, the red blood spurted out and drew a long line before being absorbed into the black blade.

Splash!

The sound erupted afterwards. Their ears deafened as they heard a ‘Woowoowoo’ sound. Choi Hyuk was still standing on the exact same spot. The space around them became agitated and the kings’ necks slowly dropped onto the floor. A body that was leaned forward flopped onto a desk and its head rolled behind the chair.

Kakakak!

With a loud noise, 2 lines were drawn onto the wall behind the dead kings. It was so cleanly cut that they could clearly see outside.

Everyone’s faces stiffened. No one had seen that technique before. With two slashes, he massacred the 6 kings who stood on either side of Song Simin and Yoon Girim.

“Uh? Huh…?”

Song Simin had a blank face.

“Euahh…”

Yoon Girim flopped onto the floor.

Step. Step.

Choi Hyuk stepped onto the conference room table. He then slowly walked towards them and stopped in front of them.

“Who should have died and who should have lived?”

Choi Hyuk muttered to himself. Song Simin lifted his head and looked at Choi Hyuk. His eyes were blank as if they had been emptied out.

“Pl… please…”

“At the very least, you weren’t one of them.”

Schlit!

It was unknown when he stabbed his sword but Choi Hyuk’s blade was embedded into Song Simin’s neck.

“Kyahh!!”

Yoon Girim’s screaming expression remained as her head was

lopped off. Choi Hyuk momentarily recalled the ‘Bonus Game’ where Jung Minji had piggybacked her and had overcome the life-or-death crisis. His mouth felt bitter.

Choi Hyuk lowered his sword and bowed his head to the other kings.

“I am sorry for causing you trouble.”

Then he bowed toward the president.

“Please forgive my impoliteness. But, I trust that you understand our situation.”

On the surface, it looked like he respected the existing power, however, their own rules applied to the survivors. This was the attitude Choi Hyuk put forward and the one the other kings silently agreed on. A new rule was being created at this very moment.

The president didn’t say a word. He, as well, agreed with silence.

It all started then.

If there was a dispute, it was resolved by a fight between the related parties. It had become a part of their culture. No outsiders tried to assert themselves into their relationship.

Two worlds had formed in one country.

The world was changing at its roots with the return of the survivors.

Chapter 35: Break Time (3)

The president treated the kings as VIPs and even provided them with accommodations. He thought that even if he wasn't able to control the survivors, he could at least cooperate with them. This was because many of the survivors had lost their way of life and he had the power to grant them that.

Of course, he was currently caught up in a chaotic situation where he couldn't predict what would happen next.

After all, there was a chance that all of humanity would have to play the survival game after the break. Why worry about the possibility that their way of life might be ripped apart like paper? The president was a realist who focused on what he could do right at that moment. He aided the survivors as much as he could and even treated the kings especially kindly.

Choi Hyuk showered for the first time in a long while.

The warm water, which endlessly wrapped over his body, felt luxurious.

The smell of clean water, the ivory tiles, the steam-filled room, a faint scent, lighting and even a soft towel. These sensations that he hadn't felt for a long time felt even sweeter and more unfamiliar, making him all the more sensitive.

After donning a robe, he went out and drank an ice cold drink from the fridge. He looked out the window. It was peaceful.

As he became more relaxed, he recalled death.

Shadows danced between the soft and fancy lights.

Screams, pleading voices. The sensation of slicing into flesh. The warmth of blood. And the faces of the dead.

Choi Hyuk repeatedly recalled the deaths of Jung Minji and his mother.

He didn’t personally witness their deaths. Perhaps it was because of this that his mother and Jung Minji’s faces were overlaid on top of the faces of the dead.

His heart felt chilly. He even felt that it was unfair.

When he thought of Jung Minji, he imagined fireworks. A dangerous but brilliantly burning flame. She was fiercer than anyone. Her decisions were never on impulse. She troubled over it, suffered over it and once she decided, she was filled with determination. It didn’t matter if she did good or bad, she lived dazzlingly.

His mother was the same. Choi Hyuk remembered the bundles of design drafts that his mother would bring home. Occasionally, when she was stuck on a certain part, she would explain the sketches to him, flipping through each sketch one at a time. Then, if she suddenly thought of a good idea, she would tie her hair up

and draw throughout the night. When Choi Hyuk asked, “What is ‘design’?” his mother would reply without hesitation, “Design is something that brings more compassion to the world.” He would then fall asleep watching his mother work. That was peace. He didn’t feel the same happiness that came from a rush of adrenaline but it was a comforting peace. The one his mother always wanted to give him. To be calm rather than angry and to be carefree rather than impatient. “Stay still and just breathe. Slowly. Breathe in. And slowly breathe out… That’s good. Listen carefully. What do you hear?” This was something his mother would often say.

“Hoooo….”

Like in the past, Choi Hyuk took a big breath and slowly breathed out. He silently listened.

The world was noisier than one would think. The sound of the water from the shower. The vibrations of the fridge. Sounds from an unknown machine. As he calmly listened to the sounds of the bustling and lively world, his heart became peaceful.

This was his mother’s world. However, since his mother had died, this world had died and disappeared along with her.

He felt this was unfair.

Every living individual had their own unique personality. Jung Minji’s world, his mother’s world, Choi Hyuk’s world and Baek Seoin’s world, none were the same. They were all so different when they lived… they were so different but… when they died, if

they died, they all become the same. A mushy lump of flesh.

Jung Minji became just a lump of flesh? It was hard to believe.

And when he thought about how his mother had become like that as well…

Grit.

An uncontrollable rage surged out.

He had killed 8 people in the meeting but that was only for an instant, his anger basically didn't settle in the slightest. He was angry. His veins bulged.

The calm night had suddenly turned into a large phantom that haunted him. His blood burned. A world where his mother was dead. The animosity from living in such a world made it seem as though each breath he exhaled was poisonous. Every time he breathed the way his mother taught him, the poison just seemed to spread thicker.

So… the reason for his unceasing anger was obvious.

Choi Hyuk hadn't caught the main culprits.

The bastards who created this game. He hadn't even seen their shadows, let alone the names of the bastards he needed to kill.

There was only a single hint.

Thump!

His dantian formed from karma was beating. The karma in his body continuously flowed into his dantian before spreading out again. Each and every cell seemed to be burned by the karma and revitalized. This was a new discipline.

‘The Flame Wing tribe’s Karma Heart Discipline.’

This was the reward he had received after killing the Wyvern of Death. That time it said, [As a reward for the corpse of the Wyvern of Destruction, the [Flame Wing tribe’s Karma Heart Discipline’ has been passed down.] The reward for that gigantic corpse. He didn’t receive any items other than this one discipline.

Choi Hyuk focused on the ‘Flame Wing tribe’ name more than the discipline itself. That tribe... in the very least, wasn’t human. What sort of connection did the Flame Wing tribe have with the creators of this game? Were they the ones in question?

Those thoughts were enough to drive him crazy.

His rage was burning but the amount of information he had was the size of a chick’s tear. He was powerless. He had no way of satisfying his thirst. Choi Hyuk stayed up all night before finally falling asleep late in the early morning.

**

The next day. On the last day of their break, Choi Hyuk met with someone connected to ‘them’.

Biiiiii-

It started with a buzz in his ears. Soon after, a message appeared.

[10 minutes before transfer. Arm yourself.]

Choi Hyuk wordlessly armed himself.

The Blue House provided him with casual clothes but he wore the clothes he obtained from the supplies in Kangdong District instead. Brown pants and a thick ivory shirt. These clothes had a high resistance to monster blood. Regular clothes would melt at the contact of monster blood so he wasn’t able to wear them for a long time.

When he put on the ‘Warrior Boots’, he heard the clanking of leather and steel, and when he wore the ‘Mountain Orc’s Leather Armor’, he felt the tightness of the leather. The three swords he used to carry around had all shattered and now he only had the Predator’s Blade sheathed on his waist. Though he didn’t get a lot of sleep, his condition wasn’t bad due to his sharp and keen senses.

He finished his preparations. His heart seemed to chill over.

A question crossed his mind. What would it be this time? Just what was happening before the end of the break?

‘Whatever it is…’

Choi Hyuk tightly gripped his blade.

It was time.

[Transfer start.]

The moment he saw the message, it felt like he was being turned inside out.

Instead of the world turning inside out, it felt more like his body was turning inside out. It felt like his insides were coming out of his mouth and becoming his skin and his skin was receding inside him.

Extreme dizziness and nausea overcame him. He couldn’t see anything. He felt that something was moving but he didn’t have the mind to discern it.

The karma in his body became wasted. They stuck together like melted plastic and scattered like boiling oil.

“Keuu..”

Choi Hyuk flopped down and retched. He forcefully swallowed down the acid reflux again and again. Only afterwards did he see his surroundings.

Steel. Steel and scales were everywhere. It might not even be steel. However, it was a metal that was as strong and cold as steel. Black and white scales that were the size of a human covered his surroundings and wriggled as if they were alive.

The place was a scale-covered cavern. When he looked at the cavern, he once again started to retch.

“Euu...”

It wasn’t only Choi Hyuk. 39 people, including himself, were staggering and retching. There were even some who actually vomited.

After feeling like his whole body was turned inside out, he was in an unfamiliar place. Distance teleportation? No... Would the earth have a place like this? Then dimensional teleportation? Either way, it was hard to endure this place even with his karma reinforced body.

Still, once he had gradually adjusted his body, he heard the noises around him.

Thud! Thud!

“Kyahhhh!”

He could hear crashing sounds as if a mountain was being shattered and a pitiful scream off in the distance.

‘It’s a battlefield.’

Choi Hyuk knew it instinctively.

Clank.

Cling! Clang!

The metal scales on the ceiling of the cavern were split apart. The scales brushed against one other and emitted a sound of two swords colliding with each other. Immediately, he heard a loud howl from outside.

Crash!

An enormous being that was more than 4m tall fell from the opening in the ceiling.

“Urk! It’s a monster!”

Someone shouted. It was as he said. An enormous body, his wrinkly, gray face resembled that of a mountain orc with teeth protruding from its mouth. Choi Hyuk reflexively unsheathed the Predator's Blade. Not only him but others in the cavern also quickly steadied themselves and raised their weapons. Their swift movements indicated that they were all extraordinary.

However.

"Put them down."

Grrrr.

How the throat of the creature worked was unknown but a mixture of a voice and a beast's growl came out of his mouth. The enormous orc's words echoed throughout the cavern.

Though he said it in an unfamiliar language, Choi Hyuk had no problems understanding him.

Blaze!

At the same time, a pair of blazing wings sprouted out from his back and with the appearance of his wings, a formless power suppressed them.

The weapons that the humans had raised were forced down. It was no use even if they tried to resist. There was only one person who didn't lower his weapon, Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk resisted even as his blade became extremely heavy. The small karma heart in his dantian was crazily pumping karma and he was barely able to keep his sword raised with that strength. However, the tip of his blade couldn't help but tremble.

The orc glanced at Choi Hyuk as if he was interesting.

But he turned away and said to everyone.

"Nice to meet you. I am Karik, the great warrior of the Steel Battleship. I am from the proud race of giant orcs."

Grr.

Even though he was simply talking, their ears hurt due to his rumbling voice. The giant orc Karik, who had overwhelmed everyone's spirits, continued to speak.

"I'll just explain since we have no time. First, congratulations on passing the new recruit training. The 39 of you were the ones who awakened as sovereigns at the end and have gathered here as the representatives of the human race."

They weren't simple words, the meaning of his words was sent into their heads.

The sovereigns were able to learn that 'kings' were in fact only

trainees and were the preliminary stages of becoming a ‘sovereign’ from Karik’s explanation.

The only ones who had awakened as sovereigns in the whole world were these 39 people who were gathered here.

“Now, I will invite the guests who currently lack the qualifications.”

Thud.

Once Karik stamped his foot on the ground, hundreds of ghost-like figures appeared behind the sovereigns. They were the leaders of each country, even the president of the Republic of Korea was among them. They had puzzled expressions as if they were dreaming. Karik said to them.

“You lacked the qualifications to execute dimensional teleportation... however, you have been appointed as leaders in your world. You are here as ‘preliminary sovereigns’. If you properly complete your mission, you will truly earn the position of a sovereign.”

The moment Karik’s voice resounded out, the disordered astral bodies of the leaders seemed to take an impact as they stiffened. They were unable to even blink as their gazes locked in on Karik.

He continued.

“You humans received a ‘consumables (deferred)’ judgement. You are as weak as they come but due to some interesting cases, you received a deferred judgement. Among you, I heard that there was a King without Subjects who became a sovereign... Very interesting.”

Sovereigns were normally those who led many people. In other words, it was almost impossible for a King without Subjects to become a sovereign. Choi Hyuk’s existence was a special case. He was so far superior to the others that they granted the human race extra points.

Karik’s gaze momentarily fell on Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk didn’t lower his sword even as he was sweating bullets. He was different from the other sovereigns who could only tremble their bodies and lower their heads.

“There are other interesting cases besides him.”

Karik’s gaze glanced over a few other sovereigns.

A grey-haired, handsome middle-aged man was calmly listening to Karik’s words with his eyes closed and arms crossed.

A young Latin woman scratched her thigh with an elongated sword as she stared intensely at Karik.

On the other hand, there was an old black man chuckling to himself with his head lowered obediently.

Karik glanced at them before continuing again.

“Still, you are very lacking. You have been granted a 5-year grace period. During this time, if you do not have a satisfying result, you will all be fated to become consumables.”

‘Consumables’, that was how they interpreted it but his pronunciation of the unfamiliar language was hard to understand. The resonations of the word itself gave them a very frightening and ominous feeling.

“You have exactly two missions. Get stronger. And colonize. First, carry out the mission to the utmost of your abilities and get stronger. And give thanks to the Exalted Wings who granted you land to colonize. This is your last chance. Do not be the slightest bit negligent.”

Karik first said to the 39 sovereigns.

“The first to completely colonize their area will be able to use the Blazing Wing Alliance’s supply store. This is a privilege granted to you, the sovereigns representing the human race.”

Then he looked down onto the hundreds of human leaders.

“It’s the same for you. The first to completely colonize their area without the help of a sovereign will immediately become a true sovereign and be able to use the supply store.”

A flood of unknown words swirled around them. However, there was no one who could reply.

Karik's overwhelming presence made these so-called representatives of the human race freeze.

But Karik only indicated he was busy, he paid no attention to their confusion as he prepared to end their short but grandiose meeting.

"Finally, I will answer a question. You."

The one Karik stretched his arm out and pointed to was Choi Hyuk, who had kept his weapon raised until the end.

"Keuk!"

Instantly, the pressure that pushed down on him disappeared. Choi Hyuk panted as his body wavered briefly but he was still able to calm his breath quickly.

Choi Hyuk slowly raised his weapon and looked at Karik.

'Ask you a question...?'

He was puzzled. He was suddenly transported to a weird place, then a monster suddenly appeared and talked by himself before

saying he would take questions out of the blue.

Just what did he have to ask in a situation like this?

However, unlike his complicated mind, his lips easily found a question.

Choi Hyuk instinctively swallowed back the question that was about to pop from his mouth. It was appropriate. It was the complete reflection of his interest. His heart revealed its claws by itself.

But he hid those claws and politely asked.

“What do we have to do to meet the Exalted Wings?”

The existences Karik had mentioned, the Exalted Wings.

Choi Hyuk thought they were the main culprits. The ones who created and started this game. The ones he most definitely had to kill.

Karik looked like he was amused at Choi Hyuk’s question. He replied.

“The ones who have at least met them once were all at least mid-ranked warrior races. However, your race doesn’t even have a rank, let alone a mid-rank one. It’s absurd. For a weak warrior

from such an insignificant race to want to meet such exalted beings… ask that once you completely escape your fate of becoming consumables. Keahaha!”

That was the end.

Karik turned around, then, as if he forgot something, added in.

“Also, if there are any tongues who dare call me a monster next time… I’ll pull them out. That’s it. Now go.”

With Karik’s words, he once again felt the sensation of his body being turned inside out.

However, this time, Choi Hyuk didn’t hunch over or retch, he stood still and endured the dizziness. He even swallowed down the acid rising up his throat. He looked out at his distorted surroundings with bloodshot eyes. How much time had passed since then?

The next thing that he saw was the residence that the president had provided him.

It was early in the morning. The world was gradually starting to become visible through the blue fog.

Chapter 36: Break Time (4)

Breakfast with the president.

Some were, depending on their tastes, scrapping the bottom of a bowl of pumpkin porridge, eating injeolmi[1] or even drinking sujeonggwa[2].

A new announcement appeared.

[The Throne Game has completely ended now. King titles revoked. '1/3 Qualifications of the Sovereign obtainers' are now 'Leaders of Hundred' and '2/3 Qualification of the Sovereign obtainers' are now 'Leaders of Ten Thousand']

"What?"

In a single stroke, the breakfast became disordered.

"Wow... What is this? Now it doesn't sound as cool."

A king, no, a Leader of Ten Thousand dejectedly mumbled to himself.

Choi Hyuk and the president, who could guess what was happening, exchanged meaningful looks.

The breakfast ended in confusion and the president asked Choi Hyuk to stay behind for a moment.

He confirmed the important information Karik had given them by comparing each other's memories. This was also beneficial to Choi Hyuk as humans couldn't completely remember everything.

"That mission, does it start tomorrow?"

"That is correct. We have to wait until tomorrow to know exactly what is going on. The position humans are in and their objective... even those things are unknown."

The president nodded his head at Choi Hyuk's words. Then he added,

"A report arrived before breakfast. It said that there is a portal leading to a land in Yeouido Park."

Choi Hyuk was a bit surprised. The colonizing was a matter the Giant Orc Karik stressed on. It seemed that it had already been initiated.

'A portal... What is behind it? Why do we have to colonize? How dangerous is it?'

As these lands he had only heard of really appeared, more specific questions crossed his mind.

The president stared hard at Choi Hyuk who was deep in his own thoughts and asked.

“Good luck on the mission. Are you planning on exploring the land?”

Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

“I probably have to. Considering Karik’s tone, it seems to be mandatory.”

The president nodded. Then he looked at him with desperate eyes.

“If you do explore… please give us some information about it. The only person I can lean on is Sovereign Choi Hyuk. I will do all I can to support you.”

There were only 39 sovereigns in the world. Among them, the only sovereign the president knew was Choi Hyuk as he was the only sovereign in Korea.

The president felt burdened by the risk of an unknown land that they had to colonize. So he hoped that Choi Hyuk would explore it first and give him some information. Of course, if that was the case, it meant that Choi Hyuk would have to take the risk himself.

Choi Hyuk felt that the president was a bit selfish. Colonizing a new land. An unknown land. No one knew how dangerous it would be.

Still...

“Okay.”

Choi Hyuk accepted the president’s request. He had to colonize it anyways and Karik’s words implied that it would be impossible for sovereigns to cooperate with each other.

If he could receive the president’s support by doing something he already had to do, it wasn’t bad.

“Thank you. Thank you.”

Choi Hyuk shook hands with the happy president.

On his way back with Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee appeared wearing a baseball cap. She had just come back from visiting her hometown.

“Are your parents okay?”

Baek Seoin asked carefully. Lee Jinhee pouted.

“They were soooo healthy. When I said I was going back to Seoul,

they said they would break my legs.”

“Probably. Weren’t they frightened?”

“Well. It’s not something you can avoid because you want to.”

Lee Jinhee shrugged her shoulders. She then looked up at Choi Hyuk.

“Anyways… leader… I heard the news.”

Choi Hyuk looked at her. What did she hear? That he killed Song Simin’s group?

No. Looking at her careful expression, he knew what she had heard. She was talking about his mother’s death.

“… It just happened that way.”

Choi Hyuk slightly avoided her gaze and walked ahead. He didn’t want to show her his eyes. Since it was obvious they would look sad.

“Anyways, let’s gather for a moment. There’s a lot to discuss.”

Choi Hyuk walked ahead swinging his arms. Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee followed behind him.

Choi Hyuk's bedroom. Choi Hyuk sat on his bed, Baek Seoin brought a chair to sit on and Lee Jinhee sat down with her legs curled up on his desk.

"So 39 sovereigns... Consumables... And he said 'Congratulations on passing the new recruit training'?"

Baek Seoin brooded over Choi Hyuk's words.

"Right. It was exactly as Jung Minji predicted. They are trying to make us into an army."

"Who are they? God?"

As if it made her blood run cold, she hugged herself.

Choi Hyuk smirked and changed the mood. It became serious.

"Anyways... you all know what my goal is?"

Getting revenge on them, Choi Hyuk didn't explicitly say those words.

He felt that he shouldn't. Though he didn't think they were listening to each and every conversation... it wasn't bad being careful and he was superstitious that if he spoke what he truly desired, it would muddle his pure heart. There was even a saying,

‘the Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao’[3].

“Wow…”

Lee Jinhee let out a small shout.

Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee both understood Choi Hyuk’s intentions.

‘So he’s planning on getting revenge on the ones who created this game!’

This was why Lee Jinhee let out a shout.

Choi Hyuk asked in a low voice.

“You can probably guess but this fight is going to be incomparably harder than the fight against the wyvern, that fake dragon. Think it through once more. Are you still going to follow me?”

He said this prepared that they would separate from him.

However, the two replied without hesitation.

“Didn’t I say that if you kill the wyvern I will serve you as my king? What follower leaves his king? And I have a grudge against

them as well.”

Baek Seoin said while fixing his posture.

On the other hand, Lee Jinhee gently lowered her legs. She tightly clenched fists above her knees.

“As expected, hyung… I like that you think big.”

She had an expression that was a mixture of nervousness and excitement. She started calling him ‘leader’ when Baek Seoin nagged her by saying, ‘It’s fine that you’re close but still you need to call him by his official title. The leader is the leader, not a hyung,’ however, looking at how she reverted back to ‘hyung’, it seemed her heart was beating wildly.

He had sort of expected this. Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

“Good. Then, let’s examine the current situation…”

The three put their heads together and started to examine their current situation. First, he shared the traits of a sovereign.

———————

[Sovereign]

1. No limit to the number of followers.
2. Able to have long-distance communication with followers.

3. Able to increase designated followers' stats by 10%. No use on followers with higher Retribution Points than you. (Current Retribution Points: 20 (★★★) Able to designate 102 followers)

4. Right to colonize land.

5. Right to use the supply store of the Flame Wing tribe. (Locked)

———————

"They say that the kings who had 2/3 Qualifications to be a Sovereign had been demoted to 'Leaders of Ten Thousand' and the buff that increased their followers' stats by 5% was removed. In other words, they were nerfed."

Same with Choi Hyuk, the buff of the 'King without Subjects', 'Increase followers' stats by 20%', had disappeared as well. Instead, he was now able to appoint 102 followers and increase their stats by 10% but this was also a nerf. It was a bit iffy since although he was now able to have an unlimited number of followers, he didn't plan on increasing the number of followers right away, so it was a nerf.

Choi Hyuk asked Baek Seoin.

"Then is there no point for people to join 'Leaders of Hundred' or 'Leaders of Ten Thousand'?"

"That's not true. They say troops will receive their own missions. We don't know exactly what mission it is; it will definitely be better to do it together than by themselves. Leaders of Hundred can create a troop with 99 members while the Leaders of Ten Thousand will be able to create troops with 9, 999 members. If we

look at it like a game, then the Leaders of Hundred have the right to create a raid and Leaders of Ten Thousand have the right to create a guild. Also, since their members now have the ability to communicate over short distances… it looks like people will gather under Leaders of Hundred and Ten Thousand.”

Baek Seoin momentarily looked at Choi Hyuk before adding in.

“If there isn’t a sovereign.”

Then Lee Jinhee added.

“Leader! Aren’t we going to recruit others? I hear other people are like recruiting thousands of people!”

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“Though we do need to, we can’t just accept anyone. First, they need to be trustworthy and have the same goals as us, meaning they need to be capable as well.”

At his words, Lee Jinhee seemed to become happier. She praised herself.

“Yeah, we are quite capable.”

———————

[Lee Jinhee]

Power: 0 (★★)

Speed: 48 (+38) (★★)

Control: 30 (+20) (★★)

Endurance: 36 (+36) (★★)

Stamina: 41 (+36) (★★)

Recovery: 26 (+20) (★★)

Retribution points: 37 (★★)

*Free karma points: 68

*Skill: [Speeding Blade] [High-Speed Breakaway]

———————

———————

[Baek Seoin]

Power: 40 (+30) (★★)

Speed: 40 (+30) (★★)

Control: 0 (★★)

Endurance: 64 (+54) (★★)

Stamina: 23 (+18) (★★)

Recovery: 18 (+18) (★★)

Retribution points: 49 (★★)

*Free karma points: 68

*Skill: [Iron Defense] [Instant Pierce]

———————

Due to the points they earned from fighting the Wyvern of Destruction until the end, both Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin were

able to get all their stats to 2-star. The skills they obtained until now were outstanding as well. They were definitely the strongest among the survivors from Kangdong District, excluding Choi Hyuk of course.

That was why Lee Jinhee's self-praise wasn't an exaggeration.

But Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly and shook his head.

"You are capable but it's still not enough. You need to get much stronger."

———————

[Choi Hyuk]

Power: 103 (+76) (★★)

Speed: 103 (+74) (★★)

Control: 0 (3★)

Endurance: 0 (★★)

Stamina: 0 (★★)

Recovery: 0 (★★)

Retribution points: 20 (3★)

*Free karma points: 150

*Skill: [Soaring Slash]

———————

Currently, Choi Hyuk was the only one who had upgraded his Retribution Points to 3-star.

It became harder the more he upgraded. The number of worthy opponents kept getting smaller but the points he needed to upgrade kept increasing.

He needed 100 points when he was no-star, 200 when he was 1-star and upgrading to 3-star needed 300 points.

Now to upgrade to 4-star, he needed 400 points. It was so far away.

However, Karik was at least a 5-star monster. However, even he wasn't the strongest.

In his eyes, Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee couldn't help but be lacking. He thought he himself was lacking so what more did he need to say.

Blaze.

Flames spewed from his hand and a haze covered his hand. The only person who could manipulate his karma like this was Choi Hyuk.

"I realized something while fighting the wyvern. Karma is much more versatile than we thought. We need to study it properly."

When the mission started, Choi Hyuk was planning on properly

training Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee.

“Ah, and… one person, there’s someone I thought about.”

Choi Hyuk who had a serious expression suddenly said as if he had just remembered it and then smiled mysteriously.

“A capable new recruit.”

**

There were many days where Chu Youngjin would just sit down with a blank expression. He skipped his meals for three days and only held a red sword at his chest as he stared up at the sky.

People murmured saying that he received a large shock when he heard Jung Minji had died.

However, he wasn’t really sad that Jung Minji had died. Sadness, he had used it all when his lover, Lee Hyejin, died.

Only… he had no clue what he would do from now on.

To him, Jung Minji was an excuse for him to continue to live.

‘She helped save Lee Hyejin and helped avenge her so I will do my best to help her. To return the favor.’ This was Chu Youngjin’s

train of thought.

That was the only thing left that he could do that was related to Lee Hyejin in this world. However, Jung Minji was no longer here.

Perhaps it was because he had nothing to do but Chu Youngjin sat down and recalled Lee Hyejin hundreds of times each day. He would occasionally stroke the item that was created upon her death, the red sword.

As he stared blankly up at the sky, there was only one thought that came to his mind.

'... Should I die?'

While he was doing this, Choi Hyuk came looking for him.

The hazy eyes of Chu Youngjin focused. This was the first time someone had come looking for him during the 3-day break. And on top of that, the person was Choi Hyuk. They had become quite close during their time in the suicide squad. It was also due to this that he was able to leave Kangdong District alive.

"Yoo..."

Chu Youngjin raised his hand and smiled faintly.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't greet him and just went straight to

the point.

“Do you want revenge?”

Chu Youngjin blankly stared at Choi Hyuk momentarily as he didn’t understand his words. Soon after, he asked.

“…Against who?”

Chu Youngjin’s voice sounded extremely exhausted.

He had not heard the news about Choi Hyuk killing Song Simin and the others. So he guessed, ‘Does he want revenge on the ones who killed Jung Minji?’

He didn’t feel like it.

‘It’s futile.’

He had no intention of avenging Jung Minji.

He did what he could for her. He was absolutely loyal to her until she died, which meant he had repaid the favor of avenging Lee Hyejin. He wasn’t duty-bound to avenge her after her death.

At his question, Choi Hyuk didn’t reply but wrote on the ground. His finger went through the asphalt like tofu.

[The ones who created this game.]

Thump.

He hadn’t expected this.

The moment he saw those words, his heart thumped.

The blood in his withered heart started to boil. His eyes became bloodshot. It was a strange phenomenon that even he couldn’t believe.

‘I still had energy left?’

His weak body that had starved for 3 days grew hot.

Choi Hyuk calmly said.

“I have a lead. No matter how long it takes... I will definitely succeed.”

At the same time, a message appeared in front of Chu Youngjin.

[Sovereign Choi Hyuk wants to accept you as his follower. Accept?]

He stared intensely at the message in front of him. He stared at it without blinking an eye. He slowly got up holding the red sword.

He said.

“Accept.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t smile. Instead, he looked him in the eyes and grabbed his hand.

It was a sunny afternoon.

Notes:

1] injeolmi – a traditional rice cake made from glutinous rice and coated with bean flour

2] sujeonggwa – persimmon drink

3] A line from ‘Tao Te Ching’.

Chapter 37: Break Time (5)

It was still day when Chu Youngjin joined them. In the beginning, Choi Hyuk wanted to train his karma and his followers. That was his original plan.

However, Lee Jinhee objected.

“Ehhhh? What! There’s something much more important than that.”

“Important?”

Even Baek Seoin seemed to question her objection.

“I can let Leader’s obliviousness slide but how can Baek hyung be like this too?”

Lee Jinhee who was astonished said.

“We have to do that!”

However, no one understood her. Eventually, she raised her voice in frustration.

“Aren’t we going to have a funeral?”

Those words blew through Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin, and Chu Youngjin's empty hearts.

**

PTSD. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

It was the collective term for, amongst others, the lethargy, insomnia, antisocial behavior, and loss of concentration that people experienced after a disaster.

3-day break. It was great at first. However, the more time passed, the more painful it became as hell approached ever closer each day.

By the third day, the survivor refugee camp's atmosphere was a mess. People didn't try to talk to other people. They didn't even try to comfort each other. 'My pain is your pain anyways. I don't expect it to get better. Nothing good will happen by sharing our stories. Everything is just fucked up.'

Even people who looked fine on the outside, when you looked inside, they would be suffering some sort of hardship. It was the same for Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin.

Choi Hyuk was currently 18 years old. You could say that he lacked the experience to immediately think about holding a funeral. However, it should have been quite likely for the 26-year-old Baek Seoin to have thought about holding a funeral for his parents, but he hadn't thought about it even once.

They weren't the only ones. From young to old, it was definitely abnormal that no one among the survivors thought about having a funeral. Though they might mourn by themselves, no one shared their sorrow with anyone else.

They could have been too tired or they might have thought that there was no need to make a big deal out of it. They might have thought that they would only be criticized if they brought it up after such a vicious experience.

Maybe it was because they kept reading each other's moods that they started to hate everything.

"Still, that's not right!"

However, Lee Jinhee had some sort of strange principle. She didn't care about how others looked at her. She only looked at her own values. The stuttering Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin, and Chu Youngjin were pushed aside. What if her actions made them uncomfortable? She pushed aside those concerns.

As she said, "We have to do it! We have to!" with utmost certainty, the passive three's hearts started to move. They felt they really had to.

Baek Seoin rushed to a bank and withdrew some money. Since there was an emergency program for the survivors who had lost their bank accounts and cards, he didn't have any difficulty doing so.

Baek Seoin took out all the money he had saved for school. Lee Jinhee had already taken out all the money she had.

Money was something of the mundane life and as that had already disappeared, it had no value.

With that money, Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee bought chrysanthemums, incense, food, alcohol, disposable kitchenware, and even borrowed a long table. They didn't leave it to a funeral service company and personally bought everything and had them delivered.

Choi Hyuk was like a duckling following the mother duck as he followed behind them. He did not say anything after hearing the word 'funeral'.

As they continued with their preparations, the sun started to set.

Marronnier Park. Three tombstones were erected next to the Guardian Choi Miyeon's burial mound.

One had Baek Seoin's parents' names written on it.

Chu Youngjin's girlfriend, Lee Hyejin, was written on another.

Finally, Jung Minji's name was written on the last tombstone.

“… Let’s make one for Jung Minji…” They went through with Choi Hyuk’s suggestion of making one for Jung Minji.

The survivors of Seongbuk District watched as Choi Hyuk’s group took apart the sidewalk bricks and erected tombstones made of polished unusable shields and swords with lethargic eyes. Some of Choi Miyeon’s admirers recognized Choi Hyuk and helped them.

Lee Jinhee said to them.

“Misters and ladies, you should make tombstones as well. I’ll help you.”

Of course, they too had lost people dear to them.

Tears suddenly started to fall at her words.

“No… We…”

They were unable to piece together the words they wanted to say. A man among them took a sidewalk brick and engraved a name on it. It was his daughter’s name. He placed the brick against Choi Miyeon’s burial ground.

“For now, I’ll… I’ll do this. It’s shabby but since it’s next to the guardian… so… I’m sorry… sorry, Hyeyeon…”

The man was unable to complete his words.

Lee Jinhee hugged him and patted his back. Sob. Sniff. The man tried to hold back his tears but once the tears started to fall, they weren't easy to stop.

Tak. Tak. Whoosh.

Baek Seoin lit a match and burned the incense. The smoke silently rose up. As the air was still, the smoke rose up in a straight vertical line.

They burned incense and placed chrysanthemums in front of their parent's names.

One, two...

On his second kowtow, Baek Seoin did not stand up immediately. His shoulders were trembling. In his prostrating posture, he kept mumbling something before slowly, slowly getting up. His eyes were red but there were no tears.

Choi Hyuk watched Baek Seoin's method and followed it exactly. He placed chrysanthemums in front of his mother's grave, burned incense and kowtowed twice...

Chu Youngjin was the same. He followed Lee Jinhee's words, "You just need to do what Baek hyung did. It's okay if you cry but let's not shed too many tears."

They each kowtowed in their respective places and then, kowtowed to other tombstones on their way back. In front of Baek Seoin's parent's tombstone, Choi Hyuk said, "May you rest in peace," and in front of Lee Hyejin's, who was the same age as him, he said, "Go to a nice place." Finally, in front of Jung Minji's tombstone, he said, "Rest well. You did your best."

It wasn't much. It wasn't touching nor was it odd. It was simply a process of confirming their deaths.

They didn't simply think to themselves, 'Did you die? Did you really die? That easily? Really?' and gloss over it.

'Did you die?' 'I died.' 'Really?' 'Really.' 'Now, what?' 'I don't know... Let's just do something and sit together.' It was simply a formal process where people had invisible conversations like these.

However, it seemed that people needed this formality.

One person, two. More and more people became interested in their funeral.

"How are you related?"

A grandma who sat with a blank expression asked.

"They are my parents. The ones over there are my friends."

Baek Seoin pointed out towards the newly erected tombstones and explained.

“So sorry for your loss… Sigh. Sorry. Still, you are admirable. Very admirable.”

The grandma patted his back. Lee Jinhee approached her.

“Grandma. Grandma should make one as well.”

“Sigh, I’m fine. You young’uns have it tough… just what is happening. What is happening.”

It was a delicate sight. Even the grandma who held Lee Jinhee’s hand was wearing leather armor and had a spear on her back. It was an unimaginable sight a month ago. The world had changed too fast.

But, even still, the very basic fundamentals might not have changed. They shared and sympathized with each other’s pain.

“Then please come this way and eat.”

Lee Jinhee placed some food that was piled to the one side on a disposable plate and put it on top of the table.

“Okay… okay.”

The grandma undid the leather armor and spear. She then placed chrysanthemums on each tombstone. She gathered her hands and prayed briefly before sitting down on the seat Lee Jinhee prepared for her.

That was the start.

More and more people started to gather. The people who received Choi Hyuk's mother, Guardian Choi Miyeon's grace, came first. Even the people who at first complained that this was pointless shut their mouths as more people gathered and looked back upon the memories of their loved ones.

An odd atmosphere formed. The public's participation brought more people to participate. Some created tombstones for their loved ones while others engraved the names of the dead on the sidewalk bricks and stacked them in a pile. They kowtowed or prayed and then ate together.

As these actions were repeated by different people, they remembered the sense of kinship and compassion they had for each other.

Due to the increasing number of people, the food ran out. When that happened, someone bought more.

The dinner, that took place when the sunset laid aslant, concluded and the sky grew dark. Someone lit a candle. Then, more and more candles were lit.

It seemed like someone had uploaded this funeral gathering online. Somehow the survivors from Mapo and Kangdong District found out and started to gather as well.

Even Bae Jinman who resided in the Blue House came. He kowtowed, engraved a great number of names on the sidewalk bricks and stacking them in a pile. He then looked for Choi Hyuk, held his hand and nodded a few times before leaving. He tried his best not to show his tears but he was crying.

Even though all the food was eaten, the night grew late and it passed midnight, the people still didn't disperse.

Bonfires started spouting from various places. People sat around each bonfire.

The guard they had against other forces had long since disappeared. There was no distinction between the young, the old, the men and the women. People moved around freely. They were free to share their stories or not to. Just sitting around these bonfires gave them a warm feeling.

Although it was unknown who had brought it, they heard the rare sound of instruments being played and the sounds of songs being sung.

Tadak. Tadak. People blankly stared at the burning flames as they sang songs from their memories in low voices.

‘This…’

For some reason, Choi Hyuk became choked up. It was like the times he spent with his mother. It was like those peaceful nights where he blankly gazed at his mother working as he slowly drifted off to sleep.

He closed his eyes. He wanted to remember the peacefulness and beauty of this moment. But still…

Blaze.

He placed his hand inside the bonfire.

Tadak. Tadak.

A burning flame. However, his 2-star endurance didn’t easily burn. Choi Hyuk blankly looked at his hand that was slowly burning inside the flames.

He decided to remember the tranquility of this night together with the pain of the fire that felt like thousands of blades were rubbing against his hand. He thought this could become the signpost.

It was uncertain if Baek Seoin and Chu Youngjin had the same thoughts as Choi Hyuk as they both placed their hands in the flames. Choi Hyuk laughed as if he found this absurd. They laughed as well.

“Crazy. They’re crazy.”

Lee Jinhee was the only one who became startled and gave them a scolding. Since they had their Recovery stat, they would be able to recovery from most burns, but still, why were they doing such foolish things?

“Stop it.”

Lee Jinhee placed her hand in the flames and took each hand away from it. Their hands were pulled out as their fingers were grabbed by Lee Jinhee’s small hands. It suddenly became a situation where their hands were on top of one another.

Choi Hyuk suddenly said lightly as if it was a joke.

“Please take care of me.”

Awkward laughs. And…

“Oww… my hand hurts…”

Lee Jinhee mumbled as she brushed the hand that was inside the fire.

Like that, the morning of the next day began. The rising sun shined on the countless names engraved in Marronnier Park.

Among them, there was even Song Simin and Yoon Girim. People indiscriminately prayed that they all rest in peace.

Just what was that night?

It was a night where people bonded through feelings of kinship, compassion, and belief that they all understood each other.

A mosaic made up of individual pieces of their different lives.

As if the tragedy where they killed each other never happened... it was a beautiful night.

And as if that night had never happened, tragedy struck once again.

With more misfortune.

The morning brightened and their mission began.

Chapter 38: Consumables (1)

[Searching for the appropriate mission based on Retribution Points...] [Mission search complete. Mission start.]

They received the message during lunch. Choi Hyuk once again felt the uncomfortable feeling of his body being turned inside out.

'It's dimensional teleportation.'

When he looked around, he saw that it was the same for his followers.

"Bleagh!"

Lee Jinhee let out a groan.

Her body was strangely twisting and stretching as it became transparent. It was the same for Baek Seoin and Chu Youngjin. Now, it became even more severe as their bodies started to split and shatter like glass falling to the floor.

It was a horrifying scene for regular people but it was so painful for the survivors that they were unable to notice these horrifying scenes occurring around them.

"Endure it. Let's meet later."

Choi Hyuk, who had experienced it before, was a bit more relaxed as he said that. Soon his vision blacked out. He was only able to tell that he was teleporting due to the nausea that gripped his stomach.

He then felt as though his body was flung high up into the air.

Slowly, his vision returned to normal. The severe nausea and pain made it feel as if his shattered body was being pieced back together again. The world looked like it was spinning.

‘No… I’m really spinning?’

5 small and large moons passed in front of his eyes. Then the dark sea, the sky and then back to sea.

His body was spinning high up in the sky.

‘Euchacha.’

He stretched his arms and legs. The atmosphere was thicker than back on Earth. He used the air resistance, that felt as though he could hug it like a balloon, to balance his body.

“Bleargh!”

When he turned around, having heard that explicit sound, he saw Baek Seoin spinning in the air while vomiting.

“Ah! Damn it, Baek hyung! So disgusting! Eueck...!”

Lee Jinhee, who came back to her senses, grumbled as she grabbed Baek Seoin’s body so that he could balance himself. However, she retched as she felt a strong wave of nausea when she saw the vomit spinning in the air.

“Hooo... Huuu....”

On the other hand, Chu Youngjin had barely regained his balance and was taking deep breaths with a pale face. One could feel his strong will of not wanting to vomit.

Looking at their struggling figures, Choi Hyuk became mischievous. So he shouted even more cheerfully.

“Free fall~!”

At his cheerful warning, his followers, who had only then figured out their situation, expressed their confusion.

“What?”

“Eu.. ha...?”

“Urk!”

Their bodies that were rising up into the air had at some point started to lose their momentum and fall. Towards that distant ground.

“Uaacck!”

The one who screamed was Baek Seoin. His struggling actions made him lose the balance he barely gained with Lee Jinhee’s help.

“Dummy! Spread your arms and legs and regain your balance!”

Lee Jinhee smacked his back and helped him regain his balance. Chu Youngjin somehow kept his balance by maintaining his stiff posture and pale face.

Because the air resistance was stronger than back on Earth, their falling speed was slower but the speed was still fast.

“Kuaaahhh!”

“Bleargh!”

They weren’t the only ones who were free falling. Figures who looked to be humans were falling at a distance, and strange individuals were screaming as they fell nearby. At a glance, they looked like humans but when you looked closely, there were unfamiliar existences who had excessive hair, others who had a

different skin color and even some who had antennas on their foreheads. They were armed in an unfamiliar fashion and wore unfamiliar clothes.

‘Aliens.’

No matter how he saw them, that was the only description that came to his mind.

‘Anyways…’

It was interesting but that wasn’t the problem. Choi Hyuk examined the oncoming ground with serious eyes. Heavy wind endlessly assaulted his eyes and breath. A chilly wind. If it wasn’t for his karma that did the work for a decent portion of his body, he might have died from hypothermia or suffocation.

‘Currently, everyone’s endurance is 2-star, including me. I don’t know about myself but it’ll be hard for the others to endure the impact…’

At first, he thought that there was an ocean as large as the Pacific beneath them. That was why he thought they would be okay, but as they came closer, he saw that rocks were submerged underneath. It might not be as deep as he hoped. If it was just a splash of water, it would be hard for his followers to completely reduce the impact of the fall.

Just then, the mission announcement appeared.

[100 monsters have absorbed the genes of the natives and are evolving into high ranked monsters. Deal with the monsters before their base karma is imprinted with the genetic information. Those with deferred judgements will receive a return code. Those who have dealt with their targets are able to activate the return codes.]

A yellow arrow appeared on the horizon at the same time as the announcement. It was as if it was indicating the location of the target.

'Monsters...'

Only then did Choi Hyuk figure out the identity of those rocks.

Krakrakrakra!!!

The earthlings and aliens who fell from the sky like meteorites created quite the commotion. As if they were irritated by the noise, the 'monsters' that were curled up like rocks, raised their snake-like long heads. They were lengthy monsters that were about the size of a 3-story building.

Bang!

Crash!

There were some who landed before Choi Hyuk's group. They didn't reduce the impact and slammed into the ground. With that impact, the water was pushed out; the rocky formation underneath it shattered and shot up into the sky.

A few dusted off their heads and stood up with a limp, but the majority who were weaker than them had all been crushed. They didn't even bounce as they had smashed into the ground. Various amounts of different colored blood splattered and dyed the ocean.

'As expected, the water is shallow...!'

Choi Hyuk almost reflexively shouted.

"Target the monsters' heads! It doesn't matter if you smash into their heads or hit them! Just do whatever it takes to reduce your impact!"

It was better to reduce the initial impact with a bending neck than smashing directly into the shallow waters.

At the same time, he said as his orders, the real collisions had begun.

Crash, crash, crash, crash!!

It was like a bombing. The earthlings and aliens smashed down from above. Monster heads were bashed by the collisions. Blood and water spurted upwards.

“Keaaahh!”

Baek Seoin wielded his shield and smashed into a monster’s head. The head faltered and fell to the ground with a broken neck whilst Baek Seoin’s shield shattered. Baek Seoin bounced off its long neck, spun in mid-air and slammed into the ocean.

Chu Youngjin sheathed his red sword and swung his fist instead. He was worried that his sword would break.

Craack!

The sound of something cracking resounded out as he slid down a monster’s neck and slammed into the ocean.

The only ones who landed properly were Lee Jinhee and Choi Hyuk.

Lee Jinhee stretched her two legs and landed exactly on top of a monster’s head. Its head bent like a bamboo shoot. Lee Jinhee matched the timing of her landing by crouching down like a cat and stabbing a gladius into its head.

“Uagyagyak!”

She kicked the bending head of the monster and jumped. 7 elegant flips in mid-air. Splash! Lee Jinhee didn’t slam into the

ocean but landed in it. The water was only up to her knees.

Slice!

Choi Hyuk simply sliced a monster's neck. He then released karma below his feet. The karma landed on the ground first. Whoosh! Like an airbag, it supported Choi Hyuk as his speed rapidly decreased and he landed softly.

Splash. Splash. Splash! Pucuak!

"Keeeehhh!"

"Kiiiii!"

It was like the heart of a war. An endless number of earthlings and aliens fell from the sky. Their screams, the screams of the monsters on the ground, and the explosive sounds of the impacts were enough to deafen their ears.

His followers gathered with Choi Hyuk at the center. Baek Seoin and Chu Youngjin's arms were both shattered and broken, but they were recovering after drinking Recovery Potions. Like a balloon being filled up with air, their arms quickly recovered to their original state.

Rain was falling from the sky.

“Fuck… to think that I would drop down from the sky after being discharged… without a parachute… fuck…”

Baek Seoin was once a Special Warfare Command soldier who had unsuccessfully pleaded to be excluded from the paratroop training, even going so far to say that he had an extreme fear of heights. He swore and sobbed, yet, even while complaining, he still took out another shield to replace the one he had shattered during the landing.

Dududu.

Monsters that were 4 meters tall and 7 meters long charged along the water. They had exoskeletons similar to that of scorpions and crayfish combined with the speed of a cheetah. Their limbs were like blades so they ran unhindered through the knee-level water.

“#$%&!!”

The aliens shouted in an undecipherable language that was undeniably a swear before fleeing elsewhere. Green aliens sunk their lower bodies into the water as they quickly flopped away like frogs.

Lee Jinhee asked with a nervous voice.

“Leader, what do we do?”

Just by looking at the silhouettes of the enemies, he could tell

that it wasn't just one or two. And looking at their speed, they had the abilities of at least a mid-boss of the [Survive and Escape] game.

However, Choi Hyuk was calm.

"What do you mean what do we do? Go through them. To the place the arrow is directing us."

[Those who have dealt with their targets are able to activate the return codes.] was the mission message they received. From their experiences until now, the rules were absolute. Unless there were hidden rules, you had to follow them.

The rule this time was simple. If you couldn't deal with your target, you might forever be stuck in this alien world without the possibility of returning.

Choi Hyuk raised the Predator's Blade.

Swish.

A 5-meter long blade of karma extended out. Bang! Choi Hyuk dashed forward so quickly that he left an afterimage. He planted his left leg into the ground with a crash. Water splashed up to the point you could see the ground below. The energy from his lower body transformed into a rotational force at his waist and naturally extended to his arms through his shoulders as he swung in a large arc.

The falling rain split apart like a curtain.

Kiririk!

His blade of karma collided with the exoskeletons and sliced off two monster heads. However, Choi Hyuk knit his brows for two reasons.

‘Hard…’

It wasn’t as hard as the Wyvern of Destruction but it was still harder than the mid-bosses he had faced previously. And most of all,

‘You dodged it?’

A monster jumped up and avoided it. He had never experienced this before. With its quick jump, it stabbed at Choi Hyuk’s forehead with its sharp legs.

“Urk!”

Choi Hyuk, who had originally planned on rushing to the next one, reacted a bit late.

“Wow-Even leader makes mistakes!”

Kirararak!

Baek Seoin had somehow placed himself between the monster and Choi Hyuk and miraculously reflected its front leg with his shield.

Tadak!

Kkigirk!

Soon after, Lee Jinhee stepped on its nape and stabbed with her gladius. However, it only left a deep scratch, it didn't penetrate through. Its exoskeleton was so hard that Lee Jinhee who had a Speed stat of 48 (★★) and a Power stat of 0 (★★) couldn't pierce it with a single stab.

"Why is it so hard!"

"Move!"

Chu Youngjin charged forward instead. Looking at how red lights streamed out of his eyes, it seemed as though he had already activated the trait of the Berserker. His Power and Speed doubled as they approached the limits of 2-star stats.

Crash!

Chu Youngjin's red sword didn't carve into the monster but ripped it apart. The rain and water followed his attack and

splashed up like whirlwinds.

Choi Hyuk smiled. ‘Hey, they fight pretty well?’ He fixed his posture that was slightly crooked and jumped forward. Swish! He didn’t swing the blade of karma as widely this time. Just by moving his wrist, he was able to cover quite a large area with a 5-meter long blade.

These swift monsters jumped each and every way to avoid his attacks but he would at least take down a leg each time.

Choi Hyuk rushed past them.

“Don’t get left behind! We rush at full speed!”

“Yes~ Yes~ If you get in danger, I’ll help you.”

Baek Seoin said teasingly.

“I’m fine without your help.”

Choi Hyuk said in a huff.

“Yes~ Yes~ Of course, you are.”

Choi Hyuk decided to just keep his mouth shut.

“Euahh! I can get one too! Speeding Blade!”

Crash!

It seemed that not killing a monster had hurt her pride as she even used her skill to pierce through a monster’s forehead. Lee Jinhee’s Speed stat that she had increased again and again applied as her Power. The moment that the water seemed to splash, with a bang, she had already pierced through a monster’s body.

“You’ll get tired out. Don’t work too hard from the beginning.”

Chu Youngjin criticized her with polite speech.

“Shut it! Why don’t you!”

Lee Jinhee’s competitive spirit rose as she thought Chu Youngjin as her rival. She was unexpectedly a year older than Chu Youngjin.

Even while bickering back and forth, Choi Hyuk’s group quickly broke through the monsters. They emphasized breaking through. They didn’t kill each and every monster. The most important thing was their target. However, even the monsters didn’t bother to chase after Choi Hyuk’s group when they passed them. There were countless monsters and countless earthlings and aliens who invaded from the sky anyways.

This was the monsters’ headquarters. The middle of the tiger’s den.

Everywhere, both earthlings and aliens who invaded from the sky began their fight against the monsters. Survival and capture. Individual battles in the rain.

Chapter 39: Consumables (2)

Words wouldn't work on monsters. Their heads were simply filled with hatred for other living creatures. There was no reconciliation or surrender. Once they met their gaze, intelligent beings were only left with two choices, either to 'fight' or 'flee'.

At first, there were many who chose to flee. It was expected as 19,000 people out of the 20,000 didn't know their mission nor did they receive an announcement. Whether they knew how to escape or not was a different story. That was the drastic difference between the fates of 'Consumables' and 'Consumables (Deferred)'.

However, the ones who fled soon realized the truth. They were in the middle of the enemy camp, and there was no place to run. A hopeless fight with their lives on the line commenced.

Amidst this confusion, the ones who received a mission invaded further towards the enemy headquarters. Looking at these people who charged forward without hesitation, the ones who fought desperately regained a sliver of hope... a false hope and followed behind them.

As their destination was the same, the paths of the ones who attempted to penetrate the enemy lines naturally started to overlap. After spending a while seeing only monsters, the number of aliens they saw gradually started to increase. Though they still didn't see any of the earthlings they caught a glimpse of in the sky.

The aliens were diverse.

Splash, splash, splash!

Choi Hyuk's party was running while splashing in the knee-deep water.

Vrrrr!

Right beside them, a feeble-figured alien placed silver machines which emitted blue electric currents on its arms and legs, and flew one palm-width above the water.

Next to them, a 3-meter tall alien with antlers protruding from its head was running in large strides. The water that was knee-deep actually only reached its ankles.

And many green aliens with the hind legs of a frog followed behind them.

"This feels strange."

Baek Seoin looked around and revealed an ambiguous smile. For them to be able to run alongside aliens in an unknown place! This was unimaginable even just an hour ago. A major premise of the unknown, what could be considered every sci-fi fan's dream, intelligent alien lifeforms! However, they weren't much different from humans. Each and every being was silently running for their lives in the darkness while rain fell on them.

Looking at their figures, they even felt a bit of sympathy. Just then, they had penetrated through a wave of monsters and suddenly found themselves in a section where they had room to relax. Baek Seoin, who was filled with curiosity and was troubling over whether to strike a conversation with an alien, suddenly became surprised.

"Huh? Ack!"

He then jumped up in place. As someone who had 2-star karma stats, he instantly jumped up as high as a 4-story building in a single leap. Instead of jumping, it was more like flying.

Choi Hyuk shouted out as soon as he saw Baek Seoin's jumping figure. He wrinkled his forehead.

"Jump!"

Choi Hyuk jumped and Lee Jinhee and Chu Youngjin jumped after him. They instantly became distant from the ground. At their sudden jumps, four pillars of water gushed up into the air. It seemed like the surrounding aliens were glancing at them. Then...

Splash!

Following the water pillars, something else erupted up from the water.

"$%@@#??!"

Warning signals erupted in front of them like a beehive along with the flustered voices of the aliens.

Poong! Palalala!

They were like an octopus's tentacles. However, the tentacles weren't only after Choi Hyuk's group. They, without a sound, crawled along the ocean floor and grabbed the ankles of the aliens all at once. The 3-meter alien with antlers fell into the water as it was dragged away by its leg. "Kiwoo! Kiwooo!" It shouted sorrowfully but there weren't any aliens who could understand it. Many of the frog aliens' heads were fully submerged underwater and were incapable of uttering a sound.

Lee Jinhee grumbled as she started falling to the ground.

"Baek hyung! I was wondering why you suddenly jumped, but you jumped only to save yourself?"

"No... It wasn't something I did intentionally but a reaction, okay? It's the same thing as suddenly touching a hot pot and instantly taking your hand off!"

Baek Seoin protested. His Intuition, which only activated for his safety, was sometimes like a spinal reflex. He couldn't do anything about it but it couldn't be helped that his figure looked like that of someone who was only trying to save himself.

However, Choi Hyuk didn’t blame him.

“Anyways, we were able to avoid it because of you.”

He said before quickly examining the approaching ground below. The tentacles were strong. Their ability to approach undetected underwater and even the instantaneous speed and power they revealed when they latched onto their victims were on par with the wyvern. Choi Hyuk’s face turned serious.

Currently, all the aliens had fallen into the water as the tentacles had grabbed onto their legs. The strength of the tentacles was so strong that they were dragged around and hurled down onto the ground. No aliens were able to resist. The only exceptions were Choi Hyuk’s group and the alien on the silver machine.

That alien was already a palm’s width above the water so it was able to avoid the attack of the tentacles. That wasn’t all, it seemed like it was about to retaliate as well.

Pazik! Pazizizik!

Its machine became covered by the blue electric currents. Powerful karma flowed down the machine and started to move intricately. Choi Hyuk, who saw this, felt a sense of danger. They had just landed. Choi Hyuk ordered his followers.

“Gather! Jump again!”

“Iron Defense!”

Choi Hyuk’s order and Baek Seoin’s skill activation sounded out at the same time. The moment the four landed around Choi Hyuk, they all jumped up once again. Choi Hyuk unsparingly sent the karma beating in his dantian down to form a barrier. The water that splashed up hit the barrier and slid off.

Flash! Pazizik!

The water and sky shined blue. As if a blue sun had momentarily risen, even the distant horizon brightened.

The alien was surrounded by a white light and couldn’t be seen. The streams of lightning covered the water and even stretched up towards the sky. The tentacle monster, its alien victims and even Choi Hyuk, who had jumped up to avoid it, were swept up by the electric shock.

Rumble!

A sound of rumbling thunder passed and everything returned to darkness.

Splash! Splash!

Choi Hyuk’s group dropped down into the water.

The tentacle monster and aliens who were dragged along by its tentacles were all burnt to crisp and steam was rising from the water. It was as quiet as a mouse. The corpse of the tentacle monster was larger than expected. Its figure was revealed through the moonlight and he could see that its tentacles stretched 70 meters in front of it and were tangled up like tree roots. Though, it was dead and was currently floating in the water.

Wiing! Kiriring!

The silver machine emitted a clear sound as the alien leisurely flew away. And not long after, Choi Hyuk stood up. He wordless drank a potion. Soon after, Baek Seoin slowly got up. The first to stand up was Choi Hyuk but the one who received the least damage was Baek Seoin. It was the result of his [Iron Defense] in addition to Choi Hyuk's barrier.

Baek Seoin helped his comrades who were embedded in the water up and made them drink potions. Lee Jinhee and Chu Youngjin stood up. Even until then, Choi Hyuk was fully concentrated on recovering.

Choi Hyuk currently had the weakest endurance among his comrades. If they only looked at Endurance, Baek Seoin: 64 (★★), Lee Jinhee: 36 (★★), Chu Youngjin: 24 (★★) and Choi Hyuk: 0 (★★). It was because he had invested all his karma points into Control to kill the Wyvern of Destruction.

Currently, he had over 170 free karma points but he had not used them yet. His Endurance was low but he believed that he could dodge or set up a karma barrier to cover his weakness but...

‘There’s a problem.’

Choi Hyuk stood still as he recalled the events that had just occurred. He had never thought about an omnidirectional attack like the one just now. He couldn’t dodge it. Also, he had to spread the barrier out to protect his comrades. Because of this, he took a lot of damage. The weakly formed ‘Karma Heart’ was his last line of resistance so he didn’t lose consciousness, but his body was a mess.

‘This is pissing me off…’

The thing that really got on his nerves was the fact that the alien emitted a black light (hostility) at the last moment. Since they were in the same situation, he wasn’t sure why it did that, but the alien was definitely hostile towards him. It wasn’t to the point of murderous intent… but the fact that he had taken a loss against someone who was hostile to him gave him an even greater sense of danger.

If he looked at the situation as a whole, it looked like the alien was hostile to all other aliens. As if it wanted the aliens to die with the monster, it didn’t distinguish friend or foe and relentlessly blasted electric current. Choi Hyuk and his followers were also swept up by its attack.

Its electric current was much stronger than he had anticipated. It was able to kill a monster comparable to the wyvern in one shot as well as wound Choi Hyuk and his followers enough to temporarily

make them unable to fight.

Clench.

He ground his teeth. He was extremely angry at the fact he wasn't able to face it properly. It was the first time he had seen an attack like that. As long as it was a physical attack, Choi Hyuk was confident he could overcome even a landslide but the previous area attack was able to reveal his weakness.

'It's going to be different next time we meet...'

Choi Hyuk resolved himself.

[Choi Hyuk]	
Power	103 (+76) (★★)
Speed	103 (+74) (★★)
Control	0 (3★)
Endurance	0 (★★)
Stamina	0 (★★)
Recovery	0 (★★)
Retribution points	20 (3★)
Free karma points	173

Skill	[Soaring Slash]
Innate skill	Eyes of Distinction

Currently, besides Control and his Retribution Points, his other 5 stats were only 2-star. If he looked at his stats as a whole, he wasn't a 3-star nor a 2-star. Once he entered this state, the calculation of karma given became more complicated. That was why Choi Hyuk was unable to rashly invest his points and chose to just save it until now.

He wasn't given a specific calculation of karma. Only, if he was curious, he could get a rough 'concept'.

First, a previously unknown fact, he was now able to increase his free karma points by hunting monsters of lower rank than him. Unlike in the past where it wouldn't increase no matter how many he killed, it was now possible to increase the number by killing large amounts of lower ranked monsters.

Of course, its effectiveness had decreased.

Though he wasn't able to guess what the specific calculation was, he was able to learn that he needed to kill more monsters the more stars his stats had and the more his Retribution Points increased.

Choi Hyuk currently had Control and Retribution Points that reached 3-star. The rest were at 2-star. In this case, he needed to

kill about three or four 2-star monsters to earn 1 karma point. The more stats that reached 3-star, the number of monsters he needed to kill to earn a point became exponentially larger.

That was why it was such a headache. At first glance, it was possible to think that increasing each stat equally was best. As then, he would earn 1 point for every 2-star monster he killed.

However, he would be able to obtain a huge merit by raising the rank of his stats to 3-star. In reality, once he raised his Control stat to 3-star, he was able to at least double the speed at which he hunted 2-star monsters and it also gave him a weapon he could use to stand up to the Wyvern of Destruction so it was definitely beneficial.

Then, as long as he had confidence in drawing out the potential of the upgraded stat, it was definitely beneficial for him. On the other hand, if he wasn't, it would be a loss. If someone other than Choi Hyuk upgraded his Control stat to 3-star, it didn't mean that that person would be able to develop a karma blade like Choi Hyuk and it may even become a situation where he pointlessly made it harder for himself to obtain points.

So Choi Hyuk was troubled on which stat to increase or whether he needed to increase them equally or not. If he was going to focus on a single stat, would he focus on Control or another stat?

However, he made up his mind.

'I can't push it aside any longer.'

He stepped forward, believing in himself. He invested his karma points without hesitation.

[Choi Hyuk]	
Power	203 (+76) (★★)
Speed	103 (+74) (★★)
Control	0 (3★)
Endurance	0 (★★)
Stamina	73 (★★)
Recovery	0 (★★)
Retribution points	20 (3★)

He put 100 points into Power and 73 into Stamina. He had speculated a situation where he was fighting the alien from before.

‘There are two ways to block its electric shock. Either increase my Endurance and strengthen my body and barrier or increase my Power and increase the repelling force of the barrier. The safest method is increasing Endurance. As increasing Power means I need to have the Control to use Power to defend. So… It’s Power. I need to put Control, my strong point, to good use. I need to block its attack with skill and, in the case of an emergency, finish it in one blow. To win against an opponent stronger than myself, I need

more Power than Endurance. Since the best defense is offense.'

He had also increased his Stamina to compliment his increased Power stat. He could recover with different methods, such as with potions, so he didn't invest in Recovery.

A rounder and stubbier formation was safer. No matter how he used it, it wouldn't easily be damaged. On the other hand, a long and pointy formation could easily be broken and become unusable. However, the most useful tools were usually those that were long and pointy.

'It's fine as long as I use it well.'

Choi Hyuk organized his thoughts. At that time, his followers had pulled themselves together.

Perhaps it was because the surroundings were the tentacle monster's territory, but they didn't see any other monsters. It was fortunate. It would have been difficult if they were attacked before they were able to pull themselves together.

Choi Hyuk looked around. The dreary sight of burnt corpses spread out in the water. The yellow arrow was still present above the raining night sky.

"So, shall we keep going?"

Everyone followed behind Choi Hyuk with more serious

expressions. They had recognized that they would have died if they messed up just now.

That tension was necessary but it also made Choi Hyuk feel bad.

'Just wait until we meet again.'

He was endlessly formulating ways to fight that alien in his mind.

**

Once they left the territory of the tentacle monster, they once again encountered groups of monsters as well as other aliens.

The closer they came to their target, the more aliens they met.

How far had they come while slicing continuously?

Baang!

Tudududu!

Sounds of gunfire.

Boom!

A grenade exploded. It wasn’t at the level of firepower of a few pistols and rifles they had seen in Kangdong District. It was... the firepower of a squadron.

They encountered humans in the middle of the fierce battlefield. They were the military that had disappeared.

Chapter 40: Consumables (3)

They weren't wearing military uniforms. They were wearing stiff, think pants, shirts and suspenders like the ones Choi Hyuk's group had obtained from the supplies. It was highly likely that their original uniforms had melted from monster blood when they fought.

Even without their uniforms, their short hair, 20-year-old faces, personal weapons and tactical movements were enough for one to think, 'They are soldiers!' with a glance.

"So the military was here~"

Lee Jinhee exclaimed.

"They probably came here along with us. They most likely had to carry out a mission somewhere else for a long time. Look at how they fight. They are so experienced."

Baek Seoin speculated.

"Are they Korean soldiers? They could be Chinese or Japanese soldiers..."

Chu Youngjin had his doubts.

Still, the three showed interest and seemed to want to approach

the troops. It was obvious. This was the military that had disappeared. Wasn't that the biggest question the world currently had?

However, Choi Hyuk calmly made a decision.

"... I don't think there's a need to approach them."

The three's gazes focused on him. Choi Hyuk raised his hand and pointed at a distant hill. In the middle of the ocean where everything was submerged in water, a hill protruded out of the water. Although it wasn't very tall, it had the grandeur of Paektu Mountain[1].

He said.

"Our target destination."

The slope of the hill became steeper the higher it went but, at some point, it just stopped. It seemed like there was a basin as monsters came up over it. They didn't charge forward but instead closely gathered together on the hill. The arrow was indicating the basin beyond them.

"Ah... So we're slowly coming to the final battle?"

Lee Jinhee revealed a nervous expression. When they were about to face such a large battle, it was obvious they didn't have the time

to try to become friends with the soldiers.

Baek Seoin groaned.

“That’s that but… there are already 93 people with just them. A small-scale squadron… Might they become a problem?

Choi Hyuk nodded.

Lee Jinhee became surprised and lifted her head.

“Ah right! Now that I think about it, didn’t they say there were only around 100 targets?”

To activate a return code, they needed to take down a target. However, with just the squadron and Choi Hyuk’s group, there were already 97 people.

Not only that, there were still at least a thousand aliens rushing towards the hill.

“… Is it another battle royale?”

Chu Youngjin mumbled as he sincerely sympathized with the soldiers. He could tell just by looking at their fighting figures. They were a group that had survived by closely cooperating with each other. However, soon, that group would break apart. Perhaps they would even kill each other as there were a thousand competitors

and only a hundred return codes.

Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Full speed ahead.”

**

Captain Lee Kangjin, the leader of the special force squadron, couldn’t forget that day.

He had just begun his morning activities when he discovered an ominous omen in the sky above the building.

“What is that…?’

Like a paper that was lit on fire, the edges of the sky were starting to turn brown. Black holes started to appear from various places. The clouds disappeared and not long after the sun disappeared as well. The world turned yellow as if it was covered in yellow dust[2]. The ground changed strangely as if it was entangled with corpses. It was dark-red like a dried squid.

The buildings turned to ash and scattered. The only things remaining were the dazed expressions of the special force soldiers, their weapons, and supplies.

This had all occurred within a span of a few minutes.

———————————

[Cut off the enemy supply route]

The path the monsters tread, Karuh Kapkun – 102.

Defend the highlands for 30 days.

———————————

A sudden message appeared in front of his eyes. First Sergeant Jang Sudong, who was walking next to the confused Captain Lee Kangjin, tapped his shoulder and called out to him. He handed him a pair of binoculars.

“Captain, please take a look. It’s not my eyes that are weird, right?”

The fences and buildings had all disappeared. Even the mountain disappeared and the strange new ground had a gentle slope. As Captain Lee Kangjin was already standing on the highlands, he was able to look down the slope. Countless troops were spread across the slope. There looked to be at least 30,000 people.

“Ah, yes. Let’s see… that’s the 21st division.”

He replied calmly when he looked into the binoculars that had

been handed him. The 21st infantry division. Also known as the Paektu Mountain troops. Though it was definitely weird that he could see the frontlines general outpost troops from here, what could possibly shock him after seeing the sky and ground change, and buildings disappear? It wasn't that he was calm but simply rather stupefied.

"They are the Chinese troops, American troops, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces... even the North Korean People's Army. Huh, damn. What about Russia? Oh... there they are. Even all the Northeast Asian countries are gathered here. Haha."

While Captain Lee Kangjin was laughing like a fool, First Sergeant Jang Sudong tapped him once more and said.

"Captain. If this isn't a dream... I think we're fucked."

The first sergeant was pointing to something below the slope. Clouds were gathering at that point. No, bizarre creatures were chaotically charging towards the troops spread across the slope. Their ferocity sent shivers down his spine as looked at them through the binoculars.

The North Korean People's Army, which was located the furthest down the slope, became chaotic. Though they were a few kilometers away, he could easily see their bustling movements.

Captain Lee Kangjin, who wasn't able to believe what was happening, suddenly woke up from his dazed state. It was as if a bucket of cold water had been poured on him. Though

unbelievable things occurred one after another, a fact became concrete the moment he saw the monsters.

Everything he saw, even the air that brushed against his skin and the sounds and scents, everything was emitting a vicious sense of ill will and hostility.

Danger grounded them in reality. In his mind, the thought, ‘Just what is happening?’ was quickly replaced with an urgent desire to seek solutions. ‘What do I do now?’ The answer was simple.

Captain Lee Kangjin and the First Sergeant Jang Sudong shouted at the same time.

“Ammunition technician!!”

The war continued for a month.

Numerous troops were annihilated and reorganized. At some point, even ranks became insignificant. Commanders kept dying one after another so they just let whoever was good at commanding be the commander.

There would be a casualty at every passing moment. Everyone was desperate. Soldiers searched around, looking for any dropped rations whilst shoving weapons of annihilated troops into their Handy Bags that they had obtained through killing monsters. They desperately protected functioning heavy firearms and endured again and again.

If it wasn’t for the occasional supplies and the items dropped from the monster corpses, they wouldn’t have been able to avoid annihilation. They fought like that for a month.

‘Still, we united and won.’

That was what Captain Lee Kangjin thought.

How many times have troops been annihilated and reorganized in that mess? Although the only original member of his troop that was still with him was the First Sergeant Jang Sudong, they still won in the end. Then, they left that hell and received a new mission.

It wasn’t any less… No, it was more hellish than before but they had hope this time.

“Squadron! If we complete this mission, we get to return!”

Major Kang Choongil. As he possessed an outstanding commanding ability, he was currently the leader of the squadron. He was also a Leader of Hundred who had obtained a Qualification to be a Sovereign.

“Uoahhhh!”

At his shout, the squadron members roared. Even Captain Lee

Kangjin tightly gripped a two-handed sword and roared. The only land visible in this endless ocean, the hill. The arrow indicating their target was just beyond that hill.

The squadron was smashing apart monsters as they made their way to the hill.

Riflemen shot their weapons even more heatedly.

The unity that Captain Lee Kangjin believed in was shining brightly at this moment.

Dududududu!

As there were casualties during this time, there were only 87 people left. Among them, 20, including the captain, held their melee weapons and waited. The other 60 were carefully creating a fire net. Each and every soldier showed their outstanding gunmanship. Even though they were shooting continuously, not a single bullet missed its target. Even their magazines were changed out in 0.1 seconds. The moment they pressed the button and shook their wrists to release the magazine, a new one was pushed into place. The released magazine was also picked up before it dropped below their waists. It was to the point where the guns were unable to keep up with the soldiers. However, as they had already filled up their Handy Bags with various types of firearms, if it broke, they just needed to replace it.

Bullets rained down. These bullets were only able to penetrate the monsters' skin and unable to break their bones or pierce their

insides. They could only hold the monsters back. However, that was enough.

When the number of monsters blocking their path to hope reached a certain number, assigned soldiers would throw grenades into the fray.

Boom, boom, boom!

A series of explosions shook the ground. The monsters' skin was ripped apart and their black blood covered them. They didn't die but they did receive injuries and fell into a state of confusion.

To Captain Lee Kangjin and his squad, the explosions were a signal to charge.

"Let's go!"

He shouted vigorously as he led the way.

Tadak!

The 20 squad members gripped their weapons and charged forward together. Team 1 held large shields and jumped over the confused monsters. At a certain time, they would draw a line and block other enemies from approaching. Team 2 would take care of the monsters during that time.

First Sergeant Jang Sudong caught up next to Lee Kangjin, who was leading the way holding a two-handed sword.

Crack!

Craack!

Team 2 was armed with longswords, axes and other primitive weapons as they moved forward while ripping monster flesh and breaking bones. They killed monsters without hesitation.

“Go! Go!”

With the orders of the leaders of the riflemen squads, the riflemen jumped over the monsters that hadn’t been taken care of yet, jumped over the wall the shield wielders of Team 1 made for them and once again advanced towards their hope.

Then Team 1 would go back and help Team 2’s melee fighters take care of the remaining monsters. Then they waited for the grenades to explode once again.

The monsters, that covered the hill in black, charged towards them and the squadron met them with their airtight teamwork. Though their consumption of stamina was enormous, the arrow in front of their eyes indicated that there wasn’t much left. Their morale was rising.

“Run faster! All members of our squadron will return!”

Major Kang Choongil's orders sounded out.

They, too, were well aware of the existence of the aliens. Currently, they were in a position where they were working together but they also knew that they would eventually become competitors for the return codes.

'Still, it's doable.'

Captain Lee Kangjin thought that way. No, everyone believed it was.

Each time they advanced, the squadron pushed against the monsters. Though there were casualties and wounded soldiers during their advance, compared to the losses their enemies received, they were progressing smoothly and quickly. Even when they compared themselves to the aliens fighting near them, they were superior.

They were revealing the power of united humans to its fullest potential.

They climbed over the hill faster than anyone and saw their targets encased in cocoons. The yellow arrows were pointing to the pulsating cocoons. The sight of a hundred cocoons, each the size of a room, gathered in one place was disgusting yet somehow, magnificent.

The remaining monster soldiers that were between the cocoons, bulged up to intimidate the squadron members.

“@#$%!!!!”

Just then, they heard a random roar filled with rage. Captain Lee Kangjin naturally turned his head towards the sound. The aliens who were advancing without any hesitation were floating in midair as if they were grabbed by an invisible hand. A silver-eyed, pointy-eared alien arrogantly stood among them. He stretched his arm and clenched his fist.

Craaack!

With a brutal sound, the limbs of the approximately 10 aliens who were in midair were twisted and crushed.

Its silver eyes indifferently turned towards the squadron.

“... What the?”

They had fought the monsters together and were advancing towards their target but once the target became visible, the flow of the battle suddenly changed.

Craash!

A 4-meter tall alien recklessly swung a flaming chain.

“Krahhhh!!”

“Keluk!”

The frog aliens, tiny aliens and wolfish aliens who were gathered together were hit by the chains and were either turned to ash or smashed apart.

‘They are starting to get rid of their competitors!’

A chilly feeling ran down Captain Lee Kangjin’s spine. For there to be aliens who were so strong hidden among them!

“Squadron! Charge at full speed! Endure the losses and charge!”

Major Kang Choongil pierced through the chaos.

“Don’t face them head on and prioritize shooting the targets!”

“#@$@!”

“Krrerb quishilk!”

Swears in different alien languages erupted everywhere. A quarrel where they either fought each other or charged towards the targets began.

In the middle of the chaos, Choi Hyuk's group stopped their tracks.

[You are still alive?]

The small alien riding the silver machine blocked their path. It was surprising fluent in human language. No, like when the Giant Orc Karik spoke, it spoke in an unknown language but Choi Hyuk and his followers were able to understand it.

[I guess you're one of the better ones among the trash. You might actually have potential.]

He crossed his legs and nodded his head as if he had a new opinion of them.

Choi Hyuk stared into its eyes. Unexpectedly, he didn't see any malice from it this time. Instead, looking at how it emitted a faint white light, it seemed that it was a bit of goodwill towards his group.

However, what did he care?

Choi Hyuk revealed his teeth as he smiled.

"Yeah. I'm happy to see you."

Notes:

1] Paektu Mountain is the tallest mountain in Korea.

2] Yellow dust – inhalable particles that originate from the dry desert regions of China and Mongolia. There has been yellow dust coming from these regions to Korea.

Chapter 41: Consumables (4)

[Don’t get agitated. Think of your place. Deferred judgment holders. A bunch who will be annihilated if you don’t carry out your mission properly. Carry out your mission. I’ll let you live. You have to understand how much goodwill I’m giving you.]

The alien said. Its words were as if it was domesticating humans. ‘Don’t get agitated. Think logically. I am saying this for your own good.’

However, Choi Hyuk was thinking of something else.

‘I can’t fight while protecting my followers.’

To fight while protecting his followers? From the start, he never recruited them for that purpose. They were followers he gathered so that he could fight better and fight to his heart’s content. Well, until he could reach that unknown place and break those who created this game. If it was possible, it was best to keep them alive but if it wasn’t, then it wasn’t.

The more distant your goal was, the more risk you had to take. To do so, didn’t he gather followers who he thought wouldn’t die?

Choi Hyuk turned around.

“I will act alone. Do you best to survive. Baek hyung, help them out. Don’t try to live by yourself.”

Against an alien who could use ranged attacks, his followers would only impede his actions.

“Yes.”

As if he understood his intentions, Baek Seoin took Lee Jinhee and Chu Youngjin away. They ran towards their target, the large cocoons.

Choi Hyuk turned back and stared at the alien again.

“So… you haven’t received a deferred judgment?”

He asked as he dangled the Predator’s Blade. The faint white color the alien was emitting was starting to mix with black. It seemed it was displeased with Choi Hyuk’s attitude.

[… I am the Lowest Ranked Warrior, Keholeun. I am also known as Dawn Lightning. But you… want to die?]

Keholeun felt regretful at this moment.

‘As expected of this alien bunch… They say if you give them a part, they’ll ask for the machine. It’s pitiful that he thinks I’m a pushover and is trying to walk all over me.’

He blamed himself. The words of his seniors weren't wrong. 'Consumables' and 'Consumables (Deferred)' didn't listen to words but only to lightning.

'What's more, isn't he trying to pick a fight with me?'

Kking, Diririk!

The Karma Device-01 that Keholeun was riding on analyzed Choi Hyuk's karma and displayed it. His Control was okay but the rest were awful, sitting at 2-star.

'This thing is baring its teeth against me? Ha... really... He's just wasting my time. It's better to just deal with him quickly and activate the return code.'

During this time, Choi Hyuk was observing Keholeun.

The black light emitting from its body became darker and, at some point, a red light started to mix with it.

'Killing intent.'

However, it was only the intent. Meaning, this was his opportunity. Choi Hyuk moved a step forward while his opponent was still thinking about attacking.

Pik!

Choi Hyuk’s body disappeared into thin air.

[Kek!!]

Keholeun became surprised and let out a shout. His speed was beyond its expectation. Keholeun wasn’t able to react in time.

Pizizik!

Instead, the Karm Device-01 it was riding on reacted. Blue electric currents spread out like a net and then struck his body, pushing him away.

Bang, bang!

A karma heart was beating in Choi Hyuk’s dantian. The heart pumped karma out of his body and the expelled karma wrapped around him, creating a barrier. Then the karma that was circulating around his body was recalled back into him. It was similar to how veins and arteries worked. The barrier didn’t stop for even a moment as it circulated around Choi Hyuk. His Power was 203 (★★). He was putting out energy similar to that of a 1,000-horsepower supercar.

Pashashasha!

The electric net that was meant to protect Keholeun was dispersed left and right. The trait of Choi Hyuk's barrier wasn't its toughness but its offensive power that was able to smash apart lightning.

Swish!

Choi Hyuk, who had penetrated through the electric net, extended his blade.

"Goodbye. Lowest. Ranked. Warrior. Keholeun."

Keholeun's prior words seemed to have hurt Choi Hyuk's pride since he even went out of his way to provoke the alien, which was something he had never done before.

[No!! @#%!!]

It seemed to be in such a hurry that it screamed untranslated words.

"Yes."

Bang!!

His karma heart violently thumped once more.

And the karma suffused within the blade accelerated. Everything was dyed blue.

Kikikik!

Though the machines surrounding Keholeun momentarily resisted.

Slice!

It was eventually split in two.

Blue blood scattered in the air. The instant the blood met the atmosphere, it evaporated.

Keholeun died without a croak. It was definitely strong. It may have even been strong enough to roast the Wyvern of Destruction without much difficulty. However, its figure was similar to that of a human's. Even with the fact that it was small enough to be sliced by a sword; it overrated itself in front of Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk didn't even give Keholeun the chance to show its skills.

Something came out of its body and ingrained into his body. The corpse was a bit haggard but it didn't complete fade away. Up until the [Throne Game], corpses turned to ash and were absorbed into his body but, at some point, they started to remain intact.

[Opponent's stats were on average 3-star. Calculating obtained karma. Opponent's Retribution Points 310 (★★★). Absorption rate increased. Granted 16 free karma points.]

Choi Hyuk possessed Retribution Points 20 (★★★). There was a whopping difference of 290 between him and Keholeun. It looked as though the number of points he obtained depended on how high his opponent's stats and Retribution Points were. Choi Hyuk invested 10 of his newly obtained points into Power and the remaining 6 into Stamina.

Clank.

The Karma Device-01 slowly dropped to the ground after losing its power. Choi Hyuk put that, which was split in two, as well as Keholeun's corpse into his Handy Bag...

"Hoo-"

Cho Hyuk let out a deep breath. The karma in his body felt heavy. It was because he had overworked his karma to not draw the battle out.

It was now time for him to quickly activate a return code.

As he took a few breaths while he looked at the situation of the battlefield, he gave a hollow smile.

"What a sight."

**

Captain Lee Kangjin couldn't believe the current situation. Was the 'unity' he had so much confidence in so weak? It had fallen apart far too easily.

"Guakk!"

A scream. Another troop member was murdered. Yes, they could be murdered. As the aliens were too fucking strong. However, the thing that agonized Captain Lee Kangjin was the fact that the murderers were the ones who they had been together, through thick and thin, with or members of other troops.

"Jang Sudong, you bastard…"

Captain Lee Kangjin grit his teeth tightly. The [2 minutes 17 seconds] above the dying squad member disappeared and appeared above First Sergeant Jang Sudong. Time passed even then. [2 minutes 15 seconds]

"Captain Lee. I understand your feelings. However, Captain Lee needs to live. To me. To me, those who I'm close with are a million times more precious than those who I am not. Captain Lee! You must live. I understand what you think of me… Let's first live. You can beat me up once we live! I will help you. Let's go together."

The only comrade from Captain Lee Kangjin's original troop was

First Sergeant Jang Sudong. Behind him were executives and soldiers First Sergeant Jang Sudong was close with and above their heads were timers just like his. For those who still did not have one, First Sergeant Jang Sudong would obtain one for them. Even if it meant killing their other comrades.

"Fuck off, bastard. For me to have considered you my comrade..."

Captain Lee Kangjin tightly gripped the handle of his two-handed blade as if hoping to crush it. How had it become like this? A few minutes. That was all it took for everything to change.

Activating the return code. That was the problem.

Major Kang Choongil's plan of trying to obtain a return code for everyone before anyone else was all in vain.

"Youngest! Slice the cocoon and hurry on back!"

The imposing cocoon. Even though its pulsating figure was wrapped in a cocoon, it was still scary to approach. However, the youngest soldier didn't hesitate when he heard Major Kang Choongil's orders and rushed to rip the cocoon.

"Kiirriiiiik!!! Kiyaaaaaa!!"

A cry sounded out the moment he ripped into the cocoon. At the same time, sharp blade-like legs stretched out from within. The

youngest hurriedly dodged.

“Kiirrrrik!”

The staggering monster that appeared from within the cocoon looked to be in pain. However, even still, its speed was incredibly fast.

“Euaak!”

At the same time a soldier’s leg was cut off, Major Kang Choongil ordered.

“Fire!”

Dudududududu!

The monster, whose body wasn’t well because it had hatched too early, couldn’t endure the concentrated gunfire. As its knee became crooked, Major Kang Choongil shouted.

“Youngest! Kill it and activate the return code!”

“Yes!”

It was out of consideration to send the youngest first. The youngest didn’t decline. It was because he had learned through

experience that nothing would piss someone more than this sort of modesty in a battlefield of life and death.

The youngest rushed out with an ax. The youngest cut the legs of the monster, that wasn't able to balance itself due to the oncoming gunfire and smashed its head. Because it hadn't completed its evolution, its endurance was weak. Its head was crushed like tofu.

The moment he killed the monster, its corpse turned to ash and was absorbed into the return code on his arm.

Something appeared above his head.

[5 minutes]

The youngest reported with a pale face.

"The corpse is transforming into return energy... It says it needs 5 minutes to activate!"

5 minutes, that was the problem, as were the other aliens.

As more squadron members obtained the codes, the approximately 1,000 aliens started to openly stare at them. It seemed as though the aliens were contemplating whether slicing the cocoons or hunting the humans who had obtained return codes would be safer.

“Tighten security.”

Major Kang Choongil said coldly as he raised their spirits. The squadron stared at their surroundings while protecting themselves. Then, the aliens started to lose interest in them. They realized that it would be a loss to fight them. However, there were also aliens who were provoked by their actions.

[Good! Let’s play! I am the Lowest Ranked Warrior Keushisuit!]

It was an enormous alien. It was 5 meters tall, had deer-like antlers that shined in various colors and wore gauntlets made of metal on its hands. Its long, coiled rope-like muscles rippled as it kicked the ground with its long leg and closed in on the squadron.

“Fire!”

At Major Kang Choongil’s scream-like shout,

Dudududududu!

The squadron started to shoot all at once. However, the alien’s antlers emitted a light and each and every bullet missed.

Crash!

As if they were hit by a bulldozer, their frontlines were destroyed.

Clash! Clash!

The alien, who had entered their formation in a single breath, swung its arms and pierced the chests of Major Kang Choongil and the youngest. It happened in an instant.

[What the? How boring.]

It grumbled as it bit off the head of Major Kang Choongil who was pierced by its right hand.

[Doesn’t taste bad.]

He said as he bit off the head of the youngest next.

As soon as the youngest died, the timer above his head disappeared and reappeared above the alien. [2 minutes 32 seconds]

The squadron fell into a state of shock. Their tactics that had brought them brilliant achievements until now were utterly destroyed. Bullets couldn’t block it and close ranged fighters couldn’t keep up with its charging speed.

The sight of an overwhelming alien that was 5 meters tall eating Major Kang Choongil and the youngest’s heads (what was more, it was evaluating their taste) was extremely horrifying.

Major Kang Choongil, who had put their confusion to rest... had

become an alien's snack and died.

"Euak!"

That was the end of the squadron.

They all started to scatter and flee. That wasn't all. A soldier, who panicked at the fear of death, killed another soldier who had activated a return code.

He had understood that return codes could be stolen with the youngest's death. It was true. They could be stolen.

When they saw that, other squadron members became even more panicked and, paradoxically, the second murder of a fellow soldier occurred more easily. He even had a good cause. "How could you kill a fellow comrade! You bastard!"

The squadron instantly collapsed and the other aliens started to attack at this opportunity. It was utter chaos. The ones, who didn't have the confidence to kill the monsters in the cocoons, targeted the aliens or even fellow comrades who had already activated return codes and they, in turn, desperately resisted and fled.

"Gather! Where are you going! Be logical!"

Captain Lee Kangjin shouted but no one listened.

Their rationality had disappeared and

It was replaced with the obsession, ‘I need to survive!’

The one who distinguished himself amongst them was First Sergeant Jang Sudong. He showed complete confidence to the panicked comrades he was close with. “Just follow me. Then you can live. Even if I die, I’m going to let you live.” Though his words were unfounded, his figure was filled with confidence. Even in this mess, he was able to clearly create ‘his side’. He would risk his life for those who were on his side but to those who were beyond that fence, even if they were once his comrades, he wouldn’t hesitate to kill them and take their return codes.

In conclusion, First Sergeant Jang Sudong was competent while Captain Lee Kangjin was not.

The first sergeant revealed a regretful expression.

“Captain Lee. Though I like you… this isn’t right. Just look around you. Who is there? Did you save even a single life? You damn bastard! You fucking bastard! Who will live if you shout like that?”

“Shut up!!”

His body trembled violently. Receiving insults from this shameless guy, who would kill his comrades to live, was simply disgraceful.

“Tsk… Then take care.”

Eventually, he clicked his tongue and left.

The trembling captain looked up with a foolish expression. The ones who slaughtered humans as well as aliens. They were on a whole other level of strong. There were around 10 aliens who were like that. The more than 1,000 aliens were quickly decreasing as they were slaughtered by these 10 aliens. There were rare cases where one would endure until the timer ran out or lucked out and stole the timer just before it did and returned.

Lee Kangjin discovered the alien with the antlers among them. It was the bastard who killed Major Kang Choongil and the youngest. Its timer had already ended but it didn’t return and, instead, was preoccupied with killing others.

“Uahhh! You bastard!”

Captain Lee Kangjin’s two-handed sword creaked as he gripped it. Bang! He shot forward tens of meters like a rocket. He aimed for the back of its head. Lee Kangjin’s karma was around the mid to late 2-star stage. He was definitely not weak.

Only, the alien with antlers was too strong. It didn’t even turn around and kicked his chest with its hind leg.

Bang!!

“Kehuk!”

Captain Lee Kangjin flew off while spurting blood.

[Oh? You weren’t pierced?]

It turned around and looked towards Lee Kangjin with an amazed expression. He showed interest and approached the collapsed Lee Kangjin…

[Deferred judgment holder, you’re quite good for trash?]

It crouched down next to him.

Although Lee Kangjin was in shock and his arm was trembling, he decided to use its interest to his favor.

He drank a Recovery potion and started to talk while spitting blood. It was to gain time for his unmoving arm to recover due to his smashed chest.

“Keuk… ptui! Ha… Why do you kill us?”

Was his question funny? The alien laughed.

[Why do I kill? Puahaha. Hmm. I guess it’s different for everyone? For me, I just kill because it’s fun.]

The alien explained friendlily as it came closer.

[Look there. At those trash who kill to live. They aren't even strong. That's why you guys received the Consumables judgment. And think about it. Only 100 people can return anyways. Since the ones who remain here are all going to die, isn't it better of them to die by my hands and contribute as an additional point of karma for me?]

"Fucking... bastards... cough."

Lee Kangjin vomited blood as he placed his hand in his bosom. He held a dagger. Even if he died, he wanted to see this bastard bleed. He flexed his arm. It seemed that he had recovered during that time as power burst into his arm.

However, before his arm could even touch the alien, it was crushed by the alien's hand.

"Guaah!"

[And above all. Because I can. Because you are so weak that I can play with you before you die. Because you can't retaliate. Isn't that a reason?]

Captain Lee Kangjin bit his lips. It was a disgrace to even let this bastard hear his screams. His eyes became bloodshot.

Though he couldn't tell what kind of expression it had because it was an alien, he was painfully aware that it was mocking himself and humanity.

[That's why it's your fault for being weak. You Consumables.]

Its voice sounded out.

"I agree."

However, that reply... wasn't Lee Kangjin's.

"Huh?"

A shadow was cast above Lee Kangjin's head.

Swish!

The clear sound of a sword followed afterwards.

[Kuak!]

Dirt rose up along with the alien's flustered voice.

Bang!

“Cough! Cough!”

Captain Lee Kangjin lost his vision momentarily. He heard something hit and break something. Then, his vision returned.

[Who are… you.]

On one side was the alien with one of its antlers cut off.

“Choi Hyuk. A human.”

He saw a young man wielding a pitch black sword.

Chapter 42: Consumables (5)

Each alien had their own way of trembling.

The skin of an alien with transparent skin, allowing you to see his insides, would turn red. His actions would also become larger and awkward.

On the other hand, a short, chubby alien without a single hair on his body would stop where he stood and stiffen like a rock. He looked exactly like a rock in Baek Seoin's eyes.

Crack!

That was until the rock crumbled and white juice spilled out. He really did look like a rock though.

The thing that smashed the alien, who had transformed into a rock, was telekinesis. A silver-eyed alien didn't even use a finger as he lifted the alien and kneaded him like dough before gently spreading him on the ground like jam.

Baek Seoin, who saw this from a distance, gulped his saliva.

"Now, this way."

His back was dripping with cold sweat as he led the way while running at full speed. Danger lurked everywhere.

‘Why is it like this? If we’re soldiers, aren’t they not supposed to let us die like this?’

Unfair! Irrational!

Rage boiled in his chest, however, at the same time, he knew.

‘Because they can. Because the ones who die so easily aren’t needed in war.’

The battle humans were caught up in was on an unimaginable scale. It was so large that humans wouldn’t be able to understand with their small brains for their whole life.

‘If this war is like a bindaetteok[1], the tens of thousands of aliens here are only a small piece of onion on top, no, a single cell of that onion, no, an atom that makes up that cell. A war… where the deaths of hundreds of millions of aliens are insignificant… that sort of scale…’

Baek Seoin imagined himself dying, buried inside a bindaetteok. He tried to shout for help but the bindaetteok blocked his throat. He died of suffocation.

It wasn’t even funny. It was a miserable thought. However, it could be how those above, the ones who actually commanded this war, saw him. No, he wouldn’t even be seen. He was an existence who didn’t even have enough value for them to look back and see

him.

A thoroughly ignored existence.

And the only way for such an existence to prove himself was to survive again and again.

“There!”

Baek Seoin pointed at a cocoon. None of the ranked warriors, who were slaughtering the others, were there. Baek Seoin utilized his Intuition to the best of his abilities to find the safest path. That was how they had obtained 2 return codes already. Now, he only needed to find his.

“Okay!”

Lee Jinhee ran forward. She swiftly leaped up and sliced the cocoon along with a thud.

“Kiiieeek!”

Screamed the monster inside. When the monster spread its legs, Chu Youngjin cut them off.

Baek Seoin would jump afterwards. He pierced his longsword into its head.

[Cleared target. Transforming the corpse into return energy. Remaining Time: 5 minutes]

That was how he activated his return code. He could escape if he endured for 5 minutes. He let out a sigh. As he didn't feel as though he was in immediate danger, he took this chance to examine the battlefield.

Utter chaos.

Humans and aliens were flying about everywhere. Some flew off as they were hit and others leaped up in an attempt to flee. In the basin, which was now void of monsters, they became each other's monsters.

However, even so, there was a fight that caught his eye – Choi Hyuk and Keushisuit's.

Usually, Choi Hyuk would dodge while the alien with antlers would charge at him. It was to the point that Choi Hyuk hadn't even used any attacks yet. However, the moment Keushisuit, who was enraged even further, stepped in one more time, Choi Hyuk dyed the Predator's Blade blue and stabbed at Keushisuit's weak point. The alien was frightened out of his wits and fell back. His arm, which was unable to avoid the blade in time, had a long cut sliced by the blade with yellow blood flowing from it.

When he had suffered a wound, Keushisuit became concerned about his body. However, as his center of gravity was tilted forwards, his main advantage was his swift charge. When he

started to get concerned over his body, he had lost his advantage and, on the other hand, Choi Hyuk's attacks became even fiercer. Keushisuit became more and more confused as he blocked Choi Hyuk's skilled swordsmanship with his sloppy defense.

"Kihiiiyaah!"

Eventually, he was unable to come up with a solution and started to charge again. Choi Hyuk immediately switched strategies and started to avoid him again. Then he would counterattack at a crucial moment and slice off another portion of his antlers.

It was checkmate. Keushisuit was getting beat up.

"He's our leader but... haa. Is he even human?"

Baek Seoin, who was watching the fight, shook his head and mumbled. On the other hand, Lee Jinhee's odd competitive spirit started to burn.

"Kyahh. Our hyung. He's good at fighting. Watch out, I'm going to surpass him one day."

Chu Youngjin heard her words and revealed a strange expression.

"Hey wait. Jinhee. You're human."

"Ha? Then is our leader a monster? If he can do it, so can I."

“What...!”

Baek Seoin, who was squabbling with Lee Jinhee, suddenly became serious.

“Wha... what? Are my words that shocking?”

Lee Jinhee became a little disappointed. However, he wasn’t looking at her. He had already turned his back away from her.

“Run!”

Baek Seoin started to run before a shout that was like a scream escaped his lips. Both Chu Youngjin and Lee Jinhee became nervous and followed behind him.

“Damn! Damn it!”

He swore as he ran. No matter which direction he ran towards, he couldn’t get rid of the imminent feeling of danger. He felt this way even though he couldn’t see any ranked warrior nearby, which was why it felt all the more frightening.

‘We’ve been targeted...’

He was sure of it. Someone among the crazy slaughterers, who were prideful that they were the lowest ranked monsters, had

targeted them. Though Choi Hyuk was able to beat them up, to others, these lowest ranked monsters were nothing short of a natural disaster.

The fleeing Baek Seoin saw other aliens fleeing and falling into despair. He also saw other humans mixed in the crowd. Though they all looked different and were from different galaxies, in this moment, they experienced the same fate. Horror and despair. A desperate escape.

'Around 4 minutes. The rest... are done.'

There was a [4 minutes 17 seconds] above Baek Seoin's head while Lee Jinhee and Chu Youngjin both had [Complete]. Because he was the last one to activate his return code, only Baek Seoin had 4 minutes left.

He decided.

"Chu Youngjin! Lee Jinhee! Return right now!"

"Don't wanna."

She replied.

"I'm not joking! Return for now!"

"I know. I guess an enemy is coming?"

Baek Seoin stiffened at her calm reply. She punched his shoulder.

“You want us to leave you and flee? Just how do you think of us?”

“… You’ll die!”

“Die?”

She snorted.

“What is our final goal? Isn’t it even higher than the sky above us? But you’re scared of a damn lowest warrior? If you have a big goal, you need to take bigger risks.”

She briefly glanced at Choi Hyuk, who was fighting in the distance.

“And just watch me; I’m going to surpass our leader one day.”

Chu Youngjin unsheathed his sword.

“Jinhee nuna’s[2] words are right. If your ‘revenge’ wasn’t a joke, then you need to at least overcome this.”

Baek Seoin was about to go crazy.

‘You damn people! You wouldn’t be saying that if you had my Intuition! You want to fight with that? Fi… huh?’

It was strange. He placed his hand on his chest. His heart that was screaming like a siren had become silent as if submerged in water. Instead of cold sweat, his hair stood up and his body became heated.

It was his first time experiencing something like this. The moment he thought about ‘fighting’, the anxiety he felt from his Intuition had died down. Of course, the feeling of danger was still strong, however, it wasn’t as strong as before. His anxiety dropped from a ‘We will definitely die’ level to a ‘We might die’.

‘Does this mean that if we were to run, we would have definitely died but if we fight, our chances of survival are quite high?’

However, his Intuition was only related to his safety. He didn’t know what to do as his enemy wouldn’t simply wait.

“He’s here.”

Lee Jinhee spoke. Baek Seoin replied with a desperate heart.

“… If it gets dangerous, immediately return.”

“Okay. Okay.”

She replied nonchalantly.

Thud!

A disgusting looking alien dropped down from above. His reason for targeting Baek Seoin's group was simple.

[You're in the same group as him?]

He was referring to Choi Hyuk, who was pushing back the antlered alien.

"He's our leader."

She replied.

[I'm the Lowest Ranked Warrior Keken. Don't disappoint me.]

"Okay. I'll turn you into a blood splatter."

Baek Seoin felt like sewing up both Keken's repulsive mouth and Lee Jinhee's glib mouth.

Keken looked like a human who had his skin removed. As if his muscle fibers were connected in long strands, muscle tissue seemed to tangle together to make up his body. His muscle tissues were crawling like a den of snakes, while his processes[3] were

writhing and the surface of his body wiggled endlessly.

Piing!

The tentacles and processes that made up Keken's body stood up. Then, shining silver threads scattered. Keken manipulated silver threads with the tentacles and processes around his body.

[I am also known as the Puppet Sorcerer.]

His body opened up disgustingly and each process was manipulating the threads.

Palulu!

The silver threads piled up to cover the sky. Almost like a metal rainbow or large snowflakes. Keken possessed a horrifying appearance but his weapon was beautiful.

"Iron Defence!"

Baek Seoin activated his skill, swung his shield and got rid of the silver threads.

Kiriring!

The light threads seemed to possess quite a bit of power as they

sparked each time they hit Baek Seoin's shield.

"Bisect!"

Chu Youngjin had already activated Berserker and used his slash skill with bloodshot eyes. The moment he swung his sword, a shadow of karma seemed to appear in a blur.

Pashasha!

As if it was hair that had just been cut, the silver threads fluttered in the air.

Kiriring!!

Baek Seoin was busy clearing away the fatal silver threads. Unless he crazily swung his shield to create a wall, he wouldn't be able to completely block them all.

'Oh, my god. It's like fighting against a downpour.'

[Kikiki! That's not all~!]

From the beginning, Keken didn't think Baek Seoin's group was as strong as Choi Hyuk.

He only wanted to use them to mock the idiot, Keushisuit, who was struggling with Choi Hyuk.

Keken became a bit happier.

‘There’s no need to kill them all at once. I’ll torment them. Little by little. So they can squirm like the bugs they are.’

Lee Jinhee noticed Keken’s demeanor.

‘Now’s my chance!’

She thought.

“Chu Youngjin! Give me a lift!”

Lee Jinhee rushed through the area Baek Seoin had cleared towards Chu Youngjin.

“What are you going to do?”

Baek Seoin became horrified.

“Just watch!”

Thud.

Lee Jinhee, who was rushing forward at an incredible speed, lifted her foot up. Chu Youngjin instinctively caught her foot with his hands.

“Throw me!!!”

She stood on his hands, ready to jump at any time. If he didn’t throw her right then they would lose balance and fall into more danger. They were at the point of no return. Chu Youngjin looked in the direction she was pointing at.

“No!”

Baek Seoin despaired.

Bang!

Chu Youngjin, whose enhanced stats were 168 (★★) Power and 196 (★★) Speed, threw Lee Jinhee with all his might.

“Speeding Blade!”

She activated her skill. It was an outstanding skill that doubled her Speed in that moment, which translated directly into Power. It was a skill that specialized in bringing out incredible effects from 2-star karma.

Her Speed was at 122 (★★) and that number was directly applied to her Power.

She looked at her target, seeing an opening in between the silver

threads that covered the sky. That opening clearly reflected in her eyes.

If she made even a small mistake, she would become a blood splatter. She was afraid. However, she wasn't scared of being afraid.

She was like that even before she awakened karma. Not only as a normal human but as someone who possessed a woman's body, she was able to scale buildings and even did stunts like jumping off the roof of a building into a small gap in the building in front of her.

She didn't want to lose to any man, building or even nature. Fear was good as it kept a suitable amount of tension. That tension was good. So, she jumped into the fear.

She flew in the air.

Flutter. The layers of thread missed her by a hair's breadth. Everything seemed to be in slow motion.

Baek Seoin had his mouth agape.

It was to the point that the silver lines that were there to scratch her looked as if they were protecting her. Nothing blocked her path. Nothing could escape her eyes.

[Huh? Huh?]

Keken was taken back. Due to the trait of these silver lines, the closer an opponent came, the harder it was to fight them. On top of that, her Speed, which was increased by Chu Youngjin's throw and her [Speeding Blade] skill, was much faster than Keken imagined.

Stab!

She utilized her athletic ability to stab her gladius into his right eye.

"Keeeee!!!"

There was no need for a translation. 'Ah, you're in pain.'

Though she didn't have the ability to freely manipulate her karma like Choi Hyuk, she had experimented by herself as well. She gathered all her karma into her blade. The short, 30cm blade instantly shined. Its cutting ability was enhanced.

Rip!

She used the momentum to slide the gladius away and pop his other eye as well.

"Keeeee!!!"

Processes crazily came up all over his body. Nothing good would happen from getting hit.

“High-Speed Breakaway!”

Bang!

As if a bomb had exploded, her body bounced away with a bang. Baek Seoin hastily ran towards her with his shield and grabbed hold of her sliding body.

[Kuaahh! You fucking bugs!!]

Keken went insane. Unfortunately, he couldn’t see so his attacks were pathetic. He couldn’t aim properly. It would take some time for him to recover his vision.

It was their chance.

“Good job, Jinhee! Now let’s run!”

Baek Seoin shouted as he helped her up. He was thinking about running away.

She grumpily replied.

“What are you talking about, Baek hyung. Let’s kill him.”

She believed it was their chance to win.

**

Choi Hyuk, who had embedded the Predator's Blade into Keushisuit's neck, spectated Lee Jinhee stabbing Keken's eye.

"She fights well."

He said in a prideful voice.

Notes:

1] Korean pancake-like food

2] Nuna – what a younger male would call an older female

3] Process – projection or outgrowth of tissue, in this case, muscle tissue.

Chapter 43: Consumables (6)

Swoosh.

The Predator's Blade sucked in Keushisuit's blood at a rate of 1 liter per second. When he was alive, his karma stopped the blood from flowing out so it wasn't able to absorb a lot, but, now that the karma had dispersed from his corpse, his blade didn't have to hold back any longer.

"Hooo..."

Choi Hyuk felt refreshed. The blood drained by the Predator's Blade's [Blood Drain] skill returned to him as a recuperative force. His heavy karma that felt as if it had been stretched became taut and his wounds healed. It was the refreshing feeling you felt when you gulped water through your dry, cracked lips.

The Predator's blade, that was greedily drinking blood, turned red and became silent. There was still blood left in the corpse, however, it seemed to be full.

[Greedy Predator's Blade]

Rank: C (Unique, Growth-type)

Sharp and sturdy. The more blood it absorbs of strong foes, the stronger it will get.

Blood Drain: Absorbs the blood of enemies to replenish its owner's karma and heal their wounds. Able to absorb 1L of blood per second.

Durability: 9,173/10,000

Evolution: 3/100

Before it needed to eat the whole corpse to grow, but now it only needed to kill. It seemed as though its effectiveness had increased when it went from D rank to C rank. Its current evolution stat was 3. He had killed 3 individuals up until now, the Wyvern of Destruction, Keholeun, and Keushisuit.

He placed Keushisuit's corpse and his equipment into his Handy Bag.

Choi Hyuk who was momentarily catching his breath felt a haze-like wave approach him.

"First, Dawn Lightning and now, Deer Antlers. Aren't you incredible?"

An alien. However, she was fluent in Korean. Her figure was covered by a veil of wavering lights and heat waves so he was unable to see her properly. Yet, somehow, he knew naturally. That her name was 'Flame-Rain' and that she was a woman. As if he had always known this fact.

‘… Weird.’

He didn’t even sense her approach. She was emitting a white light (goodwill), but Choi Hyuk did his best and kept his guard up. He pointed the Predator’s Blade in her direction.

“Your motive?”

“Just~ A greeting.”

When Choi Hyuk spoke informally, blue flames flared up and she replied informally without reserve.

Flame-Rain’s attitude felt strange to him. All the lowest ranked warriors he met here were hostile, crazy bastards, but she was friendly and there wasn’t a sense of tension.

When he silently stared at her, she uncovered the flames, that were covering her body, to reveal a surprisingly human-like face.

“Don’t be like that. We might even meet again on the next mission.”

“… We’re going to meet again?”

“Not every time. We usually get transferred to a nearby planet and they have a tendency to send those who are of similar strength

together. There are a few friends I see often as well."

"I don't think they are worth being friends with?"

He looked around at the lowest ranked warriors, who were slaughtering others. There were some who had left and others who were spectating, but there were still around 30 warriors crazily running amok.

"They give you a mission score if you take out the target. They are like that so others don't covet them."

She said in a somewhat bitter voice. Her voice contained such human emotion that it was hard to believe she was an alien.

"They give you a higher score if you take out the target? Then why are they attacking me? And what about those who are just observing?"

"They are reading the situation. The ones who go crazy are typically stronger. And you're a tasty prey. At least, you look like one. First, it seems like you hit 3-star Retribution Points but the rest of your stats seem low. You obtain more karma if you kill someone with a lot of Retribution Points... meaning you look tasty."

Specific calculations for the karma system was crazy difficult to calculate but its principle was simple. The higher your opponent's total stats were or the higher your opponent's Retribution Points

was, the more karma you would receive after killing them. This applied to both monsters and aliens.

Meaning Keushisuit had planned on killing Choi Hyuk for karma points.

“Then there’s no need to be friendly with each other.”

Just because they were in the same situation didn’t mean they were allies. Instead, it was better to think of them as enemies in this case. You would be devoured the moment you seemed like a pushover.

Choi Hyuk took a step away from Flame-Rain. He had basically heard all the information he needed. He felt that her friendliness was dangerous.

“Don’t be like that. It’s because everyone has it tough.”

Her expression looked sad as she said those words. However, the white light and the soft flames covered her face like a wedding veil.

“Anyways, let’s meet again. It’s about time monster start flooding in.”

As if her words were a signal, the ground started to shake. The sounds of flapping wings itched their ears. They were in the middle of the enemy headquarters. Monsters were coming from all directions to take out the intruders. When you looked around, the

original targets, the cocoons, had all been destroyed. It was time to return.

Flame-Rain shook her hand to activate the return code and disappeared. Crunch. Crunch. She disappeared in a gruesome fashion as if she was devoured into the void.

Choi Hyuk looked around for his followers. They were still fighting Keken. They looked like they had the advantage, but they seemed to lack the firepower to finish him off and were progressing at a snail's pace. Keken kept enduring as he believed he could end this once his eyes healed.

However, the sounds of monsters coming from everywhere were loud. Eventually, the first to give up was Keken.

[You, insect bastards! I'll kill you all next time!]

He lashed out in rage, however, Lee Jinhee lashed out in return.

"You, don't appear in front of me again!"

Keken retreated and activated his return code. It seemed Lee Jinhee was out of stamina as she didn't give chase.

The gazes of Lee Jinhee, Baek Seoin, and Chu Youngjin, who were all catching their breaths, turned towards Choi Hyuk who was walking towards them. As soon as their eyes met, Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

‘Everyone’s alive.’

He felt a strange sense of relief.

Like an endless nightmare, missions would continue and their level of danger would increase. If they couldn’t keep up, they would die.

It was a world where the ones who shouldn’t die died

And where ones who no one thought would die died.

A world where yesterday’s enemies could be today’s friends and today’s friends could be dead tomorrow.

Choi Hyuk recalled one of the criteria he had for someone to become his comrade.

‘People who won’t die easily.’

He saw his followers who shook their hands to activate their return codes. He felt happy.

It was now time for him to return as well. He had stolen Keushisuit’s return code and his timer had ended before the fight.

“Return!”

He shouted in a low voice and his stomach felt like it was flipping over. Crunch. Crunch. His body crumbled into the void.

[Calculating Mission Score]

Base Score: 100

Killed over 50 monsters: 100

Total 200 points.

It was something he learned later, but Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, and Chu Youngjin earned another 100 points for as a reward for ‘Killed Target’. A total of 300 points. Only Choi Hyuk, who was busy fighting monsters and didn’t kill a target, earned 200 points.

When he learned this fact.

“Deer Antlers… Damn bastard…”

He ground his teeth.

**

Captain Lee Kangjin escaped when Choi Hyuk and Keushisuit

started to fight. It was because he thought that even a stray blade could kill him. His crushed arm was starting to heal with the power of the Recovery potion. He pressed his arm against his chest and desperately wandering around the battlefield. To find an undestroyed cocoon.

"I will live..."

He wanted to live with sincerity. He wanted to live and become stronger.

Choi Hyuk was a shock to him. No matter how he looked at him, he was a human like himself. However, Choi Hyuk was pretty even with Keushisuit, who was a nightmare to him.

'Though it was the same in the previous mission...'

The strong were really strong. Even if they had all received karma, at some point, there was a difference of heaven and earth between them. Some were so strong it was unbelievable that they were humans. He had even believed they were simply from another world previously.

However, it was different now.

"You fucking bastard..."

He hated himself. He hated himself so much that he wanted to gnaw on his heart and stab it repeatedly.

He hated his powerlessness and incompetence. He wanted to kill himself who could only bark at First Sergeant Jang Sudong.

“I will live… and get stronger…”

His eyes caught sight of a cocoon that seemed to be ready to hatch. It was in a deep crater in the basin so it hadn’t been destroyed yet.

That moment.

Whiiiing!!

The cocoon started to rip and a piercing wind swooshed out from within.

Pashashasha!

An alien closest to it was sliced into four pieces before falling to the ground.

Jjijijik!

Its long razor-sharp legs ripped the cocoon apart and its figure emerged.

‘It’s evolution is about to be complete.’

He instinctively understood the situation. He felt a mighty aura that was incomparable to the others just inside the cocoon. All the aliens who had gathered to destroy it fled in the other direction. The warrior aliens, who were still in the middle of their slaughter, revealed a tense expression as they kept their guard against the cocoon. Even they didn’t think to recklessly approach it. This just showed how powerful the monster, that was about to complete its evolution, felt.

Nonetheless, Captain Lee Kangjin didn’t back down.

“Kelokok! Shih!”

He passed by the screaming aliens.

Thump! Thump!

And ran towards the pulsating cocoon. Luckily, it seemed the piercing wind only came out at the start as he avoided getting sliced and was able to get close to it.

Instead, a razor-sharp leg, that was stretched outside the cocoon, targeted him and swung down. He ducked and slid his left foot away to avoid the attack.

Clash!

The long leg pierced into the ground in vain. He rolled on the ground.

Bang! Bang! Slash!

It was a continuous attack this time. Another leg stabbed at him twice as the first one sliced above his head. He was able to avoid them by rolling due to luck, but, either way, he had ended up really close to the cocoon. Lee Kangjin jumped forward with all his strength. He erased all his fears. Only forward. Forward.

Swish!

He was able to dodge three attacks with that jump.

As he avoided the third, the dangerously swinging legs were unable to block him right away.

On the other hand, his concentration had reached its peak.

[Innate skill ‘Weakness Detection’ awakened!]

He saw a brightly shining point.

The monster was still partially wrapped in the cocoon. It was just about to complete its evolution.

Thump!

An explosive energy that was necessary to evolve was gathered in the center of the cocoon, constantly expanding and contracting. Lee Kangjin instinctively knew that he had to stab that center exactly where the brightly shining point was located.

He jumped into the cocoon. Its legs and antennas sliced open his shoulders in desperation.

“Kirak! Kirararah!”

The monster’s whole body squirmed and despaired. Even in this mess, even though his skin was peeling off and blood was flowing out, he didn’t stop. He finally reached his target.

Crack!

He stabbed the nucleus of evolution.

“Kiyaaaah!!!”

The monster collapsed along with a horrible scream. Lee Kangjin collapsed as well. He fell, exhausted, inside its corpse, covered in its mucus.

[Cleared target. Transforming the corpse into return energy. Remaining Time: 5 minutes]

The moment he confirmed the message, he was lying down as if he was dead, counting the seconds as they passed by. The aliens, who were madly searching for return codes, didn't approach Lee Kangjin, perhaps thinking he was dead or because they had already fled far away.

'4 minutes.'

'3 minutes.'

While he was counting the time pass, the ground suddenly started to shake. The noisy screams of aliens, who hadn't been able to return, were like bees in a hive. It seemed like monsters were incoming from every direction. As this was their headquarters.

'Whatever.'

He continued to count.

'1 minute.'

'30 seconds.'

'10 seconds.'

Just when there were only 5 seconds left.

Jjijijik!

The cocoon split apart.

“Grrrr…”

A monster he had never seen before stuck its head in. It was a beast whose head was double the size of Lee Kangjin.

However, he remained calm and swung his sword.

“Get lost!”

Kakang!!

His sword didn’t slice into its face but the monster flinched and lifted its head back out. That moment,

[Activation of the return code complete.]

It was time.

“Return! You, fuck!”

Lee Kangjin was devoured into the void.

“Krahlahlak!!”

Crunch!

The monster swung its human-sized foot, crushing the cocoon, but Lee Kangjin had already disappeared.

**

That day and a few days after, people returned to earth. The military and police, who had disappeared, were among them.

It was an event that brought the world together.

Chapter 44: Colonize (1)

Only ½ returned from the first mission.

The small groups under the Leaders of Hundred had died fighting each other for the limited number of return codes.

The groups of hundreds to thousands under the Leaders of Ten Thousand had been dropped into the fierce battlefield and had received a crushing blow.

A lot of things changed after the mission ended. It was a relief that both the military and police, who had disappeared, returned, however, the situation didn't change in the way that everyone had wanted. First, the military and police had significantly decreased in number. Not even 1 in 10 had survived. Only 40,000 members of the military and police combined had returned. Of course, the original troops and ranks had long since collapsed, and many soldiers protested against its restoration. In a life where no one knew when they would die, there wasn't anyone who wanted to die in the military. The government still couldn't gain control.

There were a lot of societal problems as well. The awakenees (also known as the returnees) had all become dreary as if they had come back from hell. They would often fight with each other, and each time they did, the streets would become demolished.

To make matters worse, global abnormalities started to arise.

[Even accounting for the lack of rainfall, the ground is extremely

dry. “This… it’s that. It’s not the lack of rain that’s the problem, I’m telling you the ground is drying up and the fertility of the soil is declining!” “There have been no records of a global decline in soil fertility up until now. That is why the academia is conducting an epidemiologic investigation…” We expect that there will be a food crisis from this abnormal global drought phenomenon.]

[Continuing from yesterday, there have been reports of a large-scale disappearance of people. Civilians are becoming increasingly worried along with the rumor that these disappearances may be caused by new awakenees. On the other hand, the domes, which produced the very first awakenees in Mapo District, Seongbuk District, and Kangdong District among others, are still impossible to enter, the authorities…]

The world was filled with signs of doom.

“Repent! The end is coming!”

Doomsayers erupted on one side of the street.

“What, you bastard!?”

“If you’re going to get drunk, do it in moderation.”

Bang, crash!

“Kyaah!”

On the other side, drunken returnees started to fight. With a single punch, trees along the side of the street were smashed and a concrete wall was punched through. These were common occurrences since the first day they returned.

Groups of awakenees, like the Alliance of Comrades in Arms, received significant benefits from the government in order to maintain order. Although this may have been possible against normal civilians, they lacked the ability to intervene in the fights between the returnees. It was because they would receive criticism like, ‘Who are you to butt in?’ and, ‘Go to hell!’

So most fights between returnees would only either end after they fought until they were satisfied or when a nosy person intervened.

Like what Lee Jinhee was doing now.

“You, misters. Do it in moderation.”

Thud. Thud.

Lee Jinhee came between the two fighting returnees. She lightly pushed their shoulders and separated them.

“Who is this bitch?”

Usually, one would become further agitated the more someone tried to stop them. Since she came up and pushed them apart, there was no way they were going to say anything nice. Mister A's eyes bulged.

However, Lee Jinhee's eyes became even wider than the man's.

"This bitch?"

"Uh? ...Berserker?"

The other man, Mister B, realized who she was. He was from Kangdong District.

"Hey! Where are you going! Bastard! Come back here!"

Mister A attempted to chase after Mister B who slowly stepped back and ran away. However,

Thud.

His right shoulder was grabbed by Lee Jinhee.

"You fucking bitch!"

Mister A tried to push her away, but after his left shoulder was grabbed, his arms wouldn't move. She only looked to be a young

female student, but her arms were pressing down on him like a machine press.

'... Huh?'

Only then had Mister A realized that the girl wasn't as simple as he had thought. However, it was too late. He shouldn't have sworn at her so easily.

Bang!

She jumped up and smashed her head downwards while pressing down on his shoulders! Lee Jinhee's regular forehead turned into a lethal weapon as it smashed into the man's forehead.

Thump.

"Who are you swearing at? I feel restless even without you adding to it"

She tidied her disheveled hair.

"Lunch is almost over!"

Chu Youngjin called out from afar.

"Ohya! I'm coming!"

Lee Jinhee ran towards Jamshil Stadium. This was something that occurred during their third day of training after they had returned.

**

“You should have just eaten something nearby, why did you go so far?”

“I was craving Naengmyeon today.”

She brushed off Baek Seoin’s complaint with familiar expertise.

“I can only endure if I eat something good!”

She shouted before gritting her teeth.

“Eagyagyagyagyak!”

Bababaang!

With a red face, as if she was taking a shit, she flew off in all directions like a deflating balloon and slammed into something.

“Pahh.”

And spurted blood.

Baek Seoin clicked his tongue whilst looking at her figure.

“Haa. Is this something you can do just by recklessly using your strength?”

It was the third day since they had returned. They trained in the main stadium of the sports complex every day. It was to strengthen their lacking offensive power.

On the first day of training, Choi Hyuk said,

“Our enemies are at least 2-star and there are some who have even reached 3-star. In other words, it means that there is a high chance that we’ll fight those with higher stats than us.”

And the two skills that allowed him to fight them and win were ‘Karma Blade’ and ‘Flame Wing tribe’s Karma Heart Discipline’.

They were currently training with an emphasis on those two skills.

Every day, before they began their training, Choi Hyuk would repeatedly teach them the fundamentals of the karma heart. It was because they needed to know the fundamentals of the heart in order to form the karma blade. If their karma stats were monstrous, they could do it without the fundamentals, but if they wanted to form the blade with their lacking stats, they needed

skill.

“I have said this many times, but the key point of the karma heart discipline is its ability to grant your karma a shape. Without a shape, it will flow however it wants, but if you invest your will into it, it can be fixed into a specific structure. And if you are able to make a karma heart from it, you will be able to use your karma much more organically. You just need to think that you are creating a karma pump in the middle of your dantian. You are going to connect all your karma to that pump. So that every time you press that pump, it spreads the karma in your body out to your four limbs, and so that you can recall it in a single breath when you expand it. The karma heart will be the secret that will allow you to focus and concentrate your strength more easily. And with that strength, you will be able to create a karma blade.”

Every time she heard that she would grumble.

“It’s too hard!”

Choi Hyuk simply shrugged his shoulders. Even if it was hard, this was the best he could do.

It would have been nice if he could teach them everything of the ‘Karma Heart Discipline’ without missing any points, but that was impossible.

The discipline he received as a reward for killing the Wyvern of Destruction was transferred into his mind through concepts and sensations. Concepts and sensations were difficult to explain with

words. It would easily become a cock and bull story. Didn't they say that the Tao could not be spoken?

It would be easy if there was a way to increase their endurance like in Martial Arts stories, but karma opposed each other so that was impossible.

Eventually, all he could do was teach them this key point and allow them to develop the method on their own.

"First, try to coil your karma into a spiral."

Due to Choi Hyuk's advice,

Bababang!

Every time she was unable to control the coiled karma, she would fly into the air and spew blood. This was because the coiled karma inside was rampaging inside her body as it was being released.

"Why are you like that when you have the highest Control stat among us?"

Baek Seoin teased.

"I don't... Khoff. Cheat. Khoff. Like you cowards... Knoff."

“It’s not cheating; we’re just doing it within our abilities.”

“That’s why Baek hyung is lacking!”

Even while blood flowed from her mouth, she didn’t lose a single bout. From the start, she didn’t know how to do it in moderation. It seemed that her mind was only filled with ‘giving it her all’ and nothing else.

“Hoooo….”

Chu Youngjin was exhaling on the one side, concentrating on his training.

Bang. Bang.

His body moved up and down. From the beginning, he had long since given up on coiling his karma into spirals as he only focused on raising his Power and Speed.

There would be sparring after individual training. It was an exercise employed to allow them to use karma blades in actual combat.

“Then, let’s start.”

Choi Hyuk stood in front of the three who stood in a line. Though it was practice, they all held real F rank swords.

Swish.

Choi Hyuk extended his karma to just barely cover his sword.

Swish.

Following him, Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee formed their karma blades as well. They were a bit wonky until the second day, but by the third, they were able to create and maintain somewhat decent karma blades. Although they weren't able to extend their blades to 5 meters like Choi Hyuk and were only able to cover their blades, this would be of great help when fighting against opponents with high Endurance.

However, Chu Youngjin didn't create a karma blade. As he had already given up on Control, he chose to only extend his karma at the moment of attack instead of maintaining it constantly.

The first to move was Choi Hyuk.

Bang!

He jumped in, and with his right foot as a pivot point, he rotated his waist and shoulders. A blitz attack that put Lee Jinhee within firing range! However, they had already read his preparatory actions.

Baek Seoin jumped into the attack's path with his shield. A faint light flowed out from within his shield.

"It's too simple!"

He said vigorously. However, the attack was a feint.

Whoosh!

Choi Hyuk slid his left foot in front of his right and used the rotating force to contract his body. The blitz attack had changed into a stabbing motion aimed at Baek Seoin.

"Ugk!"

Just when Baek Seoin was taken back, Lee Jinhee jumped over his head and stabbed at Choi Hyuk with her short sword, though he ignored her attack and pressed forward.

Bang!

He pierced a hole in Baek Seoin's shield. It was because Baek Seoin had released his karma when he became flustered.

"Baek hyung, out. You have to maintain your karma."

He said as he struck Baek Seoin's shin. Baek Seoin flew high up

into the air and smashed to the ground.

Crackle!

That moment, they heard the sound of lightning as Chu Youngjin rushed in from Choi Hyuk's side. His sword seemed to possess an aura of shadows.

As the attack was too fast for him to dodge, Choi Hyuk met it with his blade.

Clash!

Surprisingly, the one who was pushed back was Choi Hyuk. There was even a dent left on his F rank practice sword. Chu Youngjin had Power 100 (★★) and Speed 108 (★★) while Choi Hyuk had Power 220 (★★) and Speed 113 (★★).

As Chu Younjin hadn't activated his Berserker skill yet, in terms of stats, Choi Hyuk was overwhelmingly superior. However, it was Choi Hyuk who was pushed back.

It was due to Chu Youngjin's unique karma utilization method. He had given up on forming his karma into spirals and controlling them precisely and, instead, solely focused on explosiveness. Like an internal-combustion engine, he would gather his karma up before it exploded out! On top of that that, he was able to use the concentration of karma from his skill, [Bisect].

The moment his extremely compressed karma exploded out at the precise location,

Rumble! Clash!

Sounds of lightning could be heard. At the moment of impact, he had exploded karma collected in his foot and in the tip of his sword. His impulse and destructive force instantly increased sharply.

“It’s a good method, but…”

Choi Hyuk admired as he met the attack with his blade.

The karma heart he created in his dantian sucked in all the karma in his body. Choi Hyuk then opened the ‘karma pathway’ connected to his arm. It was a vision contained in the ‘Flame Wing tribe’s Heart Discipline’. First to create a heart and then to create hooks or pathways connecting to the heart. The long structures that were connected to the heart were normally used as muscles and tendons that reinforced his body, but it was also used as a pathway which accelerated the speed he could release and recall his karma.

During this training, all he did was faintly created a ‘karma pathway’ in his right arm, but its effect was surprising. The karma released from the heart accelerated and shot out towards his sword.

Kiing!

Karma quickly rotated as it wrapped around his blade. The blade became transparent. As it was only a spar, he matched the amount of karma to Chu Youngjin, but as he had finer control, he refined it to be sharper.

Choi Hyuk's sword and Chu Youngjin's sword clashed.

Slice!

Chu Youngjin's practice sword was cleanly sliced in two.

"Chu Youngjin, out. Maybe it's because you explode your karma, but when you attack consecutively, your karma loses a noticeable amount of density and your attack becomes erratic. It can't help but be cut by a sharp weapon."

Even while he was turning his body to guard against Lee Jinhee, Choi Hyuk pointed out Chu Youngjin's weak points.

"You consume a lot of stamina. If my guess is right, it probably puts a lot of pressure on your joints?"

Chu Youngjin nodded his head.

"It might be good to use it when you're in danger but try to find a safer technique."

After listening to Choi Hyuk's comments, Chu Youngjin fell deep into thought.

On the other hand, Lee Jinhee couldn't stand Choi Hyuk.

"Eek! Leader, are you looking down on me?!"

'For him to dodge my attacks and guide Chu Youngjin at the same time! Am I that much of pushover?'

"Be prepared!"

Clash, clash!

She shouted as she aggressively rushed forward, however, her sword was blocked every time. She couldn't beat him with swordsmanship. Though she wanted to break his cocky sword in two, as long as karma was wrapped around it, she couldn't.

"Jinhee nuna, you're quite good at maintaining your karma blade. I was worried when I saw you practice."

When Choi Hyuk complimented her with the word, 'quite', she became even more vexed.

"Shut it!"

Was it because she was too angry? Lee Jinhee started to move instinctively. She gathered her karma into the middle of her body, her dantian. She set up a wick and created a whirlwind around it. To her utmost controllable limit. She then broke through her limit and gathered even more. If she lost her control here, like during practice, she would fly off spurting blood.

“Eek!”

However, she didn’t stop. Instead, she moved the karma that was twirling like a whirlwind to her left hand.

When Choi Hyuk saw this, he frowned. It was because the karma on her blade was released due to her karma gathering at her left hand.

‘Did she fail to maintain it?’

Choi Hyuk, slightly disappointed, swung his practice sword out to end it.

That moment, Lee Jinhee’s left hand struck out like lightning. It rushed towards Choi Hyuk’s oncoming sword.

“Lee Jinhee!”

“Nuna!”

Baek Seoin and Chu Youngjin became shocked. To their eyes, it seemed as though her left hand would be cut off.

However, the one who was more shocked was Choi Hyuk.

Pashasha!

A storm burst out from Lee Jinhee's left hand. Her tightly coiled karma exploded out like a whirlwind. Choi Hyuk's karma, which was loosely wrapped around his sword for practice, was ripped apart and pushed back by the storm Lee Jinhee created.

[After endless consideration, you have realized a new way to use karma. Retribution Points increased by 20.]

Lee Jinhee heard an alarm, but she didn't have the time to care. She was almost halfway into a trance. She felt the world slow down. She really felt she could beat Choi Hyuk.

Bang!

Lee Jinhee's left hand grabbed Choi Hyuk's karmaless sword. Though she was barehanded, an F rank weapon couldn't pierce her Endurance. The scene was like magic.

"Checkmate, Leader!"

At the same time, her sword flew towards Choi Hyuk's neck.

“… Wow… For the karma blade to be blown away.”

As Choi Hyuk admired,

Thud!

He lightly kicked her shin. Lee Jinhee flew up in the air and fell on her back.

“Kuack!”

Lee Jinhee vented her anger by flailing her arms on the ground. However, Choi Hyuk was very surprised.

“It’s good?”

Before they went to explore the land they needed to colonize, from the training he started to increase their overall strength, Choi Hyuk once again realized the limitless uses of karma.

Chapter 45: Colonize (2)

Why did so many people have to die? Why did we all have to receive a Consumables (Deferred) Judgment?

“It might be because we didn’t save the kids.”

Lee Jinhee said in a gloomy voice.

“Will the kids even still be alive?”

She was walking as she looked up at the sky. It was a spring sky with no clouds, clear and dry.

“Maybe. Didn’t Jung Minji say that? That there must be a reason. Maybe the ones above saw everything. ‘Oh, they gave up on their race’s future. Good. You’ll be Consumables.’”

Baek Seoin weighed in on her gloominess. However, when she heard those words, her eyes sharpened.

“Who the hell are they to judge us on our actions? Arghh… Just outrageous!”

“Yeah, that’s more like you.”

Baek Seoin grinned and turned his head towards Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk was standing in front of an enormous orb. The orb that looked to be almost 3 stories tall was dark and blue.

‘Portal.’

It was a portal leading to the new lands they had to colonize.

The first to attempt an exploration in the new lands was China, who went two days ago. 15,000 people were recruited and they were promptly annihilated. The new lands were simply too risky. Everyone tried to stop him until there was more information, however, he wouldn’t listen. He thought that even going now was too late.

5,000 people were gathered in Yeoido Park, a mixture of resolution and despair amongst them. The ones gathered here were of two categories, either they possessed a firm will and conviction, or they had already given up on the world. Both sides were half-crazy. If they weren’t crazy, they wouldn’t have come to attempt this reckless challenge.

When Choi Hyuk told them that he was going to challenge the new lands and asked others to lend him their strength, everyone showed their disapproval. Most of the Leaders of Ten Thousand and Leaders of Hundred refused.

Choi Hyuk reminded them of the words the Giant Orc Karik had said to the sovereigns. Karik’s words had already been leaked by various sources and were even printed in newspapers.

[You have two missions. Get stronger. And colonize. You have a 5-year grace period.]

Choi Hyuk used Karik's announcement and said.

"We have to do this as fast as possible. We need to shed our fate as Consumables. If we don't, we'll have to keep doing these damn missions with ½ return rates."

Leader Cha Taeshik replied with a sound argument.

"You're right. But, isn't there a saying, 'more haste, less speed[1]'? It'll become more severe if we meet the same fate as China and are annihilated. Going in now is too dangerous."

Choi Hyuk simply nodded at Leader Cha Taeshik's words. He was right. However, if they started to push it back, there would be no end to it.

'It's dangerous?'

It was already dangerous. Earth was already facing a crisis. His reasonable argument was the correct method in a stable environment. However, great achievements were needed in crises.

Sovereigns and their followers were the only ones who could partake in the first colonization. So, in the case where there was no support, Choi Hyuk had already planned on going by himself.

There were, however, forces that reacted when he acted with that resolve. They were Bae Jinman and Ryu Hyunsung.

"This is nerve-wracking."

Bae Jinman, who was a Leader of Ten Thousand and a Guardian, became chatty next to Choi Hyuk.

"I couldn't even sleep last night."

Ryu Hyunsung, whose title had changed from Knight Captain to Leader of Ten Thousand, replied while rubbing his eye.

Bae Jinman and Ryu Hyunsung brought their forces and defected to Choi Hyuk's side. Both were influential leaders who had filled all ten thousand members. After the last mission, Bae Jinman and Ryu Hyunsung returned with four thousand and three thousand members respectively. Considering that the average return rate was below ½, it was quite considerable. Even still, they were both broken-hearted. The losses they endured were too large to be consoled by the fact that their return rate was relatively high. To them it was as if two out of every three people they knew died.

Although everyone was experiencing similar circumstances, the only ones who reacted when Choi Hyuk moved were those two. They said that their hearts started pumping when they heard, 'we need to quickly shed our fate as Consumables'.

When they revealed they were planning on defecting to Choi

Hyuk's side, half the members under their command opposed and left. That was how around 3,400 people joined Choi Hyuk's side.

Besides them, 1,600 lunatics, who were suffering from the aftereffects of the last mission and wanted to die, personally came to Choi Hyuk saying they admired him, resulting in a combined total of 5,000.

Choi Hyuk's followers had sharply increased from 3 to 5,000 people. Of course, they were followers recruited for a limited time. It was highly likely that they would separate as soon as they finished colonizing.

Also, as there weren't any mental or physical constraints on the relationships between sovereigns and their followers, the only way he could move these people was purely through leadership. This was an area Choi Hyuk was not very confident in.

Choi Hyuk looked around at his troops. He left Bae Jinman and Ryu Hyunsung in complete command over the soldiers. Bae Jinman would coordinate the battlefield from the rear while Ryu Hyunsung, who possessed a high fighting ability as a national sabre athlete, would lead the charge. Baek Seoin and his other followers were also assigned to Ryu Hyunsung's command as it was easier for Choi Hyuk to move alone.

"Then, let's go."

Choi Hyuk entered the blue orb with not even the slightest hesitation.

[Using the portal. 100 Mission Points were deducted.]

The base reward for completing a mission, 100 points, disappeared as an entrance fee.

**

The sensation of passing through the portal was much more comfortable than the dimensional teleportation from last time. Though he still felt a bit nauseous, it wasn't too bad.

The blue light from the portal that clung to his eyes didn't fade away easily. Only after shaking his head and blinking his eyes a few times was he able to see the white sky above. Underneath the white sky, which swirled like stirred milk, a hilly region stretched out in front of his eyes. Besides only a few trees, bleak, sharp, red rocks covered various places.

Soon a message appeared.

———————

[Colonizing Lands – Spartoi[2] Post]

The 'Dragonic' died off due to the invasion of the monsters. Using the corpses of the Dragonic, the once ruling race, as a host, new monsters, spartoi, came into existence. This region was once known as 'Barhaloleun' in the past, and the place where the high

dragon was killed was called Barhaloleun Hill.

Clear the spartoi group inhabiting Barhaloleun Hill.

If you are unable to detect the spartoi after a particular scope, a portal will be activated.

———————

There was absolutely no need to be curious as to where the spartoi were as this was their territory and Choi Hyuk's troops were the invaders.

Bang, bang, bang!!

Even before all the troops were able to pass through the portal, a magical bombardment rained down upon them. Red masses flew towards them and exploded in the middle of their troops. The strong energy contained within them shredded their surroundings and soldiers either died on the spot or their arms and legs were ripped off. More than ten soldiers would be caught up in each explosion.

"Ahck!"

"My arm… My arm…!"

The strong attack they faced as soon as they passed through brought people into a state of panic.

They now understood how the Chinese troops were annihilated.

If it wasn't for Bae Jinman, they too would have taken an overwhelming blow.

[Get up!]

An area-of-effect buff that increased their courage and sense of solidarity. Bae Jinman's especially warm karma calmed them down and boosted their will.

"Over there!"

Due to the people having woken up from their stupor, they were able to quickly figure out the location of the enemy. The spartoi were gathered on top of a hill that stood between their portal location and the start of the hilly region.

They stood upright with swords in one hand, shields in the other, and tails coming from their rears. Their bodies were angled like robots and appeared glossy like ceramics with a slightly red hue.

There were around 200 in total. Among them, 180 were heavily armed, standing as they faced them. The 180 in front looked different from the 20 in the back. The former had round heads like Lego figurines, and the latter had elongated heads similar to that of dragons'. They shot red balls of karma from their mouths which flew down at Choi Hyuk's troops.

Bang! Bang!

Every time that energy exploded, the bodies of the awakenees,

which wouldn't have been fully penetrated by bullets, were ripped to shreds.

"Iron Defense!"

Baek Seoin activated his skill and intercepted a karma cannonball aimed at the portal. Baek Seoin's shield shined with karma.

Baaang!

Though he was pushed back 3 steps, he succeeding in blocking it. He was able to save the dazed soldiers who had just passed through the portal.

"Quickly, quickly! Run!"

Baek Seoin commanded the newly arrived soldiers.

Baang! Baang! Baang!

Three cannonballs exploded above his shield.

Baek Seoin spurted blood as he rolled on the ground.

"Team 1, Team 2! In front! Activate your shield skills!"

Using the moment Baek Seoin gained for them, Bae Jinman's

orders sounded out. The shield wielders of Team 1 blocked the portal while Team 2 formed an assembly area.

As there were some cannonballs that flew above their heads, there were times when shield wielders would jump up to intercept them. Every time they heard a bang, they would see shield wielders flying up into the sky or smashing into the ground.

“We can’t endure long like this.”

Bae Jinman said with a stiff face. What was worse was that 5,000 soldiers still hadn’t passed through. Perhaps maybe 2,000 had arrived?

“We might be wiped out if we wait for more to arrive… However, if we charge now, I don’t think they’ll be able to identify our bones.”

Ryu Hyunsung revealed a distressed expression.

Choi Hyuk provided them with the solution.

“I’ll get their attention so you take the opportunity and charge.”

He tapped the Predator’s Blade once and immediately ran towards the hill.

“Really…!”

They didn’t even have the opportunity to hold him back.

Choi Hyuk had already gone far ahead.

The spartoi who were in a rectangular formation turned their gaze towards Choi Hyuk.

Thud! Thud!

Every time he jumped, Choi Hyuk would close the distance by more than ten meters. As he approached a certain location.

“Krrrereeek! Kiriik! Kik!”

The stiff, robotic, emotionless spartoi grinned wickedly. It was as if a part of their face had been cut off. A part he never thought would be a mouth split open to reveal pitch darkness as it grinned. They were definitely a monster race.

Kuaaah!

The dragonhead spartoi aimed at Choi Hyuk and rained karma cannonballs upon him.

‘So karma can be used like that as well?’

Though he didn't dare try it now, he decided to take note of it. His vision started to turn red as it was filled with falling karma cannonballs.

"High-speed Movement."

He extended karma out, grabbed a spartoi on the frontlines and pulled. Ping! The karma cannonballs fell behind him.

The sight he saw instantly changed. He saw a spartoi that was like a wall as he approached. It was big. 3 meters tall. Armed to the teeth.

Swish!

He swung an extended karma blade at the figure of the spartoi who was unable to follow his High-speed Movement.

Pacak!

However, the Predator's Blade wrapped with a karma blade halted to a stop at its armor. Although there was a deep dent, he wasn't able to cut through it.

'What?'

Only then did the spartoi lock onto Choi Hyuk. As a pitch-black aura flowed out of its hideously opened mouth, it swung its blade

wildly.

'It's weak?'

Though it was able to block his karma blade that the Wyvern of Destruction, Keholeun, and Keushisuit couldn't block, as if it was nothing, their attacking ability was ridiculously low. They were better than 1-star crooks, but they were still lacking compared to the attacking abilities of most 2-star monsters. Their attacks couldn't intimidate Choi Hyuk, however, the problem was that while they blocked his path, the dragonhead spartoi at the back would bombard him with karma cannonballs.

Bababaang!

The attack was different from previous ones. Maybe it was because he had come too close, but instead of exploding them like bombs, they started to shoot at him like machine guns.

'... Damn!'

He wrapped a karma barrier around himself. The red karma bullets that shot towards him from the front exploded and missed on either side of him. An incredible pressure also fell down towards him from above.

"Grrk!"

His feet touched the ground. His body rolled on the ground.

Karma arrows flew above him. Choi Hyuk's figure was covered by a red dust cloud as it disappeared.

"Leader Choi Hyuk!"

Ryu Hyunsung shouted out, not sure of what to do. For him to go under after saying he would get their attention?

Baek Seoin tapped his shoulder.

"Why aren't you charging? Didn't my leader just buy you time?"

Ryu Hyunsung absentmindedly gazed at Baek Seoin's face. He couldn't find a single trace of concern for Choi Hyuk on his face.

'Is he for real?'

He became doubtful, but Choi Hyuk's followers' reactions were like usual.

"Ah! Quickly!"

"Ah damn! Let him be, I'll go first! Let's go! Chu!"

Baek Seoin urged, but Lee Jinhee decided to charge first and brought Chu Youngjin with her.

Ryu Hyunsung unknowingly became caught up in their pace and he shouted out an order.

“All members! Fanout! Charge!”

The troops, who were getting beat up as soon as they arrived, started their awkward charge.

Notes:

1] I’m using the English equivalent proverb. The more literal translation is, ‘The more you’re in a haste, you take the longer road.’

2] Spartoi – Greek Mythology, Mythical people who sprang up from the dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus.

Chapter 46: Colonize (3)

The dragonhead spartoi concentrated their firepower on Choi Hyuk. During this time, Ryu Hyunsung's troop were able to execute the charge with Lee Jinhee taking the lead.

Clang! Crash!

Though loud sounds could be heard, they weren't effective. The spartoi were born from the High Dragon Barhaloleun's bones. Their bodies were built of a material that was very reactive to karma, dragon bones.

"I can't make a dent!"

Lee Jinhee shouted as she swung at the spartoi with agile movements. There wasn't a significant result. When she tried to ignore the spartoi in front of her and jump over them, a karma arrow would fly over and block her like a ghost. She had no choice but to go through them, but there was no way to do so.

Chu Youngjin put away his red sword and took out another one to attack the spartoi. He was worried it might get damaged.

"This luster! No matter how I look at it, it looks like karma's been applied? So, from the start, their bodies and the equipment they use are made of the same material. Their bodies are no different from karma-reinforced shields."

“Then what do we do?”

Lee Jinhee asked. She avoided the swinging spear of a spartoi and slashed down at its wrist. There was only a slight scratch.

Baek Seoin replied.

“Jinhee. Try that!”

“What?”

“That Wind Void…”

“Wind Void Wave?”

“Yeah, Void Wave! Use that!”

Lee Jinhee’s mind seemed to light up at his words. If their bodies were like karma-reinforced shields like he said, then didn’t she just have to blow it away?

The skill she created a few days ago, Wind Void Wave. It was a skill that was even able to blow Choi Hyuk’s karma away.

Clench.

Lee Jinhee applied power to her dantian. Her karma started to

coil into spirals. At some point, the spirals, which had been coiled to the extreme, had transformed into a whirlwind.

"Eat this!"

She rushed into a spartoi's bosom and stuck her left hand out. The whirlwind that started from her dantian made its way up her arm and smashed into the monster's chest. Wind blasted out from the spartoi's chest.

Pashashasha!

Although the spartoi flinched, it didn't move back a single step. From the beginning, it wasn't a skill with much destructive power. The skill's motive was to push away the karma on its outer layer.

"The luster is gone!"

Baek Seoin yelled in delight as he ran towards her. His sword shined with karma and,

Zzong!

A fracture appeared on the spartoi's body.

"That's good."

Chu Youngjin rushed in, not losing his chance.

“Bisect!”

Crackle!

Along with the activation of his skill, he used his own particular method to explode his karma.

Crack!

Although, because of the high endurance of the bones, he wasn’t able to sever its neck, he was still able to break 1/3 of it. They had finally left a significant blow.

“Leader! It’s Wind Void Wave!”

Lee Jinhee shouted refreshingly with karma imbued in her voice. Loud enough for all 5,000 people to hear.

It was Baek Seoin’s role to be embarrassed.

‘What on Earth… is Wind Void Wave?’

He couldn’t help but be astonished at the immaturity of her naming sense.

Anyways, her worrying about Choi Hyuk was pointless. As he had already come to that conclusion by himself.

**

The karma arrows seemed as if they were trying to force Choi Hyuk to submit. Choi Hyuk fiercely wielded his karma in retaliation, but that was all. He couldn't advance forward. He was in a situation where if he didn't give up and retreat, his safety was at risk. However, he didn't retreat.

Trials were like this. Although there were times when going around could be faster, there were also times where you would never break through once you failed to break through the first time. Your most fierce attempt would be your first. Therefore, if you couldn't do it the first time, you wouldn't be able to do it the next. With that in mind, Choi Hyuk was striking down the endless barrage of karma arrows.

His karma felt heavier every passing moment.

However, he increased his concentration. He believed in himself. His talent would always find a path to victory. What was the one move that could throw all this away? It was this moment when he figured out the answer.

'Lee Jinhee.'

The surrounding air current changed.

Thump, thump!

His karma heart thumped furiously as it pumped karma. He expanded his barrier and pushed the surrounding attacks further away.

Thump.

This time, he recalled his released karma. He created a spiral in the center of the heart. The air around him distorted.

A whirlwind, no, a storm began to brew with him as the center.

He saw the oncoming karma arrows. If this skill failed, he would undoubtedly die.

‘Though there’s no way I’ll fail.’

He didn’t stop there. He divided the fierce karma storm into smaller parts and added in his unique rhythm. As he did, the different parts started to resonate with each other. Woong, woong, woong. Once the resonance started, it expanded swiftly.

His dantian felt like it was tearing apart.

When he was at the absolute limit of his limits, he pushed the resonance that seemed as if it was about to explode out. He pushed

it out through the karma pathway on his right arm.

“Leader! It’s Wind Void Wave!”

He heard Lee Jinhee’s voice.

‘I know.’

Choi Hyuk smiled, revealing his teeth. An invisible wave exploded from his right hand.

…

Sound disappeared from the battlefield. The resonance of the storm, which was compressed to its utmost limits, blew away the air as it covered the whole battlefield. The luster on the bodies of the spartoi disappeared as did the karma on Lee Jinhee’s short swords.

The arrows flying towards Choi Hyuk either scattered or went off course and embedded into the red ground.

It was as if time had stopped. Both the humans and spartoi froze at the drastic change that silently overcame them.

The first to move was Choi Hyuk.

Thump!

He had overtaxed his karma heart to its limit, however, he gathered his strength once more. Along with a numbing pain.

Swish.

A 5-meter-long karma blade appeared. His karma and body were both at their limits.

“Euaahhhh!”

Choi Hyuk shouted to prevent himself from fainting.

Crakakakak!

The spartoi that blocked his path had their waists sliced and their upper bodies scattered in the air.

Like a lion, Choi Hyuk leaped over the spartoi and attacked the dragonhead spartoi behind them. It seemed that in exchange for their high offensive power, the dragonhead spartoi lacked strong defense as he was able to cut them without imbuing his sword with karma. Pieces of bone scattered into the air.

“Wah… Damn… I hate him.”

Lee Jinhee pouted as she pierced holes into the bodies of spartoi, which had lost their luster. She felt as if her skill was stolen.

“Is he even human! How can you improve something you’ve only seen once so much!”

While Lee Jinhee was speaking ill of him, Choi Hyuk had finished taking care of the dragonheads and was staggering. He acted otherwise by keeping his eyes wide open, but it was obvious he was exhausted. Substituting for the exhausted Choi Hyuk, 5,000 soldiers charged in.

“Push! Push! Annihilate them before their karma returns!”

They weren’t scared of the spartoi without dragonheads. They were simply monstrously tough monsters. Even that was blown away with the Void Wave. Though they were tough, the soldiers were able to smash them apart with various skills.

“Yeah, this is it!”

Spartoi would be split apart every time Ryu Hyunsung wielded his saber. His saber was shining faintly.

The spartoi couldn’t endure the attack of 5,000 people. If they couldn’t slice them with swords, they would smash them with iron maces. Though the spartoi regained their karma after the effect of the Void Wave ended, even then, these spartoi would eventually turn into powder after being beaten with an iron mace hundreds or

thousands of times. The spartoi were no longer a match for the humans after they lost their karma cannonballs.

The fierce battle concluded in an hour.

500 casualties. The casualties due to the cannonballs in the beginning were simply too large.

However,

“Ooaaahhh!”

A cheer erupted. Why wouldn’t one? Didn’t China get annihilated after sending 15,000 people?

The combination of Choi Hyuk’s existence and the skill, Void Wave, was the dividing factor between 15,000 and 5,000 people. This was an incredible accomplishment.

[First to colonize amongst humans! Retribution Points of all participants increased by 10. Granted 10 free karma points.] [Colonization Sovereign Choi Hyuk’s Retribution Points increased by an extra 30 points. Granted 30 free karma points.]

———————

[Succeeded in Colonizing the Starting Point! – Spartoi Post]

The ‘Dragonic’ planet has become occupied by monsters.

Although still surviving members continue their resistance, their prospects are bleak. Liberate the ‘Dragonic’ and prepare a human settlement.

Barhaloleun Hill 1 is now a human territory! The portal has been activated.

Passage management authority granted to Colonization Sovereign ‘Choi Hyuk’

Unlocked ‘Supply Store of the Flame Wing tribe’.

————————

**

While Bae Jinman was treating the wounded after the battle, a few scouts left while the rest sat down and rested.

Choi Hyuk’s expression wasn’t good.

“Why is Leader Choi Hyuk’s expression not very good after winning so magnificently?”

“Ah, Guardian Bae Jinman. Are the wounded okay?”

“Yes. Everyone is now fine. Though, we can’t do anything about the dead.”

Bae Jinman who momentarily had a gloomy expression examined Choi Hyuk’s expression and asked.

“Is something concerning you?”

“No. I was just thinking about what to do now.”

“Liberate the Dragonic and prepare a human settlement.”

Bae Jinman recited the announcement. Choi Hyuk’s expression distorted again.

“...I’m pissed. It was hard gathering 5,000 people. Doesn’t it seem there will eventually be battles where we need hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people?”

Only then did Bae Jinman understand Choi Hyuk’s concern. It would be great if Choi Hyuk was able to kill all the monsters occupying this planet himself. But that was impossible. He was strong, but he needed help. Even today, if he didn’t have the 5,000 people, he might have become exhausted in the middle of the battle and died.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn’t confident in ‘politics’ which was needed to gather the help he needed, in fact, he even despised it.

So Bae Jinman laughed.

“Puahaha. Why do you worry about that?”

He revealed a heartwarming smile.

‘It’s times like this when I remember he really is a young man.’

To Bae Jinman, Choi Hyuk’s worries weren’t anything to worry about.

Soon after, Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee returned from reconnaissance and an executive meeting, including Ryu Hyunsung, Chu Youngjin, and Bae Jinman, was held.

Choi Hyuk kept a blank expression throughout the meeting. His followers were very competent.

“There are no dangerous enemies within a 2km radius. There are only small-scale monster groups. The hilly region extends in a long line. You can tell just by looking, but this is the highest place in our surroundings. However, 2km north, there’s a vast plateau and there are more spartoi there. We saw around 500 with just a quick glance.”

Lee Jinhee added in during Baek Seoin’s report.

“Ah, and there was an amazing ore so I brought it! It seems similar to the material that make up the bodies of the spartoi… Look. It doesn’t cut when I hit it with a karma blade.”

She said while rubbing an ore emitting a red light on her blade. Bae Jinman’s eyes shined.

“Is there a lot?”

“Yes. There’s a lot. There~ Do you see that pointy boulder? I brought some of that as well.”

Lee Jinhee threw a wide red rock up into the air.

“This is really light. And strong.”

Bae Jinman smiled. He turned towards Choi Hyuk and said.

“It’s a gold mine. There’s a farmer amongst my comrades and he said that this dirt is extremely fertile.”

“The place seems quite desolate considering its fertile?”

Like Ryu Hyunsung’s words, there weren’t a lot of plant life around them. They only saw enormous trees here and there. They were trees whose trunks were the size of 4 elephants.

“Yes, as it is a rocky area. However, if it didn’t have nutrients, those trees would absolutely be unable to grow that large. We have to investigate specific details, but it means there is a possibility anyhow. If not, we can advance it as a flat region.”

Bae Jinman suddenly looked up at the sky. A strange white sky that looked like a milk whirlpool.

“This place is a new world. It’s full of potential. Leader Choi Hyuk, think about the words in the announcement. ‘Prepare a human settlement’.”

Choi Hyuk looked at him with a ‘So what?’ expression. It was Baek Seoin, instead of Bae Jinman, who replied.

“... Are Guardian Bae Jinman’s thoughts the same? ‘Prepare a settlement’ could be interpreted simply as creating a base... but I too find it a bit strange. Why do we need to settle? Was it because we have to leave Earth and needed a place to settle?”

“Ehh, that’s going too far.”

Lee Jinhee scolded Baek Seoin.

However, Guardian Bae Jinman agreed with him.

“No. That’s correct. You’ll know if you’ve seen the news recently. We are expecting the worst harvest in history. We’re not facing a drought because there hasn’t been any rain but the ground itself is drying up. They say that food has been reserved few years in advance.”

Everyone’s gaze turned to Bae Jinman.

“Though it may seem civilization on Earth is strong, but in fact,

it’s extremely fragile. What do you think will happen if this sudden lack of food continues for 1-2 years? But if the ground continues to dry up like now, no one will be able to live on Earth. There is another suspicious situation. They say that there have been large-scale disappearances? Where do you think they’ve gone? Even this hypothesis is possible. Perhaps this colonizing land might be the land humans have to migrate to. They might possibly be somewhere on this land as they were migrated in advance.”

A silence hung in the air. Though they would be able to figure it out as they slowly confirmed things… The dark and obscure world seemed to reveal a more detailed outline.

Bae Jinman’s expression suddenly changed. From a serious one to a brighter one.

He combined what he had said until now and jokingly said to Choi Hyuk.

“Before, you were worried that there wouldn’t be many people participating in the colonization war? There is no need for that. The value of the mineral resources here is unfathomable and a food crisis approaches Earth. Now, look here. There are resources of value and a possible escape from annihilation. Why would they endure and not come here?

Bae Jinman paused for a moment before meaningfully saying.

“You shouldn’t be worried whether if there will be a lot of participants, but who you will accept. They will eventually beg

Leader Choi Hyuk to let them in.”

A strange silence hung in the air. It was a palpitating silence. They were silently feeling extremely excited. A completely new world was approaching.

Choi Hyuk had his mouth tightly shut. He had butterflies in his stomach.

Baek Seoin broke the silence and added in.

“On top of that, there is even the ‘Supply Store of the Flame Wing tribe’.”

It was game set.

Chapter 47: Colonize (4)

{Entering the Supply Store of the Flame Wing tribe.}

{Calculating Retribution Points... Able to enter the lowest level store.}

There was a suggestion about first learning more about the supply store. When he thought about wanting to use the supply store, a message appeared and when he decided he wanted to enter, his body disappeared.

When he opened his eyes, he saw a dark basement area. Drab rocks were left naked and he could see worn-out metal tools and doors here and there. A white-haired alien, with a nose that extended down to his lower lip and a wide mouth that followed its jawline, sat crookedly at a desk.

“Who are you? First time seeing you here.”

The alien yawned once before asking. Like Flame-Rain, he was fluent in Korean.

“... I came to use the supply store.”

“Ah, of course, you came to use it. Or why else would you come here? Did you come by yourself? You’re quite foolish. Let’s see... Earth? There’s a place like that? And you’re a sovereign looking like that?”

His tone was very rude. It was to the point where it felt like he was provoking him on purpose.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't reply as he thoroughly examined the alien. When he did that, the alien said with a less enthusiastic voice.

"Go through that left door. Don't even think about causing a commotion. I don't give a damn if you're a sovereign or not. If you annoy me, I'll turn you into a seedbed for Starving Ghost Spore Flowers."

Then he crossed his arms again and closed his eyes.

Choi Hyuk silently stared at him before entering the left door. The alien wasn't likable from the start.

No matter how he looked at it, the place had an underground prison theme to it. Barbed fences extended on either side of the long hallway and items were displayed inside.

{What's that? Where did he come from? He looks funny.}

A few groups of aliens were spread out along the hallway. He had seen them before. To be exact, he had seen their species before.

Aliens with small, pale figures seemed to be the same species as

Dawn Lightning Keholeun, while the large aliens with various types of antlers seemed to be the same as Deer Antlers Keushisuit.

{That's the bastard. The earthling who received deferred judgment this time.}

{Earthling?}

{Yeah. The one who crushed Keholeun and Keushisuit.}

{Really? Someone like him?}

In front of him were aliens that looked identical to Keholeun. 3 of them. They were talking about him. Even as he was passing between them, they didn't stop talking. They weren't purposely letting him hear their conversation. It was simply because they didn't care as they believed he wouldn't be able to do anything.

Amongst them, there was even one who was thinking about calling Choi Hyuk out and provoking him.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

However, Choi Hyuk was faster. He stopped precisely right next to the group. Then he looked down at them, who had small, pale figures, and said.

"Hey, you're noisy."

{Ha?}

They were speechless, but Choi Hyuk pushed forward.

“You have something to say?”

Their expressions turned cold.

{Don’t get ahead of yourself and just keep going your way.}

One of them warned him.

Choi Hyuk grinned. He felt a fight would break out. Adrenaline started pumping and the ends of his hair rose.

‘Will I win? Or lose? How strong will they be?’

His heart started beating. Choi Hyuk wordlessly examined each of their faces closely.

They seemed to be intimidated by that.

{This bastard…}

An alien pushed Choi Hyuk and took a rotating disk from his

pocket. However, the others stopped him. They said to Choi Hyuk.

{We'll see you on the field...}

The aliens, who he thought would try to fight once he provoked them, actually retreated. He suddenly recalled what the alien at the entrance said. 'If you cause a commotion, I'll turn you into a seedbed for Starving Ghost Spore Flowers.' His influence seemed to hold quite a bit of power. This was quite depressing.

Pft.

Choi Hyuk looked at their faces and smirked before moving away.

{Keke. You're quite the rookie, aren't you?}

{Yo~ I heard you took out Keushisuit. Let's fight next time!}

{But will you be okay? Those 'Pyrio' species are narrow-minded and will constantly annoy you? Want this hyung to help you?}

Hyung – What a young male calls an older male.

Aliens, who looked similar to Keushisuit, started to chatter. He wasn't sure if it was alcohol or not, but they kept drinking a light green liquid, some of it even dripped down from their lips. One alien had a coiled horn like a unicorn's, while there were also,

amongst others, some with short horns like a cow's, crooked horns shaped like lightning and slender horns like thorns. They seemed to each have their own individual horns.

They looked at him and giggled unpleasantly.

Choi Hyuk simply raised his middle finger at them as he passed by.

{Huh? What's that? Is he saying thank you?}

{Something seems off?}

They raised their middle fingers at each other as they continued to drink the green liquid to their heart's content.

**

Inside some of the barbed fences were rooms with opaque curtains where aliens were trying on weapons and armors.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk. Welcome to the supply store.}

He had only gone a few more steps when he suddenly heard a voice. It was using formal speech. It seemed unfamiliar. Choi Hyuk stopped in place and looked around. There wasn't anyone there.

“Who?”

{I am the AI of the lowest level supply store, Supply-01173. I will assist you in using the supply store.}

“Really?”

Like he thought, it was weird to hear formal speech, but it turned out to be an AI.

{You are able to purchase various equipment, consumables, and skills here. You are also able to purchase various facilities and daily necessities as well. Facilities are essential for sovereigns.}

“What do you use to buy things?”

{You use Mission Points.}

Currently, Choi Hyuk only had 100 Retribution Points. He had earned 200 points on his last mission and had already spent 100 to enter the colonizing lands.

‘For Mission Points to have been currency…’

Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly. If that was the case, then he might even have to search for and complete other missions. He needed Mission Points to purchase equipment and skills, and in return, they would increase his chances of survival.

For him to have to complete missions with a 75% death rate to survive... it was quite ironic.

“There probably isn’t much I can buy right now... First, show me your items. Starting with armors and weapons I can use.”

{As you wish. I will prepare Fitting Room 0087 for you.}

A yellow arrow appeared and pointed towards a room covered with an opaque curtain. As he approached it, the fence blocking his way opened up and the opaque curtain swallowed him up.

{Choi Hyuk, Earthling. Generating equipment that fit four-limbed intelligent beings.}

Clunk. The ceiling opened and all sorts of armors and weapons came down. There were lightsabers he had seen in movies, an electric gun you wore on your head, a sphere that moved however you wanted it them to once you connected to it with your karma and even cold weapons that had what looked to be magic symbols engraved on them.

Cold Weapon – Any weapon that does not use explosives. I believe this word is translated literally from other languages.

There were even various armors. From a belt that would automatically create a barrier of karma if injected with karma, to armors from modern and medieval times, no, armors from various

civilizations were mixed together.

Besides them, there were also items and accessories with special skills like night vision.

There weren't a lot. As they were supplies, they only reserved cost-effective items that didn't overlap with each other as much as possible.

The majority were C rank while there were the occasional B and D rank as well. If he counted the small rings and necklaces as well, there were approximately 100 items humans could use. Amongst them, there were none Choi Hyuk could currently afford.

{Even the most inexpensive item starts at 200 points.}

All he had was 100 Mission Points.

It would have been nice if he could buy something, but he simply engraved them to his memory.

If the announcement was true, then only sovereigns were able to use the supply store. Meaning the only person on Earth who could supply C rank and above equipment was Choi Hyuk.

'Please write down what kind of items they sell.'

Were Baek Seoin's words.

When he took out a pen and paper, the AI asked.

{Would you like a catalogue?}

“… Sure.”

It should have told him this beforehand. Choi Hyuk stealthily put away the pen and paper.

{It costs 100 points. Will you buy one?}

“Ha… It wasn’t free?”

He sighed.

Choi Hyuk, who had bought the catalogue, tried on each and every equipment and tested them out. He decided to write small notes about their effect and power on the catalogue. The catalogue was a rectangular glass pane. A hologram appeared above it. You could even record voice messages.

It took quite a bit of time. Now that he had finished trying out all the equipment, Choi Hyuk stretched his back and asked.

“Now show me the consumables.”

{Should I show you all the ones that are priced under 100 points?}

“No, all.”

{We have approximately 1,000 different types of consumables.}

“… That’s quite a lot. Show me the popular ones.”

Clunk. The ceiling opened up again. This time, he could see some familiar items. Handy Bags, Health and Karma Recovery Potions, Item Order Requests, Item Reinforcement Requests and others appeared. For some reason, he felt happy.

He looked at the Recovery Potions and licked his lips. He needed them, but he lacked Mission Points to buy any.

He had stashed a lot of potions whilst escaping Kangdong District. Choi Hyuk, who possessed a Handy Bag, had enough potions for almost a thousand people all to himself. However, he had already used so many of them that he was starting to get a little low.

‘Since potions are the only way to recover…’

As Choi Hyuk had invested most of his karma on Control, Power, and Speed, he had no choice but to continuously fight risky battles… You could say potions were must-have items for Choi Hyuk.

Each potion was 20 points. If he hadn't bought the catalogue, he could have bought 5 but...

"Ha..."

Choi Hyuk was sad because he had no money.

Perhaps it was because he didn't have any money, but the consumables that filled the rack didn't catch his eye. Since he already had the catalogue, he simply checked which items were popular and moved on.

"Done."

As he said that, the rack went up and disappeared. The AI asked.

{You have exhausted all your points. Will you come back next time?}

"..."

Though they were the words of an AI, Choi Hyuk felt as if he was being disregarded for having no money, so he shook his head intensely.

"No, show me skills this time."

{What kind of skill are you looking for?}

Though it seemed like he was deciding on impulse... he had already decided on a skill he wanted to see.

“A skill where karma covers a sword.”

It was the skill Choi Hyuk developed to kill the Wyvern of Destruction – Karma Blade. He wanted to compare his regularly used original skill with alien skills.

He was always curious about his level. How did he compare to those lowest ranked warriors? Was he at least average? He had beaten Keholeun and Keushisuit, but his sample size was too small.

{There are 5 recorded skills.}

“Show me.”

At his command, a hologram appeared. He saw different types of aliens, some who looked like humans but only possessed 3 fingers, or, amongst others, had blue skin.

Karma was bursting from their swords. There was a Karma Blade that looked solid, one with karma bobbing up and down like flames and another one that was specifically for lightsabers as it noticeably changed the brightness and color of the light.

“I want to know their power…”

As he said that, a message window appeared in front of his eyes. The skills were priced depending on their Power, Stability, Karma Efficiency and Skill Cost.

They were mostly between B rank and D rank and had a C rank average if you added them together. Skill Costs were an exception in that they displayed a numerical value, the average of which was 50.

After closely examining them, Choi Hyuk requested.

“Show me Soaring Slash.”

{Yes.}

The only recorded skill that he possessed.

{Soaring Slash}
Releases a blade of karma and bisects the enemy.
-Power: C -Stability: D -Karma Efficiency: C

-Skill Cost: 61

It seemed like its Stability was low due to the fact that it was a long distance attack and its Skill Cost was quite high.

Choi Hyuk, who was browsing through the skill, suddenly became curious.

"... Where do the skills come from?"

{We purchase and store skills of value created by warriors of the Flame Wing Alliance.}

"You purchase them?"

His attention peaked.

{Yes.}

"Then can I sell skills as well?"

{Will you report your skill? After evaluating the report, we reward Missions Points based on its value.}

Choi Hyuk thought for a moment. Should he keep his skill a secret? Or should he sell it?

Choi Hyuk decided logically. Though his skill might work on the lowest rank warriors for now, it would be difficult against stronger opponents. Just looking at the 'Flame Wing tribe's Karma Heart Discipline' he received as a reward for killing the wyvern, his perspective on how to manipulate karma had changed on a fundamental level. The aliens' skills were much more refined and profound than Choi Hyuk's.

Choi Hyuk wanted to see what kind of assessment his original skill would receive from this world.

It was necessary to understand exactly where he stood.

And he happened to not have any money.

Choi Hyuk replied.

"Yeah. I'll report it."

{What kind of skill is it?}

"First... Karma Blade."

Blaze!

Clink, clunk!

The surrounding holograms disappeared into smoke and a rack came down from above.

On top of the rack was a single white sword with a wire attached to it.

Chapter 48: Colonize (5)

Choi Hyuk gripped the sword in his hand. The wire attached the end of the handle fell down to the floor and back up to the ceiling.

“Do I need to activate my skill using this?”

{Yes.}

Swish!

A blue Karma Blade surged out from his sword immediately.

The first time he created a Karma Blade to kill the Wyvern of Destruction, it was transparent like a haze, but now that his karma has been reinforced by his Karma Heart, it gave off a blue hue.

Swish!

At the same time, the surrounding opaque curtains disappeared and a rocky plateau appeared. There were monsters. Some were further away while others were closer. Some were large while others were small.

Choi Hyuk looked at his surroundings and examined himself again. In his hand was the same white sword with his Karma Blade. However, the wire that was attached to the handle had disappeared.

"… This is dimensional teleportation?"

Yet he didn't feel the particular nausea that accompanied dimensional teleportation.

{No. It's only an illusion.}

"… Amazing."

There was no way to tell that this was an illusion. He believed it was simply because the AI had said so. If this was a trap set up by his enemies, he would undoubtedly fall in.

Choi Hyuk became lost in his thoughts. The AI brought him back to reality.

{Attack however you wish.}

"Okay."

He needed to do what he could now. He rushed towards the monsters. The length of his Karma Blade would get smaller or larger depending on the size of the monster he was slicing.

And against a solid monster.

Vvriiing!

The karma circulating the blade accelerated. Not long after, he finished up all 30 monsters.

Blaze!

The illusions turned into flames as they disappeared. Choi Hyuk was once again standing inside the opaque curtains. He looked around, but there was no change. Just a moment ago, he was running around a vast rocky plateau, but now he was in the not-so-large Fitting Room 0087.

“If it was all an illusion... did I just jump around in here by myself?”

{Yes.}

“... How is that possible?”

He couldn’t help but ask even though he knew it was a stupid question.

{It is a secret.}

A stiff reply. Choi Hyuk clenched and unclenched his hands. He still felt the sensation of slicing apart the monsters in his hands.

{Outputting results.}

{Karma Blade – Choi Hyuk}
Releases a Karma Blade interlinked with a Karma Heart.
-Power: C -Stability: B -Karma Efficiency: B -Skill Cost: 85

Even with a glance, it was easy to tell that the results were better than {Soaring Slash}. It was even better than the other recorded skills. Only, the Skill Cost was vastly different. {Soaring Slash} was 61 so the cost of his skill was 24 higher.

“What’s that Skill Cost? Is it good?”

{It is not.}

The AI mercilessly replied.

{The first three are known as skill specifications. If you only look at the specs, it appears to be quite a useful skill. However, the Skill Cost is too high.}

“So, what is it?”

{The fundamental principle for creating skills is ‘even a child could use it’. A skill is created so that anyone who has the required karma can use it.}

Choi Hyuk usually used his own original skills so he wasn’t familiar with this but skills were usually activated the moment you thought about activating it. Skills did not require the user the change the characteristic or structure of the user’s karma before activating it.

{However, there is definitely a cost associated with that convenience. As the karma needs to be arranged automatically, skills can’t help but overtax your karma more than if you did it yourself. That is Skill Cost. The amount of karma consumed per unit increase in power.}

“Then the reason why my skill cost is high…”

{It is because of your Karma Heart. As you can see, the Efficiency is B so there is no problem when Sovereign Choi Hyuk uses it. You are able to reach C rank Power with a comparably small amount of karma. However, the story changes completely if you recreate that process with a skill. It is because we need to temporarily create a Karma Blade and a Karma Heart. As even creating the Karma Heart requires a high cost, the 85 Skill Cost is justified. The skill stats are between B and C rank while it costs as much as a top B rank skill.}

“… Meaning it’s not very good.”

{Yes. The cost-to-effect ratio is bad.}

He somehow felt unhappy so he became silent.

{However, we can purchase it for research data. As it is the first skill created by a human. Taking that into account, we will offer 1,000 Mission Points. Will you sell it?}

1,000 Mission Points meant that he could purchase a decent C rank equipment. However…

"… No. I'll try again. This time, without the Karma Heart."

{Understood.}

Like the time he killed the Wyvern of Destruction, Choi Hyuk formed a Karma Blade without his Karma Heart. He coiled the karma in his body and swirled it around the sword like a current.

{Karma Blade – Choi Hyuk}

Forms a Karma Blade after creating a chain of karma.

As you are able to adjust its power with its acceleration, you are also able to adjust its length.

-Power: C

-Stability: D

-Karma Efficiency: D

-Skill Cost: 59

The Skill Cost had become lower than before, but so did its stats.

{The cost-to-effect ratio is bad this time as well.}

The relentless AI.

"… It's difficult."

{The skills publicized here are skills that have been proven through long battles. Of course it is difficult to reach that level. Will you sell it for 1,000 Mission Points?}

It seemed that it had no worth besides the fact it was created by the earthling, Choi Hyuk. It was the same amount as before.

Choi Hyuk momentarily stood there, lost for words. His original skill he created to kill the Wyvern of Destruction. He seemed to have been proud of the skill without noticing it. He shook his head. This was reality. He wasn't even a speck of dust when compared to the existences who sent him to battles.

He needed to struggle his way up. He who had nothing had nothing to lose.

“Yeah. I’ll sell it. And I’ll sell one more.”

{Understood. What kind of skill is it?}

“A special skill that silences your opponent’s karma.”

{Void Wave – Choi Hyuk}

Special Skill. Resonates 3 whirlwinds of karma and scatters the karma your opponent is using. Though it is typically a single target skill, depending on the situation, it can also be used as a wide range skill.

Lee Jinhee created it and Sovereign Choi Hyuk had modified it.

-Power: C

-Stability: C

-Karma Efficiency: D

-Skill Cost: 57

The stats were below average and the Skill Cost was higher than average. Yet...

{It is possible to record it as a publicized skill.}

“It’s possible?”

{Yes. Though it looks to have a low cost-to-effect ratio on the surface, it has been judged to possess a high degree of usability.}

“What happens if I record it?”

{Every time someone purchases it, we give you 5% of the price. The price is estimated to be 1,200 so every time it is purchased, you will earn 60 Mission Points. We expect to sell 500 in 3 months so we will give you 30,000 Mission Points in advance.}

As Choi Hyuk lacked experience, 30,000 points impacted him more significantly than the 5%.

‘Wow! 30,000 points?’

Still, he asked again.

“But isn’t 5% a little too low?”

He asked as he had heard publication royalties were around 10%.

{The cost in creating skills is high. We also have to distribute to countless planets. Please keep in mind that 5% is a lot higher than it was in the past.}

“Okay, okay. But since Jinhee nuna is also a copyright holder, do the Mission Points get shared?”

{No. As earthlings have received the Consumables (Deferred) Judgment, we do not do business with them with the exception of sovereigns. If Lee Jinhee is promoted to a warrior later, then it will be divided evenly.}

As he heard the explanation, he thought about Lee Jinhee.

‘Sorry. I’ll pay you back later.’

After receiving 31,000 Mission Points, he left Fitting Room 0087. Although he wasn’t able to hold them in his hands, he felt reassured.

“Now I’ll go look at the facilities.”

{Yes, purchases of facilities are possible in the marketplace outside the door at the end of the hall.}

“Okay.”

He stopped on his way when he suddenly had a question.

“Ah, but isn’t it better telling them the discipline than the skill? If you use it yourself instead of having your karma automatically do it, you don’t consume your karma needlessly.”

{It is not possible to immediately use disciplines.}

“Ah…”

Choi Hyuk understood exactly what it meant.

If they considered long-term growth, then it was definitely better to teach them the discipline. However, the ones above weren’t concerned with the growth potential of soldiers. What they needed were soldiers who could go out immediately and kill monsters. When he thought about it, the Giant Orc Karik said that {Ring of Rebirth} and {Throne Game} were ‘New recruit training’. They had never thought to slowly train them from the start. They only cared about speed. If they gave them skills, it would increase the consumption of karma, but training time would be cut to almost zero. That was why they gave skills out. A soldier has potential to grow? Then first show me ‘results’. Something like killing the Wyvern of Destruction by yourself for example…

The fate of Consumables could be that the whole species would have to fight until extinction as they didn’t have that possibility or prospect.

‘Then what are sovereigns?’

Choi Hyuk thought while leaving the hall.

Only sovereigns received information that humans currently had

a Consumables (Deferred) Judgment. That meant that duty of getting rid of that fate also rested on the sovereigns.

Soldiers who couldn't grow would eventually be consumed and die. It was possible that finding and developing the potential of humans, which the ones above ignored, was the responsibility of sovereigns, including Choi Hyuk's.

Although Choi Hyuk was unable to come to these deductions rationally, he had a hunch.

He thought.

'The duty of sovereigns... will it be useful for revenge?'

Revenge. That was number one reason for his actions.

**

The place he arrived after exiting the door was an underground shopping district. Bright lights shone from the ceiling and shops were set up along either side of the wide hallway. Lowest ranked warriors had set up items in the shops and were doing business with each other. Useful items that weren't considered supplies were traded here was what Flame-Rain told him.

Choi Hyuk had coincidentally stumbled upon Flame-Rain. He tried to keep his guard up against her, but she acted friendly as she dragged and introduced him to different places. As they walked, there were a lot of aliens who knew her. It seemed she was quite

meddlesome.

"That's where they sell facilities. It's a must-see place for sovereigns."

"What can you do with facilities?"

"You can buy a shop that can store and also sell the items you bought in bulk from the supply store. A shop you can set up in your world, I mean. There's even a machine that can take additional Mission Points from those moving to your colonizing lands and also a device that can automatically set a tax on all business deals within your territory."

"... Set a tax?"

"Yeah. Since you're a sovereign."

She paused for a moment before saying in a serious voice.

"It looks like you don't know yet so I'll tell you. You always need to bear in mind the weight of what it means to be a sovereign. You are the representative of the people of Earth. You are the one who protects and is responsible for the survival and growth of your people. Since you have great authority, great responsibility should follow with it, right? When you buy facilities here, you need to consider not only your benefits but the benefits of your entire species. No matter how powerful you become, what's the point when your species is extinct?"

Though he had heard similar words from Baek Seoin and Bae Jinman, it hadn't felt real until now. To be a sovereign... When he heard it now, it was no different than a king. To protect and govern people.

Choi Hyuk fell into a state of déjà vu when he heard her words.

'But... will this be helpful for revenge?'

He felt another premonition. And that premonition came out as spoken words.

"That's useless."

"What? What is?"

Choi Hyuk shut his mouth. His mind continued his thoughts.

'Even if I consider that humans will become powerful. Would they raise their swords against the game makers?'

That was unlikely. In fact, the stronger and safer they became, the less likely they would. Choi Hyuk had no need for subjects who needed his protection. He only needed comrades and an army who would unsheathe their swords and put their lives on the line.

He had no need to necessarily tell Flame-Rain these thoughts.

Choi Hyuk answered ambiguously.

“No, just.”

Like previously, Flame-Rain slightly uncovered her curtain of flames. She still possessed the human-like, beautiful face. She stared deeply into Choi Hyuk’s eyes.

“… You’re angry.”

These were the words she said after staring at him silently for a time.

“I sincerely hope that your anger does not burn your world.”

Her voice speaking those words contained a sadness somewhere. And,

‘Gold?’

It was the first time Choi Hyuk’s Eyes of Distinction distinguished a gold light. Gold was the opposite of red (hostility). ‘Sacrificial will’.

Choi Hyuk blinked. Seeing a gold light for the first time was surprising, but he was unable to understand the situation.

‘Is she thinking of someone else in place of me?’

He could only see it that way. They had only met twice in his whole life. It was the only reason she would emit a gold light during a conversation in a marketplace.

Flame-Rain covered her face again. The golden light disappeared as well.

“Anyways, good luck with shopping! Let’s meet again!”

She said in a cheerful voice before disappearing in a hurry. She was as mysterious as ever.

Chapter 49: Sovereign

The store, specifically used by sovereigns, was known as the ‘Logistics Tower’. Choi Hyuk met Mechas in front of the stairs of the Logistics Tower entrance. He was leaning against the dark wall of the stairs, waiting for Choi Hyuk.

{Oh, a familiar face. It’s you, right? The earthling.}

It was a pleasant voice. Like the tone of a large brass instrument.

Mechas was a robot built of metal. Like muscles, large and small pieces of metal covered his body and every time he moved, an elegant and subtle wave rippled. He slouched forward like a gorilla, placing his long arms that looked to almost touch the ground on his waist, and swaggered towards him.

His face was like a mosaic, the metal pieces on his face moved to form expressions. He grinned.

{I’m Mechas. Flame-Rain asked me to guide you through the Logistics Tower. The mood became too serious and she felt awkward to do it herself or something like that? Keuk. Anyways, she’s quite the meddlesome girl.}

Mechas tapped Choi Hyuk’s shoulder and took the lead.

{Anyways, I am indebted to her so I’ll guide you well. Just follow me.}

Then he started to climb the dark, dim stairs.

The Logistics Tower was the only place with stairs within the supply store. It was a place where you could go up and down instead of walking around. Bright text shined like neon signs on the run-down walls. If Choi Hyuk was a bit older, he might have thought of the dark, remote stores in Yongsan Electronics Market or Nakwon Shopping Center. They were like the stores that were dark all day long, with cracked white cement, and signs forbidding students from entering.

It wasn't only the Logistics Tower but all the shops he had passed matched the name lowest ranked shops and were unpleasant. However, as there were almost no people near the Logistics Tower, it was a level drearier.

{It's because only sovereigns can pass here. And sovereigns are rare.}

"Can other species come here besides their sovereigns?"

{What did you hear me say just now? Only sovereigns can enter the Logistics Tower... Oh, aha! You're talking about the supply store in general, not the Logistics Tower, right? Yeah. So your species is a Consumables one, huh? Deferred, to be exact, right? Then yeah, you're right. Other species can come to the supply store once they've been designated as warriors. Even if they aren't sovereigns. Though they can't use the Logistics Tower.}

"..."

Those fucking Consumables. That fucking Deferred status. Every time he heard it, he felt depressed.

"How do you get a warrior designation?"

{Species, who have gotten rid of the Consumables Judgment, go through an examination of qualifications. If you spend 10,000 Mission points, you can obtain the right to attempt the lowest ranked warrior evaluation. Well, normally they pass if they have the ability to get 10,000 Mission Points.}

"You have to get rid of the Consumables Judgment... meaning Consumables aren't even worth evaluating."

Choi Hyuk bit his lip, but Mechas didn't care in the slightest. He heard the sound of metal brushing against each other from Mechas's body. Mechas chattered on with his high-pitched voice that sounded like a saxophone. Although Choi Hyuk couldn't understand the actual language, from the translated message, it seemed that he was teasing him.

{That's right. Aiya~ your shoulders must feel heavy. Sovereigns need to do well in order to rid their species of the Consumables Judgment.}

"... How is it normally?"

{Well, they say 7 or 8 out of 10 fail and end up as Consumables.}

"And if they end up as Consumables?"

{I'm not sure. I'm only a lowest ranked warrior so I don't know exactly, but they say that your entire species gets thrown into a monster-infested planet. Of course, there is no return code. It's sort of like a harassing the rear tactic... but the result is, of course, complete annihilation.}

"Crazy..."

Involuntary curses erupted from Choi Hyuk's mouth.

Even though he didn't have a lot of affection towards humanity, he couldn't help but feel angry. They rank species that are living well by themselves however they want and if they fall short, they drive the whole species into a corner?

{Keke, you carry a lot on your shoulders, friend.}

Mechas said provokingly before going ahead.

"Where are you going? I was planning on checking out the equipment shop facilities first."

{Equipment shops? You must have quite the fortune. Anyways, you can build those later. Just trust me and follow behind.}

Mechas passed through a dark hallway and opened a door. Unlike the hallway which wasn't maintained properly, the room was wide and normal. All sorts of fist-sized patterns were floating in the air.

{If you're a sovereign buying facilities for the first time, you need to reveal your trait and fate. Especially when you have a Consumables judgment.}

"What's that?"

Choi Hyuk, who felt that the order had been reversed, asked in an unsatisfied voice. Mechas didn't care.

{What do you mean 'what is it'? It's the basics that make you stronger. Though equipment might look really important right now, if you look at the future, they aren't even comparable.}

Mechas didn't give a proper explanation. He simply shoved Choi Hyuk forward. His strength was so strong that Choi Hyuk, who was suddenly pushed, entered into the crowd of floating patterns.

"What the hell are y...!"

Choi Hyuk, who was about to burst into anger, suddenly became surprised and unsheathed the Predator's Blade.

{Ho? You have good senses. It seems like you're not a sovereign

for nothing.}

Mechas's voice sounded faint, however, Choi Hyuk wasn't able to pay attention due to the gazes that were observing him. Observing him? No. They were scanning his skin. No. It wasn't even that. Foreign karma passed through his skin, entering inside him, and kneaded his organs.

"What is this..."

As he didn't know what seized control of him, he couldn't act recklessly. Before he could do anything, he was surrounded. The unfamiliar sensation, that felt as if pudding was being crammed into his body, was unpleasant.

{Don't worry. It's scanning to find the most suitable 'fate' for you.}

"That's why I'm saying. What is this fate...?"

The unfamiliar sensation was no longer the problem. His mind was becoming detached. Mechas's voice and his own reply were getting further and further away.

...

He felt as if he had dozed off.

Suddenly, the world became brighter. No, it became darker? The unfamiliar sensation that filled his entire body had at some point disappeared. Though he felt displeased at the fact he had momentarily lost consciousness, there were no other dangers. Mechas moved his hollow eyes. An amused attitude.

3 patterns approached Choi Hyuk. Then, a message appeared.

{Aptitude examination complete. Three suitable fates outputted. You are currently able to activate one.}

{Your karma will develop when you do the relevant actions of the fate you have chosen.}

{Sovereigns are able to record their suitable fate in the supply-type fate shop.}

{Suitable Fates}

Fight Addict: 100% Aptitude

The more intensely you fight, the longer a fight lasts, or the deeper your concentration gets from being immersed in a fight, the faster your karma will develop.

Undying One: 93% Aptitude

Every time you survive a life-threatening situation, your karma will develop in large leaps.

Raging One: 81% Aptitude

The more intensely enraged you become, the faster your karma will develop.

{Whoa… 100% Aptitude?}

Mechas's surprised voice sounded out in a long low tone. It seemed to be his species' surprised voice.

"… Is it good?"

Only now did Choi Hyuk get a grasp of what 'fate' meant. It was a method that could develop his karma, which had no other way of developing, except for killing until now. It was an essential foundation in quickly becoming stronger.

{Of course it's good. I occasionally hear news of 100% Aptitudes, but for me to see it with my own eyes…You're more amazing than I thought?}

Mechas's skin rippled in excitement. It made a pleasant sound.

"Really? Then does that mean I should choose Fight Addict as expected?"

Since it was only possible to activate one, he needed to choose

from the three.

Mechas gave him somewhat of a tip.

{Hmm, they each have their own pros and cons. Every time you activate the fate of the ‘Undying One’, your karma could rise to the point of going from 3-star to 4-star. However, if you aren’t in a lot of life-threatening situations, your karma develops very slowly. This one relies quite heavily on chance. From the start, it’s not like you can enter a life-threatening situation whenever you want to… You usually die when those situations arise and that’s the end. On the other hand, ‘Fight Addict’ can increase your karma proportionally to the amount of effort you put in as long as you become somewhat immersed in fighting or fight intense battles often. However, if you constantly fight intense battles, you obviously won’t be able to ensure your life. The one that can increase your strength the safest is ‘Raging One’. Although it’s slower than the above two and you aren’t as compatible with it, you are able to increase your strength without the danger of dying.}

Choi Hyuk decided the moment he listened to Mechas’s explanation. Safety? Choi Hyuk didn’t consider it. But, that didn’t mean he could leave getting stronger up to ‘luck’. Also, he would undoubtedly become stronger more quickly with 100% Aptitude.

“Then, I’m going to choose Fight Addict.”

{You sure you’re okay with it? It’s going to be dangerous.}

“It’s not dangerous.”

As his heart became determined, another message popped up.

{‘Fight Addict’ 100% Aptitude. Cost for activation. Need 500 Mission Points.}

As expected, nothing was free here.

“Take it.”

The moment he declared that, the world disappeared.

Hwaaaaah.

When he recovered his senses, Choi Hyuk was standing in the middle of a battlefield. As always.

The first thing he felt were the wounds. A pleasant painfulness and heat. However, he soon forgot about them as he saw the enemies.

The enemies rushed at him as a black mass. The mass extended beyond the horizon. However, the figures of his enemies were hazy in his eyes. The only thing that was clear were their flaws. The traces of their oncoming attacks.

Choi Hyuk's concentration approached its peak. The sight in front of him became simpler and simpler. After some time, he was simply dancing alone amidst countless shining lines. The Predator's Blade in his hand. The sword repeatedly became heavier and lighter. Soon, he even forgot the sword. He felt a comfortable sensation as if he was cutting through water currents in the deep ocean.

Then he suddenly opened his eyes. No one stood in his surroundings. Even the horizon was only filled with the corpses of his enemies.

Hwaah!

When he opened his eyes again, he was in the room with floating patterns. One of the three patterns that had approached him had greatly expanded. The pattern exemplified a sharp red line cutting through the deep darkness.

{You have obtained the fate 'Fight Addict'.}

It felt strange. It felt as if he had discovered his calling in life. He even wanted to fight immediately. As the more he fought, the faster he would grow.

{Will you purchase the fate shop that can be set up in your colonized lands? The fate shop is able to grant others with Sovereign Choi Hyuk's suitable fates, 'Fight Addict', 'Undying One', and 'Raging One'. The price of the fate shop is 10,000 Mission Points.}

“In my colonized lands? Is it impossible to set it up on Earth?”

{Because of the Consumables (Deferred) Judgment, it is not possible.}

Though he had originally planned on setting it up in his territory, he still felt displeased when he heard it wasn’t possible to set it up on Earth because they were ‘Consumables’. However, there was nothing he could do.

He was currently in a situation where he had to hide his anger and keep taking steps forward.

“I’ll buy it.”

The foothold in getting stronger over time, ‘fate’. Like Mechas had said, it was a higher priority than the equipment shop. It was an essential shop for humanity. If Flame-Rain hadn’t arranged for Mechas to meet him, he would have undoubtedly not learned of this valuable information.

‘I owe her one.’

He engraved the help he received to memory as he asked Mechas.

“Where do we go now?”

{Now you need to use your karma better. We'll go to Karma Trait shop.}

Mechas grinned.

**

The 4,500 soldiers situated in Barhaloleun Hill 1 were surrounded by a light as they saw Choi Hyuk return. He returned after half a day had passed. Although it hadn't been long, they sensed changes in Choi Hyuk. He had become sharper and more explosive.

"What the? Did leader eat something good by himself?"

Lee Jinhee mumbled.

"Don't worry. Everyone's going to eat some."

Choi Hyuk placed his hand on her shoulder and passed by. Then, as if he had just remembered, he added.

"Thanks. I will repay you."

It was a thank you for the 'Air Void Wave' that allowed him to earn 30,000 Mission Points, but Lee Jinhee didn't know what he was talking about and only blinked her eyes.

Choi Hyuk passed her and stood in the middle of Barhaloleun Hill 1. Then he took out a fist-sized transparent pyramid from his bag and placed it on the ground.

Grrduduk!

Although he had placed a fist-sized pyramid on the ground, an enormous pyramid sprouted from the ground accompanied by loud noises. As if sucking in the ores in its surroundings, the ground itself lowered and the transparent pyramid Choi Hyuk had placed on the ground stood at the apex of the now formed pyramid with a red tinge. It looked natural, looking as though it was part of the transparent pyramid from the beginning.

> {Territory Pyramid Lv. 1}
>
> Within a 1km radius, the stats of monsters will be reduced significantly and the effectiveness of allies' karma will be increased greatly.

An item that was above the Weakening Barriers used in {Survive and Escape}. It was the Territory Pyramid.

Choi Hyuk threw 2 building miniatures near the Territory Pyramid. The building miniatures, like the Territory Pyramid, absorbed the surrounding ground and expanded. Then they automatically connected to the Territory Pyramid and formed a single, massive fortress.

A fate shop was created, and then a trait shop.

The two shops protruded up from the middle of the ‘Territory Pyramid’ like a terrace.

While the 4,500 surprised people could only blink their eyes at the buildings being built in an instant, Choi Hyuk shouted.

“Now this place is our territory!”

Though the specific feeling each person felt was different... The surge of excitement they felt was the same.

“Ooahhhhh!!!”

The cheers of the humans on Barhaloleun Hill 1 shook the land. They were the first humans to have taken root on the ruined planet, Dragonic.

Episode 4: The Great Colonizing Age

Chapter 50: Investigation (1)

(There is a bit of a time skip from the last chapter.)

The great colonizing age had begun.

Colonization was profitable, and you had no choice but to take part even if you wished to avoid it.

Both the resources only produced in these lands and the alien products, which could only be bought from the sovereigns' shops, were undoubtedly valuable and worth a lot of money.

However, that wasn't all. The ground on Earth kept becoming drier. All experts claimed that if they didn't start farming in these new lands, humanity would no longer have a future.

On top of that, the number of missing people increased. In 2 years, 5% of the total population had disappeared. And, like Bae Jinman had predicted, they were found in the colonizing lands, 'Dragonic'. Earthlings called these people 'immigrants'.

Choi Hyuk had colonized half of Barhaloleun Hill and was now looking to expand to the wide plains beyond it. 3,000 soldiers participated in this expedition. There wasn't much. Even though Choi Hyuk was the first colonizer, his growth was slower than other sovereigns. Still, his berserkers were all known to be elites.

The nickname he received during [Survive and Escape],

‘Berserker’, had been spread through word of mouth and now each of his followers was known as a ‘Berserker’ while he himself was known as the ‘Berserk Sovereign’. His troops were collectively called the ‘Berserkers’.

It had come to the point where Choi Hyuk would react to ‘Berserkers’ and ‘Berserk Sovereign’ naturally.

It was a smooth march. The plains continued endlessly and because they had already annihilated the ‘Plains Shark’ monster tribe that had a tight hold on the nearby land, they weren’t met with many monsters either. The weather was refreshing. The sky still looked like whirlpools of milk and the Berserkers were marching in the direction of the largest whirlpool.

Baek Seoin, who was walking next to him and looking at a transparent tablet, suddenly became surprised and said.

“Leader, there’s a reaction from a native!”

“Native? Not an immigrant?”

“Yes. It’s the first time it’s rung since I downloaded this app.”

They called earthlings who had been forcefully moved to Dragonic ‘immigrants’. Unlike regular people who could freely move back and forth between Earth and Dragonic as long as they had enough Mission Points, immigrants, who had been forced here, couldn’t use the portals that led to Earth. Because they were

‘people who could not leave Dragonic’, they were called ‘immigrants’.

On the other hand, you had the descendants of the fallen dragonics. They called the indigenous people, who survived by avoiding the monsters’ attacks, ‘natives’. They were rare. Only three colonized lands, Israel, Thailand, and Germany, had sighted the natives. As they were a bunch who survived on a planet occupied by monsters, they possessed many mysterious and useful techniques. The benefits they could gain through interactions with them were endless. Many colonizers dreamed of encountering the natives. As a result of this, Baek Seoin had bought a transparent tablet made with alien technology and had downloaded a native tracking application on it.

Choi Hyuk looked around. Endless plains. He occasionally saw foaming mouthed monsters rushing towards them, and the search party, having been dispatched ahead, dealing with them. There were no other living beings besides them.

“I don’t see any?”

“Since they have lived until now by avoiding monsters’ eyes, of course they are hiding in a hidden place.”

“... For example?”

“Underground.”

Baek Seoin coolly pointed to the ground.

Choi Hyuk looked down towards the ground. It seemed possible. However, if they were hiding underground, it would be hard to find them. He began to think.

'Would finding natives really be helpful?'

There was a clear goal for this expedition. Of course, finding the natives would undoubtedly be beneficial in the long run, but he couldn't help but wonder if he needed to find them right this moment.

"Don't we have to wait for Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung to come back before we decide which direction we go? If we find the natives, we will also be able to obtain information about our surroundings... I think we should search."

Baek Seoin advised on searching. His judgment was usually correct. Choi Hyuk nodded.

"Fine. We stay here."

3,000 soldiers quickly dropped their bags and set up tents.

**

It had been 2 years since Choi Hyuk successfully colonized his

land. The world had changed greatly. Many sovereigns had succeeded in colonizing and new sovereigns had emerged as well. There were currently 40 activated portals. The number of people who received the sovereign title was about the same.

Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung were entrusted with a separate mission and had headed out to another sovereign's land. The colonized land of Lao Ban, a sovereign from Macau.

There they saw people locked in cages. They were 'slaves'. This place was a hot springs town called 'Pyungryu' situated deep in the colonized land near the portal between Macau and 'Dragonic'. This was a common sight here.

Unattractive men and women were in a dirty state, while beautiful men and women had all been dolled up. They were sorted into different cages. Both sides had no hope in their eyes, seemingly dead inside.

Ryu Hyunsung sounded sick.

"Ha, fuck..."

They had heard stories, but the shock they felt from looking at this personally was completely different.

The people within the cages were those commonly called 'immigrants'. The people who were the cause of accelerated colonization, the 'immigrants'. They were the earthlings who had

disappeared and were forcefully transported to Dragonic. They were unable to go through the portal and return to Earth. It was also a place where the corresponding sovereign could exercise their extraterritoriality and control over those who passed through the portal. In a place where crime was rampant, these immigrants, who had nowhere to go, became easy targets.

"We need fellow colonizers and they are overflowing with them here."

Chu Youngjin clicked his tongue. Of course they had found immigrants in Choi Hyuk's colonized land. Choi Hyuk took them in as equals and allowed them to live in his colonized cities. And, in the case their goals and skills were appropriate, he would even accept them as Berserkers.

This fit well with Choi Hyuk's aim, which put everything on the line for combat. As many immigrants were ready warriors. They had suddenly been dropped onto a planet filled with monsters, Dragonic. All they possessed were weapons and karma. For them to have succeeded in surviving in these conditions meant they were already proven warriors. Only, they were usually weaker than Earth awakenees because Earth awakenees had generally awakened earlier than them. The awakenees also had access to a greater variety of items and had formed into different powers.

"But... Aren't those people too weak? It's either because it hasn't been long since they became immigrants or because they were weak even compared to other immigrants.... Where are all the strong ones?"

Chu Youngjin questioned.

“I don’t know… It doesn’t seem like they’ve accepted them into their colonized land either.”

When he heard Chu Youngjin’s words, Ryu Hyunsung felt something was weird. Even in Lao Ban’s other colonized cities they had passed until now, ‘Zhiyu’, Yeshi’, and ‘Wanwu’, they had not heard about any immigrant warriors being accepted into their land. And only weak immigrants were being sold in ‘Pyungryu’, which had a slave market.

“Then is that really true? That Sovereign Lao Ban has the fate, ‘Plunderer’?”

Ryu Hyunsung mumbled.

Chu Youngjin indifferently replied.

“No doubt he’s a crazy bastard. Since they are bastards who had even killed our Berserkers.”

“Though they flatly denied doing that.”

“Coincidences can only happen once or twice… All sovereigns are hostile against Lao Ban… But it seems like this place is doing well.”

With a bitter expression, Chu Youngjin observed the guests who

filled the slave market. There were a lot of people even though this was a remote place. There were all sorts of people who had gathered here in ‘Pyungryu’, from people seeking pleasure and pimps looking to recruit people for their adult entertainment establishment to plantation owners who had come looking for workers. Even though it was a city far away from the portal, guests from all over the world gathered here for the only slave market in the world.

Even when 30 sovereigns, including Choi Hyuk, had banned trading with the Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban, it was to no avail.

The Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban was a headache of the current world. He received two big criticisms. One was continuously killing other colonizers and the other was inhumane treatment of immigrants.

If Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk had put everything into ‘battle’ for the development of his land, then the Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban had put everything into one concept, ‘money’.

Not only did he possess a natural talent for money, he was obsessed with it. Choi Hyuk’s shops were all filled with consumables and equipment necessary for battle, whilst Lao Ban’s shops were filled with convenient alien products. Even the transparent tablet Baek Seoin was using was first sold in Lao Ban’s shops. Instead of the supplies from the ‘Supply Store of the Flame Wing tribe’, Lao Ban was more interested in trading with the aliens in the marketplace. And that was how new products from different cultures arrived on Earth.

If that was all, no one would condemn him, but he went a step further. Disappeared earthlings who would have been someone's family or lover... He even started a wicked act of selling these immigrants as slaves.

Other sovereigns were enraged at his actions and continuously sent warnings, but they weren't able to actually act. As long as your base was situated in a colonialized land on Dragonic, you could only enter their territory through a portal. But the portal leading to Lao Ban's territory was under his management. He was able to instantly kick out anyone he refuses, which meant that using military force to control him was impossible. Although they eventually decided to impose economic sanctions against Lao Ban by officially announcing a trade ban with him, people who had become engrossed in the products and pleasure offered by Lao Ban would continuously enter his territory by hiding their identity. Both Macau and mainland China, who enjoyed the benefits they brought with them, acted as nothing was happening and remained bystanders.

They were frustrating efforts. Though all colonized lands were located on Dragonic, their locations were very far apart from each other. Currently, colonized lands were no different from unreachable islands, and controlling what goes on in a territory was an incredibly difficult task. It was natural for all sorts of crime to be rampant. Yet, it was difficult to close their eyes to the sheer scale of Lao Ban's evil deeds... Even though multiple sovereigns cooperated together, they weren't able to come up with an effective restriction due to Lao Ban's outstanding ability.

Ryu Hyunsung revealed a bitter smile as he approached a cage.

He had to gather information to complete his mission.

“Hey.”

He called out to a youth inside the cage. Surprised, the youth instinctively turned his head. He had been trained to obey orders. Though unspeakable acts of violence were committed during training. Ryu Hyunsung hid his expression and calmly asked.

“Where did you get captured? Can you tell me which direction it is from this city?”

At his question, the youth looked as if he was about to cry. Truthfully he had heard similar questions before. Horrible tortures were committed by slave traders to figure out where other immigrants were. The youth trembled in fear and lowered his head.

“That-that way. That’s all I know. That’s really all I know.”

The youth pointed at a white whirlpool in the sky. Ryu Hyunsung was familiar with this whirlpool. He nodded.

“Thank you.”

Although he had unintentionally distressed the youth, he had obtained the information he wanted. Ryu Hyunsung left the cage and joined up with Chu Youngjin. They both attempted to leave the city.

If only they weren’t caught by slavers…

“Ey. What did you do just now?”

In colonized lands that were no different for lawless regions, there was a clear-cut difference in the treatment of guests and non-guests. If you had a lot of money or was a regular, then you could receive a 5-star hotel treatment, however, it was common to beat wanderers like Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin, who only looked and didn’t buy anything, to death. It was a characteristic of slavers to be the part-merchant part-gangster type.

Ryu Hyunsung calmly observed the oncoming slavers. He saw black corpse silhouettes with a red background on their shoulders. They were patterns indicating their ‘fates’. Ryu Hyunsung had one as well. He was hiding it now but it was the pattern of a ‘Battle Addict’, a red trajectory slicing through a black background. It was the same fate as the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk.

Ryu Hyunsung indifferently asked.

“Are you guys working under the Sovereign of Dark Secrets?”

The pattern the Sovereign of Dark Secrets had was exactly the black corpse and red background. The exact name of the fate wasn’t known. Only, there were rumors it was the ‘Plunderer’. Unlike other sovereigns, he only allowed his followers to use his fate.

Because of this, Ryu Hyunsung had in fact asked a useless question. There was no doubt those with that pattern were his followers. However, it wasn't completely useless. As it was an impressive provocation.

"What? The Sovereign of Dark Secrets? Is this bastard crazy?"

The nickname, Sovereign of Dark Secrets, wasn't one Lao Ban made himself. It was a nickname created by enemy sovereigns. It was a forbidden name within his territory.

The four slavers became enraged and raised their weapons.

Swish.

Chu Youngjin partly unsheathed his sword and looked at Ryu Hyunsung.

'What should we do?'

He asked with his eyes.

Swish.

Instead of a reply, Ryu Hyunsung unsheathed his sword and extended a Karma Blade. Then, introduced himself.

“Berserker Ryu Hyunsung.”

He had no thought of avoiding a fight. Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin had two motives for coming here. First was to investigate. And the other was to give them a warning.

As they had quietly come to their destination, it was now time to give them a warning.

Rumble.

Chu Youngjin roused his own unique karma. A soft rumbling sound could be heard.

“Berserker Chu Youngjin.”

He smiled as he unsheathed a blood red sword.

Chapter 51: Investigation (2)

When Choi Hyuk opened a fate and trait shop on Barhaloleun Hill, everyone was happily deciding what they would choose. There were three fates that could be chosen from, ‘Undying One’, ‘Battle Addict’, and ‘Raging One’. Also, karma traits were much more diverse than the fates. Whatever they chose, they would become stronger. However, there was a combination that would let them become even stronger than that. What should they choose? Once a trait or fate was chosen, it would (depending on the situation) cost a lot to change it, so they had to choose wisely.

However, as everything was new, no one could tell what was good or bad. This eventually led to the popularization of Choi Hyuk’s chosen fate and trait, ‘Battle Addict’ and ‘Mind’s Eye’.

Yet, Chu Youngjin chose a different trait and fate from his leader, Choi Hyuk, and created his own extraordinary style. So the fighting style of the Berserkers separated into two main styles.

Choi Hyuk’s style and Chu Youngjin’s style.

Rumble, rumble!

As if starting a large machine, the rumbling sounds emitting from Chu Youngjin’s body became a level deeper. He had activated the karma trait, ‘Explosive Blood’.

Explosive Blood would, with the exception of Control, sharply increase Power, Speed, Endurance, Stamina, and Recovery when

activated. It was number one in terms of power. Only, it had a side effect that made it a trait unusable by some.

Rumble!

The karma that was packed in his body stirred and started to boil. The karma that was protecting his body reversed and started attacking it. A pain that felt as though each cell was being sliced apart overcame his body.

Yet, Chu Youngjin didn't even bat an eye. What was more, he even activated his Innate skill 'Berserker' along with it. His karma became even more ferocious as his Power, Speed, and Recovery increased even further. Then, his muscles started to shrink and his joints became frayed proportional to the aggressive karma. As if his whole body had become an engine, it continued to boil and emit heat and pain. Chu Youngjin's body was repeatedly becoming damaged due to his karma and simultaneously healing. The pain was enough to make any normal person insane. Even the Berserkers, who had gone through all sorts of hardships, found it difficult to fight whilst enduring this pain.

Because of this, Explosive Blood had become a trait that not anyone could choose because it was powerful.

Nonetheless, it seemed as though Chu Youngjin didn't feel anything. Only his reddening eyes burned.

{Due to intensive rage, free karma point increased by 1.}

Although Chu Youngjin didn't feel the pain, it didn't mean that he didn't feel anything. Only, because his insides were constantly filled with incomparable loss and pain, did this pain not feel like much.

'Raging One' was the most suitable fate for him. His aptitude was a whopping 96%!

"...What? Chu Youngjin? Don't tell me... The Sword Demon?"

The slavers froze when they heard that name. Their faces turned deathly pale. However, it was too late. Rumble! On the next sound of thunder, the slaver in front was crushed and blown away like a tomato.

"Fuck!"

It was surprising, but they were still experienced battle veterans. They immediately prepared for battle and targeted Chu Youngjin. One stabbed with a spear while the other two threw throwing knives.

Whoosh!

The bladed weapons flew, with a bluish tinge, making a refreshing sound. Karma trait 'Resilience'. One's karma would become resilient, making it better to shoot with, and when it is

attached to a weapon, it increases its penetrating force. As it was useful and had a decent performance, it was a trait chosen by many awakenees with no particular talent.

Instantly, a spear was aimed at Chu Youngjin's chest, while throwing knives flew to his forehead.

Rumble!

However, another thunderclap erupted and the spear and throwing knives aimed at Chu Youngjin bounced off.

Chu Youngjin's Karma Barrier wasn't continuous like Choi Hyuk's. Rather, it had a much more explosive power to it. When used at a necessary moment, karma would explode with Chu Youngjin at the center and push back everything in his vicinity.

The enemy spear bent significantly before wobbling in different directions.

"What bastards!"

As a commotion arose from one area, the whole market became noisy. Slave traders from different places started to gather.

Ryu Hyunsung acted this time.

"Hey... I'm disappointed. You're all only targeting Chu Youngjin.

Am I not surprising? I'm Ryu Hyunsung. Berserker Ryu Hyunsung."

"The Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung?"

"Yeah, that's what they call me too!"

Swish!

Ryu Hyunsung revealed a satisfied smile. A 30cm karma blade extended out from his sword. As there was no need to make it longer when facing humans, this was enough.

Ryu Hyunsung was the best expert among the Berserkers, after Choi Hyuk, who practiced Choi Hyuk's style. His fate was 'Battle Addict' while his trait was 'Mind's Eye'. The same as Choi Hyuk's.

"Use throwing weapons first to drain their strength!"

As expected, in a slave market where many interested parties gathered, the power here was significant. The pressure from 5 awakenees simultaneously throwing knives and javelins was powerful. However, the trajectories of all the attacks were clearly visible in Ryu Hyunsung's eyes.

The karma trait 'Mind's Eye' made controlling karma much easier and made it into a sensitive organ that could gather information on one's surroundings. Although it didn't raise one's offensive strength directly like 'Explosive Blood' or 'Resilience',

there was no better weapon for someone with extraordinary senses.

Ryu Hyunsung's saber elegantly flew in the air. The quickly approaching throwing weapons seemed to be caught by his senses and moved in slow motion. Looking at their trajectories, he chose the best path. He stretched his saber and lightly pushed the closest javelin away. Afterwards, he turned his wrists and flipped his saber to deflect two throwing knives at the same time. He then rotated his saber once more and hit the head of the next oncoming javelin.

Clink, clink, clink!

The last javelin, which was hit on its head, rotated and bounced away the throwing knife behind it. After cleanly clearing the five weapons, the enemies were now within Ryu Hyunsung's range.

"Gahk!"

"Ahh!"

There was no enemy that met his sword. Ryu Hyunsung, the national saber athlete at Korea National Sport University. With his world-class sword skills and the addition of a weapon known as 'Mind's Eye', nothing could obstruct his path.

The saber that was about to split someone's head suddenly turned and cut someone's wrist. The saber that was about to block

an oncoming enemy sword, pushed the sword down and charged towards the enemy's undefended neck.

The severed arms and necks of the slave traders rolled on the ground. Even when tens of people rushed at him, the result was the same. Either they were ripped apart by Chu Youngjin or cut into pieces by Ryu Hyunsung.

"Boring. I can't raise my karma fighting like this."

The fate of 'Battle Addicts' would increase one's karma the more intensely one fought. So Ryu Hyunsung preferred to have more intense fights.

Both Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung didn't try to conceal their identities, but neither did they let any of their enemies live.

There were other spectators around them, but once they annihilated those directly involved, it would take a longer time to understand the truth of what happened. As it was impossible to communicate electronically in 'Dragonic', it would take quite a bit of time for this to be reported to the center, for the center to dispatch an investigative party, and for the investigative party to investigate and report back.

It was better to reveal their identities. However, as they needed to create time for them to escape, they didn't want their identities to be exposed too quickly. These were the actions taken after taking these factors into account.

“Why… Why would the Berserkers…”

The last remaining slave trader asked whilst leaning against a cage and breathing heavily. Ryu Hyunsung crouched down in front of him.

“You guys ignored our warnings several times. You even killed two Berserkers who were on a mission last week.”

“That wasn’t us…”

“The fuck that wasn’t.”

Thud.

As Ryu Hyunsung gestured with his fingers, Chu Youngjin, who was next to him, unhesitantly sliced the slave trader’s neck. A bloody stench. An unpleasant sight. This sight would become a clear warning to the groups who figured out what actually occurred later. Why ‘Berserkers’ were called berserkers. What would happen if you got on their nerves.

Ryu Hyunsung raised his head and looked at the sky. A milky sky. The weather was fine. Perhaps it was because it was a hot springs city, but he felt a pleasant humidity and could see pretty little buildings beyond the cages.

“Now, should we cause even more of a mess?”

Bang! Clank!

Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung smashed apart the cages that had locked up the immigrants. There were occasionally “What do I do now?” questions, but every time the two would reply, “Whatever you want.” In fact, the two immediately left after smashing the cages apart. They didn’t care if the immigrants fled or stayed there.

Once they left the city ‘Pyungryu’, Chu Youngjin stretched and then said in a happy tone.

“We’re almost done with our mission. We can return once we’re done examining the topography, right?”

“You want to return quickly?”

“Yes. Home is good.”

“Kay. Let’s finish quickly and go back.”

They had finished with their first warning. However, if they stopped there, they wouldn’t be known as the ‘Berserkers’. And this sort of warning wasn’t enough to bring the Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban to his senses.

Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin began their topography

examination for their next move.

**

A few berserkers, including Choi Hyuk, were slowly walking around their camp with their eyes closed. It was to utilize their ‘Mind’s Eye’ the best they could and look for the native’s underground abode.

Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin were the best at using ‘Mind’s Eye’ so it wouldn’t be a stretch to call them executives.

Lee Jinhee who had chosen ‘Explosive Blood’ over ‘Mind’s Eye’ stood next to them bored.

“I wonder if Ryu hyung and Youngjin are doing well.”

With nothing to do, she walked next to Baek Seoin, who was hard at work, and constantly asked him questions.

“We got their report on a mission they did together 2 days ago. Everything went smoothly.”

Even though he was bothered, Baek Seoin still replied.

“It’s already been 2 days since then. How do you know nothing happened during those 2 days?”

“Just wait a little. They are expected to return 3 days from now.”

“Baek hyung, aren’t you worried? After sending them to the enemy camp?”

“Worried? About who? It’s not like we sent only Chu Youngjin or only Ryu Hyunsung, we sent them together so who am I worried about?”

“Still, it’s the enemy camp…”

“Don’t worry. We’ve decided to only cause commotions on the outskirts. In a world where people kill each other near the portal, they can’t help but be slow when dealing with events that occur on the outskirts. Unless they dispatch an expedition like us.”

At his reply, Lee Jinhee stopped her protest and silently followed next to him. She was more bored than worried about them in the first place.

Baek Seoin’s forehead wrinkled. It seemed he was using ‘Mind’s Eye’ the best he could, but the results weren’t good.

Looking at his figure, Lee Jinhee grinned.

“You always bragged about not losing to the leader in terms of using ‘Mind’s Eye’, but why are you so bad at it? What happened to the Innate skill that was optimized for ‘Mind’s Eye’?”

At her teasing words, Baek Seoin let out a groan.

In reality, Baek Seoin was as confident in using ‘Mind’s Eye’ for perception as Choi Hyuk was. As he really had a natural talent in that regard.

A karma trait meant that you were granting specific properties onto your neutral karma.

However, before artificially granting them, there were some people whose karma naturally possessed certain properties. They were the awakenees who had awakened a special power known as ‘innate skills’.

Also, when a person who possessed a ‘Innate skill’ used a karma trait that was compatible with their Innate skill, it would sharply increase its effectiveness. It was to the point where there was even a hypothesis that the concept of karma traits was created with ‘innate skills’ as a reference.

Chu Youngjin’s ‘Berserker’ and ‘Explosive Blood’ fitted together like a set.

innate skills like Choi Hyuk’s ‘Eyes of Distinction’ and Baek Seoin’s ‘Intuition’ were very compatible with ‘Mind’s Eye’, which possessed a sensing ability. That was why Baek Seoin, who had better ‘senses’ than anyone else, was confident that he wouldn’t lose to Choi Hyuk in terms of perception ability.

Even still… there was no result.

“It’s really weird… We checked around where the reaction from the native came from, but for us to still not be able to find it…”

They started this exploration thinking it would only take a day. Yet for there to be no results after half a day… as the one who suggested exploring, Baek Seoin was concerned.

As she stared at Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee suddenly asked.

“Maybe it’s like that?”

“What?”

“Magic. There’s stuff like that in fantasy novels. An illusionary magic that covers the entrance.”

“Ehh… That’s only in novels…”

Baek Seoin, who was about to reject her idea, suddenly stopped.

It was definitely impossible for humans to use their karma in such diverse methods like magic from fantasy novels. However, because it was impossible for humans, did it mean that it was impossible for the natives here?

“Huh?”

If this hypothesis was correct, then their searching method was wrong. What they had to find was not an underground tunnel but an awkward karma that was hiding the tunnel.

“Wait. It is really like that?”

“Right? I’m right, right?”

“Be quiet for a moment.”

Baek Seoin told her to be quiet as he concentrated to his limit. He extended tentacles of karma out in every direction. The world was filled with faint karma. Among them, he tried to distinguish between natural and awkward parts. It was difficult at first as he had no prior experience in what was natural karma and what wasn’t. Nonetheless, he soon found a spot.

“… Eureka…”

A trembling voice came out from Baek Seoin’s mouth.

Chapter 52: Investigation (3)

“It’s here?”

Choi Hyun ran here after hearing Baek Seoin’s call, and the Berserkers gathered here all had puzzled expressions.

The place Baek Seoin said was the entrance looked no different from any other place. It was flat with lots of grass. They didn’t see anything that resembled a tunnel entrance and even when they heightened their perception ability, they didn’t feel anything that felt like a tunnel.

“This is the place. Try to feel the karma here rather than the surrounding terrain.”

Even when Baek Seoin explained, the others were still puzzled. Only Choi Hyuk felt something was weird.

“Now that I think about it, karma only ripples here?”

Natural karma changed unpredictably. There were times when the density of karma would increase and even ripple. However, it was rare to see only a specific part move completely differently from its surroundings.

Other Berserkers had a hard time comprehending what the natural state of karma was so they were slow in realizing it, but Choi Hyuk instinctively felt what was wrong.

“Yes, leader. It looks like the natives are much better at using karma than we expected. There’s no doubt they used karma to hide the entrance.”

“Like illusionary magic…”

“Maybe.”

Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Okay, I know what to do.”

Whether it was magic or not, as long as it was created with karma, the solution was simple.

Choi Hyuk gathered a karma storm in his right hand.

“Void Wave!”

Booooom!

Void Wave had the effect of blowing away karma near its vicinity. As the storm of karma rampaged on its surroundings, tree roots started to appear from the ground which was only filled with grass previously.

“Huh? There?”

People became surprised when they saw the tree roots. However, once the effect of Void Wave was over, the tree roots were concealed, turning into a grassy area once again.

“As expected, it’s not enough with just this.”

Choi Hyuk had controlled his strength to test it out.

Huuu.

This time he took a deep breath and became serious. He created another karma storm. Unlike last time, he created three storms and repulsed them in his hand. This was the critical skill that allowed the Void Wave to be recorded in the supply store. A resonance and explosion utilizing repulsion. It required precise control but, with it, it was possible to bring forth a large effect without using a lot of power. The storm of karma resonated above Choi Hyuk’s hand and exploded.

…

A silent explosion. The karma that blocked their vision was blasted away.

As if snow had melted to reveal the world’s true self, tree roots appeared above the grassy ground. The ground they had thought was a shallow furrow was, in fact, all tree roots. The scale was

quite significant as well. To the point that they filled the whole area the Void Wave affected. This most likely extended beyond the Void Wave's range.

Something was strange. They saw tree roots, yet they didn't see any trees. They didn't even see a single trunk or branch, only tree roots covered the ground.

"Wow... It's like magic."

Lee Jinhee admired as she walked on a tree root that was stuck in the ground. Half the area was dirt while the other half was made up of roots. She, who was plodding along, suddenly stopped. At her feet lay a door made of carved roots.

"This looks like the entrance? For us to not notice it even though it was right here."

There didn't seem to be other security measures on the door either. When Choi Hyuk nodded, Lee Jinhee opened the door. She was able to easily open the door that seemed to be four times larger than regular doors.

Creaak. Thud!

The door opened wide.

"Wahhh..."

The door led to the inside of a tree root. The roots on the surface were only a small portion. The giant hollow tree root formed a long underground tunnel.

Lee Jinhee jumped in and brushed her hand against the walls. It was smooth like wooden furniture. The tunnel wasn't dark as light flowed from the wood grain.

"This is no joke. The groups found until now were from small-scale villages of 100 natives... Looking at the illusionary magic... and this amazing tree, we might actually meet a city of natives instead of a village."

Baek Seoin said in a voice filled with wonder and suspense. He jumped into the wood tunnel and looked around before carefully suggesting to Choi Hyuk.

"The natives might feel threatened by us and try to attack. Wouldn't it be best if we sent an envoy first?"

Those with good intentions do not come and [those who come do not come with good intentions]. To humans, this may be an exciting adventure in a mysterious world, but there was no guarantee that the natives didn't see them as invading plunderers who had deactivated their defense system. There are no good men among those who trespass.

However, Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“No. Everyone will enter except for 1,000 who will stay up here. And Baek hyung, how do you feel?”

“Well… Calm now. Actually, I’m a bit excited.”

Just in case, he checked Baek Seoin’s Intuition. There wasn’t any problem.

“Good, enter!”

They began their march inside the long tree root. The wood tunnel slowly kept going deeper.

At first, the tunnel was wide enough for 3 people to walk side by side, but as more and more tunnels joined together, it became wide enough for 6, then 12, then 24 and so on the deeper they went.

“This… feels like an upside down tree.”

Baek Seoin noted as he gazed at the faint light that wrapped around them.

A tree where the roots led to the surface, and the trunk and branches reached deep into the ground. A faint scent of wood wafted in the air, and they would occasionally see unidentifiable green ores. Every time they came across a green ore, Baek Seoin would crack off a portion and collected them.

“But why are you collecting those unknown rocks every time we see them?”

When Lee Jinhee asked, Baek Seoin clicked his tongue.

“You call yourself an executive and you still don’t know? I’m making a map. As there are no constellations here, we are only able to roughly approximate our location using the whirlpools in the sky and the distribution of ores.”

“Ah, a map… So, if we find rocks similar to those ores found near other portals, we might be nearby… like that?”

“Something like that. We can even use this directly as a resource as well.”

As they continued down the tunnel while investigating their surroundings, a large gate blocked their path.

It was a fortress built with dark wood and a yellowish-green mineral. The fortress walls seemed to be 30 meters tall. It was like a terrifyingly tall dam.

“Wow… Look at that.”

Lee Jinhee exclaimed.

“Do we finally get to trade with natives? But the size is no joke? Considering the illusionary magic as well, it seems like this civilization is more advanced than the other natives who have been discovered already. The scale is large too.”

Baek Seoin couldn’t contain his excitement. Sovereigns who had traded with the natives had all developed significantly. If they traded with them, how many benefits could they gain?

“Heh… But it looks like they even have an alarm device. It looks like they knew we were coming?”

Lee Jinhee whistled as she looked at the native’s solemnity.

“Halt!”

Just then, they heard a familiar language.

“English?”

Up on top of the fortress, they saw the silhouette of a relatively small earthling.

“… I think he might be an immigrant. It seems they sent him as an interpreter.”

Baek Seoin narrowed his eyes as he observed the top of the fortress. Either he was dimensionally teleported here in the first

place or he was discovered as he wandered around Dragonic, either way, he was a lucky immigrant. As the city would be safer than the surface.

“Is he an interpreter? Not needed. I’ll speak directly.”

Choi Hyuk raised his voice. He had already undergone a language resonance procedure at the supply store. The general idea of his words would appear in the other’s head. Also, the words of the other party would be translated and appear in his head. It was because of this language resonance that he was able to converse with the other aliens he met on missions.

They seemed to be surprised by Choi Hyuk’s language resonance. A small commotion erupted before the immigrant was replaced by a native behind him.

{For what purpose did you bring an army here?}

The language of the natives seemed similar to whistling and bird calls... Even from afar, he could hear it clearly. Choi Hyuk silently observed them.

He saw two colors with his ‘Eyes of Distinction’. Black (ill will) and white (goodwill). It seemed that there was a bit of ill will because they came as an army. Then, what was the goodwill?

‘Are they happy to see intelligent beings instead of monsters? It also looks as though their treatment of immigrants is good.’

If his guess was right, then they were a good group to trade with. However, was it really like that?

‘I just need to confirm it.’

Choi Hyuk decided to not bother weighing every detail and to rather face them head on.

“To ally with you.”

{Do earthlings bring armies when they come to ally with someone?}

Choi Hyuk happily brought it up, but the reaction was blunt. It was an expected reaction. This was why Baek Seoin warned him from the beginning.

However, bringing an army wasn’t a completely bad idea either. During the days of imperialism, Westerners established diplomatic relations by revealing their firepower, as it was sometimes necessary to demonstrate your military strength when trading with others. This was why Baek Seoin didn’t really oppose it either.

‘But… for them to have such a strong fortress… Maybe I should have stopped him a bit.’

Baek Seoin licked his lips. It was because their opponents weren't weak enough to show a military demonstration. Instead, it seemed to have been a negative factor.

Yet, Choi Hyuk was composed.

"That's because I don't want a simple alliance. I want a strong alliance where it's okay to post each other's troops in either of our cities."

Even Baek Seoin was surprised at his words. He thought that they were going to simply do what the sovereigns from Germany and Thailand did. Was he trying to create a semi-colonial state like the sovereigns from Israel by bringing an army? He thought about it briefly. But what did he mean by an alliance where it was okay to post each other's armies?

Like birds twittering and the rustling of leaves, whistling sounds erupted from everywhere. It seemed the natives were dumbfounded, wondering what he was talking about. When Choi Hyuk examined them with his 'Eyes of Distinction', he saw that both white and black lights had disappeared. They seemed to be unsure of how to take his words.

Just then, the representative of the natives said.

{Ridiculous... Why must we?}

"Because you're tight on time. Don't you have to rid the monsters

off this land?”

{…}

At his reply, the surrounding commotion died down. ‘Get rid of monsters.’ Was there any task above this for these natives whose land had been snatched by monsters?

Choi Hyuk continued.

“This will be an opportunity for you. You might not know this, but currently, my species is conducting a large-scale migration to Dragonic. In the future, all earthlings will migrate here. There are only two futures for this planet. One, where the earthlings lose and it continues to be occupied by monsters. Or two, earthlings are victorious and it becomes occupied by us. Then, a question. How many of your ‘descendants of dragonics’ will remain? There are currently millions of earthlings. Even if we consider earthlings successfully getting rid of all the monsters, do you think you can compete and survive against us?”

Choi Hyuk’s speech had improved over the past two years he spent being a sovereign of tens of thousands of people.

{… What is it you want to say?}

“If we combine our strength, we don’t need to needlessly come in conflict with each other and can prosper together. Let’s start with the premise we will one day join together and first create a strong

alliance. I will get rid of the monsters and let you live on the surface.”

{... How can I trust in a species I’ve seen for the first time... No, even if I exclude that, you’ll let us live on the surface? Do you even have the power to?}

Choi Hyuk was continuously looking at them with his Eyes of Distinction. It was interesting. The white (goodwill) and black (ill will) in the beginning had disappeared with the commotion, but now a dim white light remained. They held a bit of expectation after being taken aback by the unexpected proposal.

A picturesque smile formed on Choi Hyuk’s lips.

“Of course. Want to confirm it for yourself?”

{How?}

“Let’s have a light spar.”

{... What?}

Looking at Choi Hyuk smiling like a devil, Baek Seoin face palmed.

‘You want to get friendly with the aliens by fighting them?’

Now that 2 years had passed, Choi Hyuk was an adult by Korean standards. Through many experiences, he was now quite a good talker and his judgment had become better... but he was still a ‘Battle Addict’.

善者▮來 來者▮善

This is actually written in English in the raws.

Chapter 53: Investigation (4)

“So what do you call yourselves? We call ourselves earthlings.”

{… The El tribe. Other inhabitants of Dragonic call us ‘els’.}

What was unexpected was that they were els. The moment Choi Hyuk said, ‘Let’s spar’, their initial confusion had disappeared. They tensed themselves and observed Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers. They were experienced fighters.

‘Good.’

Choi Hyuk felt cheerful.

“Everyone back off.”

The Berserkers stepped back, and Choi Hyuk’s stretching figure stood out to the els.

“I’m Choi Hyuk.”

Remember it. No, I will make you remember it. Though he didn’t speak those words, his immediate charge forward seemed to emphasize them.

Whoosh!

Choi Hyuk's charge was strange. He wasn't kicking the ground physically, but rather, it seemed as though the ground was pushing him forward and the fortress was pushing him upwards.

When they were still going, 'What the?' Choi Hyuk had already climbed to the top of the fortress.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk's palm thumped into an El tribe soldier's chest. Several soldiers behind the el rolled on the ground in an instant.

Boooo.

Vibrations that sounded like daegeums erupted. It seemed to be the els' special groaning sound.

{...}

The el, who looked like the leader, didn't give them any orders. Even still, as if it was engraved in their bodies, the El tribe's soldiers got into formation and started to fight back.

Cold air fogged up the swords of Choi Hyuk and the nearby soldiers. An aura that felt as if the blood and flesh of nearby enemies would freeze and pop. If there were only one or two, it would have been fine, but as ten soldiers surrounded him, it was

quite menacing.

Choi Hyuk utilized his karma trait, Mind's Eye, to its limits. He could clearly see the thrashing karma, and he could also see its weak point. He skillfully hit away the oncoming karma that attempted to freeze his flesh. Then he punched the weakest point of the karma, where the blade and handle of a sword connected.

Gong!

The magic was broken and the sword itself was shattered as a result.

{What!}

The El tribe soldiers became baffled. Booo. He heard the sounds of daegeums once again.

Bang!

He struck the soldier whose sword had been shattered.

Thump.

His Karma Heart thumped loudly. Karma rode his body and accelerated. Previously, only the pathway on his right arm was open, but now, pathways were open on all four of his limbs. His karma had become even faster and stronger.

Goong!

The shattering swords were like snow, flying everywhere, and the soldiers looked like they had experienced an avalanche. The els, who attempted to face him in close combat, had scattered like withered leaves.

“This is boring.”

Choi Hyuk’s provocation.

Bang! Shhhhhriek!

At this moment, an unexpected attack flew towards him. Choi Hyuk felt something approaching with great speed and dodged it. He first heard the projectile smashing against the fortress and only then heard a sharp whistling sound.

Choi Hyuk looked at the watchtower the projectile flew from. He was surprised.

“Guns?”

He could only think of them that way.

On top of a tall watchtower sprouting from the fortress, El tribe soldiers were shooting with human-length wooden guns.

{The opponent's senses are extremely good! Treat him as a monster that is at least Draco ranked! Platoon 1 to 3! Open fire!}

Bang, bang, bang! Shhhhhhriek!

Sounds of gunfire rang out rhythmically.

To fool Choi Hyuk's senses, they shot bullets immediately behind one another and changed the bullets' trajectories. Sometimes, one bullet would even split into 3-4 pieces like magic baseball throws in comics.

"Wow..."

The guns didn't use gunpowder. The bullets were shot with the power of karma. As these bullets were filled with hostile karma, if he tried to defend himself sloppily, his Karma Barrier, or anything in their way, would be ripped to shreds.

3-star monsters weren't affected by human guns. However, if they had those guns, they would be effective against 3-star and early 4-star monsters. Unfortunately, their opponent was the wrong match.

Choi Hyuk's Endurance was currently at 3-star, but his fighting style was to use his Control, which was on at the extreme limits of 4-star, and his senses to cover his other stats. This wasn't a problem.

When he pushed his Mind's Eye even further, Choi Hyuk's eyes were dyed with a bluish tinge. The bullets flying from everywhere flowed like leaves and their tips were pointed. Choi Hyuk was even able to clearly distinguish the shapes and it wasn't hard for him to dodge them.

{Oh my god...}

The els murmured amongst themselves with sounds of daegeums. If he had endured the bullets with his body, they wouldn't have been so surprised, but he avoided them all?

'Wouldn't this be impossible for the great warriors?'

Buds of respect began to sprout in the hearts of the els.

At the same time,

Goong!

As if trying to firmly brand him into their hearts, he pushed his palm at the chests of the El tribe soldiers.

The els shrieked as they flew away and fainted.

{Don't get cocky!}

This time, an el wearing a smooth robe made of intertwined leaves instead of armor appeared. Karma gathered on the arm-length branch in his hand in a strange way. The karma surrounding Choi Hyuk seemed to synchronize with him as it started to roll around strangely.

{Restrict him!}

Whoosh!

When the el waved his branch, roots grew out from everywhere and started to bind Choi Hyuk's arms and legs.

"Huh?"

Choi Hyuk became surprised at the fact he wasn't able to avoid being bound by the roots. His body felt strangely heavy.

"What is this? Now I see, there wasn't only one of you…"

While the el wearing a robe had grabbed Choi Hyuk's attention, other magicians hidden amongst the soldiers had cast magic that numbed Choi Hyuk's body and made him feel a strong pressure from his surroundings.

Choi Hyuk's eyes shined blue. He analyzed the karma near him. It was quite elaborate. It wasn't to the point of being unable to free

himself, but he would either take a long time or have to push himself.

Unfortunately, the situation didn't allow for him to take his time.

{Squadron 1 and 2! Volley!}

Many more soldiers than before simultaneously shot at him.

The Berserkers were spectating this scene.

"Wow... They're strong. What would happen if we fought them? Would we lose?"

Individually they were weaker than the Berserkers when they compared fighting skills and the strength of their karma. However, if they considered their extraordinary weapons, skills, and tactics, it wouldn't be an easy fight.

"I dunno. We'll probably have to fight to be sure..."

Baek Seoin answered in a serious voice. The Berserkers prided themselves in never losing against opponents of equal numbers. Yet, when they saw how the els fought, it was difficult to guarantee this.

"That... Anyways, I bet the leader won't lose."

“That’s for sure.”

Baek Seoin nodded at Lee Jinhee’s words.

Choi Hyuk

Power: 365 (+213) (4★) Speed: 371 (+201) (4★) Control: 453 (4★)

Endurance: 100 (3★) Stamina: 359 (3★) Recovery: 371 (3★)

Retribution points: 400 (4★)

*Free karma points: 0

{Innate skill}

-Eyes of Distinction

{Skills}

-Instant Void Annihilation (Deteriorated)

-Flaming Wing Dance (Deteriorated)

-Heart Injection (Deteriorated)

{Achievements}

-You have killed someone with karma before it was distributed to you!

-First to kill a monster one-on-one!

-Sovereign (King without Subjects, First to kill a 2-star monster, Killed the Wyvern of Destruction)

-First Colonizer of Humanity

-First Human to reach 4-star stats

Choi Hyuk admired. It was difficult to free himself of the magic that restrained his body. If a monster took his place, it would have used all its stamina trying to escape by brute force. That would be fatal.

It was essential for Choi Hyuk to watch his Stamina. He increased his Power and Speed with enchants and items to exceed the midrange of 4-star, yet his Stamina was still at 3-star. An unstable state.

If he accidentally overworked himself and his karma relaxed, then no matter how extraordinary his Control was, it was of no use. Afterwards, it would be a domino effect. If his Control collapsed due to his Stamina, then the next to fall would be his Endurance.

'Endurance' didn't only resist enemy attacks, but it was also important in enduring your own strength. When you simultaneously used your karma and body in a physical fight, the more strength you used, the harder it was on your body, unless you expelled karma outside your body and used it like the El tribe. However, Choi Hyuk's Endurance was only in the early stages of 3-star. The only reason he was able to endure his 4-star strength with that Endurance was because of his precise Control. If that Control fell, then his bones and joints would undoubtedly collapse. Even if he dodged his enemy's attacks, his own strength would crush his body.

Of course, he did have a skill to account for this. Over the past 2 years, Choi Hyuk had diligently sold useless skills and only possessed skills useful to him.

‘However, it’s not the right time to use it.’

There was a way to free himself without overworking his Endurance to waste.

Woong.

The blue light that gathered at his eyes turned into streams of light and spread to his surroundings.

{Trait Mind’s Eye, Second Level: Identical Mind}

Karma becomes easier to control and easily penetrates objects.

When you broke through 200 (4★) Retribution Points, you had an opportunity to awaken another trait. There were two methods. One was choosing a completely different trait, such as ‘Resilience’ which granted resilience to your karma or ‘Explosive Blood’ which sharply increased your strength but was also painful. In other words, it was like becoming a dual-class. However, Choi Hyuk chose the other method. He had opened the next level of Mind’s Eye, Identical Mind.

Identical Mind, like its meaning, specialized in ‘manipulation’ rather than ‘sense’. Like Mind’s Eye, it didn’t have a direct affect

on combat, however, depending on who used it, the results would change completely.

Choi Hyuk's karma penetrated through the magic restraining him and destroyed its structure from the inside. The restraining magic untangled like kalguksu noodles in boiling water.

{What the…?}

Bang, bang, bang! Shhriek!

The bullets fired by the second squadron definitely possessed a lot of power, but that was useless if they didn't hit. Choi Hyuk had already disappeared from that spot. He was dashing forward. As 'Identical Mind' naturally spread out, the environment surrounding him moved according to his will. The ground and fortress pushed him forward while his target pulled him in.

Baang!

{Kyak!}

Even as he swung his fist down at the magician's chest, he didn't slow down. Choi Hyuk was heading towards the great warrior of the El tribe, who he talked with in the beginning.

The great warrior regarded Choi Hyuk as he swept towards him. He was like a blizzard and a landslide. To be honest, he was amazing. That was what all the els thought.

{That's enough. I acknowledge you are a splendid warrior. Now let's talk. I can't guarantee your life if the fight intensifies even further.}

Choi Hyuk looked at the figure of the great warrior. The white (goodwill) light emitted from him became a shade brighter. Either the great warrior thought of him as an equal or he gained a bit of respect for Choi Hyuk.

That didn't satisfy Choi Hyuk. Equals? How could his equal liberate him? Choi Hyuk definitely said, 'I will bring you to the surface.' To prove that his words were true, 'equality' or 'respect' wasn't enough.

That was what he thought after 2 years of experience.

'Fear over half-baked respect. Awe is much better.'

A faint ill will due to fear. Yet, he needed a goodwill that well exceeded that fear, a desire to be seen in a good light.

Choi Hyuk shouted loudly.

"Then fight me with your life on the line! Don't worry about losing your life. I have no thoughts of killing you!"

{... Huh.}

The great chieftain's eyelashes fluttered. He had good feelings towards Choi Hyuk because he was a superb warrior but his current remark was extremely rude. Didn't it mean that even if the El tribe came at him with all their strength, they wouldn't be able to beat him?

{Don't regret it. First Regiment! The enemy is a Dragonian ranked monster! Focus on restraining him and send in the elite troops!}

The moment the great chieftain's command sounded out, the restraining magic on Choi Hyuk increased heavily. Not only that, soldiers with freezing swords immediately attacked him. Chilling air covered his surroundings, roots shot up and bounded themselves onto his arms and legs and the atmosphere became heavier, slowing his movements. They also bombarded him with bullets.

Cho Hyuk's whole body surged with blue karma as he tried to use 'Identical Mind' to his utmost limits in an attempt to destroy the attacks, however, his steps towards the great chieftain slowed significantly. The elite troops, who targeted the slowed Choi Hyuk, rushed in.

Swish!

A wound appeared on Choi Hyuk's body for the first time. His Stamina was starting to drop.

{You should stop now.}

The great warrior suggested again. Choi Hyuk smiled.

“Screw that.”

Choi Hyuk activated a skill. The karma in his body automatically rearranged itself. A high-level skill that Choi Hyuk couldn’t even create with his Control and senses, no, it was a skill he didn’t even fully understand. One of the strongest skills Choi Hyuk found in the past 2 years exploded out.

“Heart Injection!”

Thump!

His heart starting beating explosively. His karma that had become lax after using up all his Stamina forcefully became taut again and bulged.

{Heart Injection (Deteriorated)}

Instantly recovers your karma that is currently on cooldown. Stamina and Recovery increase sharply. After the skill effect has ended, you will be in an exhausted state for an hour. You are unable to recover any karma during this exhausted state.

This was originally a top skill that could only be used by 5-star and above. Someone had deteriorated and supplied this skill so lower levels could use it.

Bbabang!

Choi Hyuk still didn't unsheathe his sword. However, the elbows and ankles of the elite troops charging at Choi Hyuk were smashed, and they fell on the floor.

"Checkmate!"

Choi Hyuk left the El tribe soldiers behind and charged towards the great warrior. With a stiffened face, the great warrior unsheathed his sword.

**

"Haa… Haa… Mister, you're amazing. Haa…"

Choi Hyuk was gasping for breath as his left hand pressed against his neck, trying to stanch the bleeding. Even though he attacked him suddenly, the great warrior's counterattack was sharp. He dodged and dodged and blocked and blocked, and yet he almost had his neck cut off.

{… It's not mister, it's Lantz. But what was that attack just now? I blocked it with the blessing of the reverse tree…}

The Great Warrior Lantz was on the ground, blood spilling from his lips. His speech was fine, but because he had been hit in the chest multiple times, the damage to his insides was severe. It would take approximately a month of rest to heal.

However, Choi Hyuk changed the topic.

“I’ll tell you later. First, let us in the fortress to rest.”

He once again requested to let his 3,000 soldiers into the city as if it was nothing. Even if one didn’t read the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, even a child would know how absurd this request was. Yet, Choi Hyuk stood tall.

{...}

“Quickly! If I was planning on fighting, I would have already infiltrated and opened it! If you don’t open it up, I’m going to!”

He was now being stubborn. If Baek Seoin had seen this, he would have face-palmed.

Unexpectedly, this attitude actually worked. Was it due to their long experience in cooperating with other surface dwellers to fight their common enemy, the ‘monsters’? The great warrior held up his hand.

{Okay.}

Grinning as he lay on the ground, he raised his trembling hand and ordered his subordinates.

{Open the door and let's welcome the grand warriors!}

"You should have done that from the start."

Choi Hyuk relaxed as he grinned.

His legs kept trembling so he put his strength into it. Even though he had activated Heart Injection, he had consumed all his Stamina while fighting the great warrior. He was simply that strong of an opponent.

Choi Hyuk stood up while leaning against the El tribe soldiers and looked at the great warrior. Looking at how a smile crept up his face by itself... It seemed he had obtained a good ally.

Not too sure what els are. I found something similar to it. In a Korean game called DK Online, there was a race called diels whose power came from contracts with ancient dragons.

Chapter 54: Investigation (5)

Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung, who had left the hot springs city ‘Pyungryu’ which had a slave market, had escaped to the outskirts of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban’s territory. They checked the whirlpool in the sky and examined the terrain.

“Ha… What a beautiful scene.”

Ryu Hyunsung took pictures as they explored a hilly region that seemed to have been cut cleanly by a sword, plains that seemed to have experienced a drought as the ground was split into deep cracks, and tens of lakes which seemed as though the ground had been punched to make uniform holes.

He held an expensive item in his hands, a transparent tablet. He used an application on this tablet that could analyze the pictures he took and automatically create a map. Electronics from Earth couldn’t function properly in outer space, but this tablet was originally created by alien technology and therefore worked anywhere. It was said to be an essential item for each faction. Choi Hyuk’s group only had two tablets. One was in Baek Seoin’s possession while Ryu Hyunsung brought the other one with him.

“Well… There are unexplainable terrains on Earth as well… But this is really amazing. Is it even possible for these to form naturally?”

Ryu Hyunsung held the transparent tablet in his hands as he admired the scene in front of him, while Chu Youngjin picked up a

white rock that was rolling on the ground.

“This rock is strangely warm.”

It was warm. Its warmth seemed to exceed 40 degrees. When he heard those words, Ryu Hyunsung placed his hand on the ground. The ground itself was warm.

“Is it because we’re in a hot springs region?”

He recalled Pyungryu, the hot springs city not far from here. He then compared their location and Pyungryu as he examined the map that had been automatically created by the tablet. Ryu Hyunsung left a memo, ‘the ground is warm’.

“Done. Let’s go to the next place.”

After he finished recording, the two continued to their next destination. Ryu Hyunsung’s map already included the territory of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, but they were extending even beyond that.

The land was split like rice paddies. However, the scale was a hundred times larger than a rice paddy. When they saw it from afar, it looked like a rice paddy, but as they approached, the crevices between the pieces of land were as wide as the gaps between buildings. When they dropped a rock to figure out how deep it was, they didn’t hear a sound. Hot air that seemed to come from the depths of hell would occasionally blow from the cracks.

Here, Chu Youngjin discovered some traces.

“This… looks like traces of humans?”

On one side of the crack, there was a cave. Wooden tools that looked like lamps rolled in front of the cave. Since it was two stories below, it was a great place to hide from monsters. They jumped into the gap and entered the cave.

“This stench…”

Chu Youngjin took immediate notice of the blood and flesh on the walls as well as the sickening stench.

“Seeing as how there is a stench, it doesn’t seem like it’s been very long.”

Ryu Hyunsung agreed with him. He examined his surroundings and said,

“Yeah, even though we don’t know when or how this cave was made, immigrants definitely used to live here. That corpse is wearing jeans.”

The upper and lower body of that corpse had been separated. Chu Youngjin frowned and asked.

“… Why were they annihilated? Monsters?”

“What monsters. In my perspective, it’s Lao Ban, that bastard. They probably only took those who could have been used as slaves and killed the rest.”

Ryu Hyunsung took out the tablet and took pictures. Even though it was obvious, they hadn’t had visible evidence of slave hunting and immigrant slaughter until now… Well, it wasn’t as though evidence like this meant anything nowadays.

“The world really is strange. Even when a sovereign pulls this kind of shit, we can’t do anything, right? Because it’s impossible to enter Dragonic without the sovereign’s permission… And the future of Earth lies with Dragonic. Same with the law. It collapsed the moment the military and police became awakenees.”

Ryu Hyunsung complained while taking pictures of the cave. The cave was quite deep. When they went deeper, they saw places that seemed to be sleeping quarters and a kitchen. Though they didn’t know who first dug this cave, they were quite functional.

“Our leader contributed to that as well.”

Didn’t Choi Hyuk kill someone in front of the president? From that point onwards, at least to the awakenees, it was no different from having no laws.

Ryu Hyunsung shrugged. He had been present then.

“Well, at least the leader was discussing the relationship between favor and spite. This, this is just killing people unrelated to him for greed. It’s very different. No matter how low the morals of the strong have fallen…”

Chu Youngjin nodded at his words. His gazed turned towards a couple who had been stabbed by a spear and had died alongside each other.

Chu Youngjin felt jealousy, pain and rage all at the same time. A pain that was incomparable to the pain he experienced from Explosive Blood.

“… That’s true… It’d be nice if we met a slave hunting troop.”

His eyes reddened as though he had unknowingly activated Explosive Blood. If any slave hunters met with Chu Youngjin now, it would the day of their calamity.

Ryu Hyunsung seconded Chu Youngjin’s wish.

“It’d be nice. We can give them another warning as well.”

After they finished recording, they left the cave. And they checked a distant whirlpool in the sky. It was a dented whirlpool that looked like stirred milk.

Chu Youngjin observed the familiar whirlpool and said,

“Is that really… the whirlpool we saw in our territory? It’s really small…”

“Even if it’s small, the shape is almost identical. There’s a high chance they are the same whirlpool.”

“If that really is the case, then they must be colonizing in that direction.”

“Yeah. So let’s quickly finish our mission and return.”

They were almost done. The two set that whirlpool as their target and started to walk.

**

Had Chu Youngjin’s words about wanting to meet a group of slave hunters come true? They really did meet them. It was at a place that was about three days away from Pyungryu. A place that seemed to be slightly closer to the dented whirlpool.

They were in a terrain where blue boulders emitted a thick fog. When seen from a distance, the combination of the blue rocks and fog looked like a mysterious ocean. While Ryu Hyunsung was taking pictures, he spotted fleeing immigrants making their way through the fog. Immigrants who couldn’t receive supplies were easily identifiable as they wore tattered clothes from Earth or

covered themselves up with a cloth.

“We’re quite lucky. Immigrants are being chased.”

To be able to meet slave traders, whom they wanted to teach a lesson to, and find skilled immigrants, it was like killing two birds with one stone.

Immigrants who survived here for a long time were of great help to Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung’s mission as they would undoubtedly know the terrain, infestation of monsters, and the distribution of the native population better than anyone else. Due to the increased sightings of monsters, it was about time for them to leave as well. If they could obtain the immigrants’ cooperation, they could even leave with information about a place they hadn’t scouted yet.

“Do we charge in?”

Chu Youngjin, who was spectating the fleeing immigrants, asked Ryu Hyunsung as if informing him. Ryu Hyunsung nodded.

“Explosive Blood.”

The next instant, Chu Youngjin dashed forward after activating Explosive Blood.

Crash!

His transformed figure kicked the ground and dashed towards the distant foggy area. Ryu Hyunsung followed behind him.

“Huh?”

Although Chu Youngjin’s explosive movements were loud, the enemies were late in discovering him. It was because Chu Youngjin’s speed was as fast as the sound was loud. By the time they figured out it was him, blood had splattered into the air.

Rumble! Rumble!

Chu Youngjin’s special karma usage emitted loud thundering sounds. His movements accelerated and decelerated, matching the erratic thundering sounds. Unable to follow his tempo, the eight slave hunters were cut into pieces one after another.

Using this opportunity, Ryu Hyunsung blocked the immigrants’ path.

“Please wait. We are on the same side.”

Two male and three female immigrants. They were black and white foreigners, however, as long as he had language resonance, there was no problem communicating with them. Ryu Hyunsung held up his hands and showed with his words and actions that he didn’t intend to fight.

Of course, the immigrants didn't trust him.

{Bullshit!}

A black man, out of the blue, swung his large sword. Not only him, the rest did so as well. They spread out as quick as lightning and wielded their swords and spears, flanking him on either side. 'Ha~ They are better than most colonizers.' They were very experienced movements. They seemed to have been immigrants for quite a while. Veterans who survived more than a year against monsters.

Unfortunately, their attacks were easily seen through by Ryu Hyunsung's 'Mind's Eye'. After experiencing hellish wars under the 'Battle Addict' Choi Hyuk, this much was a given. Ryu Hyunsung retreated precisely three steps. As he retreated,

Clink! Clink, clink, clank! Woong!

Then, he wielded his sword three times and cleared their attacks. Their spears embedded into the ground and their swords flew up into the air. All five of them simultaneously staggered and lost their balance.

{Ack!}

However, they weren't easy opponents. They rebalanced themselves with force and once again, targeted Ryu Hyunsung. Despite this, Ryu Hyunsung was faster.

{Kahk!}

The black swordsman was struck with the handle of his sword and rolled on the ground. A spear wielding white woman fell to the floor when he kicked her shin. Ryu Hyunsung's restrained actions instantly left them lying on the ground.

{Eu...}

They weren't simple hits but ones reinforced with karma. The immigrants groaned and were unable to get up easily.

"Are you now ready to talk?"

{Bull... shit...}

The black swordsman's spirit was unbending. But, he shut his mouth when he heard the screams.

{Euahhh! You bastard! Do you know who we are?!}

They were the screams of the slave traders. Chu Youngjin was already cutting the neck of the fourth one. Ryu Hyunsung shrugged his shoulders.

Looking at Chu Youngjin's figure as he fought the slave traders, the captured immigrants' eyes moved quickly. Ryu Hyunsung

thought that they would finally be able to talk. He thought that they had let down their guard a little after seeing Chu Youngjin fighting for them.

Unfortunately… He was mistaken.

The reaction he wanted was '… What business do you have with us?', but he didn't receive such a calm reaction.

The immigrants, who had stared at Ryu Hyunsung with killing intent, quickly changed their attitude and revealed their impatience.

{Quickly! We need to leave quickly!}

It seemed as though they judged they weren't enemies, but they showed extreme anxiousness. They had no hint of thanks and looked as if they were in big trouble due to being delayed by Ryu Hyunsung.

"Wait, wait. Calm down. We are dealing with the enemies."

Ryu Hyunsung attempted to calm them down, but he was met with a strong opposition.

{No! They aren't all!}

It looked as if he was screaming.

Then a low pulsating sound passed Ryu Hyunsung's ears. Ryu Hyunsung turned around without thinking.

The fog suddenly started to sway like waves in the ocean. As it did, the immigrants fell into a state of panic.

{Ahh! Escape!}

They hurriedly got up, pushed Ryu Hyunsung aside and started to flee. 'Just what is happening?' Ryu Hyunsung was taken back.

"Hey!"

Ryu Hyunsung was about to follow after them, but he hastily stopped in his tracks.

Shrrieeeek! Thud!

{Kahk...}

A spear appeared out of nowhere and pierced the black swordsman's back. That wasn't all.

"Just when did they..."

Ryu Hyunsung's voice was strained. Cold sweat dripped down his

back. The enemy was stealthy. Just when did they arrive? Enemies appeared from everywhere. They had already been encircled.

It was a complete miscalculation. This was a remote area beyond the Sovereign of Dark Secrets's territory. They believed the enemy's power would only be a small scale slave hunter group. They never dreamed to be caught in this sort of situation.

"This much... Isn't this at the level of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets's most elite troops...? Why would the main force be here?"

The situation reversed in an instant. The fleeing immigrants had all been captured, and Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin were isolated in the middle of the enemy camp.

Chu Youngjin, who had been fighting the slave traders, retreated back to Ryu Hyunsung. His back against Ryu Hyunsung's. The heat from his body was transmitted through Ryu Hyunsung's back.

"Which direction should we break through?"

However, Chu Youngjin didn't seem discouraged in the slightest.

Chapter 55: Investigation (6)

He activated Mind's Eye to its limits. Ryu Hyunsung's karma became as sensitive as eardrums. Sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and even senses living beings on Earth weren't aware of; his sensitive karma could capture all of them.

All sorts of information were transmitted to Ryu Hyunsung, the locations of the 50 people surrounding them, the direction they were looking in, as well as how tense their muscles were. This was 'Mind's Eye'. Unfortunately, that was all. Analyzing the given information was up to the individual. Mind's Eye was like a pearl. One could create fine jewelry with it while another could drop it down a drain.

Because of this, it became frightening when the Mind's Eye trait was given to those who had a talent for it.

Ryu Hyunsung, who was a national saber athlete, was a 'Battle Addict' who had experienced the most intense missions over the past 2 years. Of course, he had the talent and experience to use Mind's Eye to its extreme.

Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin didn't communicate through words. With only the angle Ryu Hyunsung held his blade, Chu Youngjin was able to know which direction to charge at. At the same time, he was able to understand the speed of the charge and their target by looking at the weight shifted on Ryu Hyunsung's legs.

‘No killing, a fast speed breakthrough.’

Chu Youngjin nodded his head and a rumble sounded out as he shot forward. Both his trait and innate skill sharply increased the output of his karma. As he lacked precision, fights were relatively more dangerous when fighting against strong enemies, but against weaker ones, he was able to crush them easier than anyone.

Clink!

However, his opponents were also elites who represented an organization. There were no cases, like with the slave traders, where they would be split in two. Still, all they could do was narrowly parry Chu Youngjin’s crashing strike and even then, they would be pushed away due to the differences in their strength. At Chu Youngjin’s charge, the encirclement seemed to ripple as if it had been hit by a cannonball. Ryu Hyunsung quickly followed behind him.

It was the same this time as well, there was no need for words. Chu Youngjin was able to determine the direction by looking at Ryu Hyunsung’s footsteps and his sword.

Rumble!

Ruumble!

Each step Chu Youngjin took, and each time he swung his sword, enemies would scatter.

“Keep your positions! Endure! They won’t be able to keep this tempo for long!”

The leader, Cha Ohjin, tried his best to keep the scattering encirclement enclosed. Although he couldn’t be said to be Sovereign Lao Ban’s right hand, he was someone who could at least be his right thumb. He was a leader who followed the orders of the executives. He had rushed here when he heard a commotion as he was hunting ‘sacrifices’ for the ‘festival’ that was held every half year.

His judgment was correct as he had a lot of experience in battles as a leader. Chu Youngjin was showing off his incredible skills, but the encirclement only wobbled, there were no casualties. If they just stuck to them like rabid dogs, they would undoubtedly win.

{Explosive Blood}
All stats, excluding Control, increase explosively. The amount of increase depends on the user’s aptitude. The karma, excluding Control, goes crazy and you feel an extreme pain. Although your Recovery stat increases as well, the burden on your body was greater, and thus, you accumulate more damage the longer you fight.

There was a limit to Stamina. On top of that, because his Control

couldn’t keep up, the explosiveness accelerated his rate of exhaustion.

Because of this, Cha Ohjin’s judgment was correct. If only Ryu Hyunsung wasn’t present.

Chu Youngjin wasn’t moving without thinking. He moved precisely according to the signals Ryu Hyunsung was giving him. Ryu Hyunsung’s orders, which were supported by Mind’s Eye, were marvelous. They weren’t piercing through one direction but were instead charging in various directions, tangling their enemies’ movements and collapsing the encirclement itself.

The elites, who attempted to stick to their role and position, had, at some point, become jumbled together like a herd of sheep without a shepherd.

And in the opening created by this confusion,

Slice!

Ryu Hyunsung’s Karma Blade sliced into the neck of the enemy leader, Cha Ohjin.

“Ack!”

Cha Ohjin screamed as he pressed his hand on his half-cut neck. However, no matter how hard he pressed, his blood splurged from his neck like a geyser. Not only that, but a part of his nerves had

been cut too, making him unable to move his left arm and he began to lose strength in his legs as he flopped to the ground. Because his karma acted to maintain his body structure, he didn't die immediately, but he began losing brain functionality due to the heavy loss of blood.

His eyes became muddled and saliva dripped down his lips. It was a fatal blow that even a Recovery Potion would be hard pressed to cure.

"Huh?"

The enemies froze at the unexpected turn of events. During this time, their attention had been on Chu Youngjin instead of Ryu Hyunsung. The enemies were unable to take their eyes off Chu Youngjin because of his frightening sword strikes that would split their weapons and body in two if they weren't careful, accompanied by the rumbling sounds emitted by his body.

That was how Ryu Hyunsung, who had erased his presence by quietly following behind Chu Youngjin, was able to slash the enemy leader, Cha Ohjin, at a critical moment. The hole in their mindset, their textbook approach and attack, the confusion amongst the enemy after their tactics, and the Karma Blade of the Berserkers that was known to be the best amongst all colonizers. Once all these factors came together, Cha Ohjin, who was known to be an expert, was wounded.

After slicing Cha Ohjin's neck, Ryu Hyunsung turned around without hesitation and created a path. They escaped. Now that they had weakened their enemy's tracking abilities, it was now

time for them to leave. It was skillfully done. While Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin were going further away from their sight, their enemies were simply a mess.

Yet, what was most surprising was what happened next.

“Leader! Damn it…”

The vice-leader Ye Chu placed his hand on Cha Ohjin’s drooling head.

Blaze!

As he did, a fiery haze covered Cha Ohjin’s body. The haze surged towards his head and passed through Ye Chu’s hand. Ye Chu absorbed Cha Ohjin’s karma.

“… My karma isn’t returning to me.”

Ryu Hyunsung said as he glanced sideways at the scene behind him.

“Well… They plunder their opponent’s karma. The rumors about the ‘Plunderer’ were right.”

There was a rumor like that. The fate where the individual would become stronger the more intense battles they fought, ‘Battle Addict’, the fate which would make the individual increasingly

stronger over time, ‘Surviving One’, and the fate where the individual would get stronger the more respect and thanks he received from others. There were many different types of fates in the world, but amongst them, there was a rumor about the existence of the ‘Plunderer’ fate. They said that it was a fate where the individual would get stronger by directly absorbing the karma of whoever they killed. And that the owner of this fate was the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, Lao Ban.

Looking at the situation, it seemed as though those rumors were true.

“… Would the disappeared Berserkers have also met that fate?”

“There’s a good chance. Strong immigrants were probably absorbed like that too.”

From absorbing the Leader Cha Ohjin’s karma, Ye Chu’s actions changed. He commanded.

“You, immediately go tell the sovereign. Two enemies. The Sword Demon Chu Youngjin and the Knight Captain Ryu Hyunsung, Chu Jung… No, Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung. Report this to him. As for the rest of you, chase after them!”

At his command, a single person jumped into the fog while the rest chased after the distant Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung.

“It’s dangerous… This isn’t the end. Let’s leave quickly.”

Ryu Hyunsung bit his lip as he sped up.

**

An area where blue rocks emitted a thick fog. It wasn't a great place to live, but as it was a good place to avoid monsters, quite a few relatively large villages were founded and immigrants survived here.

It was a region that was filled with a thick fog and the silence of the immigrants living here. However, today was different.

Today was the festival day of Lao Ban and his forces. This foggy region was chosen to be the location of the festival. As if it was always like this, a search operation, that was as tight as a net, was being conducted here. Lao Ban's faction attacked immigrant villages they discovered and separated the immigrants into either slaves or sacrifices. Colonizers, who were exploring remote places alone or those with no connections, were kidnapped and prepared as sacrifices as well.

From Sovereign Lao Ban to the lower ranks, it was an important event where the majority of Lao Ban's followers were gathered here, killing sacrifices, absorbing their power, and checking the unity amongst each other. They called this event that took place twice a year, a 'festival'.

It was a day where the ones who killed and absorbed others without the slightest hesitation would watch those who were

hesitant, checking their spirit and courage, as well as observing their transition into fellow accomplices. It was also a day where they would perceive themselves as special existences above others as they gazed at the pleading sacrifices.

Ever since Lao Ban had received the fate ‘Plunderer’, the ‘festival’ was always packed.

However, a troubling mood hung in the air today.

“Berserkers?”

Lao Ban frowned.

“Yes. They were the top executives of the Berserkers, Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung.”

“… You said Cha Ohjin died?”

“Yes. The position was passed down to vice-leader Ye Chu and he is currently in pursuit.”

“Why would the top executives come to a remote place?… Novices are definitely the unruliest. Ye Long!”

“Yes.”

“Personally lead my personal guards and bring them here. Don’t kill them.”

“I understand.”

“I will take them as sacrifices as well. The festival will halt momentarily until the new sacrifices arrive. Ye Long! Two days should be enough?”

“More than enough.”

‘Cruel Killing Sword Ye Long’, who was known to be the most skilled amongst Lao Ban’s followers, brought the personal guards and left.

Lao Ban left the Berserkers to Ye Long and started to direct orders concerning the preparation of the festival once again. As he had more time now, he was preparing slowly. Looking at Lao Ban’s relaxed demeanor, his follower who was famous for being careful, Tsu Chin, cautiously suggested.

“Still… They are famous Berserkers. Wouldn’t it be better for you to act personally to make sure we don’t create any trouble in the future? I think it would be best to deal with the matter thoroughly to prevent information about us leaking and to weaken our enemy forces.”

Yet, Lao Ban reacted indifferently.

“It’s fine. If we do that, the festival mood will be completely broken. Even if we lose them, this festival is more important.”

Tsu Chin was still nervous. Lao Ban comforted him. His cautiousness had helped him several times, but there were times when Lao Ban thought he was exceedingly cautious.

“Don’t worry. We are already in bad relations with the Berserkers. Since we don’t have anything to gain from them, we don’t have anything to lose by our relationship becoming any worse. Also, they can’t do anything. Koreans are going to invade Macau, a Chinese territory? Then a war will break out. And, even if they did invade, as long as we’re in our territory, there isn’t anything they can do. What if they are strong? If I don’t open the portal for them, they can’t do anything.”

“Still, the Berserk Sovereign is an enemy we need to be wary of. No matter what anyone says, wasn’t he the first sovereign to colonize a land?”

“I don’t know… I’m more scared of the ‘Sovereign of Balance’ than the Berserk Sovereign. I can’t comment on his fighting skills, but the Berserk Sovereign’s political ability is zero. To be honest, as long as there isn’t a way for the Berserk Sovereign to use his military power against us, he isn’t a threat. People like the ‘Sovereign of Balance’ are scarier than him. Those who have the potential to isolate us with just a few words… In the end, there’s a limit to physical strength. Tsu Chin, I understand you’re worried. However, I don’t feel that a sovereign’s provocation is serious enough that I need to stop the festival and handle it myself. Instead, that would be falling for their ploy. As it would mean

letting our biggest event fall apart because of two bastards. Since I've sent Ye Long and my guards, that's already enough."

As Lao Ban went this far to explain, Tsu Chin eventually backed down.

"I understand."

To be honest, any more words would be useless. The Berserk Sovereign was ultimately known for his military strength. However, if he wasn't able to use that force, wasn't it useless? If that was the case, then there was no need to fear him. And, didn't Lao Ban already dispatch his best experts? Logically, he believed he handled it appropriately.

'But... Why am I so nervous?'

Tsu Chin tried to recall if he missed anything. However, he was unable to come up with anything.

Chapter 56: Revolution (1)

“When were we expected to return?”

“Tomorrow.”

“We’re screwed.”

After a brief exchange, Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin tightly closed their mouths once again. Heavy breaths leaked out from the gaps of their lips.

Ppiiiiii~ Bang!

Red and yellow fireworks were exploding behind them.

Bang!

They exploded next to them as well.

Bang!

This time, one exploded in front of them. They were quite pretty.

Ryu Hyunsung’s eyes were tightly closed. He activated ‘Mind’s Eye’ to its limits which dyed his whole body in a blue tinge before disappearing. The reason why his lips were blue wasn’t due to

Mind's Eye but because of extreme exhaustion. It was also due to the fact they were being pushed to a corner.

Thump!

Ryu Hyunsung suddenly changed his direction.

Rumble!

Chu Youngjin let out a rumbling sound and followed behind him. Chu Youngjin's face was haggard as well.

"This won't work. We have to give up escaping through the gate."

Ryu Hyunsung explained as he tried to calm his haggard breathing. Chu Youngjin only listened.

"Even those who are based in the cities are coming after us. Breaking through that is impossible with our current Stamina. Instead, we support each other and head for the targeted whirlpool."

"... You want to pass through unexplored lands? Is there even a chance of us meeting our main troops?"

"That, no one knows. We don't even know whether it's a traversable distance or whether we're even going in the right

direction in the first place. Still, if we continue like this, it's certain death. We need to look at other possibilities."

"Well... It might be better to die by the hands of monsters than by those bastards."

Chu Youngjin agreed coolly.

"Okay... If we succeed, we make history, if we fail, it'll still be better than dying here."

When he thought of it that way, he felt a little better.

A day had passed since they started their escape. Yet, the encirclement was only getting tighter. An endless number of enemies appeared and blocked their path, making them run in circles, unable to advance any further. To be honest, individually the enemies were lacking and it was possible for them to pass them in a pinch, but the real problem was something else.

The one who was known to be the strongest under the Sovereign of Dark Secrets's command, the Cruel Killing Sword Ye Long, and his personal guards.

As they were truly strong, Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung didn't have confidence facing them. If they were slightly delayed by small fries, Ye Long and the personal guards would be right on their tail, and thus, they even had to flee from opponents who were weaker than them.

Ppiiiiii~ Bang!

This time, a signal flare was shot near them. Ryu Hyunsung looked back and sighed.

“Haa… It’s them again.”

If the Berserker’s unique method of utilizing karma was added to their 3-star stats, they could run with the speed of sportscars. However, Ye Long and the personal guards weren’t any slower. Currently, they were even faster because of the superiority in Stamina. They who were quite distant from them had, at some point, almost caught up to them.

“Just where did they get those… Sovereign of Dark Secrets. He’s quite a skilled fellow.”

The object that Ryu Hyunsung was complaining about were the ankle brackets Ye Long and the personal guards had.

Ring! Ring!

The karma resonated with the clear sound of xylophones as the object allowed them to fly as if they were on hoverboards. As it had a device that would change the karma that you injected into it into energy that was specialized for transportation, it allowed you to reduce your karma consumption while maximizing your speed. It even possessed a separate ability that could store a bit of your

karma as well.

Since they caught up to Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin, who simply relied on their skills for their speed, with equipment, Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin would obviously tire faster. They were already in a disadvantageous situation as they were being chased… This was really a difficult difference to make up for.

If they didn't have Void Wave, they would have already been captured.

"… We'll attack them first!"

Since they were already near them, they had no way to break apart from them with simply speed. Ryu Hyunsung turned at the right moment. Due to his rotation, he was able to instantly reduce his forward momentum.

Crash!

He kicked the ground and shot between the ones who were chasing him. Ryu Hyunsung went left while Chu Youngjin went right.

"Gak! Spread out!"

As they had already fallen for this a few times, the enemies began to scatter after understanding Ryu Hyunsung's intentions. However, since Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin relied on their

bodies instead of equipment, they were able to change their direction faster than them.

“Void Wave!”

Void Wave had now become a representative skill of the Berserkers. When this resonance swept past the enemies’ equipment, they would momentarily stop functioning.

Their momentum suddenly vanished, but, like the elites they were, none of them rolled on the floor.

Thud!

They lightly kicked the ground and once again targeted Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin. Of course-

“Breakaway! Breakaway!”

-The two didn’t face them. If they ran at full speed, they couldn’t catch up without the help of the devices.

Ye Long clicked his tongue as he saw them get further and further away. How many times had it been… He couldn’t help but acknowledge their swiftness that made them suffer over and over again even when they knew they were coming.

“These slippery bastards… We’ll chase them by running until the

‘Flying Rings’ become normal. They are probably starting to get exhausted by now.”

Ye Long looked in the direction Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung disappeared to and commanded. Then, suddenly, his eyes shined.

‘Isn’t that direction towards the unexplored lands?’

He smiled.

‘It’s finally time to slowly end this.’

They couldn’t enter the unexplored lands. They didn’t know anything about these lands, what kind of monsters lived there and how many. Rashly entering unexplored lands would only result in their deaths. Because of this, the encirclement had been set up to trap them towards these lands.

These bastards who attempted to return through the portal they came through had completely changed directions for the first time. It meant they were cornered. They would soon find themselves in a situation where they were caught between the hunting group and monsters.

The finale of a hunt was always pleasant. Ye Long smiled as he ran.

The direction his enemies headed towards was the unexplored lands. No more fireworks were shot into the sky.

**

Every sovereign created a map of Dragonic, since maps were important. It was important and essential for maintaining their territory, to understand and disrupt the distribution of monsters, and when they wanted to expand their territory.

There were 40 different maps of Dragonic. The number was exactly the number of sovereigns. Each sovereign created his own map. And not a single map overlapped with each other. Dragonic was expressed through 40 different maps, these maps were never connected.

During the Age of Exploration, Europeans firmly believed that India was to their east. That was why they thought that traveling through the Atlantic Ocean, which was to west, to get to India was ridiculous. However, the well-known truth was that Columbus's voyage shattered their prejudice. Of course, the place he arrived wasn't India but the Americas, his belief was still correct in the end. As the Earth was round.

And the current colonized state of Dragonic was similar to then. If they were on the same planet, then there was no doubt that the territories each sovereign colonized would be interconnected. However, there weren't many who believed that was true. First, it was difficult to estimate their direction with the starless Dragonic sky. While there were some suggestions about using the whirlpools in the sky to approximate direction, but because each whirlpool looked similar, there was a lot of room for error.

Even if the direction was correct, there was a problem. It was difficult to approximate the distance between colonized lands and there was no guarantee they wouldn't meet a monster that was impossible to fight. Although Dragonic was the hope of humanity, the speed at which they colonized was pitifully slow because of the monsters. It was hard enough to expand their colonized lands, but to try to create a passage between territories? The predominant view was that it was impossible.

However, the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk was in the middle of carrying out this reckless challenge.

"So Lantz... You're telling me you have a bit of information on the humans living in that direction?"

"Yeah, there was information sent through the leaves. If I'm being honest with you, it wasn't good information. They said they were a bunch who killed their own kind."

Currently, Choi Hyuk and Lantz were at the lowest level of the inverted tree, the 'nest'. This place was the heart of where the branches of the inverted tree spread out. Thick leaves grew from the branches that stretched into the ground. Because the tree was so large, each of its leaves was the size of townhouses.

The leaves of the inverted tree were metallic with a very unusual property. It was durable enough that it could grow while penetrating the ground and bullets couldn't pierce through it, but at the same time, it was flexible enough to flow through the gaps in the ground.

A special magic was cast in the nest, allowing them to see the branches and leaves spread out from the tree. Just beyond the table Lantz and Choi Hyuk were sitting at, they could see branches that stretched out like mountain ranges and thick green leaves hanging from the branches. Occasionally a leaf would fall and disappear through the gaps in the ground. These leaves that fell would spread throughout the world through an underground passage. By engraving special characters and magic on these leaves, the El tribes were able to communicate with one another.

Because of this, Lantz already learned that humans were coming to Dragonic. Of the information he heard, some were positive and neutral while others were negative. Lantz had no choice but to be wary of humans entering his territory because of this information. Yet, a friendly atmosphere covered Lantz and Choi Hyuk.

They had only stayed in the El tribe's territory for a day, but the Berserkers and the El tribe really hit it off. In one night, they had exchanged their various battle techniques and had acknowledged one another.

"Existences who hunt their own kind... Then there's a high chance that they are the ones I'm looking for."

Choi Hyuk was pleased with the information Lantz provided him. The expedition others thought was too early was an expedition forging a path to another territory.

However, Choi Hyuk daringly led this expedition banking on this

small possibility.

A reason? Of course, there was one.

Lantz asked.

“This Sovereign of Dark Secrets… He killed your comrades?”

“Yes. Not just once or twice. Though he himself will never admit it, there have been countless times we’ve been stabbed in the back. We need to get revenge. Some say that he’s contributing to humanity, that he’s speeding up the rate of colonization, but I don’t think so. He’s cancerous. He’s cutting down our potential in the long run.”

Choi Hyuk coolly conveyed his thoughts.

“We humans still haven’t gotten rid of our Consumables (Deferred) circumstances. There are only 3 years left to the grace period. Although there are optimistic views that we would be able to get rid of this deferred state within 3 years because we are continuously colonizing and getting stronger, I’m pessimistic. First, we probably didn’t receive the Consumables judgment simply because we are weak. My friend in the past, Jung Minji, said this to me once. That they watched and judged each of our actions. They are not simply looking at individual strength but our organizational power and unity. We became Consumables after they evaluated how far we could go as an organized army and handle the missions. Meaning, the Sovereign of Dark Secrets is simply cancer who is bringing down our evaluation.”

Choi Hyuk stopped momentarily before continuing.

“And, I have no thoughts on taking 3 years to get rid of our deferred state. I need to get much stronger than I am now.”

In some ways, this could be Choi Hyuk’s true goal. To open a path between territories to accelerate their colonizing speed. Once one person started it, it would only accelerate afterwards.

In Choi Hyuk’s perspective, the progression of humanity was too slow. This slow progression had once again become a handicap on Choi Hyuk’s own growth.

Lantz showed a serious expression as he listened to Choi Hyuk’s words.

“… Okay. I still can’t believe it. Do those god-like existences truly exist?”

Lantz, who was the great warrior of the El tribe, didn’t know anything about the ‘Flame Wing Alliance’ who created the system. Because he had only heard of this yesterday, he would show a bewildered expression every time they talked about them.

Choi Hyuk grinned. He would naturally learn about them when the time came. There was no need to explain any further right now. Instead, it was time to resume their expedition.

“Thanks for the information. We don’t have any more time so we need to get going. Let’s see each other often from now on.”

Choi Hyuk wanted to confirm this information even a second faster. If there really was a colonized land if they continued in that direction. And if the owner of that territory was the Sovereign of Dark Secrets.

He learned that it wasn’t far from their talks. It would take them no more than 5 days if they ran at full speed. Of course, there was another problem.

“Are you really planning on going? A monster that is the peak of Dragonian ranked monsters lives in that direction. I know you’re strong… but it’s almost a Dragon rank. Sorry, but your strength falls short.”

Lantz wanted to stop Choi Hyuk.

And these kinds of impossible-to-handle monsters were the main factor that made colonizing difficult. This was also the reason why the predominant opinion was it would be difficult to create a passage between territories.

Yet, Choi Hyuk simply laughed.

“That’s welcoming news. I haven’t been able to fight with my life on the line these days.”

That was how Choi Hyuk and 3,000 Berserkers resumed their march towards the unexplored lands.

At the same time, Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung were already passing through the unexplored lands.

Chapter 57: Revolution (2)

There was no end to the various different kinds of monsters. The moment they stepped into the unexplored lands, they saw monsters they had never seen before. Like how the Berserkers endlessly fought the spartoi created from dragon bones near their base, they were now ceaselessly fighting four-legged tree monsters.

"I think it must have been an amazing forest in the past."

It was as Baek Seoin said. The ground was fertile and large building-like trees sporadically sprouted up from the ground. Mysterious karma flowed on the tree bark and there were three different colored leaves. Silver, yellow, and blue.

It was undoubtedly an amazing forest in the past. However, the distance between the trees had become wider over time. There were quite a few dead trees collapsed on the floor, and they saw half-dried withering trees as well. The tree monsters were continuously gnawing on the living trees and creating new tree monsters.

"If only there weren't these 'tree dogs'."

With his naming sense, Baek Seoin decided to call these monsters 'tree dogs'. It possessed two meanings; 'a dog made from trees' and 'something you couldn't see with your eyes open{1}'.

The raws use 목불견 to refer to tree dogs. Depending on which hanja characters you use, it can mean either of the two meanings. (목 – tree/eyes, 불 – similar/can't, 견 – dog/see)

It was a humorous name, but it fitted oddly well with their appearance. The monsters were called ‘dogs’ because they possessed wooden figures contaminated by a black bodily fluid, wagged a weirdly twisted trunk, and had four legs. Rather than saying they looked like dogs, their figures were similar to dogs, therefore the name, tree dog, fit quite well.

The tree dogs latched onto the trees and struggled to gnaw on them. These weren’t ordinary trees. Even when these monsters diligently gnawed on them, it didn’t seem like they left a visible mark. However, it seemed as though these trees couldn’t resist for a long time as there were hollowed out trees here and there. A trunk would grow from tree dogs that had gnawed on trees for a long time and create a new tree dog. It wasn’t hard to find small tree dogs that were attached to the foreheads or thighs of larger tree dogs.

“These monsters do not only kill people but are existences that even destroy the environment itself. Ah, damn! Just! Die!”

As these tree dogs would still attack even when split into two or three pieces, Baek Seoin had to put a lot of karma into each slash as he impatiently dealt with them.

“At this rate, there will be monsters who eat the ground.”

Baek Seoin lamented, looking at the destroyed forest in regret. And his prediction was correct. The most problematic monster that stood in their way in colonizing a passage. The name of the

overwhelmingly powerful monster that the great warrior of the El tribe, Lantz, described as ‘the apex of Dragonian rank monsters’ was the ‘ground devourer’.

“Woah… This is…”

The Berserkers’ relentless march came to a halt. The sparse trees had disappeared, and they saw an area where the fertile ground had been cracked opened. These were traces of a new monster.

The El tribe called this monster the ‘ground devourer’. A monster that ate rocks. Even when the powerful monsters that annihilated Dragonic went into a deep slumber, this strong monster continued to be active. It wasn’t a monster that ate the living creatures who were on the brink of extinction, but one which devoured the planet itself. That was why there were basins that looked as if it had been scooped out like ice cream where this monster inhabited.

The dirt slowly started to fade away, and at some point, they could no longer see any dirt from the surface. They saw layers upon layers of different kinds of rocks exposed in an endless downward slope.

Choi Hyuk closely examined this overwhelming and frightening sight before commanding.

“We enter.”

The basins weren't similar to each other. Some were deep, while others were a bit shallow. The terrain went up and down like the KOSDAQ index. However, it became clearly deeper the further they marched towards the center. The relatively tall entrance covered the sky and the basin gradually became darker.

KOSDAQ (Korean Securities Dealers Automated Quotations) is a trading board of the Korea Exchange (KRX).

Crunch! Crunch!

They heard the sound of hundreds of rocks being crunched on.

In the darkest place, the 'ground devourer' was shattering rocks and shoving them in its mouth.

"It isn't as enormous as I thought."

Choi Hyuk glanced at it as if he was admiring it. Its size was smaller than the Wyvern of Destruction. Around the size of a 5-story building. However, its head took up half its body and its mouth, which was located at the center, could open to the size of its face. Its thick limbs shattered the ground and shoved the rocks into its mouth. It seemed to possess a black hole in its body as even when it consumed as its body size in rocks, it showed no signs of being full.

"Like the El tribe said, this is a strong foe that sits at the top of all the opponents we've faced so far. Everyone, be prepared. We'll go with the large monster hunting formation."

Choi Hyuk commanded them in a low voice. There were no replies. However, there was no need to check. They were only silent to avoid being discovered by the monster, they all understood. After experiencing over 100 fierce battles together, the Berserkers showed perfect coordination with each other without the need for words.

“Then… Begin!”

The moment Choi Hyuk commanded, the Berserkers spread out and scattered throughout the surroundings. Unexpectedly, they took out long-distance weapons. The majority of the weapons were bows and throwing spears.

However, they didn’t begin shooting yet.

Baek Seoin, who became the real commander after Choi Hyuk ordered them to attack, stared at a white male. His name was Handke. Amongst the Berserkers, he was known as the artillery captain. The main weapons of the ‘artillery’, made up of approximately 30 people including Handke, were quite unusual. While they possessed weapons that looked like bazookas, they also used long rods, bracelets, and rings. Sometimes they would use a hat with an unusual design as their main equipment as well. Handke, who was concentrating with his eyes closed, suddenly opened his eyes and stared at Baek Seoin.

That moment, Baek Seoin’s body had already been dyed blue by activating Mind’s Eye as he examined the ‘ground devourer’. When

he felt Handke's gaze, he commanded.

"Right leg!"

The moment Baek Seoin's command fell, Handke's rod shot through the air. Lightning gathered at the tip of the rod as it flew towards the ground devourer. The members of the artillery behind Handke each started shooting their own weapons. Some shot flames, others shock waves, each attacked the ground devourer's right leg with an attack that matched their own karma traits.

These people, who were known as the artillery amongst the Berserkers, were long-distance attack specialists. They were experts who raised their Control and Power to 3-star, and, supported by their Control and equipment, trained in throwing their karma through long distances.

Because their Endurance stat was low, they weren't suitable for close combat, and because they would often choose karma traits with properties like 'Blaze' or 'Shock' to suit their long-distance combat style, they were often called magicians by others.

The power of the Berserkers' artillery group was quite significant. Although the Berserkers were known to be strong in close combat, their power was this strong because their Control was high while their Endurance was low like their leader, Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk and the magicians got along really well and this was how the artillery captain, Handke, who was considered to be a top expert, joined the Berserkers.

Rumble!

Like their name, the attacks of the 30 members of the artillery group were powerful. The ground devourer's body staggered.

{Krrrr!}

The ground devourer became enraged. And the Berserkers shot their arrows and spears at the enraged ground devourer. Although their attacks weren't as powerful as the artillery, they were great in number.

{Kwawoo!}

Most couldn't pierce its skin and bounced off, but they were necessary for messing up the monster's surroundings. Using the monster's momentary stumble, the strongest amongst them, the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk, closed in.

Slice!

His powerful Karma Blade sliced into the ground devourer's left leg. However, it was only able to cut into its leathery skin.

Crash!

As if it was smacking away an annoying fly, the ground devourers slammed its arm at Choi Hyuk.

The ground shook and the bodies of the Berserkers trembled. Luckily, Choi Hyuk was able to avoid the attack and, instead, jumped on top of its arm. He ran up its arm and shouted.

“Let’s play!”

After a long time, Choi Hyuk was finally able to fall into a deep battle trance.

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Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin’s escape was also spectacular. A chase in an unexplored land no one had walked on. The further they went, the more dangerous the terrain became, and the more monsters appeared.

In a swamp with water up to their ankles, Ryu Hyunsung, Chu Youngjin clashed with the Cruel Killing Sword Ye Long and his personal guards for the final time.

“Let’s stop now.”

The Cruel Killing Sword Ye Long thought this was the end of their long chase. These bastards had fled tirelessly. It seemed they didn’t even value their lives as they went further into these unexplored lands. It didn’t seem like they cared whether a monster appeared or not, or whether they were exhausted or not. Just by looking at them, he could tell that they were at their limit. Even if

they fled from this place, they wouldn't have the strength to return. They weren't even able to use that great Void Wave of theirs properly anymore. The hot water that went up to their ankles also seemed to make these exhausted fellows suffer even more.

Ring. Ring.

On the other hand, Ye Long and his personal guards, who were riding on these ankle bracelets that emitted ringing sounds like a xylophone, were floating slightly above the water. Because of this, they were relatively unhindered by the flesh-meltingly hot water.

They were at a dead-end.

"Kik. I'd rather smash my head into this water and die than be captured by you."

Ryu Hyunsung kept his composure even when his lips were pale blue due to severe exhaustion.

"..."

Chu Youngjin silently stared at Ye Long as if he was going to take at least one of them with him.

"You tiresome bastards..."

Although Ye Long was disgusted by their present condition, he was also filled with expectation.

'How much stronger would I get if I absorbed them?'

They seemed to be the biggest catch of Ye Long's life as a plunderer. Filled with expectation, he commanded.

"Don't kill them. Cut off their arms and legs."

"Yes!"

His guards answered with vigorous voices and charged forward. However, Ye Long had no luck, while Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin had the heavens on their side.

A monster suddenly appeared from the marsh floor.

Splash!

An intense heat blasted out alongside its appearance. It was so intense that the already hot water evaporated altogether. Instantly, four red eyes peered through the thick steam.

Frightened, Ye Long shouted.

"Dodge it!"

Rip!

Unfortunately, the guard in the front wasn't able to avoid the sudden attack and had his waist ripped in two. The steam was dyed red with his gushing blood.

"Damn it...!"

Ye Long grit his teeth and jumped into the red steam.

Clash! Clash!

Sparks flew as sounds of swords and the monster's claws clashing against each other sounded out.

"... Wow. Was our luck this good?"

Perplexed by their sudden fortune, Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin hastily escaped. They were able to overcome a desperately dangerous situation due to the monster. And the monster wasn't weak like the monsters that had appeared until now, it was truly strong.

'Since we're getting this much help, we need to survive.'

Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin gathered their remaining strength and began to run towards the whirlpool that had

gradually been getting larger.

“But… it seems we’ve awoken the monsters.”

It was like he said. This marsh had initially only been hot and silent, but now, monsters were getting up one after another. They were all formidable. It seemed the monsters wanted to attack the more dangerous looking Ye Long’s group as they all ran towards them.

Of course, there were the occasional attacks on Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin, but they avoided, blocked, or even used the momentum to keep running without facing them. When they did, instead of giving chase, the monsters turned their attention towards Ye Long’s group.

“Run. I can’t stop…”

Ryu Hyunsung continued to run while pounding his trembling legs as he tried to allude himself by mumbling these words. His Stamina was at its limit, but if he stopped here, he would undoubtedly die. He gritted his teeth and continued.

“Damn it…! Retreat! Retreat!”

They heard Ye Long’s distant voice. He sounded dejected.

That was how they were able to leave Ye Long behind, but that didn’t mean their situation became better. Their Stamina had

already been exhausted and more and more monsters appeared. Ryu Hyunsung had no choice but to forcefully continue activating Mind's Eye. Since they didn't have the strength to fight, they had to avoid them before encountering them. When it was unavoidable, Chu Youngjin would step forward and deal with the monsters blocking their way. As if walking on a tightrope, the two squeezed between the monsters and fled.

They happened upon an enormous basin. Like a quarry, shattered rocks lay exposed in the basin. Below the basin, they could hear deafening roars and vibrations from the center of the basin, which was covered by a boulder.

"... Are the monsters fighting with each other?"

"... They don't seem normal. But do monsters even fight with each other?"

"I haven't seen it myself but... you never know. They might fight considering monsters are split into different territories."

"Like you say, considering we can't see any other monsters, this seems to be the territory of a powerful monster."

"... And these monsters are currently fighting each other, right?"

Ryu Hyunsung was silent for a moment as he thought. They had almost exhausted their Stamina getting here. If they continued to overwork themselves, it would only lead to their deaths. They had

to rest at least once.

Ryu Hyunsung decided.

“Let’s go down and observe them.”

Chu Youngjin’s eyes widened in surprise.

“Why?”

These monsters possessed such incredible destructive power that the top of the basin shook. Why should they risk it and go down to observe their fight?

“The fight is intense. If the two kill each other, or even if they critically injure each other and are unable to pay attention to their surroundings, we can stay and rest here for a few days before heading out. Since this is a place where nearby monsters won’t approach.”

If they didn’t plan on dying here, they needed to rest. Although it was dangerous, if they could rest, it was worth taking the risk. Chu Youngjin agreed with Ryu Hyunsung.

The two nervously hid behind boulders and made their way down. As they went further down, the clouds of dust from the fight started to completely cover their vision.

“You… are still on cooldown, right?”

If Ryu Hyunsung activated Mind’s Eye, he could easily look through the dust, but he was completely exhausted.

“Yeah… It’s recovered a bit, but I can’t use it for long so we’ll use it when we get closer.”

Eventually, the two dangerously made their way towards the center of the basin, grabbing onto boulders as they couldn’t see very well.

Thump!

A loud noise suddenly sounded out.

Then, it seemed the fight had ended as there were no more roars or vibrations.

“Doesn’t it seem the fight is over?”

“Yeah…”

What would be the conclusion of the fight? The two became even more nervous as they continued to make their way down.

Then, once they were at a suitable distance, Ryu Hyunsung

activated Mind's Eye.

He was able to sense a 5-story sized monster with his sensitive karma. It looked dead. Karma had left its body and he couldn't perceive any movements.

'Where's its opponent?'

Ryu Hyunsung pressed down his trembling, exhausted leg and searched for the dead monster's opponent. He had difficulty because he was so small, but he was eventually able to find him. He was sitting on top of the monster's corpse. He seemed to be the size of a human. Though he possessed powerful karma... his karma felt very familiar.

"Uh?"

Ryu Hyunsung was stunned.

"What's wrong?"

When Chu Youngjin asked, Ryu Hyunsung blankly replied.

"He saw me..."

"The monster?"

“Yeah….”

“Then… doesn’t that mean we’re in big trouble?”

“Well, that’s…”

Just then, a loud voice erupted and blasted the thick dust hanging in the air. A very happy voice.

“Hey! Chu hyung! Ryu hyung! It’s been a while!”

It was the voice of their leader, Choi Hyuk.

This was the moment a passage between colonized lands was discovered.

Chapter 58: Revolution (3)

{Due to the intense battle, free karma points increased by 3.}

The fight against the ground devourer had ended. A message appeared. As even a single karma point was precious these days, Choi Hyuk was extremely happy.

For example, it took him one month to get his Control to reach 3-star. However, it took him 2 full years to get it to the outer limits of 4-star.

When his stats were at 1-star, meaning during in the {Ring of Rebirth} and the beginning of {Survive and Escape}, he was overflowing with karma. All his stats would increase by 1 when he killed a similar ranked opponent. However, when he reached 2-star, it changed so that he would only gain 1 free karma point every time he killed a similar ranked opponent. The level of difficulty had increased greatly.

However, when he looked back at it, those days were still good. They would reward him with tons of karma, claiming his feats as surprising achievements and/or results when they weren't really all that amazing.

When his stats reached 3-star and 4-star, they really became hellish to increase. It was then where it started to get harder to find similar ranked opponents. Of course, his stats would increase when he killed a lot of lower ranked enemies... The fact that he

really had to kill a large number was the problem. Now, however, he wouldn't even be given any points for doing this anymore. The only thing he could rely on were the karma points he received from the 'Battle Addict' fate.

However, since last year, even that didn't satisfy him. Earthlings, who were Consumables (Deferred), usually had cooperative missions with the lowest ranked warriors. The main stats of lowest ranked warriors were at about 3-star. No matter how difficult the mission he chose was, they no longer matched Choi Hyuk's level. There were occasional large-scale battles with low ranked warriors who were at the 4-star level, but besides them, there weren't any times where he could 'fight intensely'. What was more, even if they were recruited for a large-scale battle, the roles of earthlings were mostly supportive so it was hard for Choi Hyuk to play an active part.

This meant that the Consumables fate of earthlings was hindering his growth.

Because of this, he couldn't help but be happy whenever he saw a message stating that his karma increased due to intense battles. He had finally fought with all his strength and he even obtained 3 free karma points... His mood was really good.

On top of that, he finally reunited with Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin, whom he had sent on a dangerous mission, and hadn't seen for a long time. How could he not feel elated? Before the obvious curiosity of why they were here in the first place struck him, a welcoming feeling burst out instantly.

“Chu hyung! Ryu hyung! It’s been a while!”

And because of his shout, Baek Seoin, who had flopped on the floor after becoming exhausted from commanding the troops, widened his eyes.

“What?”

Lee Jinhee, who had dropped to the floor, suddenly got up and addressed her pain.

“Oh? Youngjin and Ryu hyung? Owowowow…”

She was a mess. It was the result of getting close to the ground devourer to attract its attention so that Choi Hyuk could land the fatal blow at the final moment. She contributed this time as well. She would always risk her life and survive, and she always had swollen bruises, fractures, and wounds.

Even in this state, Lee Jinhee got up to welcome Chu Youngjin and Ryu Hyunsung, who were staggering over from exhaustion.

Everyone survived.

One of the main criteria when Choi Hyuk chose Berserkers: Survivability. And fitting their roles as the top executives of the Berserkers, Chu Youngjin, and Ryu Hyunsung returned.

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That day, they camped at the basin where they slew the ground devourer.

The sky always shined with a milky hue. Although Dragonic didn’t have nights, their surroundings were dark as the night due to the basin. The Berserkers, who had no choice but to sleep in the light, were happy for this darkness.

When everyone was busy getting ready to sleep, the top executives held a meeting. Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung and finally the artillery captain, Handke, had gathered.

“Oh, my god. I never thought we’d discover a passage on this expedition.”

It was as Handke said.

They thought that it would take two or three more attempts to see a small progress. They all implicitly believe this. However, they had reached their goal on their first attempt.

Though they were happy, they were just as much taken back.

“It’s difficult to attack the Sovereign of Dark Secrets with our current force. Since it wasn’t a seizing expedition to begin with…”

Baek Seoin's suggestion was to withdrawal and prepare properly before going to war. It was a rational suggestion, but there was an objection. It was Lee Jinhee.

"I don't think there will be much difference if we withdrawal and come back. Our numbers are small in the first place. Even if we include everyone, our numbers would be around 20,000? But if we exclude those who have been recruited for missions and those necessary to maintain our cities, wouldn't the numbers be around 5,000? I don't think there will be much of a difference between 3,000 and 5,000. Instead, why don't we go earlier and release the slaves?"

"No. 3,000 and 5,000 are completely different numbers."

Baek Seoin immediately opposed Lee Jinhee's words. However, she wasn't convinced.

"The Sovereign of Dark Secrets has 80,000 soldiers. 80,000 against 5,000 or 80,000 against 3,000, aren't they similar?"

"Even if we say there are 80,000 colonizers, less than 10,000 of them will have at least 2-star. There's a big difference between 5,000 and 3,000 against 10,000. And if we are thinking about occupying their territory and not simply going to war, then it makes sense every person counts."

"Then can't we strike first and come back again?"

“Why would you do that? We can just finish everything in one go.”

“But what are we going to do about those slaves who are being sold right now? And Youngjin and Ryu hyung suffered like this, and you want to just go back?”

Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee argued. But, at some point, the discussion didn’t progress, and they simply said what they had already said over and over again.

Choi Hyuk wordlessly listened to them before cutting them off when he felt it was getting nowhere and addressed everyone.

“To be honest. My goal wasn’t to occupy them from the start.”

When other sovereign thought of ‘conquests’, they easily thought of ‘conquer and occupy’. Because of this, when Choi Hyuk proposed they ‘attack the Sovereign of Dark Secrets’, his followers all thought this was a ‘conquest’. Yet, Choi Hyuk was thinking much more simplistically than them.

“Our first goal is the Sovereign of Dark Secrets himself. If Sovereign Lao Ban dies, his forces will have no choice but to collapse, and their authority over the portal will disappear. Occupy their territory? Of course that’s good, but our first goal is killing Lao Ban.”

Choi Hyuk really hated the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, Lao Ban.

The fact that he used immigrants, who were from Earth like him, as slaves, and that he killed colonizers and used them to increase his strength. He could overlook the fact that Lao Ban's immoral actions that received the immense hatred of many. What was really unforgivable was that the actions he did habitually ruined the people's trust in humanity and hindered their unity, which, in turn, obstructed his performance. This was something Choi Hyuk couldn't endure.

During a seemingly normal day, the {Ring of Rebirth} opened. Afterwards, he was able to leave Kangdong District after overcoming a competition of kill or be killed. Everyone had become murderers, and they were also victims.

Then his mother passed away.

That day, Choi Hyuk's personal world had already collapsed. Afterwards, he felt as if he was simply living in a doomed earth. He was always enraged by this collapse, and he fought and struggled to get revenge on the ones who brought along this collapse. Yet, there was someone who was happy about this and was happily enjoying the 'fruits' brought on by this collapse. What was more; their actions left a large scratch on the great cause of those who sought to fight against this collapse. They would say, "Why do you fight so hard in such a great world?" but the pleasure they enjoyed had all come from the blood and sweat of others. Humans would repeatedly become divided the stronger they became, and animosity amongst them would increase. The hearts of those who want to fight against the collapse couldn't help but become dull.

Starting with Lao Ban, Choi Hyuk wanted to stomp on those who filled their bellies by snacking on this damned world. Those people didn't have the right to be a 'sovereign', who represented humanity.

No lamps were lit, so the inside of the tent was dark. Cho Hyuk's black eyes seemed even darker in this darkness.

"So I don't think we need to reorganize ourselves. From Ryu hyung and Chu hyung's reports, it seems that Lao Ban is currently on the outskirts of his territory so there is no better chance. We attack now."

If his goal was Lao Ban himself, they didn't need to withdraw. Although Lao Ban was with his main force, his city guards were far away, and he had only brought his elite troops so there was no need to fear their numbers. Since there was no force that could match the Berserkers in terms of elite troops... 3,000 was enough.

"Hmm... Now that I think about it, no one knows what happens when a sovereign kills another sovereign. If everything, such as the authority of the portal, gets transferred over... then we don't necessarily need reinforcements to occupy their territory. We can just deport resisting forces."

Everyone nodded their heads at Baek Seoin's words. If the authority of the sovereign was transferred over, there was nothing to fear. It would be game over the moment they killed Lao Ban.

The artillery head Handke asked.

“Then what is our plan of attack? Target the sovereign with a single-point breakthrough? Or annihilation?”

Choi Hyuk didn’t think twice and answered.

“Annihilation. We will not accept their surrender. The ones gathered there will all be Lao Ban’s henchmen. They are ‘plunderers’ who kill others and rob their strength. Although we won’t chase them too far if they run, if possible, it will be total annihilation. Also, we will thoroughly track and take down Lao Ban and his executives.”

It was a resolute action.

Handke continued to ask.

“Then, next, what do you plan to do if the full authority of the sovereign does get transferred to you?”

He paid attention to the chill emanating from Choi Hyuk’s tone. Choi Hyuk wanted the death of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets. Then what would he want afterwards? What kind of decision would he make about the colonizers who cooperated with the Sovereign of Dark Secrets? Deportation? Or punishment?

“If that happens... We advance towards the cities. We will destroy all of Lao Ban’s workshops and free the slaves. And if there

are still organizations operating under Lao Ban's command, then, we will undoubtedly punish them. If these organizations break up and scatter, that's fine. However, if they are still maintaining their organizations by the time we get there, I will use the authority to ban them from using the portal and sweep them all up. I have no thoughts on clumsily letting them live."

Choi Hyuk was giving his enemies two small chances. First, he would let those who flee the battlefield, without looking back, live. Second, he would let those who flee after hearing the news from the escapees. He clearly declared he would kill everyone else besides them. A risky, yet powerful method.

A silence hung in the air momentarily.

A large-scale slaughter of humans. Their hearts were heavy.

"Mmm... Now that we're about to kill them, my heart's a bit..."

It was Lee Jinhee's gripe, who was naturally kind. Although she was in favor of a war against the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, she was generally thinking of a way to minimize casualties. A rule of accepting their surrender if they did.

However, Choi Hyuk was planning on thoroughly stomping on his enemies.

Baek Seoin didn't say anything. He was psychologically more resistant to the notion of killing humans compared to others. Still,

he was inwardly trying to justify this decision.

'Since it's a world that's already out of control... Because it's a world where humans openly sell other humans as slaves... Since we already gave them a chance to talk. Is it time for them to take responsibility...'

The more chaotic a situation was, the quicker the effect of creating a rule by blood was. Although telling them hundreds of times to not have slave markets had no effect, if they hit them hard once, its effects were clear.

While everyone was judging the necessity of this operation, the artillery head Handke said.

"... It's already inevitable we will face off against the Sovereign of Dark Secrets's forces. Then it's better to properly step on them when we inevitably face them. Since it's cleaner if we fight them properly once than fighting them multiple times... I think it's a good idea."

Everyone else nodded at his words. It was like this ever since humanity first started to record history. There was no easier or cleaner method of dealing with others than killing and removing them. Only...

'I still wish we could find a better way.'

Lee Jinhee couldn't let go of this fantasy. She wasn't scared of

fighting them, however, fighting humans was tiring and difficult. Although her worry was an important one that advanced human civilization, but in the current situation, where history had degenerated and humanity had collapsed, it was a powerless worry.

The Sovereign of Dark Secrets and the Berserkers were already in a relationship of kill or be killed. They killed Berserkers, and Ryu Hyunsung and Chu Youngjin killed their slave traders. Although there was a difference in scale, they had already killed one another.

Only, the colonizers clashed in local fights, there hasn't been a case of a full-on battle yet. The war that was about to begin would be the first. They felt a psychological resistance to the fact that this first war would have to be an annihilation, crushing their enemies thoroughly.

However, the fact that if they did this properly this time, it could reduce future losses was a big strength to them.

"I know. It's just a gripe."

Lee Jinhee looked somewhat depressed. Choi Hyuk tapped her shoulder. If they were in a different group, then Lee Jinhee, who said these words before a battle, may garner some hate, but Choi Hyuk was already familiar with this side of her. Since she fought the most courageously when they actually went into battle. She was different from Choi Hyuk, but they walked the same path.

Eventually, they decided on annihilation. Everyone looked at

each other with determined eyes.

The very next morning, the march towards the very first territory war began.

Chapter 59: Revolution (4)

It was a cruel day.

Although she resolved herself multiple times, the new member was unable to act, and repeatedly apologized to her senior in vain.

“I will do better!”

I will do better. I will do better. She had repeated those words a few times, yet, her hand didn’t move.

A slim beauty, however, she was an outstanding warrior. In the past, these words might have been ridiculous, but it was very foolish to estimate someone’s fighting ability from their looks these days. Weren’t they in a generation where civilians could awaken karma if they simply came over to Dragonic?

Because she possessed outstanding talent, she overcame countless competitors and had become a clan member. Afterwards, the clan had invested mission points to send her over to Dragonic. Above all, the fact that she was invited to this ‘festival’ clearly showed that she would later become a cadet, a rising star who would lead her clan’s future.

The panic she was feeling now was simply something she had to overcome.

Because he understood this fact, her superior didn’t punish her

but gently reasoned with her.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. This is normal for your first time.”

“Yes! Yes! Thank you!”

When she heard her superior’s gentle tone, her heart, which was beating like a drum, calmed slightly. Yet, her hand still didn’t budge.

“Now, now, take a deep breath. That’s it. Breath out.”

Her superior continued to calmly coax her.

“Try closing your eyes.”

She closed her eyes at his suggestion. His tear-stained face, pleading eyes and shaking gagged head all disappeared from her eyes. She no longer saw the ‘sacrifice’.

She only heard her superior’s voice now. He guided her hands in the darkness. Nudge. Her guided hands took aim at a specific area. It was undoubtedly the chest, the beating heart of the ‘sacrifice’.

“Just push the sword through here. Then you just need to place your hand anywhere on the sacrifice’s body and receive his karma. It’s not hard. It’s like eating noodles.”

There wasn't the slightest hint of cruelty in her superior's voice. He instructed as if he really was teaching her how to eat noodles.

"I understand!"

Although his calm voice calmed her down even further, unlike her loud reply, she was still unable to stab out with her sword.

"It's okay. It's okay. Deep breaths."

Her superior continued to speak softly until he suddenly grabbed her shoulders and shouted.

"Stab!"

Shhhk!

The surprised new recruit reflexively jolted her sword forward. The sword smoothly slid into the 'sacrifice's' flesh and stabbed into his heart.

"Ah... Ah..."

Warm blood splattered onto her hands. The new recruit opened her eyes. The dying 'sacrifice' was a man who looked to be in his forties. Looking at his non-ruined suit, he seemed to be an immigrant who had only recently migrated here. She clearly saw the lights in his eyes dying out.

‘It’s hot…’

Was blood ever this hot? The blood that splattered on her hands not only felt hot but heavy as well.

Her shoulders were trembling, and her superior comforted her.

“Shh. Shh. You did well. It’s normal for it to be difficult. You did well. Now, you can smoothly absorb his strength.”

To be honest, this part didn’t require any technique. As long as one possessed the ‘plunderer’ fate, they would absorb their dying foe’s karma once they placed their hand on them. Her body trembled as wisps of karma entered and spread throughout her body. It was incredibly refreshing. Although she felt guilty at the fact she killed an innocent person, a euphoric sensation spread as the refreshing karma entered through her hand.

‘Am… I a monster?’

Her mind became torn and confused.

‘No… Come to your senses!’

She hated her weak self whose determination still swayed after resolving herself constantly. However, it was useless.

As she fell into a state of shame, thinking ‘Do I not belong here? I didn’t know it would be like this,’ her superior calmly guided her.

“There’s no reason to be distressed. Enjoy it with a thankful heart. This is the power of one life. It’s a noble sensation.”

Her superior looked at her with solemn eyes.

“You know how the first awakenees awakened, right? You probably heard of the <Ring of Rebirth>. From the start, there are no awakenees who haven’t gotten strong by killing others. Don’t concern yourself with what those hypocrites and politicians say. They talk as if our Lao Ban clan is the only one who kills other people, but that’s not true. Even though they may act as if it’s not true, they all kill others to get stronger. If you kill a person or monster, you obtain a set amount of karma. It was this kind of game from the start. The system itself was already like this. In short, even if you aren’t of the Lao Ban clan, as long as you’re a colonizer, you will have no choice but to kill people. If that’s the case, isn’t it better to thoroughly absorb that karma? It’s like that. With our fate known as ‘plunderers’, we aren’t doing anything others aren’t. It’s only a fate that increases the efficiency of what everyone else is doing. When other colonizers gain 1 karma from killing a colonizer, we simply earn 2 or 3. So, is that bad?”

“No, it is not.”

She had, at some point, been drawn into her superior’s words which were filled with his own conviction.

“Yeah. That’s right. We only need to think about getting stronger. Forget about the rest. Killing people. Selling slaves. Don’t waver from their criticism. That’s not all. Because our business is flourishing, more earthlings are coming over to Dragonic and the speed of colonization has become that much faster… You are aware that our clan’s contribution to Earth is enormous, right?”

“Yes… Yes! That is correct.”

“Yeah. We only need to think about our job – Getting stronger. And honor our homeland, China. We only need to think about becoming stronger and tougher as warriors.”

“Yes, that is right.”

“Yeah. Kill. Then absorb their strength with a thankful heart. That is our job.”

“I understand.”

The new recruit stopped trembling. Her eyes shined brightly. Her superior grinned and said,

“Good. Then try to properly absorb a ‘sacrifice’ this time. He’s a strong one so the sword won’t go in easily. Still, you’ll eventually pierce him if you just keep on stabbing your opponent until he becomes exhausted, so don’t be too flustered. I’ll lend you my weapon. Try it out.”

Within the thick fog, sacrifices, whose limbs had been cut off, were prepared. The sacrifices were tightly bounded, unable to let out a scream, unable to resist, and died with open chests. Those familiar with this enjoyed the slaughter and would sometimes go and rape slaves or sacrifices, indiscriminate of gender. As these horrible acts were being done, the mood within the fog became trancelike.

New recruits, who had never done this before, overcame their initial shock and gradually began to become familiar with this mood. They started to look at it from whatever perspective they pleased. Beliefs to those with beliefs, pleasure to those who enjoyed it, Lao Ban clan's festival was drawing to its peak.

It was a cruel day.

"... What a load of bullshit."

They suddenly heard someone swear within the fog.

"What?"

At the sudden swear, a superior and a new recruit turned around with widened eyes. Although the fog was thick enough that it was difficult to see someone's face in the distance, they were able to identify a person's figure. While everyone was becoming engrossed in the festival, a single shadow approached them.

"What the? Who is it?"

The superior asked. The person replied with a sword that suddenly slashed out, slicing through the fog.

Creak!

Worthy of being an elite of the Lao Ban clan, his Endurance was high so the sound of the sword scraping metal sounded out. However, a misty Karma Blade sliced through his tough skin and ribs.

Pshhlt!

“Ack...”

His heart split apart without being able to do anything. Although she got into a battle stance after seeing her collapsing superior, her opponent was much faster than her.

Piick!

Thud.

Her head rolled on the ground in vain.

“As I thought, killing people feels disgusting...”

Lee Jinhee didn’t even look at the corpses as she spat out a complaint and continued. Berserkers started to pour in from different locations within the fog.

Choi Hyuk declared one principle.

“Complete fear.”

A trauma that would prevent them from lifting their heads when they heard the ‘Ber’ of ‘Berserkers’. He wanted to implant them with PTSD.

The Berserkers, who moved under this principle, were viciously brutal.

Thud, stomp, dash!

It sounded like a rain shower. The Berserkers charged at full speed. They didn’t stop for a moment. If someone blocked them, they would avoid them while wielding their swords. They slashed out with their swords even as they jumped up or slid below.

“Ahh! Acckk!”

Lao Ban’s clan members, whose legs had been cut off so that they couldn’t run away, were crawling along the ground and screaming like children.

Sounds of rain showers flooded in as blades stabbed out. No one could tell who was killing who. Only, they would suddenly come close and stab them. The fact that they didn't know when or where these swords would target them was fear itself. The fog was dyed red.

"Who are these bastards!"

At that moment, the executives of the Lao Ban clan started to act.

Thud! Clink!

The Berserkers, who were recklessly rushing forward, were pushed back.

Sliice!

Some unlucky ones were cut in two.

"Wake up!"

With the executives' urgings, Lao Ban's clan hastily began to get into formation. However, it would be breaking the Berserker's principle if they let them do that.

Rumble.

“Explosive Blood…”

Wherever Chu Youngjin passed, the fog would split like the Red Sea.

Crash!

A strong, single strike. His opponent reflexively lifted his weapon to block it, but Chu Youngjin’s sword cut his body in two along with his weapon. Although their weapons were clouded with karma and physical Endurance stats, his explosive blows would ignore them all.

The impact of his strike was enough to blow people’s hair from far away. One of Lao Ban’s executives, whose skull had been split in two, became a geyser, still in an upright position. Shudder. At the blood drops that took a moment to fall, at that horrifying feeling, Lao Ban’s clan members shuddered slightly.

If Chu Youngjin’s overwhelming single strike broke their spirits, Lee Jinhee’s speed brought panic.

Dash!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Although she used Explosive Blood like Chu Youngjin, her movements were more mechanical than his. She chased down the fleeing foes as if she was a cheetah hunting her prey and planted

them into the ground. No matter which direction they fled or how they blocked, she would skillfully grab her opponent and stab them with her sword. They couldn't block her. As if their fates were already predetermined, even her tempo was consistent. The figures of their comrades being pinned to the ground, like butterflies being pinned on display, brought on additional panic.

"Ahh! Ahhh!"

They fled even though they knew it was hopeless. And they were soon hunted down.

At this time, Choi Hyuk was facing Lao Ban.

Lao Ban had fallen into a state of confusion.

"Why? Why aren't you guys getting deported?"

This place was Lao Ban's territory. Rationally, all the colonizers here must have had passed through the portal under his authority. If that was the case, Lao Ban should have been able to deport them whenever he wanted. In fact, it was impossible to revolt. However, Lao Ban was unable to deport these bandits who had come for him. That was what made him fall into a state of confusion.

"It's our first time seeing each other face to face."

Unlike the flustered Lao Ban, Choi Hyuk started to talk leisurely. The situation had already progressed to a point of no return. Lao

Ban was no match for Choi Hyuk. Both Lao Ban and Choi Hyuk were aware of this fact.

"This punk bastard!"

Yet, Lao Ban didn't admit it and began his last-ditch effort. Karma Blades had become universal. Lao Ban's sword was covered with a faint yellow-green light. However-

Crack!

His weak Karma Blade was ripped apart by Choi Hyuk's Karma Blade that was as deep blue as the ocean's depths.

Riiinging!

"Kaahk!"

Lao Ban's sword didn't split in two, but instead, vibrated intensely before shattering, gruesomely shredding Lao Ban's hand. Lao Ban, who grabbed his hand as he fell to the ground, saw the corpse of his strongest expert, the Cruel Killing Sword Ye Long, which had been split in two. Beside him was the corpse of Tsu Chin, who had advised him about being cautious of the Berserk Sovereign.

"Urggg... You crazy bastard. Why do you have to do this?!"

Lao Ban despaired.

“I warned you.”

“What? About selling slaves? Ha! What a joke. Do you even know how many of your Berserker bastards are among our clients?”

Lao Ban snorted.

“Hypocritical bastards.”

As he realized he couldn’t match him in strength, Lao Ban started to make cynical remarks.

“Colonizer. That’s when you look it from a bright side. How many of these colonizers are of their right minds? Hmm? No, is that wrong? We are people too so do we always need to live in hell? I simply provided them with a comfort zone for their own sake! If it wasn’t for me, do you think colonizers could maintain their sanity? Do you think they could endure the stress from endless missions?! People are only coming out to become colonizers because there’s a way to relieve that stress. If it wasn’t for me, who would fucking become a goddamn colonizer?!”

Although many sovereigns criticized Lao Ban’s slave market, their followers, with or without their knowledge, came to Lao Ban’s territory to relieve the stress that piled deep within them. It didn’t matter whether they were men or women. Especially Berserkers. Following Choi Hyuk’s policy, they underwent more

intense missions more often than anyone else. Because of this, once they started to take a liking to the slave market, there were many cases where they would become known perverts.

Lao Ban brought out all the malice inside him and cursed Choi Hyuk.

“Didn’t you guys kill others? What’s so different about you? You hypocritical bastard!”

However, Choi Hyuk’s face didn’t change. Instead, it became even colder.

“That… isn’t something a dead man should be worried about.”

At Choi Hyuk’s cold reply, Lao Ban harbored even more malice. ‘What? A dead man? Me? This bastard!’ He was about to spit curses once more. That moment-

Choi Hyuk’s sword pierced through Lao Ban’s throat.

Shhii. Shhii.

Lao Ban’s lips moved, but no words were spoken, only the sound of air rushing out could be heard.

Choi Hyuk grabbed Lao Ban’s hair, stuck his head out and stared directly into his eyes. In that state, he slowly moved his sword and

cut Lao Ban's head off.

"You lost, and I won. And the slave market is no more."

Thud.

The completely severed head fell into Choi Hyuk's hand. Choi Hyuk continued to stare at it and said.

"If you have something to say, say it."

Perhaps it was due to karma, but the lights in Lao Ban's eyes still shined. He moved his facial muscles to speak another curse, but it was for naught. As there was no one who could speak without their body.

Choi Hyuk looked disinterested as he threw the head far into the distance.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk has killed Sovereign Lao Ban. If you prove your qualifications in the 'Sovereign Mission', all of Lao Ban's authority will be transferred to you. Until then, Lao Ban's colonized lands will be shut down. It is possible to return to Earth through the portal, but it is no longer possible to enter Dragonic.}

"So it's this kind of system."

A Sovereign Mission.

“Will there be a proper fight there?”

Choi Hyuk mumbled as he looked around at the battlefield. It was normal. They properly executed their blitz strategy, and their prior reconnaissance to find the executives’ locations turned out well. After all their commanders had died, the Lao Ban clan had turned into nothing but a simple mob.

“How boring.”

Baby chicks who believed they were strong. Battles against these chicks were always bitter and boring. He had to fight against real enemies, not these fools. He wanted to fight against a true foe. Choi Hyuk’s body became heated. He had to get stronger. He wanted to fight against stronger opponents. Whether this was because of his instincts that wanted to enjoy fights or because of revenge, it had come to a point where it was hard to distinguish which one it was.

**

That day, the Lao Ban clan collapsed. The situation became known to the world by the survivors who had fled through the portal. A passageway between colonized lands, the collapse of the slave market, the shutdown of Lao Ban’s portal, the Berserker’s terrifying fighting ability, news of this incident made waves throughout the world.

Chapter 60: Demon King (1)

Full name: Alexei Romanovich Ivanov.

Alexei was a 15-year-old boy who had come from Russia. He was also a famous Berserker who was amongst the first to awaken through the {Ring of Rebirth}.

The reason why Alexei, who was Russian, joined Korea's main clan, Choi Hyuk's 'Berserkers', was purely because of Lee Jinhee.

He fell for her at first sight after coincidentally watching a video of her fighting. He came to Korea and became a member of the Berserkers partly because of his puppy love and longing, and partly because he seriously respected and wanted to learn from her.

Although he was young, like many members who were the first to awaken, he had lost his family and had become an orphan so he didn't have anything holding him back. At first, he used the Language Resonance Device to converse with Koreans, but perhaps it was because he was young, he quickly picked it up.

Alexei was tagging behind Lee Jinhee. Lee Jinhee looked at Alexei who appeared to be holding filming props and let out a sigh.

"Lyosha, Youtube again?"

‘Lyosha’ was a nickname only his family members and close friends could call him. Out of all the Berserkers, Alexei had only told Lee Jinhee his nickname. There was a time when a Berserker shouted, ‘Hey Lyosha!’ and that day, an intense fist fight broke out. Although he was a boy with a small figure, Alexei was an expert as one of the first to awaken, and the majority of the Berserkers never called him Lyosha after that day.

Only Baek Seoin would occasionally tease him with a ‘Lyosha~’. Alexei had become famous for never replying back.

“Yes! Please take care of me, Director Lee Jinhee!”

Alexei replied in fluent Korean and began to film. Lee Jinhee said, as if dumbfounded.

“Just from where did someone like you join our clan? You should have gone to Jessie’s clan, why’d you come here?”

Jessie was a popular American sovereign. He was handsome and had gained popularity from both his stylish fighting style and lectures on fighting techniques posted on Youtube. He liked to be in style and was known for being showy. Even the name of his fate was ‘Superstar’. ‘Superstar’ was a fate that increased his karma the more his fighting techniques were complimented and the more people were influenced by his techniques. It matched well with Jessie. As the sovereign was like this, his followers were the same. The fighting lectures and best battle videos that dominated Youtube were mostly from Jessie’s clan.

Lee Jinhee often teased Alexei, who liked to film, with this.

And whenever she did that, he would hop up and down.

“What mean words...! I have no interest in those with flashy outer appearances. The legit ones are those that are compact and fatal! And if you combine that with Director Lee Jinhee’s beauty! Keeu...!”

“The heck...”

As if embarrassed, Lee Jinhee pressed her hat down.

“In any case, for Baek hyung to permit something so useless... Haa.”

“Useless?! How is filming Director Lee Jinhee’s techniques and using them as the Berserker’s training aids useless?”

“You said you’re going to release it to others.”

“That’s to promote ourselves. You can’t ignore the effect of promoting ourselves. Even I came running here after watching a video. You need to show something cool if you want to gather really talented and passionate clan members. Berserkers are already known for their small numbers, and the flow of new recruits is declining as more time passes. Promoting ourselves is very important.”

“Brrr.... Did you know you’re saying exactly what Baek hyung said?”

“Although Director Baek does a lot of useless things, I think he really did well with this decision.”

Alexei replied without a moment’s hesitation. Of course, his heart was filled with happiness for being able to film Lee Jinhee’s movements to his heart’s content and being able to show such treasures to other people.

“Haa... I don’t know. Anyways, what I am going to teach today is running vertically using karma.”

Lee Jinhee eventually surrendered and looked away from Alexei to stare at a building in front of her. It was a high-rise apartment with 30 floors. Lee Jinhee put her foot on the wall.

“There are two main methods. One where you focus on body control and another where you focus on your karma control. First I’ll show you the method focusing on body control.”

Lee Jinhee jumped slightly and stepped on the wall with her right foot before dropping down.

“In parkour, we usually tilt our upper bodies back when we step on walls. If we don’t and we lean forward, our bodies get too close to the wall. If we do that, our strength isn’t applied vertically but

horizontally, and we slip. Like this."

Lee Jinhee explained with her words before showing a few good and bad examples.

"We can now apply original parkour movements to go up even further. I mean, our physical abilities have completely changed, right? First, you run towards the wall faster than before. The trick where you lean your upper body slightly back and step is the same. It's like shooting towards the wall like an arrow. Next, you need to move your body in rhythm. The movements of your upper body and toes are important. You need use your toes to create thrust while you still have vertical momentum to go up the wall. At the same time, you need to lean your body forward and kick upwards. Then, when you step forward with your left foot, you need to lean back slightly to get a better grip. And you repeat that. Like this."

Lee Jinhee swiftly dashed forward and ran up the wall of the building. Her body swayed rhythmically. Her breathtaking balance between her toes and body was beautiful.

Alexei filmed her figure with a blank expression.

Lee Jinhee, who had climbed to the top, shouted,

"This is the technique that focuses on body control. Now I'll teach you the second method! If you are confident with your karma control, you can move karma between you and the building and grip the wall yourself. If you try hard, you can even do this."

Lee Jinhee walked down the wall. She used her rotating karma to grip the wall. As if gravity had been reversed, she walked down the wall to the ground naturally. A few drops of sweat hung on her forehead.

“Even though I invested a lot into Control because my trait is Explosive Blood, it’s still not easy. However, those guys with the Mind’s Eye trait should have an easier time. Also, in my opinion, the best method is combining these two techniques.”

She said before going up and down the wall a few times. She used her karma to create a decent grip while performing effective movements to minimize her karma consumption.

Alexei filmed each movement with shining eyes.

After she finished her demonstration, Lee Jinhee came down and said.

“That’s enough. Stop filming.”

“No, a bit more…”

“Shush. Now you try, Lyosha.”

After refusing Alexei’s right to talk, Lee Jinhee sat on the floor. Alexei ran up and down the wall while being criticized by Lee Jinhee and had even fallen a few times due to mistakes.

Lee Jinhee grinned while she looked at him. Although he said he couldn't be bothered to, Alexei was a talented warrior, and she enjoyed teaching him. He was cute too.

"Lyosha! You have to move your hips there! Are you going to move like that?!"

"I'll do it again!"

"Of course you will!"

Alexei and Lee Jinhee were, in fact, quite similar. They both became Berserkers because they longed to make everyone stronger.

Of course, not everyone felt that way.

**

South Korea was under martial law.

To be honest, they should have already declared martial law when unknown hemispheres covered Kangdong, Seongbuk and other districts. However, it couldn't be helped but be pushed back until after the awakenees had returned because the military, including full-time reservists of the reserve forces, had all disappeared.

After the awakenees returned, and Choi Hyuk killed Song Simin's group in front of the president, the South Korean president, Shin Woojin, did his best to not fall behind global changes.

He accelerated weapon production and established a new military called the Superpower Headquarters, which was an army of awakenees consisting of the surviving military, youths with conviction, and veterans from the Alliance of Comrades in Arms.

What he had been most concerned about was establishing a system to maintain the current industry. A way to keep people working in their companies and getting people to purchase items with Korean currency. He used all his energy trying to continue their normal lifestyle. Public order, economy, diplomacy, national politics, he need consider all of them.

Once it was predicted that there would be a food crisis caused by the international drought, he used his right as a 'preliminary sovereign'. He mobilized awakenee troops to pass through a portal and created a new colonized land. He used the mission points of awakenees as currency to bring farmers, researchers, and miners over. Sometimes he would dispatch awakenee troops to protect Korean national treasures located overseas and to protect trade, which had become dangerous due to increased acts of piracy. He would either suppress internal conflicts with strength or compromise.

As it was impossible to conduct these acts under existing laws, he had activated martial law in order to be above these laws.

And there were two results. One was, like his original motive, that he somehow maintained their daily lifestyle. The other was... dictatorship.

It was like this. Presidents served terms. However, ‘sovereigns’, who possessed colonized lands and were essential to human survival, were permanent positions. As long as the survival of Korea rested on Shin Woojin, who was both the president and a sovereign, absolute authority and dictatorship had become expected.

Also, the new troops Shin Woojin established did not have the culture and order that came from a long history like the original military, and because they were hastily established, they couldn’t help but have problems with discipline and morals. However, because Shin Woojin needed them to maintain his authority, he didn’t aggressively restrain their deviations but rather accepted a moderate level of these acts and would occasionally encourage these acts to strengthen his footing. Illegal and evasive acts were committed as an open secret.

Because of this, safety was a distant goal. Chaos continued to spread. Disharmony would spread day after day, and each day would bring about more and more absurd rumors. Despite all this, normal people still went to work, shoved food they bought from the market into their mouths, and occasionally, even enjoyed dates... but the world had changed immensely.

Bars were packed early into the night. Alexei, who had finished filming Lee Jinhee, sat in front of the bar and drank a beer. No one cared that he was underage. In a world like this, minor rules like

these weren't properly upheld. This was especially the case for awakenees.

Alexei, who was drinking leisurely, poked a fellow Berserker next to him and asked.

"Hey, aren't they 'Super Soldiers?"

The raws say 초능사 which is taken from 초능사령부. Although this isn't the literal translation, I chose to use 'Super Soldiers' as their short version instead.

Alexei pointed towards a table with three or four awakenees who were drinking and had their arms around women. The awakenee troops President Shin Woojin had established, the Superpower Headquarters. Their members shortened the name and called themselves 'Super Soldiers'.

Although the nation propagated that they were martyrs who possessed 'loyalty and patriotism'... they weren't all like that. Like how the majority of any group were more interested in the food offered for sacrifice than the ancestral rites. The police, military, and especially the Super Soldiers benefitted a lot during these times of extreme chaos. First of all, they had a free pass in any store. It could be said that it was a very good job that allowed one to enjoy all sorts of pleasures for free.

I couldn't find a good English equivalent to this. It means putting the reward before the cause.

Perhaps it was because of this, but the relationship between the Super Soldiers and Berserkers was rocky. The Super Soldiers

thought they were the best in Korea and believed that everyone else had to crawl beneath them, while the Berserkers subtly looked down on them.

So, as per normal, Alexei decided to provoke the Super Soldiers. Still sitting, he raised his voice.

“Since when did Super Soldiers crawl to this area to drink alcohol?”

There were many bars near Yeouido Park that catered to awakenees, but the ‘Frontier’ pub Alexei was currently in was a bar Berserkers frequented. This was why Super Soldiers didn’t usually come here to drink.

At his provocation, the drunken Super Soldiers, who were groping the women next to them, turned around in a fit of rage. However, Alexei stared directly at them and shouted.

“It’s okay you’re drinking here, but at least pay for your drinks. Okay?”

A very drunken Super Soldier tried to jump up from his seat when he heard Alexei’s words. If the person who looked to be his superior didn’t grab his wrist and sit him down, he may have tried to start a fight.

“Sit. He’s Alexei of the Berserkers.”

When his superior whispered those words, as if spitting them out, the Super Soldier, who had been about to get up, revealed a nervous expression. Alexei was well-known as an elite amongst the Berserkers.

His excitement died down when he saw they weren't getting up, so he continued to drink his beer.

That moment, a group of Berserkers entered through the door. Alexei raised his hand up and acted familiar.

"Lee Kijin! You came here too."

Lee Kijin was a man with a hazy focus in his eyes. He looked around at Alexei and smiled brightly.

"Ohh! It's Alexei."

Lee Kijin was a Berserker who possessed a similar ability to Alexei. He was also an elite amongst the Berserkers. He was also one of the comrades Alexei was a bit competitive with.

"Did you hear the news? The Sovereign Mission carried out by the leader! You were assigned to it as well, right?"

Alexei brightly asked Lee Kijin with a 'You're going to the party too, right?' tone. As someone who longed for strength, he loved fighting more than anyone else and being assigned to a great mission like the Sovereign Mission was really exciting to him.

However, Lee Kijin's reply was gloomy unlike Alexei's.

"Well... I was assigned. How tiring."

As he said that, his eyes really did exude an exhausted aura.

"Ha. As someone who goes crazy in the battlefield, stop being so coy all the time."

As this wasn't the first time Alexei had seen him like this, he ended their greeting with a raised glass.

Lee Kijin grinned, and the group of Berserkers joined the table of Super Soldiers.

"Huh? They knew each other?"

Alexei looked at this scene with a strange look. They chatting noisily amongst themselves, and not long had passed before they got up to leave.

Alexei suddenly shouted after continuously looking at them.

"Hey! Pay before you go!"

The Super Soldiers, who were leaving in a good mood, suddenly

became angry and turned around at his words. Lee Kijin consoled them. Then he shouted at Alexei.

“They are my friends. Don’t mind them!”

At his words, Alexei tightly shut his mouth. Although he personally didn’t approve of eating food for free because they had a bit of power, he didn’t want to say something to fellow comrades who had gone through life or death situations with him.

Lee Kijin smiled as if thanking Alexei, before leaving with the group.

Alexei looked at them with a sullen expression before asking another comrade next to him.

“Since when were they close with the Super Soldiers?”

His comrade didn’t seem to know as he simply shrugged his shoulders.

Chapter 61: Demon King (2)

The death of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, Lao Ban, caused an immense change to occur in the world. Among others, the hit to China's economy for losing one of their colonized lands, and the preparation of other sovereigns to connect colonized lands after Choi Hyuk were the most prominent.

However, there was a different burning question that was on everyone's mind.

'How strong were the Berserkers?'

They brought down the powerful and prosperous Sovereign of Dark Secrets in a single day. How strong were they?

There was speculation based on a few points.

"Lao Ban's clan was no match for them. The battle ended in an instant."

"… Screw off! Screw off! Hiiii! Don't come close!"

The people who escaped from Lao Ban's colonized lands. Those who didn't participate in the battle all claimed it was one-sided, while the participants… shivered in fear, unable to speak properly.

Although there was a problem of morals, Lao Ban's clan was

famous for being incredibly wealthy and for possessing many experts. So the reactions of the survivors greatly resonated with the colonizers.

A large discussion would break out whenever colonizers gathered.

“It’s an exaggeration. Of course, the Berserkers are good at fighting. However, they aren’t that good. It was one-sided because they were attacked unexpectedly, completely unprepared for it. When fighting, one strike is enough if you’re caught off guard.”

“Hey. Even if you say that, look at the numbers. Even if you count every Berserker, they barely number 20 thousand, but Lao Ban has more than 80 thousand! And if you include the small subordinate clans operating in his cities, they easily number 150 thousand. So, let’s assume only 80 thousand could be mobilized immediately. But, the number of Berserkers who participated in this expedition may at most be 5 thousand. 5 thousand vs 80 thousand. No matter how unexpected it was, isn’t it ridiculous that they were able to sweep through cities with just that?”

“That’s because Lao Ban and his important executives had already been ambushed away from the cities. They obviously wouldn’t be able to face the Berserkers without a proper line of command after the clan itself was wiped out.”

“Hey... hey. I met some Berserkers on a previous outer space mission, okay? They are no joke.”

“Really? My friend was drunk and got into an argument with one. He said he could take them?”

“The hell he could. He was probably beat up. Those who haven’t fought against a Berserker need to shut up.”

“But, Alexei of the Berserkers? I saw some of the videos he posted, and while they were good, they weren’t that good? To be honest, Jessie’s clan has better techniques on Youtube.”

“Ah geez… Do you think those videos and fighting are the same? Those Berserkers are real beasts. Let’s say two sides have the same specs, right? Then the Berserkers’ side will undoubtedly win. Honestly, aren’t Berserkers the strongest in real combat?”

“That is something we’ll only know once they fight.”

The word ‘Colonizer’ was used to define warriors who had awakened karma and fought in colonized lands and outer space missions. However, when used in a more general sense, ‘colonizer’ encompassed a wider variety, as not everyone who awakened karma became warriors, in fact, warriors were the minority.

Those who worked in primary industries, producing food and minerals, workers in secondary industries, processing these raw materials, researchers, and even merchants who went around to various colonized lands to buy and sell products. These non-combative workers made up a significant portion of colonizers.

Because they too had to go through forced missions in the beginning, around half of them could be considered combat ready. However, once the colonization had passed a certain point, the number of forced missions noticeably dropped, and even if they were occasionally assigned to forced mission, it became possible to be exempted from them if they paid a certain amount of Mission Points. The number of colonizers, who worked in production, increased significantly since then. They would sell their wares to buy Mission Points, and then use those points to be exempt from forced missions.

So these production colonizers were usually the ones who collected a great deal of information as they went to and from different territories, and amongst them, merchants collected the most. Combat colonizers usually wouldn't leave their bases often, and because of this, there weren't many cases of them fighting against each other.

This was why it was difficult to come to a consensus on the Berserkers.

Eventually, the majority opinion was that 'While Berserkers are strong, wasn't this case an exception due to various fortunes and tactics aligning with each other?'

"Still, I heard the Berserk Sovereign was strong beyond imagination."

"Beyond imagination? Then are his main stats at the mid-4-star level?"

“Like hell they are. Probably around 3 of his stats just reached 4-star. Maybe one of them is close to mid-4-star level.”

“Yeah, it’s a bit much to assume all his main stats are at the mid-4-star level. Even the strongest expert, Jessie, only recently got his second stat to 4-star.”

“But there are rumors that the Berserk Sovereign already had 3-star stats on his first mission, 2 years ago.”

“Pfft, no fucking way.”

“Really. They even say he singlehandedly killed the last boss of <Survive and Escape>.”

“Yeah, I heard that’s true.”

“Hey. Even if that’s true. You know, it becomes almost heinous to increase karma later on.”

On top of that, there wasn’t a proper evaluation of Choi Hyuk’s fighting abilities.

**

Choi Hyuk was sitting face-to-face with Lieutenant Colonel Lee Kangjin[1]. In Choi Hyuk’s eyes, Lt. Col Lee Kangjin was emitting a

white (goodwill) light.

Lt. Col Lee Kangjin was one of the influential figures in the Superpower Headquarters.

Although Choi Hyuk didn't remember, he had coincidentally saved him from getting killed by Deer Antlers, Keushisuit.

Since then, Lt. Col Lee Kangjin wanted to maintain a good relationship with the Berserkers. The reason for him coming here today was the same.

"We noticed some rebellious movements."

Lt. Col Lee Kangjin got straight to the point.

"The loyal followers under Lao Ban's immediate command and the groups, who had lost their workplace in a single morning because the colonized lands had been shut down, are targeting you."

Choi Hyuk figured something out from Lee Kangjin's words.

"We actually received requests asking us to allow them to continue to do business there once I received Lao Ban's authority."

"What was your reply?"

“Since they sent their pawns, we didn’t kill them, and instead sent them on their way after cutting off one of their arms.”

After listening to Choi Hyuk’s story, Lee Kangjin understood why these merchants were trying to kill Choi Hyuk.

“Hu… How direct.”

Lee Kangjin, who had momentarily blanked out at Choi Hyuk’s brutal answer, continued with a serious tone.

“However, the problem isn’t simple. Colonizers, who used Lao Ban’s slave market, may even target you. And there may be… I’m sorry to say this… but there may be traitors from within the Berserkers.”

Colonizers from other groups… And traitors… Choi Hyuk showed interest in those words. Lee Kangjin calmly explained.

“They simply didn’t do it as openly as Lao Ban, but there were sovereigns who secretly ran slave markets, and those who did business with products they received from Lao Ban. They will feel greatly threatened by your actions. And…”

Lee Kangjin momentarily paused before almost spitting these words out.

“There are drugs.”

“Drugs?”

Choi Hyuk asked in a doubtful voice. This was because normal drugs had almost no effect on colonizers who had restructured their bodies with karma. Even the purest drugs in existence had no effect on colonizers.

“Yes. It’s a new drug that makes you sensitive to karma. They say it is secretly being supplied through slave markets. Although we don’t know exactly how they make it, there’s no doubt that it is a technique that followers under Lao Ban’s immediate command manage. From what I’ve figured out, it seems the scope of addicts is quite large. Although I’m embarrassed to say this, but even amongst the Super Soldiers... I feel there will be a significant number of addicts. There’s a very likely chance they may be requested to assassinate you under the pretext of receiving a supply of drugs.”

Lee Kangjin spoke with a serious tone while Choi Hyuk’s eyes shined in interest.

“This doesn’t seem easy.”

Drugs couldn’t help but become bestsellers. For there to be a drug that works on colonizers who lived through combat hell and the nightmares of loss day after day. For there to be a drug that works on colonizers when even alcohol and tobacco had no effect.

They may even be able to win Berserkers over. Choi Hyuk

grinned.

“How exciting. Betrayal…”

He had always thought of this after Jung Minji had died from betrayal. Things that could destroy a strong existence in an instant. Betrayal. Mutiny. ‘Their blades can target you at any time.’ Choi Hyuk always bore that in mind. And that moment had really come…

“Betrayal…”

For some reason, his heart started beating.

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Berserker Lee Kijin blew smoke.

“Hoooo….”

They were in a rooftop lounge that had been remodeled from a pool at a luxury hotel. The ceiling and walls were made of glass, and, with the pool as the center, a bar and a dark, remote room were arranged. It was an accommodation with a great view overlooking the Han River. The inside was currently filled with thick fog-like smoke.

The smoke wasn’t as thick as tobacco smoke, a bit more

transparent, and it was smooth like vapor. The smell wasn't that potent, it was like an aroma, pungent yet sweet. Simply smelling this scent made one feel better.

"Haa... It feels good..."

Sitting at the bar, Lee Kijin took another breath of smoke before downing a bottle of strong whiskey.

"Keuu..."

Lee Kijin's body shivered pleasantly.

It was a drug called 'Water Fog'. This drug, supplied by the Lao Ban clan, was rolled up and smoked like cigarettes. Only, it didn't burn with fire but rather with karma. Perhaps it was because of this, but it did have an effect on bodies protected by karma. In fact, while you were smoking Water Fog, your karma's defense would drop enough that you could get slightly drunk.

'Although there may be colonizers who have never smoked Water Fog, there are no colonizers who've only smoked it once.'

This was a popular line between them.

Lee Kijin couldn't help but agree 100%. After becoming a colonizer, the only time he felt happy was when he was smoking Water Fog.

“Haa… But… what did you say?”

Lee Kijin, who was happily enjoying the lingering sensation, suddenly focused his hazy eyes and stared at the bartender. The bartender’s expression didn’t change as he repeated his words.

“Please cooperate with us in eliminating the Berserk Sovereign.”

Lee Kijin’s lips fell limp. Then he smiled.

“You want me to die?”

“That’s not it. We will create a careful plan with our best warriors.”

“The best warriors? Who? Is even that team leader of the Super Soldiers over there joining as well?”

“Of course.”

The bartender confidently nodded his head. However, Lee Kijin’s smile became even thicker. He smiled to the point where his wrinkles covered his eyes. With that expression, he said.

“Hehe, what a load of bull.”

“Pardon?”

“Hehe, fuck… who’s going to kill who?”

At his words, the bartender and the surrounding Super Soldiers’ moods turned sour. Yet, Lee Kijin didn’t care in the slightest. The other Berserkers, who accompanied Lee Kijin here, were smiling as well. The bartender thought that this was most definitely not a positive sign.

“Are you more loyal than we thought?”

The bartender muttered bitterly. Then he needed to get rid of them. However, Lee Kijin sneered at him.

“Puha… What loyalty. It just doesn’t make sense. Who’s going to kill who? Choi Hyuk? You guys? Puahahaha….”

“Puhehehe…”

“Kikik.”

The other Berserkers couldn’t contain their laughter anymore. After laughing for a while, Lee Kijin said.

“You guys are misunderstanding something.”

Lee Kijin slowly stood up and placed his hand on his sword. The mood became vicious in an instant. The Super Soldiers sitting around the bar, the guests who were smoking Water Fog, and even the administrators, approximately 30 in total, stood up one after another.

Lee Kijin stared at the various faces surrounding him before spitting on the ground.

“You guys... Do you even know what Berserkers are? Let alone Choi Hyuk... You guys can’t even take the three of us on.”

He said as he unsheathed his sword.

Once he had unsheathed his sword, like a domino effect, everyone raised their weapons. Metallic sounds rippled out.

That moment, Lee Kijin disappeared from their sight. A speed their eyes couldn’t keep up with.

Slice!

“Kaaahh!”

The Super Soldier, who had stared at Alexei in the afternoon, had his arm sliced off.

“Die, bastards. Die.”

Stab. Stab.

It was like a magical scene. Even if they excluded Lee Kijin, whom they couldn't match in speed, they couldn't block the other Berserkers' strikes even though they didn't seem very fast. As if they were peeling an orange or eating a live octopus, they didn't hurry as they neutralized their opponents' defenses and stabbed their arms and legs.

Lee Kijin, who had acted first and neutralized his opponents' elites, said while leisurely cutting the tendons of other guests and stationed bodyguards.

"We could take a dozen of you on with similar specs, but what to do when there's also a difference in specs?"

The difference between their specs was fine, but the difference between their fighting experience was too large. In the past 2 years, even if they compared themselves to groups who completed as many missions as they could, the Berserkers completed at least double their missions. Especially due to those who chased after fights with their 'Combat Addict' fate, the Berserkers specialized in dogfights and close fights.

A small-scale fight in a small area with no commanders. On top of that, their opponents were Lee Kijin, a top elite of the Berserkers, and the other two who were also elites.

Puddles of blood flowed down and dyed the pool red.

Of course, the Berserkers weren't completely fine. They had wounds in various places and were panting. However, Berserkers would usually start fighting properly from this point. Since the level of 'intense combat' was quite high. These wounds and Stamina consumption were only a warmup for Berserkers.

"Hey, bartender."

Lee Kijin grabbed the collar of the bartender collapsed on the floor and lifted him up. His voice sounded oddly happy. Like a 'Combat Addict', he had become refreshed after a bout of fighting.

Lee Kijin grinned.

"So what. You're saying you will provide an unlimited supply of drugs or whatever if we cooperate in killing Choi Hyuk? Right?"

"Th... That's right. Ah, no, sorry."

The bartender was trembling as he barely replied. No, he didn't know how to reply. He couldn't tell what exactly was going on in the minds of these druggies.

He asked them because he believed he could win them over, but they suddenly wielded their swords. His voice was currently friendly. Then how should he reply? Should he apologize for the blasphemous conspiracy, or should he ask them to cooperate by offering even more?

The bartender could only tremble.

Lee Kijin grinned and relaxed his grip on the bartender. He slowly stood up. It seemed one of the glass walls had shattered during their fight as a cool breeze ruffled through his hair.

The effects of the drug and the excitement from the battle still remained. And a cool breeze. Lee Kijin enjoyed this moment.

'To the point where I want to just die like this.'

Behind the momentary happiness, a bottomless futility approached him. It was the same ever since that day with the <Ring of Rebirth>. Without the effects of the drug, without the excitement of battle, the daily life he faced... was always unbearably horrible.

He was only alive because he couldn't die. No, perhaps it was because he wanted to die. He might have joined the Berserkers as a means of suicide.

Perhaps it was because of this. Lee Kijin unknowingly declared.

"I'll help you. For my last opponent to be Choi Hyuk... That's not so bad."

It was exciting simply thinking about it. Though he would

probably die. But he felt even more excited. Dying while fighting that monster? His comrades showed surprised expressions at first, but they too nodded their heads in understanding.

Amongst the Berserkers, there were many who had no attachment to life and were semi-insane. And they were druggies on top of that. This meant they were complete lunatics.

“Still, create a good plan so I don’t die too futilely. See you next time.”

Lee Kijin waved his hand as he left the hotel with his comrades.

Leaving bloody footprints and sounds of moaning behind them.

Chapter 62: Demon King (3)

The only path to humanity's survival – Colonization. Although becoming a colonizer was dangerous, there were many young men and women who wanted to become colonizers. Like the young, penniless colonizers who crossed over to the New World, and like the outlaws who roamed the West, many left the world of civilization behind and headed towards the colonized lands, sword in hand. On top of that, wasn't it 'outer space'? It was a suitable place to act on impulse when you broke up with your lover and the word 'outer space' was enough to boil the blood of people for no reason.

Those who were determined on becoming colonizers would normally either take a test to enter a clan or buy Mission Points with money to move to Dragonic. This aspect was very different from the first awakenees who had no choice but to become colonizers.

That was why Lumin was saying this today again.

"What I'm saying is that being a colonizer is nothing compared to the past."

Did kids these days know what suffering was? Even without saying, it felt like they could hear the bragging coming from within his heart.

Like most clan leaders, Lumin was also one of the first awakenees. The generation who became colonizers after

overcoming more vicious fights than anyone. He had achieved a few feats within that hell and obtained ‘2/3 Qualifications to be a Sovereign’, becoming a Leader of Ten Thousand, the clan leader of the ‘Lumin Clan’.

That was why he was calm while everyone else was nervous. He was saying those words, how becoming a colonizer wasn’t anything, in an attempt to cheer up his clan members.

Although Lumin’s new recruits felt that his words were a bit cocky, they were also strangely reassured by them.

Their clan leader, Lumin, sat his butt on the rampart and confidently said,

“Don’t worry; you’re not going to die. I survived through worse conditions than this.”

His composed figure, even with the growing number of monsters outside the rampart, was brazen but also felt reliable.

The Lumin Clan was a skilled, mid-sized clan. They considered themselves as one of Lao Ban’s subordinate clans and were active in his capital city, ‘Zhiyu’. It was also a profit-oriented clan that surrendered immediately once Choi Hyuk captured ‘Zhiyu’ a few days ago.

The hot springs city ‘Pyungryu’, the mining city ‘Wanwu’, the farming city ‘Yeshi’, and the capital city ‘Zhiyu’, whose market

had developed so much that it was known as ‘the market of all things’, had all fallen under Choi Hyuk in an instant. Amongst them, there were mid and small-sized clans that confronted Choi Hyuk out of loyalty towards Lao Ban, and some, like Lumin, who immediately backed out, saying they never had that kind of relationship. Choi Hyuk left the clans who backed out intact. Not only that, but he even ordered them to manage the city for the time being.

To be honest, his actions weren’t very understandable. Choi Hyuk didn’t come with enough soldiers to safely occupy the four cities in the first place, and immediately left the cities after capturing them. After telling the surrendered clans that they would be back, all the Berserkers headed towards their capital city, Barhaloleun, before returning to Earth.

In reality, the four cities were left alone in a state of anarchy.

Within these cities, the mid and small sized clans began a bout of wits. To swallow the cities for themselves? That was impossible. If Choi Hyuk inherited Lao Ban’s authority, then they would be deported without even being able to fight. Then, there were two remaining choices. Either obediently manage the city, or flee and look for another colonized land.

Each of them did their own calculations and eventually around half stayed while the other had left the cities. The clans that remained were usually those that yearned to revive themselves in a city with fewer competitors, rather than finding a new foothold in a different colonized land teeming with competitors.

However, the problem was the monsters.

“The fight must have been noisy for monsters to swarm into the city territories…”

Perhaps it was because of the noise and the scent of blood.

A few days after Choi Hyuk left, the number of monsters gathering around the cities started to increase. At first, it was ‘I see some?’ to ‘There’s a lot of them?’ and now, a week later, there were enough to call them an army.

Yet, they normally wouldn’t fear them. They had thick ramparts as well as the blessing of the Territory Pyramid that weakened the abilities of monsters and strengthened the abilities of allies.

However, now that the position of the sovereign was vacant since Lao Ban’s death, the Territory Pyramid stopped functioning. They had to fight the monsters without buffs. This was the reason why they couldn’t help but resolve themselves on top of the ramparts.

It was to the point where clans, who decided on leaving late, stayed. However, Lumin was still confident.

“This place is our hometown. If we leave once, we will have to forever live as fellows without a base. Just erase the thought of running away. And don’t worry! You won’t die. The Berserk Sovereign said so. That he would return after inheriting Lao Ban’s authority. You know that those monsters out there are nothing if

the Territory Pyramid functions again, right?”

It would be fine if the Territory Pyramid functioned. They only needed to endure until then. The goal he proposed ignited the fighting spirits of his clan members since it was a more realistic goal than trying to block all the monsters.

Then all that remained was in the Berserk Sovereign’s hands.

‘Hey, Berserk Sovereign. No, Mr. Berserk Sovereign. I don’t know what it is, but finish it quickly and return…’

Even Lumin’s heart was burning with urgency.

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The reason why Choi Hyuk suddenly withdrew was, in fact, because of the Sovereign Mission.

{Sovereign Mission}

Complete the dimensional transmission and obtain the code that can lift the dimensional isolation. Among the three dimensionally isolated areas, Kangdong, Mapo, and Seongbuk, release one and annihilate the monsters dominating within.

It was a mission with a time limit, and one that also took place on

Earth. It was a situation where Choi Hyuk, who prioritized inheriting the sovereign's authority, couldn't help but quickly withdraw. Once he returned to Korea, Choi Hyuk immediately issued a draft for Berserkers and put the Berserkers, who returned from outer space missions, on standby at their headquarters. 12,000 soldiers could be recruited. This was the largest soldier recruitment since the formation of the Berserkers. The deciding day was tomorrow.

Since he was recruiting within Seoul, he had already discussed it with President Shin Woojin. Shin Woojin had introduced him to nearby civilians and actively promised to cooperate with the Berserkers for food supplies and other problems.

Although there were frequent disputes between Berserkers and Super Soldiers, Shin Woojin and Choi Hyuk's relationship was amicable. In reality, in Shin Woojin's perspective, nothing good would come out from being on Choi Hyuk's bad side.

Though he was still the president, due to his recent dictatorship, his political legitimacy had fallen greatly. Only, he still had the support of the military and colonizers because of the crumbs he could give them, and with their support as his foundation, he was able to give citizens the minimum level of safety, not completely lose his popularity, and obtain political power. But to get on the bad side of Choi Hyuk, who was known as a mythical existence among Korean colonizers, in that situation? The military power of the Berserkers was already frightening, but there was no doubt that the reactions of other colonizers, due to this, wouldn't be soft. If the political situation became that chaotic, then even hearts of the citizens would leave him.

The president had even acknowledged the current fighting-oriented colonizers', the members of large and small clans, extraterritorial rights. Because their support was his most important political foundation, he usually let their commotions and unlawful acts slide as long as they weren't too severe. He especially paid no attention to disputes amongst colonizers. He had already decided on this policy the moment Choi Hyuk sliced Song Simin's head during the dinner party.

Since he treated regular clans that way, it was obvious he would treat the Berserkers, who were a sovereign clan, even better. On top of that, Shin Woojin was already greatly indebted to Choi Hyuk.

It was successfully colonizing his first territory which made him a sovereign. If it wasn't for the apt advice from Baek Seoin, whom Choi Hyuk sent, Shin Woojin would never have become a sovereign.

There were 39 people who made up the first sovereign group. They were all strong, becoming sovereigns after accomplishing amazing achievements. However, there were only 13 still alive today. 26 had died. Although there were some who died during outer space missions, or while expanding their territories, but 17 of them had died during their first colonization. They made up the majority of deaths. The first colonization was simply that difficult.

There were currently 41 sovereigns. Among them, 11 had accomplished new achievements and became sovereigns, and 17 leaders of various countries succeeded in colonizing a land and became sovereigns. Only 17... The Giant Orc Karik had granted the

leaders of each country the status of ‘preliminary sovereign’. There were hundreds of them. Since only 17 of them had succeeded in their first colonization, one could once again realize just how difficult the first colonization was.

In fact, even those from developed countries, like the prime minister of England and president of France, had died during their first colonization. Although, strangely, the Queen of England succeeded and had become a sovereign.

Anyways, the reason why Shin Woojin was able to succeed in such a difficult colonization was because of Baek Seoin’s unsparing advice. The composition of soldiers. Quality and formation of soldiers as well as tactics. Shin Woojin had consulted Baek Seoin on all of these and was able to safely succeed in his first colonization.

Because of this precedent, the relationship between Choi Hyuk and Shin Woojin couldn’t help but be amicable. In the very least, Choi Hyuk was still useful to Shin Woojin. It was the same for this ‘Sovereign Mission’. Wasn’t this a mission that he may eventually have to take? There was nothing bad in watching it beforehand.

Due to President Shin Woojin’s wholehearted support, preparations for the Sovereign Mission, which would be held in the middle of Seoul, was going smoothly despite the urgency.

Choi Hyuk had decided to release the Seongbuk District’s dimensional isolation. Yes, Seongbuk. This was why he was feeling restless the night before the Sovereign Mission.

He left the dormitory and was walking alone. The dormitory of the Berserkers was simply called so, but it was, in fact, a luxurious apartment complex in Yeouido.

Choi Hyuk quietly walked along the well-tended garden and wide streets. Yeouido Xi apartments stood tall. Although it wasn't possible for all 20,000 Berserkers to live here, those who were considered elites all lived here. No living costs. Choi Hyuk took that burden for his followers.

Where did this money come from? He was a sovereign with colonized lands. Each passage to his colonized lands was taxed. Every business transaction within his territory was taxed. And Earth's economy was restructuring to become more reliant on resources from colonized lands. This... was a structure where even a three-year-old child could build a fortune, let alone Choi Hyuk.

"Money, power, how great..."

When he thought about how this vast apartment complex solely belonged to him, he felt odd. This wasn't a level of power that could be achieved simply through money.

Although he paid more than the market price, it wasn't like he was buying a house but an entire apartment complex, so there was no way things would go as he wished. People were bound to be unable to leave due to certain circumstances no matter how much money he paid. Also, because it was already an apartment complex the rich lived, it wasn't possible to solve everything with money...

But, the ‘Yeouido Colonizer City Special Law’ was created. It was a bizarre law that made it so that if a clan offered to buy a property above market price and if the property wasn’t owned by a clan, then the owner would have no choice but to sell their property and leave. My god.

… It was times like these when dictatorship was good. As long as you were friends with the dictator, of course.

There were rumors about how Baek Seoin, who disliked unjust acts of power, went to each of the original owners and gave them additional compensation and apologized with an awkward expression, but Choi Hyuk was happy. Since he was already overflowing with money, he gave Baek Seoin a bonus to make up for his loss.

Power to do almost anything you wished…

The more he appreciated it, the angrier he became. He wasn’t someone who could use this power properly. He was someone who was more suited to destroying something than creating it.

Of course, when his mother was still alive, he wanted to become someone who created things. Although he liked the unmatched thrill of fighting, a peace that calmed his emotions wasn’t bad either. Those days, he would normally read books about design and architecture. However, that was already a world he had separated from.

The buildings, pictures, and design products... he now had the power to buy all of them. However, he no longer needed them. Since it wasn't him who could achieve something with them, but his mother.

However, his mother was gone, and he was alone.

So he decided on Seongbuk District to be the location he would conduct the Sovereign Mission in. The place where his mother had died.

"That bastard known as the Flaming Devil... Would it still be there?"

The monster that killed his mother. The monster that was the same rank as the Wyvern of Destruction. Seongbuk District which was blocked by the opaque dimensional isolation wall.

Choi Hyuk sincerely wished to meet the Flaming Devil.

"Of course it'll be there. But you need to be careful. Because that bastard should only be a small fry now. The monsters in there aren't normal. They might even be able to see your mind."

He suddenly heard a familiar voice. Choi Hyuk couldn't help but be surprised. As if it was morning, it brightened up behind him. He turned around.

"Flame-Rain...?"

“Long time.”

Her face was still covered by a rippling flame veil.

“… You can come to Earth?”

“Of course. This place is also part of the Flame Wing Alliance. Although you haven’t officially joined.”

“… You call that a reply… Anyways, your motive?”

As expected, Flame-Rain didn’t give him a proper reply. From what Choi Hyuk knew, lowest ranked warriors didn’t have the qualifications to enter other warrior’s homelands. He had never even heard of this.

But Flame-Rain acted as if this was obvious.

In fact, there was one thing he was certain of. Flame-Rain was not a lowest ranked warrior.

‘There’s no way she is. Since she’s that strong.’

Even though Choi Hyuk had become stronger, he was still unable to estimate Flame-Rain’s abilities. All he knew was that she was undetectably strong.

Then what was she? He had once straightforwardly asked her, ‘What is your identity?’ However, because she replied with a ‘Let’s see. Guess?’ nonsense, he never asked questions like that again.

“How heartless. I just wanted to congratulate you. I heard rumors that after this Sovereign Mission, they will decide the advancement evaluation for earthlings. They were divided, some being for and against it, and they very narrowly passed it. I think they said something about deciding after seeing the results of your Sovereign Mission?”

Where did she hear these rumors from? The question, ‘What is your identity?’ once again crept up his throat, but he pushed it down.

“So?”

“What do you mean so? I’m saying that’s how it is. Hmmm… Want me to give you a hint? They say that they are going to test your control and command in this Sovereign Mission… How about it, are you confident?”

“Control? Command? I don’t know but… Who knows… In the very least, I’m not afraid of opponents I don’t know.”

As if she was pleased with his reply, Flame-Rain giggled.

“Kik. Okay. If it’s you, you will do well. Still, don’t let your guard

down. The stronger monsters aren't simply powerful fools. How elaborately and wickedly they destroy intelligent beings... Remember that sometimes taking them down with a sword might not be everything."

It was like a riddle. Choi Hyuk's judgment became distorted.

"If you're going to give me a hint, give a proper one or don't distract me and leave."

At his sharp reaction, Flame-Rain showed an exaggerated gesture as if saying 'Wow! Fiery!' and stepped back. Then she calmly changed the mood.

"Sorry, sorry. To be honest, I don't know much either. I only brought this up as an excuse... I honestly wanted to come to your homeland once."

She pushed her two palms out in apology.

Choi Hyuk was silent.

Unconcerned, Flame-Rain spread her arms momentarily as she looked up at the sky. Tall buildings, and the moon which rose between them. A few stars that had been covered by the city lights.

"Beautiful... As expected, your homeland is as well."

She said with a faint voice, staring into the sky as if piercing into outer space.

Choi Hyuk stared at her before letting out a sigh.

“Haa... Okay. Still, since you’ve come a long way, have a cup of coffee before you go.”

Then he swiftly turned around and left the complex. Flame-Rain quickly followed behind him. Choi Hyuk was bothered by the flames trailing behind her and turned around.

“It’s bothersome, put it out.”

“Don’t worry. I look like a normal person to other people.”

“Why can’t you do that to me too? My eyes hurt.”

“Ah, but what’s coffee?”

Completely ignoring Choi Hyuk, she walked with hurried steps, looking somewhat excited.

Chapter 63: Demon King (4)

The day of the Sovereign Mission.

The whole world was focused on Marronnier Park. Facts about the Sovereign Mission had already been widely spread. Observing the park, outside the civilian restricted area set up by the military, were curious colonizers and scouts from each sovereign.

What would they do if Choi Hyuk succeeded his mission? Be wary of him? Ally with him? Ignore him? What kind of change would occur in their forces? Colonizers were alert with their sharp senses, keeping each other in check.

Amongst them, there was Richard who was known as the ‘Sovereign of Balance’. Other colonizers would chatter amongst each other when they coincidentally sighted him.

“The Sovereign of Balance? The Sovereign of Balance personally came here?”

Everyone couldn’t help but become surprised at Richard’s, a distinguished sovereign’s, appearance.

“It’s a bit… embarrassing. Other places sent their followers here while our sovereign personally moved.”

Richard’s aide, Leah, mumbled. Richard, who was a clean, bearded middle-aged man, gave an easygoing smile.

“You already know. The reason why I’m like this.”

“I know. He’s an important figure. Someone who Richard personally needs to check.”

“Right.”

Richard leisurely smiled and turned to look at Choi Hyuk who stood at the head of the Berserkers.

“So what’s the verdict?”

Leah’s eyes shined, seemingly curious. She asked in a slightly lower voice,

“Do we kill him? Or let him live?”

However, Richard didn’t look at Leah, only staring at Choi Hyuk.

“Amazing.”

This was his reply after a long silence.

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Giant letters appeared above the opaque dome which covered the entire Seongbuk District.

<Searching dimensions. Wait 10 minutes.>

These words that were updated in real-time were slowly counting down and soon, the mission was announced.

{Sovereign Mission}

Dimensional transmission in progress. Starting now, participants of the mission may enter the dimensionally isolated area. You will only obtain the code after annihilating the pursuing monsters. Once you activate the code, dimensional isolation will be released. If you fail, the dimension will explode.

Choi Hyuk, who had finished reading the mission briefing, nodded his head.

“So, basically, I just need to annihilate them?”

Then, there was no need to waste any more time.

“Enter! Wipe them out!”

At his command, 12,000 Berserkers leaped into the opaque wall at once.

The Berserkers moved in troops. Troops of a thousand Berserkers moved systematically as they alternated between infiltration, attack, and support. With cognitive abilities beyond that of humans', they comprehended the situation and communicated with each other. Charging without the slightest hesitation was the base of the Berserkers' tactics. However-

"What the-Why are you stopping?"

The moment they passed through the dimensionally isolated wall and stepped into Seongbuk District, the Berserkers unknowingly stopped. Those who jumped in after and hit the person in front of them grumbled, but they stopped in their place as well.

The scene in front of them was simply shocking.

"... It's not Earth?"

This place wasn't Seongbuk District. No, it didn't seem like it was Earth at all.

Their first impression of the place was that it resembled more of a garbage landfill than a ruin. Countless broken machines were piled up into a mountain.

“Wh-what do we do?”

The Berserkers, who originated from Seongbuk District, were even more shocked. They vividly remembered escaping this place two years ago, yet, no matter how they looked at it, there were no similarities between Seongbuk District and this place.

Although they did felt it was strange that the opaque wall was called the ‘dimensionally isolated wall’… They never thought that it was a completely different dimension. Then where did Seongbuk District go?

While a quiet confusion took hold of the Berserkers, Choi Hyuk silently clipped up the mountain of broken machines. He had already activated Mind’s Eye to its greatest potential. His whole body was emitting a blue hue. He was calm. From the beginning, whether this place was Earth or not was outside his concerns. He was only interested in what kind of monsters were here.

The edges of his senses felt a savage power. He ran up to the summit and searched for the bastards that were shaking his senses.

No, he didn’t need to look for them. He could see clearly see them.

At a glance, they looked like humans. One head and a pair of arms and legs. However, their waists were long like ferrets, and they had long, sharp claws. They were approximately triple the size of a human. Their heads were long on both ends, and fangs filled their large, open mouths. White, long tissue, that looked to

be either a bandage or their flesh, covered their eyes. The moment Choi Hyuk's eyes landed on them, the name 'eyeless observers' came to mind. He didn't know why, but it seemed that this was the name of these monsters he was seeing for the first time.

The eyeless observers surrounded a white building that looked to be a fortress, and crooks, mountain orcs, bladed starving ghosts, and other monsters he had seen plenty of in Kangdong District were surrounding them like clouds as if escorting them.

When Choi Hyuk spotted them, they too spotted him.

{Keeeeh!}

Amongst the eyeless observers, the largest one with the most savage karma roared in Choi Hyuk's direction. The air reverberated.

{Kueeeehhh!!}

As if stimulated by its roar, hundreds of thousands of monsters cried out at the same time. A few hundred thousand pairs of eyes all looked towards Choi Hyuk.

Rumble!

Hundreds of thousands of monsters ran on the ground. The vibrations even reached where Choi Hyuk was standing, and mountains of broken devices trembled as some rolled down.

The monsters dashed forward. And Choi Hyuk's eyes fixated on the 'Flaming Devil' instead of the 'eyeless observers' that were controlling the monsters. The monster that caused his mother to die, the Flaming Devil. It was a 'Wyvern of Destruction' level monster in Seongbuk District.

'Let's see.'

It had a horn and a tail. The Flaming Devil had flames akin to a lion's mane beginning from its horn. Whether looking at its appearance or spirit, it was the Flaming Devil. A fierce smile hung on Choi Hyuk's lips.

Screech! Clank!

Karma filled the Predator's Blade like a storm. The body of the Predator's Blade distorted intensely as it was unsheathed. An ear-piercing metallic sound resounded as the sheath and the blade, both filled with karma, slid against each other.

It was Choi Hyuk's unique battle cry that initiated combat. Strictly speaking, it wasn't a cry, but rather the grandiose sound of him unsheathing his sword... Either way, the Berserkers knew the meaning behind this sound better than anyone.

"Woaah!!"

The battle cry of the Berserkers followed behind Choi Hyuk's.

“Let’s go.”

There was no need for detailed tactical commands for the Berserkers. Each troop chose their target and judged where to evade, and if a larger scale cooperation was needed, they would follow the tactics of the captain-ranked troops. If an even greater strength was needed, they would follow the tactics of the director-ranked troops.

Because Berserkers used actions rather than words to command, the commanders always took the lead. Only those who won tens of these crazy battles were divided into the elites and top elites, and they could become captains and directors.

The Berserkers stepped on the broken machines and began their charge. Questions about where this place was or where Seongbuk District went had already been clearly wiped from their minds.

Only thoughts of fighting remained.

{Kiiiieek!}

Crunch!

The moment the Berserkers dived between the monsters, black blood began to fall like heavy rain. It was the Berserker’s one-sided slaughter. The results were obvious considering the Berserkers possessed 2, 3-star stats while the monsters normally had 1-star

stats and mid-bosses had 2-star stats, same as before.

Choi Hyuk was forging a highway between the monsters. Only slashing sideways. Left to right, right to left, he didn't need any technique. He simply extended his Karma Blade and, like a car windshield wiper wiping away raindrops, he erased the monsters. Choi Hyuk's speed was too fast for the monsters to react.

He only thought of one thing as he ran.

'Flaming Devil... How should I kill it?'

In his heart, he wanted to first start by ripping it apart. However, if he ripped it apart, wouldn't it simply die like that? It was quite the dilemma.

Also, when the Flaming Devil saw Choi Hyuk running crazily towards him, it revealed its flaming fangs and-

Started to run away.

'Huh?'

Choi Hyuk was momentarily stunned to the point of forgetting to run. A monster fled? Monsters normally considered intelligent beings as being their absolute enemies and showed endless hostility towards them. A monster like that fled? Before fighting? He had never imagined something like this.

‘A monster? Fled?’

That moment, the counterattack of the monsters began.

“Huh?”

A Berserker, who was charging vigorously, suddenly blankly turned around. This was unbelievable. No matter how outstanding their skills were, they couldn’t drop their guard for even 0.1 seconds when fighting against monsters. But for him to blankly turn around during a battle?

Screech!

It was unsurprising for a crook’s claw to rip his cheek. Fortunately, its opponent had an overwhelming Endurance stat and was able to avoid a fatal blow, although there was nothing that could be done about the bleeding from the wound on his cheek. However, it seemed that he didn’t care. He absentmindedly said,

“Yoonseo?”

It was his dead daughter’s name.

These events were happening everywhere. Some foolishly stopped, while others went into a greater frenzy and jumped into the horde of monsters. The smallest team of Berserkers, the

‘troops’, were starting to collapse.

The unhesitant charge of the Berserkers slowed and instead, the spirited monsters intently pressed forward.

Even Choi Hyuk heard a very unpleasant sound.

{Aaaack!!}

His mother’s screams.

“… So it’s like that.”

Choi Hyuk was able to instantly realize this was all a hallucination. His ‘Mind’s Eye’ allowed him to look into the truth. His gaze turned towards the ‘eyeless observers’ that were spectating the fight. They possessed the ability to manipulate minds. From the start, he was able to know that they were called ‘eyeless observers’ because they had personally told him.

Their tactic was simple. Reading their opponents’ minds as they pleased, and then showing them auditory or visual hallucinations that left the greatest emotional impact on them. They made their enemies waver while the monsters became more organized.

‘Flame-Rain said it. That they were going to test my control and commanding abilities.”

Only now did he somewhat understand what those words meant. Weren't the Berserkers fighting a dogfight, having lost their charging formation?

'Well... They can fight their own battles.'

However, Choi Hyuk didn't care. Baek Seoin or Ryu Hyunsung would resolve these problems on their own.

It was always like this. Choi Hyuk paid no attention to the Berserkers' tactics. He simply fought at the very front. He only requested one thing from the Berserkers. The ability to survive any brutal battle. If they were Berserkers, they would survive.

As a sovereign, he promised them endless victories, not their survival. Choi Hyuk walked his own path. Those who could follow without being left behind were Berserkers.

Choi Hyuk once again concentrated on himself. He slowly turned his gaze and looked at the Flaming Devil. It fleeing was probably the eyeless observers' trap. They planned to draw Choi Hyuk, who looked the strongest, deeper so that they could finish him in an instant. As he speculated all of this, Choi Hyuk gazed at the Flaming Devil.

{Aack!}

His ears continued to ring with his mother's desperate screams, and the mouth of the Flaming Devil, the villain that killed his

mother, distorted strangely as it looked at Choi Hyuk. It was definitely mocking him.

Choi Hyuk saw this and his firm mouth gave way.

Screech!

The Predator's Blade shook. It screeched as it scratched the ground.

Even though he knew the monsters' intentions, it changed nothing. A heat that seemed to burst his heart and melt his head surged from his body.

'You used my mom?'

Rage surged throughout his body. This was more provoking than his hearing being manipulated.

"Okay. Try to stop me."

Crack.

The sound of a sword being crushed sounded out from Choi Hyuk's hand.

Thud!

Choi Hyuk kicked off the ground. He shot forward in a straight line. Towards the Flaming Devil that was mocking him. That moment, Choi Hyuk decided how he would kill it.

'I'll first burn your face.'

When Choi Hyuk chased it further in, the monsters, as if waiting, jumped him at once.

Screech!

Choi Hyuk's Karma Heart pulsated like an engine. His Karma Blade, which was as dark as the depths of the ocean, extended a few meters and sliced the monsters.

Black rain fell.

{Aaahck!}

The more he advanced, the more his mother's screams stung his ears. Even though he knew it was a hallucination, his heart thumped crazily.

At a certain point, while the Flaming Devil was fleeing for its life, and monsters blocked his path, something flew and stabbed towards Choi Hyuk.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk's body was pushed back for the first time.

"What... are these bastards?"

They were four-legged monsters with long, flexible bodies. When they opened their mouths, their spine would shoot out like a spear from within their bodies and strike Choi Hyuk's body.

Clang! Clash!

Like bees and their stingers, this was a technique they could only use once in their life. At some point, these monsters surrounded Choi Hyuk and were crazily shooting their spines at him.

Crash! Clash!

Their spines, filled with their life, were fast and strong so it was hard to block them with his Karma Blade. If he blocked two or three, the rest would fly and stab into his body. His Karma Barrier swayed as if it would break at any moment. The spines battered away, giving him no time to come to his senses.

{Kueek!}

{Keuuk!}

The sounds of them vomiting their spines covered his surroundings like a waterfall.

Danger? Yet, it wasn't to the point of being dangerous. It would take some time, but if he handled it calmly, he would be able to end it without overworking himself. However-

"Kurararah Keuk!"

Choi Hyuk saw the Flaming Devil that had stopped fleeing and was mocking him.

Choi Hyuk's lips opened. He definitely needed to burn it to death. Choi Hyuk activated the second strongest skill among the three most powerful skills he possessed. It was so difficult that he wasn't able to copy it now, even with his 4-star stats. It was one of the skills he had where he had no choice but to 'activate it automatically' while consuming a lot of karma.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

What was interesting was that these skills were all closely related to the 'Flame Wing tribe's Karma Heart'. The instant he wished to activate the skill, his Karma Heart beat explosively. Its pressure was strong enough that, if he didn't train to make his Karma Heart stronger every day, it may have actually burst his Karma Heart. At a certain moment, after Choi Hyuk's karma had been forcefully drawn into his Karma Heart and compressed again and again,

Blaze!

Flames erupted upwards.

These flames, that were hotter and more intense than those who chose the ‘Blaze’ karma trait, scattered from Choi Hyuk’s body like feathers.

“Flaming Wing Dance!”

The moment he said the skill name.

Blaze!

The whole world was covered in flames. Like flowers blooming, the feathers sprouted, and like wings spreading, the skin of the spine-throwing monsters surrounding him and the monsters that blocked his path all burst into flames.

The flames that sprouted everywhere returned Choi Hyuk again. The flames covered Choi Hyuk’s body and, along with his breathing, melted, fogging up his sword.

{Flaming Wing Dance}

The battle technique of the Flame Wing tribe. Using the ‘Flame Wing tribe’s Karma Heart’, you change the nature of your karma into an intense blaze. On activation, it creates a

powerful flaming storm in your surroundings. It will improve your physical abilities for a limited time and will allow you to use techniques utilizing the blaze karma. Suitable for area attacks, and Stamina consumption is great.

It was originally a top-level skill only those at the 5-star level could use. Someone supplied a deteriorated version so that those at the lower levels could use it.

Choi Hyuk's body disappeared instantly, only to appear in front of the Flaming Devil with a blaze.

The Flaming Devil seemed to be suffering from the heat surrounding it. Choi Hyuk grabbed its throat with his left hand. Sizzle. The sound of meat cooking was heard. The devil writhed its body in pain.

Choi Hyuk smiled. It was a pleasant moment.

"You've... never been burned before, have you?"

He smiled innocently as he sliced off its toes with the red-hot Predator's Blade.

Blaze!

A transparent, clear flame sprouted from each of its sliced toes. It was different from the thick, dark flames that covered the Flaming

Devil. A high-level technique that even Choi Hyuk, with his 4-star stats, couldn't control himself. The flames of a 3-star rank monster were helpless against it. Fire swallowed fire.

{Kuaaah!}

The devil let out a desperate cry.

"I'm curious. Will there even be ashes left?"

As he said this, Choi Hyuk reached out and grabbed the Flaming Devil's face.

Chapter 64: Demon King (5)

From the outside, the dome that covered Seongbuk District was opaque, but from the inside, it was transparent. Of course, this place looked to be from outer space instead of Seongbuk District, but the sky they saw outside the dome was still the Earth's sky.

It was currently dusk.

Flames spread from Choi Hyuk's hand as though it would burn the whole world.

{Kiiiiaahh!}

The cries of the devil, caught by Choi Hyuk, rang out continuously.

The pitiful devil used to be the nightmare of the Seongbuk District awakenees in the past. The Flaming Devil that melted cement and steel with its endless flames. The devil that was narrowly held back through Saintess Choi Miyeon's death.

However, the devil was currently crying. Its face, grasped by Choi Hyuk, had become distorted with burns.

Its cries were desperate, similar to the pleading of a person in tears. No human thought that a monster that was filled with killing intent could cry like this.

“Does it hurt? Does this hurt?”

Yet, Choi Hyuk felt its cries were insufficient. The monster that killed his mother, the monster that snickered as he heard his mother’s cries, for a monster like that to cry after this much... Wasn’t this boring to the point of being absurd?

“You can’t be like this.”

As Choi Hyuk let go, its face, where the eyes, nose, and mouth had melted together, was revealed. The devil tried to open its mouth to scream, but it wasn’t able to let out a proper cry as its upper and lower lips had merged together. The sound of air escaping and its cry reverberating from its throat mixed together to sound like the winds from hell.

Shrriiieek, Guahhh!

<Flaming Wing Dance> was still activated. Other monsters didn’t dare approach due to the flame-like feathers fluttering around his body.

“There’s still a lot left.”

Choi Hyuk grabbed the devil’s leg with his left hand. Its leg burned.

{Krrrr!}

Unable to properly scream due to its burning mouth, the devil shrunk in fright. Choi Hyuk dragged it by its leg as if dragging a corpse.

Every step Choi Hyuk took would be engulfed in flames, and the even monsters that were wary from afar became enwrapped in the flames, rolling on the ground before turning to ash. In an area filled with broken machines, screams sporadically cut off and only the suppressed cries of the devil weakly continued. A strange stillness.

The sound of the devil being dragged could be heard clearly.

Thunk, thunk, thud!

The devil, which was being dragged while head-butting against piles of machines, had, at some point, become sprawled on the ground. The leg Choi Hyuk grabbed had burned and cut off. The devil was unable to endure the pain as its body flailed around on the ground.

“What the… it cut off?”

Choi Hyuk, with an unimpressed look, rubbed his hand that had turned black with ash and grabbed another leg. His steps were walking towards the ‘eyeless observers’.

Choi Hyuk wanted to hear it. A collaborative song of the Flaming

Devil and their screams.

"Now, now. I'll be gentle so endure for a bit longer."

To prevent the Flaming Devil from becoming dull to the pain, Choi Hyuk lowered the heat. Thunk, Thunk. The Flaming Devil, which was being dragged while striking into machines, felt a momentary coolness... and learned the unfamiliar emotions of despair and fear.

A purple color swelled up between the red sun like veins.

The Berserkers fell into a state of madness over the hallucinations and mental stimulation created by the 'eyeless observers'.

The Berserkers' characteristic boundary, which narrowly hovered between order and disorder, had disappeared, and only disorder remained. There were some who forgot themselves in the voices of their loved ones, while others jumped in after seeing hallucinations, yet, the result was the same. It was madness. The 'eyeless observers' made the Berserkers emotional, however, the emotions the majority of them possessed were only rage, despair and a madness mixed with spasmodic bursts of pleasure. The Berserkers, who were unable to resist the eyeless observers' mental attacks, simply fell into a state of madness.

However, the circumstances were the same for the Berserkers

who had resisted the mental attacks. Even though they understood the monsters' tricks, they didn't care. They didn't attempt to stay calm. They didn't resist and left their bodies to fall into the madness guided by the monsters.

Why?

"Ha. Ha. Haha..."

Dispirited laughter erupted out.

The moment they lost the people dearest to them, the fear, cowardice, and longing from that day, all turned into hallucinations created by the monsters. Similar the darkness they felt the moment they were about to fall asleep and the confusion they felt when their eyes opened in the morning, the Berserkers suddenly realized. The dullness of their life that continued since that day. They who lived in a partly dream-like state after leaving everything that was beautiful behind. They who lived simply because they hadn't died. The feeling of futility in their chests that couldn't be sated after drinking rivers of blood and consuming mountains of flesh.

And the rage they felt towards the monster bastards that used these memories.

Enlightenment? Strategy, tactics?

At this moment, the majority of the Berserkers had the same

thought.

‘’Fuck that!’

“Keaahhhhh!!”

{Keulalalh!}

Monsters and Berserkers tangled together. Who was the monster, and who was the human? They were indistinguishable. Slicing with swords, ripping bones with their hands, tearing off veins and smashing heads… The Berserkers charged at the same time. Whether the monsters responded systematically or not, whether they died or not, until all the monsters were dead, until the Berserkers’ limbs were smashed apart and they died, they would restlessly press forward.

They thought,

‘Whether you die or I die, I just wish for everything to die.’

Of course, there were a few who maintained their senses.

Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman were like that.

“Come to your senses!”

Unable to communicate. Lee Jinhee shouted as she looked at the Berserkers who scattered like tiger moths and died along with the monsters. Even if she stopped those who were running out, it would only be for an instant. Lee Jinhee felt a thorough helplessness. There was no way to stop them.

“If you continue like this, you’ll die! You crazy bastards!!!”

She shouted until her voice was hoarse, but it was useless.

Lee Jinhee looked around her. She looked for a commander who could calm this situation. Ryu Hyunsung and Baek Seoin. However, even they weren’t in their right minds.

Ryu Hyunsung was a Berserker who ran out faster than anyone. The eyeless observers brought him panic and fear. Thus, he was unable to stop.

Although no one knew this, he had a vulnerable mind. He was weak to stress and had no hostility. He was like this since young. So, even though he possessed better sword skills than anyone else, he wasn’t selected as an Olympic athlete. ‘He’s used for practice. He doesn’t have the temperament of a victor.’ That was what his coach would always say, and it was also something Ryu Hyunsung felt in his bones.

Whenever he stood in official competitions which were more bloodthirsty than hostile, he was unable to display even half of his abilities after succumbing under pressure.

That was how he lost all his chances to participate and returned to campus. Ryu Hyunsung spent his time lazily sleeping, flopped on his desk, during lectures. Though it was self-deprecating, perhaps it was because he was naturally meek, but a listless peace wasn't bad. However, when he woke up from his nap, what he saw were the blood and flesh of other students. Everything changed that day.

"Euaahhh!"

Ryu Hyunsung wanted to live. He wanted to survive. Because he did, he hid all his fear, astonishment and vulnerability deep into his heart. He jumped into terror and wielded his sword more viciously than anyone. Until that horrible feeling dulled.

Now, Ryu Hyunsung endured vicious fights better than anyone and possessed murderous intent. However, that didn't mean his true nature had completely disappeared. He still had nightmares every night. He couldn't sleep without his sword, and because he wielded his sword in his sleep, he couldn't sleep with anyone.

The 'eyeless observers' brought out the loathing that seeped out when he was asleep. As someone who possessed the 'Mind's Eye' trait, he was able to quickly resist it, but fear and astonishment couldn't be easily repressed once released. There only one solution. Like before. He would have to jump into that fear and endure. Until his sensitive senses dulled.

Ryu Hyunsung threw out his responsibilities as a commander and began to run amuck amongst the monsters. His unmatched precise and exquisite sword skills shone with murderous ferocity.

Lee Jinhee sighed.

“Ryu hyung doesn’t look good… Baek hyung? What about Baek hyung?”

The only person she could believe in was Baek Seoin.

Baek Seoin possessed both ‘Intuition’ and ‘Mind’s Eye’. As expected, he wasn’t in a state of madness like the other Berserkers. However, he didn’t have the ability to control this situation.

He was in a state of listlessness.

“Baek hyung! Do something!”

Lee Jinhee shouted hurriedly, but Baek Seoin slowly shook his head.

“What can we do… We can’t stop this. We already remembered.”

Then, as if he suddenly remembered something, he placed his hands over his eyes and sighed.

“Haa… Fuck…. Fuck this…”

The depression he usually felt when he was alone came up and

wouldn’t die down.

“What do you mean there’s nothing we can do!”

Lee Jinhee became sick of this. How was it that all her supposed comrades weren’t of their right mind? Her head ached when she saw these mad Berserkers ripping into the monsters.

‘I hate this. I hate it.’

However, she couldn’t continue hating it forever.

“Haa… What do I do about Youngjin.”

It was because she knew his circumstances better than anyone else. Chu Youngjin was literally shedding blood tears. She wasn’t sure how he was using his karma, but the veins in his eyes had popped, and blood mixed with his tears. There was no doubt he was hearing the screams of Lee Hyejin, his lover.

When she knew the reason why he couldn’t help but fall into a state of madness, she was distressed and heartbroken. Of course, Lee Jinhee also heard the voices she hated the most. However, she only felt disgusted, it wasn’t to the point of driving her mad. Either way, she didn’t lose anyone dear to her in this mess. Hadn’t she left her friends and family behind to come to Seoul? Although it did seem that some of her parkour friends had died… she was only sad. It didn’t drive her mad. Instead, she had actually gained good friends like Choi Hyuk, Chu Youngjin, and Baek Seoin after that

day.

Lee Jinhee saw Alexei wielding his sword with sunken eyes.

“Lyosha! Lyosha! Come back! Hey! Can’t you hear me?! Lyosha!”

If it was any other day, he would have come wagging his tail, but as if he couldn’t hear her, he didn’t even look back. He disappeared amongst the monsters.

Lee Jinhee, who was jumping up and down unable to do anything, spotted someone who still had his senses. It was Guardian Bae Jinman.

He tried his best to bring the Berserkers back to their senses. However, it was no use. Even when he granted a sense of security and solidarity with his ‘Get up!’, their eyes would momentarily return to normal before falling into a state of madness again. If he poured all his strength, he may be able to return one or two people to normal, but that would be useless. Also, it was difficult for Bae Jinman to approach fierce battles. Eventually, Bae Jinman was barely taking care of the Berserkers who had become mad and were injuring themselves.

Nonetheless, the madness was fierce. The Berserkers were wiping away the monsters with incredible vigor. However, unnecessary losses were just as large. Bae Jinman looked at the casualties in regret, but there was nothing he could do.

Lee Jinhee thought of something good when she saw him. She abruptly grabbed his hand.

“Guardian!”

“Yes?”

“I have a good plan! Follow me!”

The place Lee Jinhee dragged Bae Jinman to was in front of Baek Seoin. Baek Seoin was still depressed and listless.

“Baek hyung! I’m going to turn you back to normal. As long as you regain your senses, you can do something.”

Bae Jinman gazed at Baek Seoin. Baek Seoin was the one who actually led the Berserkers instead of Choi Hyuk, who wasn’t interested in politics. Baek Seoin, who was thoughtful, meticulous, and cheerful, was emitting a depression and listlessness he didn’t show normally in their entirety.

He had replied to Lee Jinhee before, but he had further weakened during this time. Even when Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman came close, he didn’t take notice of them. Indeed, in a hellish battlefield where even normal people would become crazy, there was no way Baek Seoin, who suffered from depression, could endure.

Bae Jinmen felt pained. There was no one who didn’t harbor some sort of hell after that day. And that hell manifested here and

now. It was regrettable. Because of this, he wasn't confident.

"... I don't know if I can succeed with my power. Director Baek is an expert of the Mind's Eye trait... He had already resisted the eyeless observers' tricks. The reason why he's like this now is solely because of his depression..."

The only thing the eyeless observed did was pull the trigger. Everything else was done by himself. So Bae Jinman wasn't confident in being able to cut the shackles of Baek Seoin's depression.

Rather than pouring his strength into Baek Seoin, it was better to take care of the Berserkers who were injuring themselves. Since Baek Seoin was quiet.

However, Lee Jinhee refuted.

"No. There's still a chance. Baek hyung isn't mad like the others!"

"Now that I look at it..."

Fights erupted everywhere. Those Berserkers, who were affected, became mad and fought the monsters or would injure themselves. However, Baek Seoin was simply standing absentmindedly.

Lee Jinhee said,

“His Intuition is activating right now. Even now, he still wants to live! There’s no doubt he’s standing still since it will be life-threatening if he wounds himself or if he jumps towards the monsters! So his survival instincts and his self-destructive instincts are fighting! If you help him a little, you can make it so that his survival instincts win!”

At those words, Bae Jinman resolved himself. He poured his karma, which was filled with life energy, directly into Baek Seoin. It seemed to be of no use for a while. Baek Seoin simply stood absentmindedly. However, when Bae Jinman increased his strength, there was an effect.

“Haa…”

Baek Seoin let out a big sigh. He raised his shoulders and then let them fall.

He shook his head and blinked his eyes. He slowly met Bae Jinman and Lee Jinhee’s gazes and rapped Lee Jinhee’s head.

He grumbled,

“Hey. What do you mean ‘Even now, he still wants to live?’… If you say it like that, it makes me look bad.”

Lee Jinhee rubbed the place she was hit and smiled brightly. Baek Seoin had returned to normal.

“So what!”

She shouted before giving him a tight hug. In this state, she asked,

“But what do we do now? If things stay like this, all the Berserkers will die.”

Baek Seoin patted her back as he looked at the situation. In his eyes, it didn’t look like they would all die. Since Berserkers were still strong. Still, it seemed around half would die.

‘It’ll be difficult if that happens.’

Baek Seoin said to Bae Jinman.

“It seems we’ll need your power.”

Bae Jinman expressed his disapproval.

“Maybe if there were one or two… If I use my power in a large area, it won’t work.”

Baek Seoin nodded. Then he raised his palm and flipped it over.

“That’s why we do the opposite.”

“Opposite?”

“Yes. I understand now that I’ve experienced it. This isn’t something we can stop. Instead, it is better if we blow it up even more. Make them madder. Detonate it so that they kill the other side before they die.”

“Haa?”

“Huu…”

Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman’s jaws dropped at his extreme suggestion. Baek Seoin smiled brightly and said,

“Those who seek death will live~”

Chapter 65: Demon King (6)

“But the guardian is a healer?”

Lee Jinhee raised a question. As a healer, Bae Jinman’s karma was fixed at the ‘Heal’ trait. Like how the karma trait shop didn’t sell the ‘Heal’ trait, Bae Jinman couldn’t change his karma trait as well. He would improve their state simply by using his trait. So how would Bae Jinman make the Berserkers even madder?

However, Baek Seoin only stared at Bae Jinman as if he couldn’t hear Lee Jinhee’s question. Bae Jinman rubbed his chin and pondered for a moment before replying.

“… I’ll try it.”

“What? You can do it?”

Lee Jinhee asked in surprise. However, this time Bae Jinman was in deep thought and didn’t reply. Instead, Baek Seoin replied for him.

“There’s only a paper-thin margin between medicine and poison. They both have similarities in their influence on the body. Depending on when or how you use it, poison can turn into medicine and medicine into poison… I thought that healing and buffs were the same.”

“Really?”

Lee Jinhee, who had only believed that the more medicine she ate, the healthier she would get, widened her eyes at this new information.

At this time, Bae Jinman finished conceiving a plan. He released his karma with a changed version of ‘Get Up’. Increase vitality, enhance the mind, and strengthen sympathy. Bae Jinman especially worked hard on ‘strengthen sympathy’.

Normally, it would be a useful buff, however, now it would add oil to the flames known as madness. Increase vitality would support the Stamina they had consumed due to madness, and enhance the mind would make those who had fallen into a state of futility and numbness become even more intensely enraged and sorrowful. Also, above all, ‘strengthen sympathy’ would make the Berserkers sympathize with each other’s pain and rage. Simply put, it made all the Berserkers clearly sense each other’s pain. Like how Jung Minji felt...

Berserkers, who were burdened with their own pain, were flooded with the indiscriminate pain of others.

The result was a more severe madness.

The sudden change came remarkably. Even Choi Hyuk, who was fighting by himself in the distance, could sense this change.

The noise of the battlefield. The rhythm had changed. A rain shower had turned into a hail storm. Tennis balls grew to

baseballs. The formation of monsters, that would occasionally endure or occasionally get penetrated, started shatter like glass.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head. Due to the Berserkers, the pressure, from the countless number of monsters that blocked his way, lessened.

He now didn't need to be concerned with the battlefield and could fight the boss to his heart's content.

"Then, is it my turn now?"

With the monsters' commanders, the 'eyeless observers', in front of him, Choi Hyuk slowly stretched his shoulders. He threw the Flaming Devil in a corner. The Flaming Devil, whose other leg had burned off on the way here, was pitifully writhing on the ground.

There were only trails of flame, and the ashes of the monsters that had been burnt black, behind him.

He pretended to be composed, but he didn't find his current situation very lax. 'Flaming Wing Dance' was a skill that consumed a lot of Stamina, and Choi Hyuk's Stamina was only at 3-star with 366 (3★) points. It was very low compared to his Power, Speed, Control, and Retribution which were all over 4-star, meaning he couldn't maintain Flaming Wing Dance for a long time.

"Hooo..."

He let out a big breath and drank down a special karma recovery potion in one shot.

“Keu… It’s not enough to send a message to my liver.”

This was a temporary method… And he obtained the strength to fight once more.

The moment he tossed the empty bottle behind him.

Blaze!

Flames violently erupted once again.

In front of him were around 100 eyeless observers. Each one was stronger than the Wyvern of Destruction. They were 4-star rank monsters. The real enemy of the mission this time wasn’t the hundreds of thousands of monsters but the hundred eyeless observers.

{Kyahh!}

Feeling threatened, the eyeless observers let out a cry.

“You’re too late.”

By the time they cried, Chio Hyuk’s sword had already sliced

through the front most monster.

A geyser of flames.

The flames that sprouted from its wounded chest spread to its four limbs and its face. The eyeless observer twisted its body, and its long flesh that covered its eye brilliantly dispersed as it burned.

As expected of the Flaming Wing Dance that possessed power beyond that of 4-stars. It burned up an observer with a single strike. Yet, Choi Hyuk's expression was serious.

'As expected, wide area damage doesn't work.'

Normal monsters would turn to ash once they came into contact with the flames he emitted. Without wielding his sword, the majority of monsters would burn to ash and disappear.

However, the eyeless observers were different.

Tssss...

{Kii.}

Although it looked like it was burnt, he wasn't able to completely burn it before the flames died out. The burn wounds quickly recovered. To properly burn them, he would have to cut each one with his sword, but he couldn't endure that with his Stamina.

It wasn't easy. When Choi Hyuk thought this, a smile hung on his lips.

"Yeah. It needs to be like this."

Pssft-

Choi Hyuk immediately gave up on the Flaming Wing Dance. The flames that had engulfed his body died down. The Flaming Wing Dance was an area attack; it wasn't very effective in this situation where he had to kill each one individually.

As the flames died down, the pitch-black sword that shined within, the Predator's Blade, was revealed.

{Tyrannical Predator's Blade}

Rank: B (Unique, Growth-type)

Sharp and sturdy. The more blood it absorbs of strong foes, the stronger it will get. It has almost reached the limit to its growth.

Blood Drain: Absorbs the blood of enemies to replenish its owner's karma and heal their wounds. Able to absorb 1L of blood per second.

*Second Blade: Sacrifice the Evolution stat to imbue karma into the blade. No extra karma consumption.

Durability: 98,573/100,000

Evolution: 11/1,000

The driving force behind how he was able to endure up until now with only 3-star Stamina was due to the Predator's Blade. He was able to recover small amounts of Stamina with its absorption ability and reduce his karma consumption with its outstanding cutting force.

The Predator's Blade had evolved once more during this time. Since it was a B rank weapon, if enough force was added, it was able to penetrate through 4-star Endurance. On top of that, if he reinforced its cutting force with the Second Blade, it was able to rip through most protective skills.

"Second Blade."

{Evolution reduced from "11" to "6"}

Choi Hyuk resolutely invested its Evolution stat to activate its Second Blade.

Swish.

A frightening sound of an enormous snake slithering. The Predator's Blade was imbued with black karma. It was a different color from Choi Hyuk's deep blue karma. It was a Karma Blade

that the Predator's Blade created itself.

"Let's fight."

Choi Hyuk began to only utilize his karma inside his body. He used the 'karma pathways' that extended to all four limbs from his dantian, where the Karma Heart was located. The heart and the 'karma pathways' became new muscles and tendons for Choi Hyuk and moved his body faster and stronger.

This was how Choi Hyuk was able to minimize his Stamina consumption.

{Kuahh!}

The eyeless observers swung their hands at Choi Hyuk. Their hands were especially large. They were about three times as large as a person's head. Their skin was white like limestone, and they possessed tough claws.

Choi Hyuk walked naturally as he avoided their attacks and cut one.

"One."

Choi Hyuk's movements became more and more efficient and simple.

He looked at his opponent's next step and their shoulders. He stepped forward before his opponent took another step and slashed out.

"Two."

As their skin, which was as white as limestone, was cut, their sticky blood, which was as black as oil, burst out.

{Kekiehhh!!}

"Three."

Choi Hyuk's eyes tinged blue. Using his right foot as a pivot, he rotated his body to evade an attack from his blind spot. Using the momentum of his evasion, he slashed out again.

"Four... No, three-and-a-half."

It was a bit shallow. It was difficult to kill them while maintaining his maneuverability. He couldn't stab them or block their attacks. He used his 'Mind's Eye' to find the shortest path for his Karma Blade to traverse between the monsters.

Swish! Swish! Slice! Slice!

As if he were a child who was hiking while swinging a wooden stick, Choi Hyuk simply walked as the eyeless observers were

critically wounded and fell to the ground. Their black blood stained their white skin.

They were all 4-star monsters. However, they weren't a match for him.

There were cases where martial artists with similar physical abilities would knock each other out with one blow. Precise strikes had that sort of power. Choi Hyuk had much higher karma stats than normal eyeless observers. They were in the early stage of 4-star while he was in the mid-late stage. If Choi Hyuk's senses, which allowed him to hit precise strikes, were added on top of that, it was difficult for even 4-star monsters to endure a single sword. Since this wasn't a game, if a sword pierced through, and if it was a fatal area, no matter how strong the opponent was, it would end with a single sword.

Also, perhaps it was because they possessed a special mental attack ability, but the Endurance and Recovery stats of the eyeless observers were low. Being Choi Hyuk's opponents, this was a fatal weakness.

{Kiiyahhhh!}

As more than thirty observers fell at Choi Hyuk's hand, the largest monster at the back, the king of the observers, wailed. The mood abruptly changed.

"Hmm?"

Choi Hyuk, who was wielding his sword in a trance, halted.

All the observers followed their king and wailed.

{Keahhh!}

Following their king that seemed to have shouted a command, their long, tattered skin, which covered their eyes like torn fabric, molted. Single eyes, red as blood, were revealed.

Their sclerae were red, and their pupils were redder. Their eyes rolled and all stared at Choi Hyuk at the same time.

Kiiiing!

Choi Hyuk felt dizzy.

‘Would you look at that.’

Their ferocious karma shot out of their eyes, through the air, and into Choi Hyuk’s head. Around 70 observers carried out this simultaneous mental attack.

Choi Hyuk smiled.

‘You want to enter my mind?’

His whole body tinged blue. His karma trait went beyond ‘Mind’s Eye’ and reached ‘Identical Mind’, which could engage with anything. It tightly wrapped around the observers’ karma, preventing them from escaping.

‘Although you can enter whenever you want, you can’t leave.’

His mind boiled. The observers’ ferocious karma ran amok inside his head. However-

‘There is something worse inside.’

Choi Hyuk recalled.

The moment his mother died.

He recalled.

The {You have no choice. Get angry. Kill. Only then can you kill.} message from those bastards.

And… the delight he felt when he fought and killed his opponents.

Like a monitor screen that exploded with a blast, as if a pitch-darkness lurked inside, Choi Hyuk’s vision was blown away. His insides, beginning with his stomach, boiled black. It surged. Madness filled his head and swallowed his brain. He felt an

unbearable thirst. He didn’t endure it.

There was no need to.

{Kiyaahhhh!}

As if they saw something, the observers screamed. Black blood flowed from their red eyes.

Kiiing!

Dark red blood dripped from Choi Hyuk’s nose. However, the smile on his lips didn’t fade.

He mumbled.

“Get angry…”

“Get angry…”

He mumbled as he stepped forward. While the observers were unable to move, crying bloody tears, Choi Hyuk slowly tottered forward.

“Kill.”

He raised his sword.

“Only then can you kill.”

His sword stabbed out.

{Kekk… kekk…}

One observer’s body trembled before collapsing.

“Get angry…”

Choi Hyuk moved towards his next target. His mind had already flown away. He couldn’t see properly. Since it wasn’t possible to block the mental attack of 70 observers. Choi Hyuk’s mind with greater rage instead of blocking their attack. With the despair he felt when his mother, who was his only sanctuary, died, and the rage he had towards the ones who created this game. With his cruel instinct he had avoided his whole life, his love of fighting.

The observers invaded his mind to destroy and control it, but the place they invaded was already hell. They weren’t able to escape due to Choi Hyuk’s karma, and they could only sorrowfully scream.

“Ah…”

Choi Hyuk, who was staggering forward, abruptly changed his direction and grabbed the Flaming Devil.

{Kuaahhh!!}

{Kiyahhh!!}

The screams of the devil and the observers mixed together terrifyingly.

Choi Hyuk dragged the devil by its throat as he stabbed each observer that was pleading due to pain.

“How good to hear… good to hear… hehe.”

Choi Hyuk, who had already lost his reasoning, simply enjoyed their screams. He dragged the Flaming Devil as he walked towards the observers, which were screaming sweetly, and stabbed them with his sword.

As if harvesting screaming reeds, he stabbed, cut, and then repeated. White corpses lay on the ground, flowing with black blood.

The large-bodied king of the observers was no exception. They may have had a chance if they had attacked him physically instead. Unfortunately, they had invaded Choi Hyuk’s mind, which was a hellhole, and futilely lost their lives, suffering in pain.

“Ah… Is it over?”

Only after he killed the king of the observers, and popped out and threw the Flaming Devil's head did Choi Hyuk return to his senses.

> {Obtained the Dimensional Isolation Release Code. Releasing the isolated dimension.}

The message was heard as if from a dream, and the dome that covered the sky faded away.

Chapter 66: Demon King's Leadership

The transparent dome, that covered the sky, faded as if melting away. It was night.

The monsters, which made their minds act violently, had all died. The moment he realized they had all died, almost like a flip of a switch, Choi Hyuk came to his senses. Choi Hyuk, who had regained his senses, looked inwardly at the madness inside him.

His mind was blank after burning all the monsters that attacked him. Now his madness seemed to be fueled by itself.

'Kill.'

'Kill more.'

But Choi Hyuk shook his head.

'This much is enough.'

Choi Hyuk swallowed down his ferocious madness and buried it deep within his stomach. His madness, like a well-trained beast, returned to where it resided. It wasn't able to beat Choi Hyuk. 'Patience'. This was what Choi Hyuk lived his whole life with.

He was as confident in his talent for fighting as he was in his talent for patience.

… It was also the only inheritance his mother had left him.

{Dimensional isolation released. Successfully completed dimensional transmission. Obtained the inheritance of a ruined civilization. Inspecting… Discovered a B rank Artificial Intelligence. Nothing else is of value. Provided 10,000 Mission Points as a reward.}

The message appeared. It wasn't a message he was expecting.

"… Artificial Intelligence?"

He held his forehead.

'Ah, whatever. I don't care.'

He was too dizzy to think about it now, and his ears rung with the sounds of cicadas.

"What about the message that says I succeeded in the Sovereign Mission…?"

Whether it had come up, but he had yet to see it, or if it hadn't ended… Now that he thought about it, it seemed like the king of observers said something before it died. 'It's not… the end…' was

it? Whatever. His memories weren't clear.

No, from the start, when did monsters even talk?

Choi Hyuk shook his head and looked around.

It seemed the Berserkers' fight had ended slightly earlier than his own. The field, which was filled with broken machines, was littered with ripped and sliced monster corpses. The Berserkers were scattered throughout.

The Berserkers succeeded in destroying the monsters before destroying themselves, but their Stamina had hit rock-bottom. Although there were still some remnants of the madness, because there wasn't enough energy to fuel that madness, it was peaceful. They were even starting to get hungry. The Berserkers were spread out. Some were gathered in groups, chatting with each other, whilst others were sitting absentmindedly, or even chewing on something. Then, one by one, they looked up to watch the dimensional isolation wall melt away. They were currently in an alien area with no streetlights. The Earth's sky they saw from here was very dark as countless stars shined.

And there were people spectating this from outside.

Later on, when people talked about this event, they usually started with this moment.

How unfamiliar the area they saw when the dimensional

isolation wall faded away was. That place, which had no buildings, random hills, no dirt or asphalt, and looked like a planet piled with broken machines and monster corpses. How terrifying it was to see the Berserker scattered however they wanted on the dark ground. They always described this in great detail.

The Berserkers' appearance was like the Asgardian gods who had overcome collapse.

While they all captivated by this overwhelming scene, a change occurred.

A red fog spread from the dead observer corpses. At first, it was faint, almost indiscernible. The red fog crawled low on the ground as it spread. Then, when it met other monster corpses, it would 'devour them' and grow.

At some point, the red fog grew at a terrifying rate. By the time they thought, 'Huh? What's that?' the red fog had already devoured its surrounding. There were hundreds of thousands of monster corpses it could devour. As soon as it started to grow, the whole area had become engulfed in the red fog.

"What is this...?"

The ones, who thought it was poison and were taken back, tilted their heads when they didn't feel anything wrong. It was somehow frightening. Some sort of karma was melted into the fog. They felt both an ominous feeling and feeling of relief simultaneously.

Then, not long after.

“It’s slowly disappearing!”

Someone shouted. It was as he said. No, to be exact, it wasn’t disappearing but rather it was being absorbed through their mouths and noses. The process was so quick that the awakenees couldn’t see it.

“… What was it?”

Like how it suddenly appeared, the red fog suddenly disappeared as well. It felt like a hallucination as no traces of it remained.

Of course, it wasn’t as if everyone was simply tilting their heads.

“Haa… Damn. This is troublesome…”

Baek Seoin shook his head.

“We finally finished and now this…”

Baek Seoin had seen the identity of the red fog with his Mind’s Eye and blocked it. It was a simple, yet powerful curse left by the observers. It was a curse which dumbed their patience and judgment, and instead, maximized their impulses.

“Did they wait for this opportunity?”

If there were only Berserkers present, it would have been fine. First of all, the Berserkers who possessed the Mind’s Eye trait would have been able to resist it, and those who couldn’t wouldn’t have been a problem either. Berserkers had overcome countless life-or-death situations together. Because they subconsciously differentiated between friend or foe, they wouldn’t fight their comrades simply because they were under a curse which increased their impulses.

The problem was that the first army division and the Super Soldier brigade were encircling them to restrict civilian access, and beyond them was crowded with thousands of colonizers who had come from various places. The sudden appearance of the curse, and a situation where the excitement of the battle had yet to calm. It was easy for there to be clashes between them and the Berserkers. Baek Seoin was uneasy as if he was looking at a bomb which was about to explode.

“Leader. I think it’s best we quickly clean up and leave this place.”

He immediately requested Choi Hyuk. As Choi Hyuk was also aware of the situation, he understood what Baek Seoin was saying. However, his judgment was different. Because his eyes saw what Baek Seoin’s didn’t.

‘It’s red.’

It was deep into the night, yet the world Choi Hyuk's eyes saw was as red as a sundown.

'Were there this many people who wanted to kill me?'

Because their patience and judgment had become dull and their impulses were maximized, their inner intentions they had hidden deep within themselves had risen to the surface.

Choi Hyuk saw the killing intent pouring in from everywhere. From the Super Soldiers to the colonizers far away, red light shone. What was more... there was no small number of Berserkers emitting it too.

Choi Hyuk said,

"Too late."

There were many who resisted it, but more than half were definitely under the curse. Since it was such a wide-scale curse, it was impossible to dispel it with the guardian's power. You could only wait for time to pass and its effect to fade.

But, it seemed it would be difficult to leave without clashing with each other since the number of groups unreservedly emitting killing intent wasn't small, and there were many groups who held hostility within the Berserkers. It was too late. He couldn't stop them from clashing.

“Pardon? What’s that supposed to mean…”

Baek Seoin was taken aback by Choi Hyuk’s remark, where he gave up before even trying.

However, Choi Hyuk didn’t reply and turned around. His eyes landed on Lee Kijin in the distance. Lee Kijin. He was someone Choi Hyuk was very familiar with. He was a drifter who voluntarily joined him on his first colonization attempt. Like most of the people who joined at that time, he was someone who was looking for a place to die while fighting. Unfortunately, due to his naturally good fighting senses, he hadn’t died and had survived until now. He was an elite member who was selected as a captain-level troop leader.

Choi Hyuk saw his face. It wasn’t certain what illusions the observers had shown him, but both his cheeks were stained with dried tears.

“Is it you?”

Choi Hyuk remembered Lt. Col. Lee Kangjin’s warning. The traitors connected to Lao Ban. Although he thought it would be fun, now that he had confirmed the faces of the comrades he had fought together with, it didn’t feel good.

Lee Kijin met Choi Hyuk’s gaze. He instinctively knew that his betrayal had been figured out.

His original plan was different. He had planned on attacking the exhausted Choi Hyuk when the Berserkers had dispersed and were returning. Lee Kijin and a few other Berserkers were to lure Choi Hyuk to a designated place and wound him with a sudden attack. Then the Super Soldiers and colonizers, who had agreed to cooperate, would attack altogether.

Unfortunately, their plan was now useless.

Lee Kijin smiled with his black eyes.

“It’s a good day to die, right, leader?”

Choi Hyuk could tell when he saw his face. The reason why Lee Kijin betrayed him. He could tell simply by looking.

“Come. I will let you on your way with no regrets.”

Choi Hyuk raised the tip of his sword, which had been on the ground.

Unable to follow the situation through their dialogue, Baek Seoin simply opened and closed his mouth.

“What is this…”

That moment, a commotion broke out with a shout. It wasn’t certain what was going on, but some of the Super Soldiers were

fighting against the Berserkers. Due to the curse, everyone had lost their self-control, and once a fight broke out, it immediately intensified and spread. Even the colonizers, who were outside the civilian access line, became agitated. There were many groups bearing hostility towards the Berserkers amongst them.

'We just fought a dogfight, and now this?'

Choi Hyuk said one thing to Baek Seoin, who was grabbing his head in annoyance,

"Baek hyung, take care of work."

Then, perhaps it was because they were stimulated by the commotions nearby? Lee Kijin and Berserkers who followed him, whose lips were oddly distorted, rushed towards Choi Hyuk at once. Choi Hyuk didn't evade their attack.

Bang!

Crash!

Clash!

He met each swinging sword. He precisely hit the tips of their swords to shake them.

Clang!

“Urk…”

Every time he clashed swords with Choi Hyuk, Lee Kijin felt a ripping pain in his hand. Yes. Pain. Sometimes pain was the best anesthetic. Lee Kijin wanted more pain.

Unconcerned if his hand burst or not, he gripped his sword to the point of shattering and swung. It was fine if he could never use his hand again. It would be of no use if he died anyways.

Choi Hyuk didn’t attack. He stood in place as he deflected the attacks of the surrounding Berserkers swinging their swords at him.

The Berserkers used the skills they practiced with all their strength. However, none of their attacks could pierce through Choi Hyuk’s defense. They couldn’t make him retreat one step, let alone pierce his defense. As their Stamina had hit rock-bottom, they both couldn’t use their Karma Blades. It was a battle of purely strength and skill. Although his breathing became slightly heavy, Choi Hyuk still overwhelmed them.

“Kik… As expected of our leader.”

When they no longer had the strength to attack, Lee Kijin and the Berserkers distanced themselves from Choi Hyuk. They hit him with all they had. It was now time to see the victor.

Kill or be killed.

The people sent by Lao Ban's followers arrived using the confusion.

Choi Hyuk slowly looked around. Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, Ryu Hyunsung, Bae Jinman, and others were busy trying to save as many Berserkers they could from within the crazy fight. Instead, using this opportunity, hundreds of unfamiliar colonizers surrounded him. Each one of them emitted killing intent.

They were experts from various parts of the world that Lao Ban's followers had sent to kill Choi Hyuk.

Although they were surprised by Choi Hyuk's lack of action, they were also able to see that he was exhausted at the same time. They exuded a confidence that they were able to kill him.

"You should have run wild moderately."

One said mockingly.

"Lao Ban contributed a lot more to the world than you imagined. He wasn't a figure you could kill with your childish sense of justice."

Another added in his own opinion.

Choi Hyuk acted as if they weren't there. He simply asked Lee Kijin,

"Is it refreshing?"

"Yeah. If this is the end... But can you do it? Maybe it's because I scared them, but they sent a ton of them."

He never thought they would send hundreds of people. Lee Kijin thought that perhaps he may be able to witness Choi Hyuk's dying figure.

'Quite the spectacle. But then, how do I die?'

Yet, Choi Hyuk was calm.

"You won't be lonely."

Choi Hyuk felt his Karma Heart, which had become tattered after squeezing his karma to its limit. He then whispered,

"Heart Injection."

Thump!

His tattered heart beat heavily once again. Like a phoenix which arose from the ashes, his karma, which was as heavy as rocks,

recovered all at once.

“That bastard’s acting really calm. Haa, how scary… What?”

These experts, who were dumbfounded by how Choi Hyuk was disregarding them, became surprised by the sudden burst of Choi Hyuk’s karma. His karma that should definitely have entered a cooldown stage…

“His karma recovered?”

They were surprised by the illogical event. And that was also their last will.

“Instant Void Annihilation.”

Choi Hyuk drew his sword sideways. He made a 360-degree rotation with his smoothly gliding sword.

{Instant Void Annihilation}

A powerful strike that slices through space.

Ignores defense. Applies the same destructive force within the skill range, independent of the number of enemies inside.

An incredible amount of Stamina is used depending on how many killed in this one strike.

It was originally a top-level skill only those at the 5-star level could use. Someone supplied a deteriorated version so that

those at the lower levels could use it.

It was one of the three skills Choi Hyuk possessed besides his standard ones. Choi Hyuk's single strike, which was able to make the Great Warrior of the El Tribe, Lantz, yield, poured out.

"..."

There wasn't a single sound. Only space was disjointed.

Lao Ban's experts, who were chattering only a moment ago, and Lee Kijin and his followers, they were all cut in two like straws and fell to the ground. That was the end. Death was fickle and silent.

"Huuu..."

Choi Hyuk slowly walked forward and left a word as he passed Lee Kijin.

"You worked hard."

Choi Hyuk sincerely wished for Lee Kijin and the Berserkers who followed him to rest in peace.

Afterwards, Choi Hyuk watched the wild free-for-all, people fighting each other. It was gradually becoming uncontrollable. The exhausted Berserkers were at a disadvantage.

Maybe this was what Flame-Rain meant by testing his control and command, wondering if he had the leadership to control this situation.

Now that he thought about it, Flame-Rain also said this.

‘Remember that sometimes knocking everything down with a sword may not be everything.’

But was it really?

Choi Hyuk’s judgment was simple.

His eyes only saw his Berserkers dying. A scene which twisted his assessment.

“How dare…”

Was this incident simply instigated by the observers’ curse?

What did he care? This occurred because the Berserkers normally looked easy to push around. Control and command? Although Choi Hyuk had no talent in politics, he knew one sure method.

“From now on, people are going to piss their pants when they hear ‘Ber’.”

Choi Hyuk took aim with his sword.

He charged. He cut apart anyone who was hostile towards the Berserkers, regardless of whether they were Super Soldiers or colonizers dispatched from abroad. If he killed all those who didn't follow him, he would eventually gain command, and only those who could be controlled would live.

"Gack!"

A red path made of pieces of flesh was laid down wherever Choi Hyuk passed. Not long had passed when,

"Do it in moderation!"

Someone tried to stop Choi Hyuk.

Looking at his military uniform, he was from the Superpower Headquarters. Colonel rank. His voice sounded quite angry.

Yet, Choi Hyuk ignored him. The angry colonel eventually unsheathed his sword and rushed towards Choi Hyuk. His head fell.

"Colonel!!"

That was the start. The fight intensified. In an instant, even

those who were sober were tangled in and started to fight. The fight grew larger. Even the normal military with firearms started to join.

Then…

“Wahahahaha!”

A laughter which vibrated through the battlefield could be heard. It was Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk, who had activated Flaming Wing Dance, was leading the Berserkers. When he took the lead, the Berserkers instinctively followed behind him. Like a snowball effect, the number of Berserkers gradually grew.

Experts from other parts of the world rushed in to block Choi Hyuk, and even modern weapons, such as tanks and helicopters, tried to stop him, but it was all for naught. Choi Hyuk’s eyes could see their hostility and killing intent. The moment black or red light surged, that place would become a sea of flames.

The seething free-for-all had, at some point, turned into a one-sided slaughter. Whenever Choi Hyuk passed by, they would either be burned from the flames, or their limbs would be sliced off. Fear overcame them. If they combined all their strength and resisted, Choi Hyuk wouldn’t be able to endure. He was exhausted, and his enemies were plentiful. However, for them to do so… Choi Hyuk was too scary.

The curse of the observers?

The urge to fight changed to an urge to flee. The Berserkers chased after them. The rest fled. The chaos was starting to be controlled paradoxically.

“Oh, my god… Is he… even human?”

Leah widened her mouth.

The Sovereign of Balance, Richard, and his aide, Leah, did not lose their reason in this chaos. They were completely overwhelmed by Choi Hyuk’s figure.

The Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk. He was strong. There were many rumors about him being strong, but no one thought he would be this strong.

In a free-for-all with various different forces, Choi Hyuk suppressed them solely with his overwhelming power. He started a mass slaughter by himself, and he may have erased additional casualties with his actions.

“… Amazing. Really.”

Even the Sovereign of Balance, Richard, was speechless.

The ruthlessness and power to strike fear into those who had lost their minds due to the curse.

His aide, Leah, suddenly mumbled.

“Demon King...”

That word became another nickname for Choi Hyuk after that day.

A message appeared.

> {Sovereign Mission success! From this moment, all of Sovereign Lao Ban’s authority is transferred to Sovereign Choi Hyuk.}
>
> {First to succeed in an exchange between human colonized lands. (Invasion will be considered the same as exchange). Retribution increased by 10. Free karma points increased by 10.}

That moment, the Sovereign Mission ended, and two colonized lands became one.

Episode 5: Citizenship

Chapter 67: Advancement Evaluation (1)

This time, the fight really had ended.

There were 8,000 surviving Berserkers. The fight this time had left an unprecedented number of casualties in the history of the Berserkers. There was nothing more to say when 1/5 of their total members had died.

“By the looks of it, it seems the losses from the second free-for-all are large.”

Baek Seoin’s voice was depressed.

What they earned was significant. With the completion of the Sovereign Mission, even if they only considered the indirect rewards the Berserkers earned, everyone’s Retribution had increased by 10 and they also received 3 free karma points as a reward for being the first to succeed in an exchange between colonized lands. (Choi Hyuk’s Retribution increased by 10, and he earned 10 free karma points.) Not only that, but due to the unprecedented level of intensity from their fight, the ‘Combat Addict’ traits had activated, and they each received a plentiful amount of karma.

However, the losses were too large for them to simply be happy. 4,000 casualties. If they accounted for the wounded as well, no one was unscathed.

Although the Berserkers were known to have the highest casualty

rates compared to other organizations, the majority were from the deaths and injuries of new recruits. The veterans, who had polished themselves in the Berserkers, were monsters who were able to return from the most hellish situations with a smile. Yet, this time, people had died or gotten injured without a distinction between veterans and new recruits.

The mental blow from this was just as large.

"…"

Alexei silently bit his lip as he followed behind Lee Jinhee.

Lee Jinhee was looking for her left arm that had been sliced off while she was trying to save Alexei. However, she was unable to find it. Alexei's expression became gloomier.

Lee Jinhee roughly stroke his head with her remaining right arm.

"It's fine. Lyosha, I can get the guardian to regrow it, so don't worry."

"…"

Alexei didn't reply and only bit his lip harder. Of course, Guardian Bae Jinman could regrow her arm. However, when there were this many patients, he couldn't help but feel burdened by using such a high skill like regrowing limbs. Since it wasn't like

she would die right away if she didn't have her left arm, there was no doubt she would have to wait 1-2 weeks to regrow her left arm.

"I'm sorry... I will get stronger..."

Alexei thought that Lee Jinhee, who he idolized, became hurt because he was weak. Although he was only barely able to speak those words because he was deeply ashamed, his insides were boiling.

When she saw Alexei like this, Lee Jinhee clicked her tongue.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Lyosha. If you can't distinguish between when you should jump in and when you shouldn't, you will never be strong. Okay? Burning heart, cool head."

As she said this, Lee Jinhee placed her remaining hand onto Alexei's forehead. Her fingers, which had become chilly due to blood loss, cooled Alexei's burning forehead.

Perhaps it was at this moment when Alexei completely fell for Lee Jinhee. Of course, he was unable to express this in the current mood... Alexei's eyes quaked. He bent his waist and bowed.

"I will bear that in mind, teacher!"

"What teacher?"

Lee Jinhee snorted and left. From a distance, Choi Hyuk shouted.

“Directors, gather for a moment!”

The directors gathered. Even though they had won, none of them were excited. They were all ill-tempered as if they were asking why he called them when they were dead tired.

He couldn’t blame them either. Lee Jinhee’s left arm had been cut off, Artillery Captain Handke’s thigh was still bleeding, and Chu Youngjin was standing blankly. Ryu Hyunsung was better off than them, but his eyes were filled with drowsiness. An expression that said he wanted to quit everything and sleep. Guardian Bae Jinman was unable to attend because he had to treat the wounded.

“Damn... That stubborn old man. We’re both getting old, and he’s like that...”

The person Handke was bitching and grumbling about was Bae Jinman. Since he thoroughly treated people in order of dangerous wounds instead of rank, Handke was pushed back even though he was a top executive. No, he was refused. ‘Fix that sort of wound with your own Recovery!’ was what Bae Jinman prescribed him. Although his life wasn’t at risk, someone like Handke, who had low Recovery, would have to bear this pain for half a day.

Because they had gathered disorderly, Handke’s mumblings were buried under the racket. Once they had each found a spot and

quieted down, Handke's mumblings clearly stood out. Handke, who was diligently cursing Bae Jinman, suddenly felt embarrassed and closed his mouth.

Only then did Choi Hyuk open his mouth. He got straight to the point.

"We are going to explore."

At his words, the top executives raised their heads like zombies. 'Explore? Right now? Seriously?' That was what was written on their faces.

"We can't move while the critically wounded are being treated anyways."

After saying that, Choi Hyuk gestured to the back with his chin. There was a white building which looked to be a fortress. In the beginning, the monsters were gathered around that building as if sieging it.

"Since we don't know what's in there, executives need to take the lead. Ah, mister Handke can stay here since he's wounded."

Handke clenched his fists in happiness at Choi Hyuk's consideration for him.

"Jinhee nuna stay here as well."

Choi Hyuk called out Lee Jinhee a tempo later. Then, like he expected, Lee Jinhee opposed,

“What! You’re telling me to stay here when there’s a trace of an alien civilization right in front of me? That’s not right, leader!”

Even though one of her arms were cut off, she was still full of vigor. She added grumpily,

“I’m already upset because so many died, don’t take away my joy as well.”

Choi Hyuk looked at her. She clearly distinguished between her likes and dislikes. However, she didn’t dawdle in what she didn’t like and needed to find what she liked.

Alexei, who overheard her, shouted, “Director, are you crazy?!” But Lee Jinhee counter argued, “Is getting your arm cut off something to fuss about? In such a great world where you can regrow them?”

Choi Hyuk simply grinned. She was definitely an interesting person.

“Then, do what you want.”

The exploration members were decided.

Starting with Choi Hyuk, it included Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung, Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee and Alexei, who begged to participate.

“We leave in 30 minutes.”

Choi Hyuk needed a break as well. Since he had also used ‘Heart Injection’, his karma had completely collapsed. Although the 1-hour exhaustion period, which didn’t let him recover, had ended, he hadn’t recovered enough yet. He didn’t show it, but his body was heavy like a cotton ball doused in water.

Once Choi Hyuk ordered, the executives vigorously shouted, “Yes!”, then staggered away like zombies.

As if he found this amusing, Baek Seoin laughed as he stood next to Choi Hyuk.

“Still, because they survived due to our leader, we are able to see them like that. I really thought we might’ve died for a change.”

Baek Seoin would normally take command and handled household matters in Choi Hyuk’s stead. He was a talented advisor. However, things that were impossible for him to handle with his own power were eventually resolved by Choi Hyuk. It was the same this time as well.

“Thank you.”

Said Baek Seoin bashfully.

However, as if asking why he would say such pointless words, he didn’t reply and sat down on a moderate pile of machines.

Then he pointed to another pile and said one thing.

“Baek hyung should rest as well.”

Deep into the night, the exploration began.

The alien ground that took over all of Seongbuk District. The endless desert of broken machines. Within, there was only a single trace of civilization, and the closer they got, the more certain they were that it was a fortress. Its surroundings were blocked with solid metal, and machines were destroyed around it. It seemed like there was a large battle, as various places were dug up or melted. It was definitely different from other places where there were only endless piles of machines.

“What kind of attack were they prepared for to create such a fortress…?”

Baek Seoin mumbled and Lee Jinhee answered,

“Isn’t it obvious? Aliens probably made it to defend against monsters.”

“Then how did the monsters invade this alien world, what eventually happened, and why did it appear here?”

“Portal? Annihilation? … Rescue request?”

The two gossiped like always. Baek Seoin’s questions and Lee Jinhee’s light replies, uncertain whether they were conversing or talking to one’s self, they continued endlessly until they arrived at the fortress’s outer walls.

When they arrived at the outer wall, Ryu Hyunsung sluggishly said,

“This… there is no entrance.”

It was exactly as he said. The metal, which was white like milk, was coiled around the walls like croissants, not leaving a single space.

“… Do we need to smash it?”

Choi Hyuk gripped his sword handle. However, the monsters were unable to smash open this outer wall. Would it break easily? As his body wasn’t in a good condition yet, it wasn’t a welcomed situation.

Just then, a hologram appeared in front of their eyes.

Cheng!

At the hologram's sudden appearance, the lax atmosphere instantly tensed as the executives unsheathed their swords. However, they realized it was a hologram with no substance.

A simple, white silhouette that looked like a stickman. As if miming, the fellow looked around in an exaggerated motion before letting out a sigh of relief.

'There are no monsters nearby,'

It expressed what was on its mind.

It was an unusual method of communication. It wasn't transforming its thoughts into symbols known as language, instead, the emotions it was feeling and its decisions were clearly conveyed to them.

The white hologram raised its hands high up at the sky, then dropped its shoulders towards the ground. At the same time, an indefinable emotion was conveyed to them.

Baek Seoin attempted to change its emotions into human language.

“Hello… However, you are a bit late…?”

The fellow momentarily stared at Baek Seoin. Then, this time, it imitated Baek Seoin’s voice perfectly.

“Hello… However, you are a bit late…?”

At the same time, they felt another emotion.

Baek Seoin translated it again.

“Continue?”

“Continue?”

The hologram perfectly imitated him.

“You want to learn the language?”

“You want to learn the language?”

“You’re saying if we continue to talk like this, you’ll learn it by yourself?”

“You’re saying if we continue to talk like this, you’ll learn it by

yourself?”

As if it was happy with Baek Seoin’s reaction, the white silhouette strutted around, almost like it was dancing.

When the fellow knocked on the outer wall of the fortress, the outer wall, which had no openings, wobbled like a liquid and created a path.

‘Follow me. I’ll tell you.’

Choi Hyuk looked at Baek Seoin once.

Baek Seoin replied.

“I’m getting good vibes?”

If that was the case, it shouldn’t be dangerous.

They followed the white silhouette and entered the fortress.

The fortress was one large city. The city was so advanced that it was unimaginable with Earth’s current scientific knowledge, yet it was currently a ruined city.

The emotions and thoughts the hologram conveyed as it walked were cooperatively translated by Choi Hyuk’s group.

This place was an alien city where ‘language’ didn’t exist. Since they were able to use telepathy by nature, they communicated purely through impressions and thoughts and not language. Following this trend, there wasn’t a name designated for this species.

Their ability was excellent at sending and accumulating information, and their science advanced brilliantly. It had reached a point of being able to trade with other alien civilizations. They began space commerce and continued to flourish.

Unfortunately, the monsters invaded one day, and everything changed.

At first, they were able to defend without difficulty. Their weapons were incomparably stronger than weapons from Earth. They didn’t even need to personally get involved. Their machines meant for war were able to face the monsters by themselves. But, that soon reached its limit.

The ‘karma’ awakenees and monsters controlled was a power that ranked above all other sources of energy. After monsters of a particular level appeared, weapons that did not use karma were ineffective. Then, when high-ranked monsters appeared, their war machines were all pitifully destroyed. The aliens experienced defeat, after defeat, after defeat.

Eventually, they learned how to fight with karma from another alien civilization, and afterwards, they had no choice but to

personally take part in the battle. At first, it seemed to be effective. But... once the eyeless observers were dispatched, everything ended. Their species, which was proficient at telepathy since birth, suffered a mental attack which brought them to despair. They always had their minds wide open for each other.

In the end, the planet had completely collapsed.

They built a city and flung the city and its surrounding land into a dimensional gap.

Hoping for someone to save them, sending a rescue signal.

‘But no one came to rescue us... and the monsters followed us through the dimensional gap.’

The city floated around within the dimensional gap. Accepting such a city itself would consume a lot of resources. But, there were no species who wanted to go through that and risk bringing monsters into their planet.

Ultimately, they had to chase the monsters away to survive. Unfortunately, their natural enemy, the eyeless observers, were among the monsters, and they were unable to personally attack, only sending out the war machines. They were all destroyed. That was the identity of the pile of machines that filled the area.

The place they arrived after following the emotions and memories the hologram revealed was a tomb. The square, situated

in the center of the city, was made with a glass floor, and below it laid aliens with simple appearances like the hologram's. A massive tomb.

The hologram conveyed sadness.

'In the end, they all died, isolated here.'

They could feel its sorrow, grief and something that felt like pride and fervor.

'I am the last descendant of this civilization.'

An artificial intelligence created by concentrating their accumulated techniques to maintain the city and its defenses. It existed for a long time, continuously improving itself. It was literally an existence which possessed the essence of a whole civilization.

It expressed its feelings.

'Please accept me. I will definitely be of help to you.'

Chapter 68: Advancement Evaluation (2)

‘Please accept me. I will definitely be of use to you.’

That was what it seemed like it was saying. So Choi Hyuk replied,

“Okay.”

Then the artificial intelligence replied, imitating Choi Hyuk’s voice.

“Okay.”

“…”

Now that he thought about it, this fellow didn’t know human language yet.

“I said okay.”

When Choi Hyuk agreed, it simply imitated him.

“I said okay.”

“…”

Then it stealthily walked around Choi Hyuk's group. It seemed it was reading the mood. Choi Hyuk sighed before stretching his hand out.

It stopped in its place and calculated the countless meanings behind the action of 'stretching one's hand out'. Attack, control, help, cursing, greeting... among others. It still couldn't tell what that meant out of those countless scenarios. To learn more about it, it carefully stretched out its hand. When it did, Choi Hyuk quickly approached and grabbed its hand.

'Huh?'

He thought he wouldn't feel anything because it was a hologram, but he was surprised by the unexpected soft sensation.

Either way, it was all good. Choi Hyuk pulled on its hand.

"Let's go together."

Was his meaning conveyed? The fellow imitated Choi Hyuk's words again. What was different was,

"Let's go together."

It took a step forward, being pulled by Choi Hyuk.

It started to eliminate the countless scenarios from its mind.

Attack? No. Cursing? There was a high probability that that wasn't the case. Rescue? No. Then greetings? Advice?

Choi Hyuk continued to pull its hand. When he took a step, so did the artificial intelligence.

The fellow spoke, changing its tone in an odd way,

"Let's... go together."

"Yeah."

Another step.

Now the artificial intelligence almost knew his meaning. Since Choi Hyuk held its hand and they were both walking together, 'He accepted my proposal!'

The artificial intelligence shouted loudly. It wanted to express its joy.

"Let's go together!"

"Yeah."

Choi Hyuk replied. The fellow changed its tone slightly again.

“Let’s go together!”

It would shout in a louder voice.

“Yeah. Okay.”

Choi Hyuk replied.

“Let’s go together!!!”

The fellow shouted even louder.

Punch!

In the end, Choi Hyuk hit the back of its head.

“That’s enough.”

Bzzt.

After all, it was a hologram. Once a strong force was applied, the electromagnetic field, created to replicate a sense of touch, distorted. Choi Hyuk’s hand passed through its head, and the hologram’s head, which was covered with a fog-like static, crackled. After a few seconds passed, it returned to its original form. The scene was quite scary, but the artificial intelligence didn’t seem to mind.

The fellow simply judged. ‘Okay, yeah’ -> ‘Assumed to be a positive signal.’ ‘Raising one’s voice or tone’ -> ‘Increased probability that this is to express joy. If repeated, an aggressive reaction will be observed, but not enough to cause harm.’ -> ‘Assumed to be a negative expression.’ That was how, at the moment, it was able to learn the information it needed.

As if it had practiced and was happy, in a cheerful voice, the fellow stretched out its hand and said,

“Let’s go together~”

As if this phrase had become a command, the city vibrated smoothly.

Whoooo.

That sound… was similar to a computer booting up.

Whoosh!

They heard the whirring of a rapidly spinning fan when suddenly, their bodies became heavier. It felt like gravity had grown stronger.

“What the?”

Choi Hyuk and his group were taken aback. The artificial intelligence's thoughts were transmitted to their minds.

There was the Earth... And the fortress-city Choi Hyuk and his group were in was hovering in the air and orbiting the Earth.

The fortress-city was currently getting ready for takeoff, and their bodies were pushed downwards due to the upwards acceleration.

"Holy... This was a spaceship?"

Lee Jinhee's body trembled. Even Ryu Hyunsung, who had constantly been tired, had shining eyes, whilst Baek Seoin had an amazed expression. Feeling the force pulling him downwards, he excitedly said,

"... If what we understood just now is true, since it said it was a frame that traveled through dimensions... It's not just a spaceship, but a spaceship that can warp and be used for deep space exploration!"

Intergalactic exploration!

How many hearts wouldn't flutter at that word?

Yet, Choi Hyuk hit the back of the artificial intelligence's head.

Punch! Bzzt!

The hologram’s head distorted with static.

“That’s too much!”

Lee Jinhee protested, feeling sorry for it, but Choi Hyuk didn’t have a choice. Since he couldn’t communicate with words, there wasn’t any other way.

The spaceship’s takeoff, which was even able to make Chu Youngjin’s eyes wistful, came to a stop with Choi Hyuk’s words and a hit to the back of its head.

“Hey. Go down.”

Then he added,

“Our friends are down there.”

The artificial intelligence wasn’t able to completely understand his words, but the moment it was hit on the back of its head, he understood, ‘Ah, it seems he doesn’t want me to do this.’ He canceled the takeoff. The fortress-city, which landed on the ground, took off only after the Berserkers, who were resting, had gotten on.

“Oh, my god… Oh, my god.”

Lee Jinhee twirled around excitedly. Seoul’s night scenery was spread out below her feet. The night scene they saw in the air gifted them a surprising sense of freedom and sweetness. She twirled around with her arms spread. Because she only had one arm, her body was tilted.

“It’s unfortunate. I thought this place’s technology could have helped.”

Baek Seoin clicked his tongue as he watched Lee Jinhee twirl.

“What can we do? Naro says it’s still unfamiliar with earthlings. It said all the equipment here was meant for narolings. And this isn’t as bad as it looks.”

Lee Jinhee coolly glossed over it as she twirled her arm around in the air.

Naro was the name she gave to the artificial intelligence. It seemed that their takeoff had left quite an impression on her. Baek Seoin said that the name felt unlucky, but Lee Jinhee stubbornly said, ‘Our Naro isn’t like that!’ and that was how its name was decided.

Naro-1 is South Korea’s first carrier rocket. The first two attempts failed to reach orbit, succeeding on the third attempt.

“But, I never thought that video calling wouldn’t work on this great spaceship and that we would have to resort to simply calling.”

The president, who had escaped from the mess, wanted to video call, but because they were in outer space, they ended up communicating through a simple phone call. If Naro analyzed human technology, then it would definitely be able to support video calling, but that was too much right now since they weren’t able to communicate smoothly yet.

Baek Seoin looked at Choi Hyuk, who was on the phone.

Choi Hyuk and the president’s conversation couldn’t help but be sensitive. There were too many casualties on both sides.

Although they could agree that this accidentally began because of the eyeless observers’ curse and that either side had no intentions of fighting each other, the problem was how the situation was resolved.

Choi Hyuk acted in a way to minimize losses in the Berserkers, but that looked like excessive killing from the president’s perspective. The mood of his military was chaotic. They wanted Choi Hyuk’s apology.

{So I clearly understand Leader Choi Hyuk’s circumstances, however, in their perspective in which their comrades died, they can’t help but feel disappointed. It’s a formality. Please express your condolences to the dead and apologize. If you say those few

words, we will also give the Berserkers the appropriate compensation for their losses.}

That was President Shin Woojin's proposition. But, Choi Hyuk felt that his words were useless efforts. The perspectives they viewed this situation in were too different.

Cho Hyuk flipped the president's proposition.

"No. I will offer you a proposition. Hunt down everyone under your command who is affiliated with Lao Ban's followers. They are the ones who are fully responsible for today's event."

Yet, President Shin Woojin continued to bring up Choi Hyuk's apology.

{I know. But, to do that, there's a need to smooth our relations with an apology. In this current mood, those who would normally cooperate won't.}

However, Choi Hyuk ignored him and continued,

"Lao Ban and the groups who cooperated with him are no help to humanity's fight. They will only create unnecessary division and casualties like today. We need international cooperation."

{Yes, yes. But, don't we need to resolve national matters first? If things continue like this, the relationship between the Berserkers and the military will reach a point of no return. Please think of the

citizens.}

"Because we left them alone while knowing it was wrong is why it came to this point. We can't push it back further."

{Of course. We will definitely look into that issue. However, first...}

The president felt like his throat was burning.

This wasn't even a conversation. Choi Hyuk didn't bother to respond properly. As if reading a script, he only said what he had to say. The president was suffering because their conversations were parallel. He even felt frustrated. 'Is this guy even understanding what I'm saying?'

Just then, Choi Hyuk changed the mood.

He, who had taken a 'listen if you want to' attitude, began to directly interrogate the president.

"Let's properly divide right and wrong. We can't overlook the government's liability in this incident. The majority of the assassins who targeted me were foreigners. What did you do while they entered the country and were crawling up Marronnier Park? Did you not know that Lao Ban was targeting me? There's no way you didn't. You clearly knew this. Yet, you didn't do anything. What was the result of that? From my perspective, is there any reason for me to not believe that the government was on the same

side as the assassins? If you want to smooth our relationship, first hunt down those who are related.”

The frustrating mood turned razor-sharp like the tip of a blade.

The president felt a chill on his throat.

{No, that is... don’t tell me you think that I had a hand in this? That’s a misunderstanding. Leader Choi Hyuk. You know the circumstances on our side.}

As he listened to the president’s excuse, Choi Hyuk turned his gaze to the outside of the spaceship. Although he wasn’t sure what technology it was, he could clearly see outside as if it was made from glass. From the outside, however, it was definitely an opaque fortress, but he never thought he would be able to see something like this. He could see Seoul’s night scenery beneath his feet. If they went a bit higher, he would be able to see the world below his feet.

Choi Hyuk felt that all of this was comical. He replied to the president, who was justifying himself.

“I know. Your circumstances. You can’t perfectly control the country. The discipline of public officials has slackened, and the majority of the colonizers and soldiers under your command only look for what’s in front of them. It was probably the same this time. There will certainly be those in important positions who had connections with Lao Ban, and you were unable to control them. You consider them as a strength that is maintaining Korea. For the

security of the country, you can't hastily wipe them out. Isn't that right? So you need my apology. Since you need to cater to them so they continue to cooperate with you. So that you can continue to maintain Korea."

Shin Woojin was momentarily at loss for words. Choi Hyuk plainly knew what was going on. Which made him even more uneasy. 'A person who knows all this still acts this way?' Although bitterness surged inside, he worked hard to appease Choi Hyuk.

{That is right. It's all because I am lacking. I am truly sorry. However, please reconsider and take a step back this time. I don't plan on continuously minding them. I will definitely handle this once I can maintain safety. However, it isn't possible right now. I still need their strength. And there is a need in setting them at ease. Taking a step back in order to take two steps forward. If you yield this time, I can repay you by double or triple the amount. Please. Look at it from the long run."

Shin Woojin suggested once again. Choi Hyuk snorted,

"Long run? From the long run, you say?"

Then he spat,

"Do we even have the time to?"

{...}

Shin Woojin couldn’t reply. Choi Hyuk exposed the president’s inner thoughts.

“Mr. President, I will say this clearly. Country, safety, forget them. Can’t you see? The Earth is collapsing. The only thing we need is an army. Not an army that uses its brain to fill their bellies. A real fighting army. Trashy soldiers aren’t soldiers but trash. They aren’t needed. Clean them out. Only then, can we live.”

He was disgusted.

While the world was collapsing… there were those who were satisfied, those who only thought to fill their own bellies, those who plotted and killed outstanding warriors, those who stepped on potential, and those who made unity difficult.

“Where is safety when we’re already living in hell? Now is not the time to be looking for safety, but a time to cut things down and rebuild. If we don’t, the world will die out. Don’t you understand?”

{…}

President Shin Woojin was silent.

However, his silence wasn’t of agreement but of helplessness. He was currently thinking that Choi Hyuk’s words just now were immature.

Choi Hyuk realized this as well. He judged that there was no meaning to talking any further.

“Okay. Do as you wish. Act like a king in a collapsing world. However, don’t get in the way when I deal with Lao Ban’s followers. You will regret it.”

{Leader Choi Hyuk… Don’t act so emotional…}

The president tried his best to appease Choi Hyuk, but Choi Hyuk cut him off. It was comical. They still didn’t understand their reality.

“But do you even know what we obtained from this Sovereign Mission? You don’t, right? Your air force is in an utter mess. I hope you live long with them. S-a-f-e-l-y.”

Then he hung up.

“Hoo…”

A sigh came out by itself. He was frustrated.

The reason why he decided to attack Lao Ban was due to his endeavor to colonize and to concentrate the colonizer’s capability. However, when he opened the lid, it felt as if the dirty politics of different influences were clearly seen. As if you pulled on an annoying thread, only to make it longer?

Those like Lao Ban were simpler to handle. Since he could simply kill them all. This was simply frustrating, and it wasn't like he could just kill them...

"Earth... collapsing. Earth... collapsing."

Behind Choi Hyuk, who hung up, the artificial intelligence, Naro, mumbled as if babbling. It was currently gathering the conversations of the 8,000 Berserkers onboard and analyzing the human language system.

While Choi Hyuk was sitting still and organizing his thoughts, the Blue House was going crazy.

"What? What? There's what above Yeouido?"

"UFO? The castle in the sky, Laputa? Military spacecraft? Just what is above it?! Either way, you said the Berserkers are aboard it?"

"Why is this report only coming in now?!"

"Whether it could or couldn't be detected with radars, you should have seen it if you have eyes! What was the satellite doing?"

“What? It was under maintenance because you were lacking technicians? What the…!”

It wasn’t only the Blue House.

Every organization, that observed the fortress-city take off from Seongbuk District, was going crazy. While they were already astonished by the Berserkers’ military strength, an aircraft of unperceivable over-technology fell into the hands of the Berserkers.

“Just what is going on…”

The playing field they had become familiar with over the past two years had collapsed, and a new one was created.

Chapter 69: Advancement Evaluation (3)

From afar, it looked like a graveyard. Stones, which looked like gravestones, were erected in a circle. Yet, the closer one came, the clearer it was that they weren't gravestones. The erected stones were enormous. When one came even closer, they looked to be taller than humans. They may have made one recall the Stonehenge in England. But up close, one would realize that that wasn't enough. If one stood right next to one of the erected stones and looked up, one would tilt backwards to the point of falling and still not be able to see the end. The erected stones were frighteningly tall, each one the height of the Lotte World Tower.

Lotte World Tower is 554m tall.

Beautiful, abstract symbols were carved and engraved onto the surfaces of these stones. The peculiar lights that emerged from within the rocks dyed the symbols in various colors. When closely examined, each erected stone had different patterns of symbols and colors.

This place was the most important location of the Flame Wing Alliance. The place where all matters of the alliance were decided, it was the 'Brain'. The 'Exalted Wings', who were scattered throughout outer space and different dimensions, conducting war, were able to communicate in real time through these erected stones (dimensional stone plates). Each stone plate indicated one Exalted Wing.

They would decide on more matters than there were grains of sands every day. As the war waged at a cosmic-scale, there were countless matters that needed to be decided by the greatest

committee, the ‘Brain’. Each decision would decide the fates of planets and entire species.

One of the Exalted Wings, who accessed the dimensional stone plate, spoke,

{Earth… Although we decided to put an advancement evaluation in motion in our last meeting, I am still pessimistic about this. Even if they become lowest ranked warriors, the moment they rid themselves of the Consumables judgment, they would be protected by the laws of the alliance. They would become our members. I am worried whether they have the qualifications… We have to conduct the evaluation with great impartiality.}

There was no reply. The Exalted Wings had the ability to process the entire human population’s day’s worth of conversations in the blink of an eye. If they had a different opinion, they would be able to refute with 1,000 different reasons within that time. Due to this trait, the momentary silence was treated as an agreement.

The suggestion of an ‘impartial evaluation’ was unanimously approved.

Another Exalted Wing suggested.

{During the new soldier training, it was judged that the free status earthlings pursued their own safety and that there were many cases where they would become an ill influence on their species. However, their war-fighting abilities aren’t bad. With the representatives of Earth, that is, the sovereigns as a center, there

were a few instances where they revealed excellent results. It seems that we need to focus on evaluating the limits and potential of their abilities. We need to use the ‘Dilemma’ evaluation method.}

There weren’t any replies again.

It was decided. The evaluation would be ‘impartial’ and the evaluation method would be ‘Dilemma’.

This only took an extremely short period of time, less than 0.01 seconds. The fate of the Earth was decided in the time it would take light, which could travel around the world 7 times in a second, to reach Busan from Seoul.

The daily life on Earth was fragmented.

Fragments of reality and unreality, daily life and non-daily life, war and peace all floated without mixing with each other. People’s experiences and their outlook on the world were vastly different from each other.

The gap felt similar to the awkwardness a South Korean soldier would feel when he went on a break. It was similar to the strange feeling a soldier, who suddenly had his breaks and overnight privileges cut due to North Korea’s provocation, and had spent the whole night sitting in a car in full military gear, would feel when he walked out onto the streets filled with couples excited for

Christmas once he finally went on his break. No, multiplying that feeling by a hundred would be appropriate.

Even though the world had come to this point,

There were undoubtedly people who went on with their lives no different from yesterday. They hadn't witnessed the common conflicts between colonizers, the bankruptcies of companies, which were commonplace, and their families were safe... There were quite a few lucky people who lived their lives like that.

The colonizers fought endlessly and tirelessly, but there were others who were tired of working overtime and enjoyed watching TV while lying down during the weekends. Because the media didn't report on grave news to avoid disorder... The world was cozy for those at home. They thought that the warnings that the world was collapsing were instigated by those who were pessimistic about everything. They believed that if people actually tried living, then they would find that the world was quite safe and livable, and as such, they continued on with their daily lives.

To them, Alexei's Youtube video was an overly aggressive incitement video. This video contained a conversation between the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, and the alien artificial intelligence, Naro.

Choi Hyuk: So... All this is a war between dimensions?

Naro: Yes. The monsters aren't from our universe. They are from a different universe, meaning that they are existences who have

crossed over from another dimension. Their inborn karma is unable to mix with ours. They move in order to annihilate all our karma-lings. Conversation and compromise are impossible.

Choi Hyuk: Karma-lings?

Naro: The intelligent beings living in our universe each have their own appearance and physiological function. However, there is one similarity. The retribution we accumulate, in other words, our karma, is the same. Happiness, anger, sadness, joy, love, hate and desire... The accumulation of the world's energy through these emotions, what we call retribution or karma, is the same. That is why we are able to generalize the intelligent lifeforms in our universe as karma-lings despite the vast differences between species.

Choi Hyuk: But the monsters are different from us?

Naro: Yes. That is why it is impossible for karma-lings and monsters to coexist. Also... the situation of the war wasn't good from the start. Because of this, narolings were isolated and annihilated. The alliance had turned their backs against us.

Choi Hyuk: The alliance? The Flame Wing Alliance?

Naro: Is that their name now? Yes. The alliance of the most advanced species in our universe. They traded amongst each other before the war, but once the war broke out, they established an alliance to take joint action. Although the alliance members pledged to help each other... the narolings were eventually cast

away and annihilated... The progression of the war was most likely not very good. In fact, there was a gradual increase of species who fled to the dimensional gap like the narolings.

Choi Hyuk: Are they like the naroling's land which swallowed Seongbuk District this time?

Naro: That is right. They floated around in the dimensional gap and desperately sent out rescue signals, but the alliance was usually silent. They most likely thought that it wasn't worth the risk. In the case of narolings, although we had advanced scientific technology... that sort of technology was common within the alliance. And they were also not very useful in the war.

Choi Hyuk: Is that why they said you weren't of much worth even though you are a B rank...

Naro: Is that what they said? Yes, that's right. That would be the case in their perspective. However, I can be of great help to earthlings. You are aware that the situation on Earth isn't very good, correct?

Choi Hyuk: Explain in detail.

Naro: You can tell by the fact that they sent the narolings' land, which they thought was worthless, here. The method of procuring energy necessary for dimensional transmission is like this. They disassembled the earth... and the karma of the people living here to procure energy.

Choi Hyuk: Seongbuk District… was disassembled?

Naro: Yes. But there are a few reserve areas for dimensional transmission on Earth. Even in Seoul, there are two places, Mapo and Kangdong District. They will attempt dimensional transmission at the cost of sacrificing Earth's land. The dimensional lands transmitted here will all be of little interest to the alliance. The expected worth is low, while the risk of monsters that will follow is large. A land that has been completely destroyed might be transmitted. Earth is getting the short end of the stick.

Choi Hyuk: Why… is the alliance doing this?

Naro: Two reasons. To check if there are any inheritances the alliance missed… And, also, land, which contains the last retribution of the planet, possesses a lot of karma. They benefit if they obtain that. The risk falls onto Earth, which is their throwaway card, and the alliance simply takes everything of substance. I even observed that the karma the last naroling left behind as it died, had disappeared somewhere with the dimensional transmission. The alliance most likely took it.

Choi Hyuk: … That's unfair. But the Earth is a throwaway card?

Naro: Yes. The problem is 'Where did the karma earthlings awaken come from?' From what I observed, karma is being extracted from the planet itself. As more people become awakenees, the Earth is definitely approaching collapse. All that's left for planets that have expended all its karma is ruin. Earth is already at that point. So Earth is… a sort of a garbage landfill for the alliance. They bring the inheritance of ruined species floating

in the dimensional gap, break them open, take everything of substance, and then throw them away…

Choi Hyuk: … Then is colonization the only way left for us?

Naro: Yes. Earth will be destroyed within 3 years. Humanity has no choice but to colonize a new planet. I, Naro, the last inheritance created by the narolings to protect karma-lings and oppose monsters, will readily participate in this journey.

The conversation ended there. The frame zoomed out and eventually captured the enormous spaceship floating above Seoul. Soon, Alexei's face appeared.

"Don't let the world decide your fate. Please get stronger. There is no way back. You have to protect your own life. The enemies we will face from now are monsters that that enormous spaceship couldn't do anything against. There is only one method to face them, 'karma'. Awaken. If you aren't an awakenee, please immediately head to a colonized land and become an awakenee. If you are an awakenee, please awaken non-awakenees around you and fight more intensely for your own growth. Do not fear fighting. If you put your life on the line and fight, there will undoubtedly be Berserkers fighting next to you. … The end is coming."

That was how the video ended.

Some reacted positively to Alexei's video.

“Wow… A spaceship!”

“Let’s go. If we’re going to die either way, let’s fight to our heart’s content!”

Youths, who didn’t have a proper job or family and only possessed boiling blood, joined the Berserkers. Of course, while they weren’t able to officially join the Berserkers, who stood for elitism, the number of people who became awakenees after entering the Berserkers’ city, Barhaloleun, grew drastically.

However, the majority reacted negatively.

“You can tell this is fabricated just by looking at it. Does it make sense that an alien artificial intelligence can speak Korean? What a joke.”

Naro had reached a level of speaking Korean on the first night, but many people underestimated the abilities of an alien artificial intelligence.

“They say the spaceship only floats there. If you think about it, it might not be all that amazing.”

“Just what is their purpose in aggravating unease?”

“There’s no need for everyone to fight. They will need people to support them from behind, right?”

“I heard those guys are very radical.”

There were many who didn’t want to accept danger as danger. Their desire for safety was so strong that it made them deny obvious changes and evidence.

The awakenees weren’t much different.

“I heard the Berserk Sovereign killed a ton of people?”

“Yeah. It looks like there was an especially large number of casualties in the Korean military. They say there is also internal conflict as well.”

“Not only that, they say the casualties among scouts sent by other forces were also large. The mood isn’t good.”

“It was a situation where a fight would have broken out… but since that spaceship appeared, they are experiencing a headache. They probably can’t decide whether to be in their good books or to go to psychological warfare.”

“The Berserkers used their head well this time. They turned the issue around, saying that our enemies are the monsters. Even displaying it as if they were going to stand at the front when fighting the monsters.”

“I know, right? I thought they were only good at fighting, but they can even play decent political tricks as well.”

Even they were doubtful of the sincerity of the Berserkers’ claims.

Of course, there was an exception among them. A very big exception.

“Huh? The Sovereign of Balance, Richard, declared his support of the Berserk Sovereign!”

Worthy of his name, Richard, who was one of the most influential sovereigns in the world, publicly supported Choi Hyuk. It wasn’t simply through words. He clearly showed his support by tracking down active Lao Ban’s followers who were within his group and publicly resisting them. Then, they started a large-scale recruitment of new awakenees.

Once Richard acted this way, the minds of the other sovereigns became even more complicated.

One day, while they were divided by their individual thoughts and positions, the advancement evaluation began. Like the ring which appeared in the classroom, an announcement suddenly appeared.

{First Advancement Evaluation – Dilemma}

The monsters in Dragonic are aware of the invaders, ‘earthlings’. The monsters are planning on sending this information through a relay base to the center. Destroy the relay base before they send this information.

If you are unable to destroy the relay base within the time frame, 1/5 of the population of non-awakenees will be sacrificed to execute a dimensional blow. The relay base will be destroyed, but the selected non-awakenees will die.

Participation in this mission is not mandatory. You have a choice. You have 10 seconds.

Will go destroy the relay base. (In the case of non-awakenees, they will immediately awaken karma.)

Will not go.

It didn’t matter whether one was an awakenee or non-awakenee, they all received the same mission.

It was a simple choice.

To go? Or to stay?

If they were to go, they would experience fights with their lives on the line. But, they would have the chance of preventing the sacrifice of 1/5 of the non-awakenees.

If they didn’t go, the chance of sacrificing non-awakenees would increase. However, if those who selected to go fought well, they could live comfortably and safely.

It was a simple, yet cruel choice.

Chapter 70: Advancement Evaluation (4)

Someone said,

“I’m not going. Why would I go?”

He had chosen the ‘Not going’ option before the 10 seconds were up and laid back down, covered in a blanket.

It was a lonely world anyways. What did it matter to him if 1/5 of the non-awakenees died or not?

Another person said,

“What can I do even if I go…”

He was a non-awakenee. He trembled as the 10 seconds passed.

It was better this way. Since he had never fought before in his life, wasn’t it obvious he wouldn’t be of help even if he did go and would die a dog’s death?

“People better than me probably went. It’ll be okay…”

Even if they did fail, it was only a 1/5 probability.

“It’s fine. It’ll be fine.”

The hole he could self-justify himself inside was large and wide.

Another was like this.

“Huh? Huh? What? What should I do?”

He troubled over the decision until 10 seconds had passed.

10 seconds was too short of a time to think about it. Like whether one would jump in before a child was hit by a car, they only had enough time to choose with their deeply-imbedded instincts, without thinking.

It was very difficult to choose ‘to go’.

The moment the message appeared, Choi Hyuk felt his vision and the surrounding noises fade away. Similar to how it felt when one stared into their white phone screen in the dark, the message window stood out in front of him, and his surroundings became dark. It meant that they were unable to discuss it with others, and people wouldn’t know what decision others made.

The decision to go or not solely rested on each individual.

The ‘Dilemma’ had already started. They could choose to go out of goodwill. However, if the majority of people selfishly chose to ‘not go’, their goodwill would only lead to a dog’s death. It didn’t

only depend on their own intentions. It was a problem whether they could trust others. 10 seconds was short, and the decision was difficult.

But, those, who evaluated without taking others into consideration, could easily decide.

“I’ll go.”

Choi Hyuk immediately answered when he read the announcement.

What did he care whether others came or not? If he went, he could get stronger. He could obtain the opportunity for revenge. But, if he didn’t go, he wouldn’t be able to get stronger and would forever remain as a Consumable, unable to dream of revenge. To him, it was a choice he didn’t need to think about.

Even if he was by himself, he had to go and smash them apart.

The moment he decided, the dimensional teleportation began. Space inverted and swallowed him.

Crunch.

“Hmm…”

He felt his stomach being inverted. Choi Hyuk swallowed down

the acid coming up. No matter how many times he experienced dimensional teleportation, it didn't get any more comfortable.

When his vision returned, he was inside a white room. It was the size of a classroom, and the walls were smooth and cold like metal.

The wall rippled and a message was engraved.

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair}

The most commonly used relay base between dimensions by monsters. Using the unusual secretion of the dimensional wasp queen, they are able to exchange information with other nests far away. The speed of information transmission is slow, but it is hard to target.

Dimensional wasps' nest replicate and multiply within the dimension.

Because of an endless line of identical looking rooms, it is difficult for invaders to locate the path to the queen's room.

The wasps, that guard the queen, replicate and multiply in each room. Every time you take them out and clear a room, the growing nest collapses and slowly becomes smaller, revealing a path to the queen's room. On the other hand, the guardian wasps become stronger and more numerous.

This place is a 'dimensional wedge' created by the alliance to

find the path to the queen's room and to protect and support their allies. In this place, allies can take a break or receive support, and they are also transported to the next path they will enter.

Take out the queen within 10 hours.

In order to deteriorate the growth of the dimensional wasps' nest and search for the path that leads to the queen's room, each member will enter different rooms.

You are able to return to the dimensional wedge once you are done clearing your assigned room of dimensional wasps.

Warriors, who have weak karma and are able to disguise themselves, are given a camouflage incense pouch and an awl.

There were eight people inside the room. There was no way only 8 people came from Earth, so he could simply tell that there were countless dimensional wedges.

On a whole, the mood of the eight people was stiff.

There were five who were trembling. He could tell they were non-awakenees with a single glance. The mission this time was given to all earthlings. Since awakenees made up less than 10% of the total population, probability-wise, it was normal for there to be more non-awakenees than awakenees. They raised the 'camouflage

incense pouch' and the 'wasp-hunting awl' which appeared in mid-air. They held the two items in their hands and broke out into a cold sweat. They each had their own reasons for courageously choosing 'Go', but now that they were about to fight, they were unable to steady their nerves.

Besides them, the other three, including Choi Hyuk, had their own weapons. Since it was common sense for colonizers to sleep with their weapons next to their heads, they had all brought their weapons even though it was unexpected. However, the only person who had also brought their defensive gear was a South American woman with large eyes.

"Wow... Still, it's nice to see people gathered here for a good cause."

She said so refreshingly and comfortably as she blinked her large eyes. Seeing as he could easily understand her even though she was South American, she possessed a 'Language Resonance Device'. The defensive equipment she wore was decent... Unlike her innocent face, she was an expert.

"Really... I feel a strange sense of hope seeing the people gathered here. Haha."

A youth chimed in.

The South American woman looked in each person's eyes as she greeted them, starting with that youth. It seemed she was trying to make them relax. She looked like she was trying to make the

novice fighters relax by telling them some things they should be aware of. She was unbelievably kind.

“What is your name? I’m Penelope.”

Eventually, she attempted to introduce herself to Choi Hyuk.

However, Choi Hyuk didn’t give her the slightest attention. He simply approached the wall and shouted,

“We enter.”

Then, the metallic wall ripped and turned into a transparent membrane. Choi Hyuk entered inside without hesitation. “Hehe…” Penelope awkwardly laughed behind him.

The dimensional wasp’s room was a throbbing purple. It pulsed as if it was alive.

Psshhh.

The dimensional wasp was sort of…. It was more like a skeleton angel or devil than a wasp. Tough, black exoskeleton and pulsating muscular fibers. A sharp stinger hung at the end of its tail. The reason why it gave off an angelic impression despite these features was due to its wings that distorted their surroundings into a haze. Its wings weren’t made of film but energy. Its wings spread out

splendidly in the room.

Psssh.

Though, unlike its cool exoskeleton, its wings let out a vibrating sound which got on his nerves.

The wasp shook its wings once and the space around it agitated as it flew towards Choi Hyuk. Its head, which seemed to be a bundle of bones, opened to reveal rows of blades as it tried to bite Choi Hyuk's head.

Crunch!

Then Choi Hyuk used his fist to shatter the wasp's head. It didn't matter whether it was its blades or exoskeleton, it was completely smashed.

"... Weak."

Dimensional wasps could multiply at incredible speeds, alongside their nest, inside a parallel dimension. However, every time they multiplied, their individual power would drop greatly. It was the same as how beer could be fermented with very small bubbles, where the density of each bubble would be small.

The wasp in front of him wasn't as tough as it looked. If he considered its strength, it was on the lower end amongst 1-star monsters. It wasn't even as strong as the crook, which was the first

monster he saw. It was an insignificant opponent for Choi Hyuk.

As the wasp died, the purple room rippled and turned black. The black wall split on one side, and the door to the white metallic room, the dimensional wedge, opened.

Choi Hyuk returned to the dimensional wedge in less than 10 seconds. In the white metallic room, the colonizers, who had yet to start, awkwardly stared at Choi Hyuk. Perhaps it was to be expected since he returned in less than 10 seconds.

Looking at their figures, it looked like they were surrounding Penelope and were in the middle of learning fighting tricks.

Choi Hyuk indifferently passed them and shouted at the wall.

"Next!"

As Choi Hyuk shouted, the wall swayed and a new notice appeared.

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 1st Stage Boundary Region}

Attack progression rate: 0.000001% -> No idea where the queen's room is.

<Possible Actions>

Return (Locked)

Food Supply (Attack)

Continue to attack

From the start, there was only one choice he could choose.

“Continue to attack.”

The door opened again. Afterwards, it was simple repetition. The wasps were still weak, and Choi Hyuk returned to the dimensional wedge every 5 seconds. Every time he returned, he saw the beginner warriors listening to what Penelope was saying. When he returned for the fifth time, there finally was no one in the dimensional wedge. On his seventh, he saw Penelope who had returned from a wasp room. With her ever innocent face, she greeted him friendlily with round eyes. Choi Hyuk passed by and re-entered the wasp room. Returned after slicing through the weak wasp inside. He repeated these actions twenty times.

“How boring…”

This was one of the reasons why it was difficult to attack the dimensional wasps’ nest. The nest, which multiplied like bubbles, wasn’t something he could instantly smash apart simply because he was strong. Even if a strong warrior invaded, he would be unable to make any progress within the endlessly multiplying wasp rooms. Even if he killed and killed, it was difficult to clear the multiplying rooms.

Because of this, they needed an absolutely large number of

warriors to attack the wasps' nest. They needed to attack the wasps' nest together and deteriorate its multiplication.

Just then, when he finished his twenty-seventh repetitive attack and returned, there was a change. A new announcement had appeared on the wall.

> {Waiting for the 1st Stage Boundary Region Attack to complete...}

The announcement flickered. It was impossible to attack anymore. Choi Hyuk stood inside the room and waited.

Soon, other warriors, who had finished their attack, returned. As they returned one by one, a total of seven people gathered, including Choi Hyuk. The last remaining person didn't return. During the waiting time, the six, excluding Choi Hyuk, whispered to each other.

"How was it?"

It was Penelope's gentle voice. It was lively and filled with concern.

"Yes... Maybe it was because of the camouflage incense pouch, but they thought I was a larva and didn't attack... When I waited and precisely stabbed its neck with the awl, it squirmed then

died... However, there was an incident where I was almost cut apart by its teeth as it squirmed...”

The left arm of the man who was speaking was mutilated as blood flowed out. His face distorted in pain when he glanced at his arm. Penelope quickly covered his face, taking his eyes off his wound, and comforted him.

“Shh... Calm down. Don’t look at your wound. That sort of wound will heal by itself if you rest. Because we are awakenees.”

Choi Hyuk began to slowly find her interesting. ‘Are those actions truly out of sincerity?’ Choi Hyuk, who had spent his time amongst Berserkers, found it hard to believe that a colonizer could be so kind.

After passing time like this, the announcement changed.

{1st Stage Boundary Region Attack complete. The dimensional wasps’ lair is deteriorating.}

“Ah... Mr. Kimura...”

The moment the announcement popped up, Penelope let out a sad sigh. There were eight people gathered at the start. There were now seven. It seemed that the one known as Kimura had died. Although they were very easy opponents for Choi Hyuk, if he

considered that the five were beginners who didn't even possess 1-star stats but no-star, many more had survived than Choi Hyuk expected. Perhaps it was because of Penelope.

The announcement continued.

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 2nd Stage Outer Region}

Attack progression rate: 0% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.

<Possible Actions>

Return to Earth

Food Supply

Continue to attack

*Warning. If you choose to return, someone in another dimensional wedge will have to face your opponents in your place.

The attack progression rate had changed from 1st stage to 2nd stage. They had skimmed off the bubbles of the boundary region created through multiplying and had taken a step forward.

Then the possible options they could choose in the dimensional wedge were unlocked.

As expected, the most eye-catching option was ‘Return to Earth’. Then the warning below it. That was the problem.

“... If I choose to return, someone else would have to fight my opponents as well? ... Then, in reverse, doesn’t it mean I might have to face double the opponents?”

It was the man who Penelope had sincerely taken care of just now. He said it in a completely exhausted voice. He glanced at his arm which was now barely starting to stanch.

“... I can’t. I suffered from just one, I’ll die for sure against two.”

His voice seemed like he had come to a decision.

Penelope hurriedly grabbed him.

“You can’t. Mr. Alberto. If you give up here, someone else will face even more danger!”

Alberto’s eyes trembled. He looked at Penelope with a tearful face.

“But… Reversely, the other side might give up.”

He was stricken with fear.

“Don’t… Don’t criticize me. There… There are people who haven’t even come here. Why… Why do I…”

He avoided Penelope’s eyes and said,

“Sorry… Return!”

Crunch!

The special effect of dimensional teleportation… Space erased his body as if swallowing him.

“Ah…”

Penelope sighed in regret and the remaining beginners murmured. Like how Alberto had given up, others would have given up as well. They may possibly face double the opponents in this fight. To them, who had only now awakened, this was too cruel.

“Sorry… Return!”:

Another shouted his return.

Although the rest didn’t shout to return… their eyes were wavering.

They may have possibly held good intentions. They chose to fight a battle they could have avoided without hesitation.

However, the problem now wasn’t their intentions but others’. ‘Just because I don’t betray them doesn’t mean that the other side, who I’ve never seen before, can’t betray me. Why is it that I need to be this scared, and why is that I need to die like this?’

A cruel test.

The second dilemma, the game was about to begin.

Chapter 71: Advancement Evaluation (5)

The first decision was somewhat easy. Whether they were going to fight to save 1/5 of the non-awakenees or not, one single decision. If they had just closed their eyes and chose, that would have been the end of it. It was a decision emotional people could have chosen romantically, thinking ‘I’ll do something good for a change!’

However, the second decision they had to make was one based in reality. Because they had already experienced fighting, they could clearly imagine, in frightening detail, the events that would happen later.

Didn’t beginner warriors only have one technique anyways?

> Use the camouflage incense pouch to get close to the dimensional wasp.
>
> When the dimensional wasp lets down its guard after smelling the scent of a larva, use the wasp-hunting awl to deal a fatal blow.

This method would work quite well against one wasp. However, what if there were two? Would one stay still even after seeing the other die?

The answer that popped up burrowed into their minds.

‘I’ll die!’

There was a big difference between ‘I might die’ and ‘I will die’. The moment they thought this, they were stricken with fear.

The crossroads of life and death made their heads spin.

If I continue to attack? If someone else doesn’t give up, I have a 50% chance of surviving. However, if someone else does give up, I have a high chance of dying. But there is no guarantee that this mission will be successful just because I die. Also, even if the mission was successful, what’s the point if I’m dead? I, who bore a sacrifice, will die, while the one who gave up cowardly will live instead.

If I give up on attacking? I have a 100% chance of surviving for the moment. If someone else doesn’t give up and fights well, the chances of successfully completing the mission will greatly increase as well. If the other person gives up as well, although the chances of successfully completely the mission will drop, I, at least, avoid the situation where I alone bear the sacrifice. It was fair.

For those who thought of their life first, there wasn’t a need to trouble themselves over the decision. Giving up on attacking was the answer. Those who fought in case they would be part of the 1/5 non-awakenees to die quickly chose to return. They were now awakenees anyways and wouldn’t be part of the 1/5 to die.

Those who still remained were those who had other things that tugged on their minds besides that. Whether it was family,

principle, or their natural personality.

... Or worry about Earth's future. Those who were quick witted already felt it. That the annihilation of 1/5 non-awakenees wouldn't be all. That if they all gave up and failed this mission, it might somehow result in the collapse of Earth. However, it was also a reason that held no weight right now.

'When I'm about to die right now?'

What filled their vision wasn't of what was far away, but what was right in front of their eyes.

One thought came up repeatedly in some people's heads.

'Ah... I shouldn't have come from the beginning.'

Choi Hyuk passed through the middle of that hesitation and pain as if it was nothing.

Dilemma was being indecisive between two choices. Because of this, those who had already thrown away the alternatives didn't fall into a dilemma.

"A waste of time."

Choi Hyuk thought, 'It's better to kill another monster in the time you thought about it.'

“Resume.”

Choi Hyuk walked out of the dimensional wedge with surefooted steps.

“Puha… That fellow, he has a straightforward personality. He’s him, right? The person who’s famous these days. The Demon King, Choi Hyuk.”

The man who had been silent until now said as he jingled the sword which hung at his waist. He looked around at the beginner warriors who had fallen into a state of confusion.

“Don’t feel so dejected. The first awakenees were thrown into this fight without a choice. From my perspective, this is an opportunity to get stronger comfortably. Crying already… Anyways, take care.”

Then, he walked out of the dimensional wedge, swinging his arms.

Looking at him from behind, Penelope thought that it was time for her to leave as well. The more deserters there were, the greater the experts needed to try their best. In her sweet voice, she said to the beginner warriors,

“Don’t worry or blame yourself too much. It’s normal for you to be scared. Then… Please take good care of yourselves.”

Penelope prepared to risk her life as she told others that being scared was normal. Although she looked soft and innocent, she too was a tenacious person who had already thrown away all of the other alternatives.

There wasn't much of a difference between the 1st and 2nd stage. Although the monsters became a bit stronger, this made no difference to Choi Hyuk. The wasps had still not reached the 2-star level. Occasionally, another wasp would be added, becoming two, but they still only took one strike anyways...

The bigger difference was the dimensional wedge he returned to after attacking a room. In the 1st stage, he always returned to the same dimensional wedge, but this time, it was always different.

Thanks to this, Choi Hyuk was able to see all sorts of different groups.

While Choi Hyuk repeatedly attacked 10 rooms, there were dimensional wedges filled with agonizing beginner fighters. Perhaps it was because of this, but the attack rate went up at a ridiculously slow rate.

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 1st Stage Outer Region}

Attack progression rate: 0.00001% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.

<Possible Actions>

Return

Food Supply

Continue to attack

When he had returned after attacking by himself during the 1st stage, the attack rate was 0.000001%. It was a percentage with five 0s after the decimal... As a fraction, it was 1 out of 100 million. That meant there were at least 100 million rooms. He was also able to infer that at least tens of millions of warriors participated in the 1st stage from this. So, although Choi Hyuk attacked 27 rooms by himself, his level of contribution was insignificant.

It was the same this time as well. Choi Hyuk alone attacked 10 times, but the 2nd stage attack rate was now only 0.00001%. Four 0s after the decimal... As a fraction, it was 1 out of 10 million. Because the majority of the recruited warriors were beginner fighters, and since they didn't act, the attack rate had barely risen.

Still, Choi Hyuk didn't mind. As he silently continued to attack and clear away the dimensional wasps, the dimensional wedge had, at some point, become completely empty. The ones who had decided to give up had given up, and those who decided to attack had gone to attack.

Only then did the attack rate start to move.

Even though many gave up, since there still were a lot of people who continued, the attack began to rise quickly.

{Attack progression rate: 3.78577% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.}

However, it was clear that the risk for beginner warriors was higher compared to the 1st stage. Choi Hyuk met people with all sorts of hesitation and pain.

After finishing his attack and returning to the dimensional wedge, Choi Hyuk was met with a shivering woman. Her arm had been completely cut off. She sat still, unable to select 'Return to Earth' or 'Continue to attack'. Perhaps she was waiting for the wound on her arm to stanch.

Choi Hyuk simply passed by. She too didn't look at Choi Hyuk.

{Attack progression rate: 11.57325% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.}

Choi Hyuk finished his attack again and entered a dimensional wedge.

This time, there was a man. He was a beginner warrior. He mumbled to himself,

"Fight? Return? Fight? Return?"

When Choi Hyuk walked past him, he hurriedly called out to Choi Hyuk,

“Hey! Please wait!”

But Choi Hyuk passed by as if he couldn’t hear him.

{Attack progression rate: 51.35781% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen’s room.}

The beginner warriors were definitely doing their share. Nonetheless, at some point, the attack progression rate gradually started to slow down. They were fatigued from fighting, and the casualties were growing. Once these beginner warriors narrowly returned to the dimensional wedge, the continuous choice of whether to return or attack unceasingly corroded their will. They were exhausted and scared. The thought of ‘I did my share,’ slowly bared its head.

It was more than understandable. But, for the success of the mission, they couldn’t admit it. When they considered the dimensional wasps’ nest that could endlessly replicate itself, a decline in their attack rate could be fatal.

Choi Hyuk was clearly aware of this. ‘The attack rate can’t slow down.’ Yet, this wasn’t something he could do by himself. There were 10 million from the start. Even if Choi Hyuk alone attacked 100 or 1000 times, it wouldn’t make a noticeable difference. So… A

special action was required. He didn't have time to think intricately.

'Now's not the time to be picky.'

Choi Hyuk resolved himself. The advancement evaluation was a key point he had to pass for his revenge. For his revenge, he was literally willing to do 'anything'.

Just in time, the environment was becoming more advantageous for him. The dimensional wedges which had been scattered everywhere to destroy the expanding dimensional wasps' nest came together and grew larger. The dimensional wedges, which fitted 8 people at the start, had now become large enough for tens of people to access it. That meant... that it was now possible to control the crowds.

Choi Hyuk tested something before acting.

'Continue to attack.'

He didn't say it out loud, but only repeated the command in his mind.

Fortunately, nothing happened.

There were a few beginner warriors gathered in the dimensional wedge Choi Hyuk was in.

They were in the middle of taking a break, talking to each other while waiting for their trifling wounds to stanch.

"I have a 3-year-old daughter. So I can't give up. If my daughter somehow becomes part of the 1/5 and dies, I will probably never forgive myself."

"But what happen to your daughter if you die?"

"Since she has a great dad, she'll be fine."

From the beginning, these people had chosen to take the challenge instead of running away within the 10 seconds given to them. Although others gave up and left, they didn't flee even though they may have had to fight twice the number of enemies. The ones who were still alive until now were, in general, out of the ordinary. They had resolved their will.

But, even still, it wasn't as though everyone was of the same mind.

While people exchanged their resolutions and words of encouragement, someone slumped his head and mumbled,

"... Sorry... I'm sorry... This is it for me. Re...!"

Smack!

The word he wanted to say was ‘Return’. However, he was unable to say it. Choi Hyuk appeared as if he had sprouted from the ground and blocked his mouth with his right hand.

‘As expected, since he can’t talk, the return won’t activate.’

Things went as he planned.

“No, what is this!”

The surprised crowd stood up from Choi Hyuk’s sudden use of violence. Yet, Choi Hyuk ignored them. He blocked the squirming man’s mouth and pushed him towards the metallic wall.

Then he warned him.

In a quiet voice only he could hear.

“If you bring up ‘Re’ of ‘Return’ again, I’ll cut your right arm. And if you say it again, I’m going to slit your throat. Now, the only thing you can say is that you will attack.”

After his warning, Choi Hyuk let go of the man he had his hand on. The man shook Choi Hyuk off and furiously expressed his protest. Although, it didn’t last long.

“This crazy…! Gaack!”

The man was about to swear at Choi Hyuk. Suddenly, his right arm was rolling on the cold, metallic floor. He didn't even see Choi Hyuk unsheathe his sword, but his arm was already cut off.

Choi Hyuk calmly warned him,

"There's not much time. Go attack."

The man, filled with pain, was unknowingly about to curse again.

But, Choi Hyuk was a step faster as he cut him off and warned him again,

"This time is your neck."

The man's voice, which was on the verge of sounding out, miraculously halted. Choi Hyuk simply stared hard at the man, who had broken out into a cold sweat due to pain, and ordered,

"Go."

Feeling fear, the man opened his mouth.

"Con... Continue to attack."

A path to the dimensional wasps' nest appeared. The man's face became pale white. The man, whose arm had been cut off, looked back and forth between Choi Hyuk and the pathway as he showed a desperate expression.

"Please... Please don't do this."

Yet, there was no change in Choi Hyuk's expression.

"Go."

The man, in a state of panic, shouted,

"Why me! What did I do wrong?! I... I... risked my life and came here to take responsibility... I fought as much as I could! However, I'm scared now... I want to live... Is that wrong?! Huh? I should have ignored the announcement and slept like others! Then, I wouldn't have met a crazy bastard like..."

Smack.

Choi Hyuk wordlessly kicked the man and pushed him through the pathway. As soon as the man entered, the pathway disappeared, and the smooth, metallic wall reappeared.

"..."

Choi Hyuk, who had been silent for a moment, only then turned

his gaze towards the people gathered in the dimensional wedge. They were all beginner warriors. They were dumbstruck at Choi Hyuk's sudden act of violence. However, because he looked undoubtedly stronger than them, they didn't dare attempt to restrain him.

Choi Hyuk looked at them as he gripped his sword. Then he sincerely thought,

'Should I kill them all?'

Grip.

The moment Choi Hyuk made up his mind, the inside of the dimensional wedge became chaotic.

'Mon... Monster... A real monster!'

A monster that was incomparable to the dimensional wasps was here with them. The senses all over their body began to give off warnings. Their hair stood up. Their animalistic instincts shouted, 'Danger! Flee!'

"Co... Continue to attack!"

"Continue to attack!"

Beginner warriors chose to attack in order leave the dimensional

wedge like scattering grasshoppers. Danger also made them unconsciously reveal their inner thoughts.

"Re... Gaahk!"

"Ret... Kyak!"

Those who attempted to flee by choosing 'return' instead of 'attack' all had their arms cut off. Choi Hyuk's ears didn't miss even the smallest whispers, and his Karma Blade pierced through the air as he didn't give them even the slightest opportunity.

"Devil! Devil!!!"

"Don't do this, please! Please? Don't do this!"

Choi Hyuk pushed the ones who were trembling in fear into the pathways leading to attack.

As they cried, cursed Choi Hyuk, or even cursed themselves, who had chosen to fight... they all passed through the pathways leading to attack and disappeared.

To be honest, they weren't people who should have been treated like such. When others didn't even come to fight, they were the ones who willingly chose to fight. When others gave up on the first choice and returned, they were the ones who fought at least one more time. Although their hearts eventually broke, they were still more courageous than anyone.

Unfortunately, for the completion of this mission, they didn't have any other alternatives and were cruelly required to change their attitudes at this moment. Although their will in coming to the battlefield may have been noble, there was nothing noble in this place. It was simply hell. The abode of devils, who would do anything for victory.

Choi Hyuk was one of those devils. He desperately wanted the successful completion of the mission, but he wasn't good-natured and his method of handling people wasn't good. To them, this was a tragedy.

Choi Hyuk's actions had now changed. When he finished his attack and entered a dimensional wedge, he would emit a murderous aura and make everyone inside the dimensional wedge flee. He left those who fled into the attack pathways but forcefully pushed those who tried to flee into the attack pathways.

He himself became an entity of irrationality and forcefully erased people's freedom of choice.

"You... will one day pay the price,"

Was what someone said. Choi Hyuk admitted it as well. That all the curses and verbal abuse that they poured onto him were reasonable. However, he still continued.

It wasn't like he was 100% certain.

‘Would there be an effect just because I do this myself?’

Tens of millions of people had to act. Just because Choi Hyuk was doing this, didn’t mean that the progression rate would increase significantly. It could very well be possible he was making others die or get wounded in vain.

But, even still,

‘This is more effective than me repeatedly attacking alone… And it won’t be just me.’

He was simply doing what he could right at this moment. Choi Hyuk even used the resentment and curses directed at him to fuel his burning revenge. His rage gradually increased.

Fortunately for Choi Hyuk, it wasn’t only him who acted after feeling a sense of crisis.

The majority of sovereigns also had similar realizations as Choi Hyuk.

‘We can’t succeed unless the beginner warriors act.’

They orchestrated or threatened the beginner warriors in their own way.

Once these actions accumulated, a clear change appeared in the progression rate, which had slowed down.

{Attack progression rate: 78.11852% -> The deduced location of the queen's room is very imprecise.}

Although they were each in a place where they couldn't see one another, because their individual methods of increasing the progression rate accumulated and accumulated, they had finally created an immense result.

{Attack progression rate: 100%}

{2nd Stage Outer Region Attack complete. Dimensional wasps' lair is deteriorating.}

Some used cruel and irrational methods, while others used touching methods to make people act. Either way, they felt as if a sudden shower had passed, leaving them feeling clammy and downcast. People despaired, prayed and bit their lips in front of the dimensional wedge, where they had to choose either to 'give up' or 'attack'. The 2nd stage attack, which felt as if it would never end, was complete.

It was all due to the gruesome fight of the beginner warriors who survived until the end, whether it was by their own volition, because they were influenced by others or were threatened.

Rumble!

With the completion of the 2nd stage, the dimensional wedge shook heavily.

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As the rumbling continued, the metallic walls gradually became transparent. Once the walls became transparent, they could see the silhouettes of the people beyond the walls.

As if they had entered a mirror room, the dimensional wedges were lined up endlessly. They were in the process of connecting every dimensional wedge. Due to the transparent walls, the people, who had been scattered throughout the dimensional wedges, were able to identify each other's faces.

"You were alive!"

The ones who saw people they knew shouted happily. However-

Bang!

When they tried to get closer, a faintly shining wall blocked their paths.

"Huh?"

The walls between the dimensional wedges had disappeared, but walls between people had appeared instead. Everyone was split up into independent spaces and were rearranged. The space given to one person was only 1m x 1m x 2.5m. People were placed into these semi-transparent boxes and were arranged into rows beside, below, or above each other.

Then, once the arrangement was complete, the floor became transparent. They saw empty space below the floor, and below that, they saw a purplish grid. It was a familiar shape – The dimensional wasps' nest. However, it was more enormous than what they had seen until now, and the purplish walls had turned semi-transparent, giving off a dangerous vibe. They could clearly see the wasps hovering inside their nest.

If they took an overall view, they were arranged in a circle. It felt like seeing a stage from the top of an amphitheater.

Just then, the rumblings stopped.

An announcement appeared in front of their eyes.

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 3rd Stage Inner Nest Region}

Attack progression rate: None. The attack is complete the moment the queen is killed.

Current situation: Obtained a route to track down the location of the queen's room.

The dimensional wasps' nest has been drastically reduced. The dimensional wasps have become much stronger.

As there isn't a significant difference in density between levels in the inner nest region, warriors are able to pass through different

rooms with their own power. However, your speed will decline. On the other hand, wasps are able to pass through rooms without any restrictions.

Because you need to deduce the queen's room while following the route and exploring, you will be divided into teams and will infiltrate one by one.

<Possible Actions>

Return to Earth

Food Supply

Infiltrate

*Warning. As the dimensional wasps' nest has become stronger, it is impossible for dimensional wedges to intervene. If you choose to infiltrate, you will be unable to return to the dimensional wedges until the attack has completely ended.

*Warning. The wasps, that felt threatened, are preparing for a large-scale counterattack. The first team to infiltrate will face the most danger.

There was still an option to return. However, because everyone was separated into individual, transparent boxes, there was no longer a way to force their decision. If it was like this, there was a high chance that many would choose to return.

Yet, Choi Hyuk smiled. That didn't matter anymore.

When he read the announcement information, the progression rate was 'none'.

It meant that this was different from the 1st and 2nd stages where they needed to attack in numbers to deteriorate the growing dimensional wasp's nest. Now was the time to directly deduce the location of the queen's room and kill her. They didn't know where the queen was or when she would appear, and if they failed to kill her, even though she was right in front of them, they would fail the mission. This was the reason why the concept of a 'progression

rate' didn't work anymore.

Also, the meaning behind this fact was clear to Choi Hyuk.

'I'll finally get to warm up.'

He could simply fight without caring about others. That moment had finally arrived.

However, there was a procedure which allowed them to influence those still remaining.

{First, form teams. The 38 sovereigns currently participating will each command a team. Free warriors, who are not affiliated with any sovereign, are able to choose whichever team they want. There is a chance for sovereigns, who wish to gather team members, to speak. No one is able to return to Earth until the sovereigns are done.}

A new announcement had appeared.

The moment that announcement appeared, before people could finish reading it, a sovereign requested to speak.

A blond, handsome middle-aged man appeared in front of them.

{Nice to meet you. I am Richard. I am known as the Sovereign of Balance amongst colonizers.}

He possessed gentle eyes and a confident voice. He felt trustworthy simply through his expression and voice.

{There is one thing I want to say. Everyone, please do not think there will be another chance. Please think that there isn't another chance. Do you remember the announcement that appeared before we came here? Exactly. It said 'First Advancement Evaluation'. If there is a 'first', it means there will also be a 'second'. The next test may dig into our selfishness and distrust even more skillfully. That is why we must win. We must win and set an example. We need to know what it means to be victorious. We need proof that we can trust each other. We had a hard time coming to this point. If we can't win here, we will undoubtedly lose next time. You think the deaths of non-awakenees will be the end of it? That won't be the case. It seems many have forgotten, but please remember. We, humans, are still Consumables. Please fight alongside me. To those who fight under my team, I will definitely repay you on behalf of my clan. I will even take care of your families.}

His speech followed a proper rhythm, the content was reasonable, and the rewards he promised were enticing, such was why the people's expressions were as friendly as ever. As expected of the 'Sovereign of Balance' who was judged to have the most outstanding leadership skills amongst the sovereigns.

In fact, his method of guiding beginner warriors to participate in the 2nd stage was the same. He had approached them friendlily, patted their backs, promised his personal support, and persuaded

them with reasons why they must fight. Also, people trusted his words because of how he had lived until now. He was a completely different style of sovereign compared to Choi Hyuk.

"Wahhh!"

Richard's speech ended with a storm of applause.

After Richard's speech ended, a young Latin woman's face appeared this time. If one looked closely, she was young, however, perhaps it was due to her deep eyes and stubbornly shut lips, but she didn't look young at all.

"Ah... It's unni!"

What a younger woman calls an older woman in Korean.

Penelope was near Choi Hyuk. When she met Choi Hyuk's gaze with her large, gentle eyes, she smiled sweetly and waved her hand.

Only then did Choi Hyuk figure out the secret behind her kindness.

'Is she part of the Camilla clan I've heard about...?'

{Hello. I am Camilla. I am also known by the unmerited name, the 'Sovereign of Paradise', amongst colonizers. I would first like to express my gratitude and respect to all of you who have arrived

here after enduring this difficult fight. I am very happy to be able to meet with you all. And I request to you. Give us your courage once again. The reward for those who are good-natured and courageous is the meeting of other courageous people itself. Do not be afraid. If you bring up your courage, you will definitely not be alone. I will become your brother and sister. The Camilla clan and I will be at the front. We will make it so that no one dies before us. Likeminded brothers and sisters, cooperate with the Camilla clan.}

Camilla and her clan members famously possessed the ‘Savior’ fate. Their karma would increase the more they saved and helped others, and the greater number of people who trusted and relied on them.

The Camilla clan was also famous for being a small clan comparable to the Berserkers. It was because people needed to have at least an 80% aptitude in the ‘Savior’ fate to join. Unless they naturally possessed a reciprocal personality, one could never get over an 80% aptitude, so the Camilla clan became a group of people who were rarely seen these days.

Because they were a group that possessed high morals and reciprocity, it was easy to obtain their help, but it was very hard to become a part of them. In an anarchy like now, there was no way they could maintain a ‘paradise’ without blood and steel. To the groups who attempted to trick them or exert an evil influence on those they were protecting, the Camilla clan would retaliate with zero tolerance. Especially the ones who specialized as ‘executors’ within the clan. They were famously known to be as cruel as the Inquisition of the Middle Ages.

They were a group which simultaneously possessed both a warm, heavenly interior and a cold, strict exterior. Due to this, the ‘Sovereign of Paradise’ not only held the positive meaning, but also a sarcastic implication of their exclusivity.

Unlike how almost everyone reacted positively towards Richard’s speech, the reactions Camilla received were mostly positive, however, they were divided. Some felt deep excitement and were touched, whilst others felt ill will towards her instructing tone.

However, since she pledged that she would fight at the very front, she couldn’t help but make a favorable impression. Didn’t it say in the announcement? That ‘the first team to infiltrate would face the most danger’. Of course, the number of people who would apply to join Camilla’s team would be small because of this, but on the other hand, they would be able to obtain indisputable new recruits.

Camilla’s speech ended with applause as well.

Then, Choi Hyuk’s face appeared in front of everyone.

“Huh?”

“Now, really…”

The reactions when Choi Hyuk appeared were greatly different from before. The interest, expectations, and respect, among others, they had shown just now were almost non-existent.

Choi Hyuk's vision was dyed in a dark red like the sunset. Hostility and murderous intent. Everywhere, people were staring at Choi Hyuk. The majority were beginner warriors. There was no doubt that the actions Choi Hyuk took during the 2nd stage accumulated a large amount of hostility.

Yet, Choi Hyuk's expression didn't change. He simply said what he wanted.

"Berserkers, gather. We infiltrate at once."

In fact, his words weren't directed at others, but instead, was a message to the Berserkers who were scattered here and there. He was not interested in gathering other team members.

"Infiltrate."

The moment Choi Hyuk said this, an ivory sandy pathway formed in front of the box that surrounded him. The ivory sandy path formed a circular field at the center of the donut-like arrangement of people.

Choi Hyuk steadily walked on the path.

Thousands of Berserkers from every direction walked down the sandy paths towards the field in the center. There wasn't even the slightest hesitation.

“Haa… Now that I think about it, the announcement said that you couldn’t return to Earth during the speeches, but it never said anything about not being able to infiltrate.”

Richard said as his eyes shined. His gaze fell on the Sovereign of Paradise, Camilla, far away. Even she, who looked like not even a needle would get past her, currently had a dumbfounded expression.

“Keu. Now that she’s showing an expression like that, she finally looks like a woman in her twenties. She’s so scary since she’s always pompous all the time. Anyways, Sovereign Camilla said she would take the lead, but she lost the initiative.”

It was as he said. While she showed the personality of the Camilla clan and was waiting to gather team members, the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk had chosen to attack immediately. As if it was a waste spending time like this.

Soon, all the Berserkers gathered at the field.

{The first infiltrating team has been formed. The first infiltrating team can begin their infiltration any time their sovereign gives the order.}

The announcement changed.

Choi Hyuk unsheathed his sword.

Screech, clang!

The Predator's Blade jolted as it left its sheath. The sound was heard by the millions of people gathered here.

"Let's go,"

Said Choi Hyuk.

The sandy field scattered and disappeared. The Berserkers began to fall towards the dimensional wasps' nest below.

Pshhhh!

Whooosh!

As if they sensed a dimensional infiltration, the wasps, which were hovering back and forth inside the nest, simultaneously shook their wings and raised their vigor.

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The Berserkers fell. The dimensional wasps spread their wings, which rippled like a haze, and flew towards the Berserkers. The wasps gathered into a dark cloud, making the thousands of falling Berserkers look insignificant.

Pssshh.

Whoosh!

The sound of their flapping wings was irritating. The sound was like a sudden rain shower, then a waterfall, and then a landslide. The sound grew louder, becoming unbearable.

The number of dimensional wasps overwhelmed their vision, and the sound of their flapping wings was unbearable. Although they looked similar to the wasps they had seen until now, they were different. The onlookers trembled at the wasps' explosive vigor. They were only watching from above, but the beginner warriors were already frozen with fear, unable to move their arms or legs.

Yet, the Berserkers were not the least bit afraid. There were even some who looked cheerful as if they were enjoying an extreme sport.

An unhesitant freefall.

But, Choi Hyuk felt strangely uneasy. His eyes were locked onto the incoming dimensional wasps. The vigor of the dimensional wasps looked fierce but felt somewhat light. Choi Hyuk thought that they were inflating their vigor like balloons.

He activated his karma trait, Mind's Eye. With his eyes dyed blue, he was able to clearly see the flow and structure of the dimensional wasps' karma. When he saw this, he was able to figure out the reason behind his unease.

He shouted,

"Prepare for impact!"

At the same time, the Berserkers' second-in-command, Baek Seoin, shouted. Like Choi Hyuk, his eyes were dyed blue.

"Damn! They are fireworks! Deploy the Karma Barriers!"

Crash!

Booom!!

The dimensional wasps, which were gathered together in a black cloud, simultaneously turned white. Their crazily flapping energy wings had started to explode. They were white fireworks. A cluster of stars, which shined bright as the Sun, formed inside the dimensional rift and created to prevent mutual interference between the dimensional wedges and the dimensional wasps' nest.

Even as this cluster filled their vision, the Berserkers didn't bat an eye.

Bang, bang, bang!

Karma Barriers surged out of their bodies like deployed parachutes. The Karma Barriers and Karma Blades they personally learned from Choi Hyuk were reputed to be the best amongst colonizers.

Each person's karma color was different, and different colored marbles, formed by karma, fell into the cluster of stars below, which expanded with explosions.

The beginner warriors who watched this gulped down their saliva.

"Oh, my god… What is that…"

The explosion had been created by the self-destruction of the black cloud of wasps. They could almost feel the heat from the blast from where they were standing.

"They said the first team to infiltrate would face the most danger…"

They never thought it would be to this degree.

They had fought in the wasp rooms individually until now, but to suddenly change to a group battle... Just this fact scared them, but they suddenly had to face self-destructing wasps? Wasn't the level of difficulty too different?

As the explosion hadn't yet ceased, they couldn't see the Berserkers who were within.

"Are they alive...?"

'No way.'

The beginner warriors could not imagine someone surviving that blast. Until yesterday, they had lived in a peaceful world as non-awakenees. Although they knew that awakenees had superhuman power and had heard they were fighting a gruesome war against monsters, that was all. Seeing with their eyes was completely different from their imagination.

The aftermath of the explosion subsided.

Someone shouted,

"They are alive!"

"They are fighting!"

While the people above were distracted by the explosion, the Berserkers were already in a bloody battle against the guardian wasps within the dimensional wasps' nest.

The exterior appearance of the guardian wasps was identical to the wasps they had fought until now. However, they were stronger as if they were completely different existences, only their appearances were identical. Even if they compared them to the self-destructing wasps, their vigor was on another level.

"Gahk!"

A Berserker was flung away after being hit by a wasp's tail. The poison spread and his face became pale. Even though he saw this clearly, Ryu Hyunsung was unable to help him immediately.

"Damn... Late 2-star or early 3-star... This isn't good."

Ryu Hyunsung wielded his saber as he examined the wasps. A Karma Blade erupted out of his saber. His saber exquisitely sliced off the wasp's legs, tail, and mandibles before slicing its neck. Considering his stats, which were approaching 4-star, these late 2-star to early 3-star level wasps weren't a problem for him at all. The problem was the dimensional wasps' nest itself.

Ryu Hyunsung tried to pass through the semi-transparent dimensional wall between the rooms in order to help the Berserkers who were being pushed back. The moment he tried to pass through, his body slowed down as if he was moving in slow motion.

“Keuak! This thing!”

Ryu Hyunsung let out a tantrum and exploded the karma within his body, only then did the purplish wall ripple and subside, allowing him to pass through smoothly.

“To do this every time…”

Since it was able to annoy Ryu Hyunsung, who was heralded as a top expert amongst the Berserkers, it wasn’t easy for regular Berserkers to pass through these dimensional walls. The consumption of stamina was enormous.

The dimensional wasps’ nest was sectioned into countless rooms, each divided by purplish semi-transparent walls. They called these walls, dimensional walls. When humans passed through these walls, their movements would become extremely slow, and to offset this slowness, they would have to use up a significant amount of karma.

Yet, the guardian wasps weren’t affected. The wasps flew around as if the walls didn’t exist. It was an indisputably disadvantageous battleground. The wasps were highly mobile while the Berserkers’ mobility was bogged down.

On top of that, the Berserkers were scattered amongst the countless rooms.

This was due to the self-destruction of the wasps at the start that was not only dangerous but also had the effect of scattering the members of the infiltrating team. The Berserkers were spread out into different rooms, and it was impossible for the Berserkers to fight as a group, leading them to face the risk of being defeated one after the other by the guardian wasps, that could easily pass through the walls.

What made the situation even worse was that each guardian wasp was at the level of veteran colonizers, and if they compared their stats, they would either be equal or above normal Berserkers.

The Berserkers were forced to fight these enemies by themselves, unable to support each other.

Still, they weren't intimidated.

When the guardian wasps flapped their wings, rattled their black exoskeletons and opened their mouths, which split into ten sections, the Berserkers actually became even more vigorous.

"Come at me, asshole!"

In a pinch, they sacrificed their arms and struck the wasps' necks. Even in moments where they were unable to defend, when their necks were cut, or when they were dying from poison, the Berserkers still took down a wasp with them. The Berserkers, who had been tempered through countless fights, took at least three wasps with them on their road to hell. On their last breath, they would deal one final sharp strike.

“Kuahk!”

{Kieeeeeh!}

The screams of the Berserkers and the wasps were unending. There was no time spent on finding the other’s weaknesses. Within seconds after a fight broke out, a wasp or a Berserker would die. In a war of attrition, where they would either kill or be killed, the Berserkers showed no signs of damping vigor. Instead, since the wasps were pushed back by their vigor, more and more wasps had to swarm in.

While spectating, even though their teeth chattered at this hopeless war of attrition, they also felt strangely moved.

“They really fight well…”

Then, another announcement appeared due to the Berserkers’ actions.

> {The enemy’s defensive line has fallen into a state of confusion. Still have not confirmed the route to the queen’s room. Second team, infiltrate.}

The second team was the Camilla clan. The Camilla clan were hit and scattered by the self-destructing explosion on their way down

too. It was the same for the third, fourth and fifth teams. However, because the number of self-destructing wasps were noticeably smaller than the number that had self-destructed when the Berserkers infiltrated, they were able to safely land even while protecting the beginner warriors. Although there was no way to stop them from being scattered throughout the dimensional wasps' nest, they were able to quickly get into formation before the guardian wasps attacked them because the Berserkers had gathered the wasps' attention.

Just then, the usefulness of the beginner warriors was revealed.

{Due to the increase of infiltrating members, the speed of locating the queen's room has become quicker.}

{If you use the wasp-hunting awl given to you, you are able to nullify the walls in the wasps' nest.}

This was the announcement which appeared after later teams joined.

The beginner warriors, who had chosen to fight instead of returning to Earth, were able to quicken the speed at which they were locating the queen's room by their sheer numbers. Not only that, but the weapons, given only to them, were able to melt down the walls which were tormenting the Berserkers.

From then, the beginner warriors became miners. The beginner

warriors would gather around the purplish walls and pierce holes in them with the awls. Every time they pierced a hole, the wall would become more transparent until it disappeared completely. When the walls were removed like this, they were able to go to and from different rooms like normal. Although it took 20 beginner warriors a minute to remove a wall, it was an essential task for the group battle.

By the time the guardian wasps, that were busy with the Berserkers, found out about this, the later teams had already gained space and gotten into formation.

It was slowly becoming a worthwhile fight.

As more teams infiltrated, the pressure from the wasps gradually lessened. However, it was still an even fight. It didn't look easy to completely push or annihilate the wasps. When the dimensional wasps were at a disadvantage, they would move the fight to regions where dimensional walls still stood. Although they tried their best to push forward and remove the dimensional walls, the fight couldn't help but be dragged out.

However, even during these moments, they were constantly deducing the location of the queen's room, and at some point, the location of the queen's room was announced.

They learned this information as if they had suddenly remembered something they had forgotten. They suddenly knew where they had to go.

The warriors, who had become tired due to the long drawn out fight, were instantly fired up.

“Good! Attack! Let’s go!”

In order to create a path to the queen’s room, each sovereign placed their veteran warriors in the lead to push the wasps back before sending in the beginner warriors to melt the dimensional walls.

Psshsh!

“Kuahk!”

“Gaahk!”

Of course, to resist them, the guardian wasps’ attacks became fiercer, increasing the number of casualties.

The Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, who had been quietly fighting until now, started to make his move. From the start, his objective was the queen, which was why he felt reluctant to use his skills when he was unsure of the queen’s location. Even though he saw the deaths of Berserkers, he only fought dimensional wasps at a suitable pace, only lending a hand at critical moments. He had not used all his strength.

However, now was the time for him to use his full strength. Choi Hyuk suddenly showed off one of the strongest skills he possessed.

It was a skill that could melt the dimensional walls without the wasp-hunting awls.

“Instant Void Annihilation!”

His sword cut through the air and ripped open a dimensional wall.

“Let’s go!”

Every time he swung his sword, he would rip open a dimensional wall which obstructed his path. The Berserkers, who were feeling greater exhaustion because they had to pass through the walls without the help of beginner warriors, shouted, “Woaahhh!” and rushed out like fish from a ripped net. They began to run amok like a mass jailbreak of vicious criminals.

“What… What are they?”

This scene looked similar to a natural phenomenon, like a typhoon or blizzard.

The Berserkers rushed past them like a gale. The guardian wasps melted and disappeared like sugar in hot water.

There were even quite a few warriors whose lives were saved by standing in the rushing path of the Berserkers.

"W... What the..."

Not even 30 seconds had passed since the location of the queen was announced, but the Berserkers had already run off so far that the other sovereigns were no longer able to see them.

"Hurry! Hurry up and follow them!"

The other sovereigns, a step too late, followed the path Choi Hyuk had ripped apart. However, after around 5 minutes had passed, they heard cheers.

"Wahhhh!"

An announcement followed shortly after.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk eliminated the queen wasp. Sovereign Choi Hyuk and his team members will be given additional rewards.}

"What? Already?"

The fight had been long and tiring. However, once the objective had been located, the end was pitiful. It was all because the monster that had endured until now had suddenly gone berserk.

The 3rd stage began and ended with the Berserkers.

"... Let's just forget what I suffered."

Although it wasn't the case for all the beginner warriors, to many, this served as a trigger to silently bury their grudge against Choi Hyuk.

Chapter 74: Advancement Evaluation (8)

There was no announcement when they returned. There weren't even any events where they congratulated or consoled the soldiers who returned after saving more than a billion lives. They simply returned suddenly, without anyone knowing. Life was progressing as usual, and only they had returned from hell.

Chirp, chirp.

A bird chirped.

The day they returned to was sweeter and warmer than yesterday, the morning of a spring day.

The cool, yet soft breeze and the flowery scent which accompanied it created a stark contrast to their blood soaked clothes and the acidic stench of the dimensional wasps' bodily fluids.

"... I'm alive!"

Even though there was no fanfare, the beginner warriors, who had returned from hell, were moved. For colonizers with lots of experience, this hell was something they were used to, and they didn't feel anything new.

Chirp, chirp.

Still, the bird was pleasant to listen to.

“There will probably be almost no flowers blooming by spring next year. Since there won’t be any flowers, the number of insects will drop drastically, and since there won’t be any insects, birds won’t sing. A silent spring will come.”

Naro’s white hologram spread its mitten-like hands apart and shook them before lowering them towards the floor. Then, while shaking its head, it covered its mouth as it said, ‘A spring of silence will come.’

Although it could speak Korean more fluently than Koreans, its unique mime was still the same. Accompanying its mime-like actions, the images of what it was thinking were telepathically transmitted as well.

“Hu... Rachel Carson... You even read books now? It’s quite the classic.”

Author of Silent Spring. The book documented the detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment.

Baek Seoin was surprised at the passage Naro used. He had already been surprised when it had perfectly mastered Korean in a single day. However, it still did not know how to read in Korean back then. It had never read a book before, and it had yet to know how to access the internet. But, after only a day had passed, by the time they returned from the advancement evaluation, the fellow had changed.

“Yes. I succeeded in accessing the internet yesterday. I can now use most of the languages used online.”

As if it was bragging, it twirled around in place.

Although it had a simple appearance, in reality, it was an artificial intelligence which possessed superintelligence far beyond that of a human’s. Because its abilities were beyond his imagination, Baek Seoin felt somewhat overwhelmed.

Nonetheless, in a tone which sounded as if things had become easier rather than being surprised, Choi Hyuk asked,

“Really? That’s good. Then tell me the global trends.”

Even when it was abruptly requested for ‘global trends’, the superintelligent artificial intelligence Naro selected and reported topics Choi Hyuk would be interested in.

“First… The number of identified participants of the advancement evaluation is around 20 million. If we consider those not identified as well, I estimate there to be around 30-40 million in total.”

It was a number that didn’t even account for 1% of the world’s population. That was the number of people who had willingly decided to fight.

“The majority of the sovereigns participated in the advancement evaluation. Of the 40 total sovereigns, two sovereigns have been confirmed to not have participated.”

“Really? Who are the two?”

He had been curious about this. The number of teams formed during the attack on the dimensional wasps’ nest was 38. Two sovereigns were missing.

“The Clown Sovereign, Freeman, and the Sovereign of Opportunity, Nasir. They were caught going out.”

“… Even though, as sovereigns, they should be clearly aware of what the Consumables fate is, they didn’t participate…”

Choi Hyuk tapped his cheek with his index finger and thought for a moment.

“That aside, what about the treatment of returnees?”

“Including South Korea, the 17 countries with sovereigns as their political leaders ordered to prepare rewards for the participants. Besides them, it seems each sovereign has been trying to reward them… the actual effectiveness seems to be low. There isn’t a method to prove that the participants who died actually died there or a suitable method to filter out the people who claim they participated even though they didn’t.”

In some ways, this was irrational. Although the people, who fought for peace with their lives on the line, returned, drenched in blood, it seemed they hadn't gained anything. However, Choi Hyuk didn't really feel pity for them.

"Okay, well... The reward is that they became stronger than yesterday. That's their reward. The real problem should be the treatment of those who did not participate?"

"Even if I used every monitoring device towards analyzing that... There is no way to find out the real debate. I think that punishing those who did not participate is rare."

Baek Seoin agreed with Naro's judgment.

"Indeed... Since the majority of the population didn't participate... It will be difficult to take unfavorable actions against such a majority."

Of course, Choi Hyuk's thoughts were different.

"It's not like we can't take any action."

"Of course, that is true... But, if we look at it from the perspective of our group, we will take a loss. Leader... You said that you acted harshly against the beginner warriors already. We are already a small force, if we keep this up, we'll be isolated."

Baek Seoin sounded like he was complaining.

Choi Hyuk was silent for a moment before asking Naro,

“Advancement Evaluation… This isn’t all, is it?”

Naro replied,

“Of course, this won’t be all. If I analyze the tests and mission patterns up until now, it isn’t. Since the condition this time was the extinction of 1/5 of the non-awakenees, it seems the same test will be repeated four more times. Of course, it could end earlier…”

“Four more times… If we don’t set upright laws, then the further along we go, the fewer people will participate.”

When Choi Hyuk protested to Baek Seoin, Baek Seoin shrugged.

“Or, the veterans, who had already gone once, might be more active.”

“Hmm…”

Choi Hyuk thought for a while.

The isolation of the Berserkers wasn’t what Choi Hyuk wanted. From the fight against the eyeless observers not too long ago to the dimensional wasps’ nest attack this time, the damages to the Berserkers were too large. There were 2,000 casualties. The most

and second most losses the Berserkers faced until now had actually occurred one after another. The number of Berserkers, which approached 20,000 in total, had now been reduced to 14,000.

This wasn't the only problem.

"If we start to crack down on those who did not participate, we will have to start by cracking down on Berserkers. It's not like 100% of the Berserkers participated. It seems around 40% hadn't participated..."

It was as he said. There was no way that, just because they were Berserkers, they all participated in the advancement evaluation that less than 1% of the world's population participated in. Still, since around 60% of the total members participated, it was a great participation rate... but the fact that 40% didn't participate was true as well. If they blamed them, then there was the danger that the already reduced Berserkers would be reduced even further.

Baek Seoin's worry made sense. Choi Hyuk slowly nodded his head.

"... Then, I'll think about this problem a little more."

In the end, he pushed back his decision and looked at Naro before asking his last question.

"But if we pass the advancement evaluation, can we... stop the collapse of Earth?"

Naro slowly shook its head.

“That’s not it. It has already passed the point of stopping. Like I said before, there won’t be a spring starting next year. Even if earthlings succeed in advancing… Earth will collapse.”

Over the past two months, Choi Hyuk grew at a dazzling rate. Important fights continued without rest. The fight against the El tribe, the fight against the ground devourer, the fight against the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, Lao Ban, the capture battle for occupying Lao Ban’s cities, the fight against the eyeless observers, the dogfight between colonizers right afterwards and the dimensional wasps’ nest attack.

The ‘Combat Addict’ fate had activated without rest, and he had also obtained additional rewards. Because of this, his stats, which had stagnated, were able to increase by 51 points. Choi Hyuk invested these points into his Control and Stamina. Besides that, his Retribution had also been increased for free as a reward for killing the queen wasp and establishing trade between colonized lands, among others.

Stamina: 359 (3★) ->0 (4★)

Control: 453 (4★) -> 463 (4★)

Retribution: 400 (4★) -> 421 (4★)

He raised his Stamina, which had been stuck at 3-star, up to 4-star and invested the remaining points into Control. Choi Hyuk was now aiming for 5-star stats. Once he reached 5-star stats, he would thoroughly straighten out his three skills, Instant Void Annihilation, Flaming Wing Dance and Heart Injection.

They were skills that were so difficult to comprehend that he had to rely on automatic activation to use them. However, if he could figure out the fundamentals of the skills after gaining stronger Control and a higher Retribution rank, he felt expectant at the thought of activating the skills with his own abilities and even possibly improving them.

How strong would his skills be then? To endure that power, he raised his Stamina to a 4-star stat in advance. With just this, Choi Hyuk felt that he had become much stronger than before. 4-star Stamina and an almost 5-star Control allowed him to use Flaming Wing Dance and Instant Void Annihilation, which consumed a lot of karma, with more ease. Perhaps if he were to face the fight that broke out in Hyehwa District again, he would now be able to dominate the battlefield much more easily.

A period of rapid growth that followed after stagnation.

Yet, Choi Hyuk was unsatisfied.

“... I have to get stronger.”

Although this was a desire which was carved into his instincts, it was also a characteristic which allowed him to be Sovereign Choi Hyuk as well. The mistreatment of beginner warriors this time, the slaughter of the other forces' colonizers last time, and even when he killed the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, the reason why he was able to remain as a sovereign was because he never lost. It was because he was stronger than the rest and had always won. If Choi Hyuk showed even the slightest opening, those who held a grudge against him would swarm to him like bees. Because of this, Choi Hyuk had to be stronger than anyone else. Of course, he himself didn't calculate all this.

Due to Baek Seoin's dissuasion, he decided to think about officially punishing nonparticipants a little longer, however, the more he swung his sword, the more his mind became set.

"Hooo..."

Steam rose from his body. He tried to control the Flaming Wing Dance skill, but he failed today as well. However, while he was training, his mind became more simplistic.

'I can't leave those who don't fight alone.'

Various side effects? What if there were.

"If a problem comes up, I just need to get that much stronger."

Although Choi Hyuk always trusted Baek Seoin's judgment, he needed to uphold the identity of the organization he led. This wasn't a problem others could decide, but a decision he alone had to make as the sovereign.

Choi Hyuk, who had finished training in the training area arranged inside Naro's spaceship, had hardened his mind.

The moment he stepped out of the training area, Naro appeared in front of him.

"Leader! The second advancement evaluation has started!"

The reason why he was surprised was,

"...What? What about me?"

Choi Hyuk hadn't received a mission announcement. This occurred the day after they returned.

It wasn't only Choi Hyuk who hadn't received a mission announcement. The majority of the people who participated in the previous advancement evaluation were excluded from this advancement evaluation.

{The members who participated in the past advancement

evaluation are exempt. Only the 10 sovereigns named below can participate.}

The second advancement evaluation began with an unexpected announcement.

It ended in failure before the day ended.

When the sun was setting, 1/5 of the non-awakenees ceased to exist. Starting from the tips of their fingers, their bodies turned white and melted before scattering away. The scene looked like snowflakes rising up towards the sky. The snowflakes, which gathered in the sky, flashed brightly before disappearing.

That time, Lee Jinhee was holding onto her phone.

Her mother, who was in her hometown, had called her to tell her that her father had gone missing. She was worried that he might have gone to the advancement evaluation.

“Ah... Really, you Lee’s need to fix your tempers. You and that man, why do you guys always lose your tempers and go out? Even if we don’t do it, others will take of it on their own. I thought we had passed over it last time, but what’s all this now.”

She was finding fault in her husband while simultaneously worrying about him as she talked with Lee Jinhee.

“Dad went there? Euah… That’s worrying. It’s not easy…”

“Haa, it’s fine. Don’t worry, don’t you know your father’s temper? He’s not that easy to deal with.”

She had just been worrying about him, but when Lee Jinhee began to worry, she waved her hand dismissively.

The two of them continued their normal conversation. However, not long after, Lee Jinhee’s mother saw her fingertips turn white as they melted and scattered like snowflakes.

“Huh? Huh? What’s this? Why is my hand…”

“What? Mom? What’s going on? Why does your voice sound like that?!”

Lee Jinhee asked when she felt something was wrong in her mother’s voice. At the same time, a telepathic message sent by Naro entered her mind.

{It looks like they failed the second advancement evaluation. There is a phenomenon where people are evaporating throughout the world.}

Images of people’s bodies fading away like snowflakes appeared from the message Naro sent. They were videos taken by surveillance cameras in the streets, subways, and elevators.

Lee Jinhee became astonished.

“Mom! Mom! It’s not you, right? Mom!”

However, Lee Jinhee soon heard a strangely resigned voice.

“... It seems my time has come. I never thought this would happen to me. Daughter! Daughter, are you alright? Jinhee, you’re alright, right?”

“I’m fine! Mom. Where are you? I’ll go right now!”

“It’s a relief you’re okay. I’m only worried about that man... Whether he’s alive or not.”

That was the last phone call Lee Jinhee shared with her mother. Lee Jinhee lost both her parents that day. Although she learned that her father died on the battlefield a few days later...

“...Ah...”

Lee Jinhee’s body trembled in rage.

Perhaps failing the second advancement evaluation was inevitable from the start. The ones who willingly chose to fight had already gone. On top of that, only 10 sovereigns, who could organize and lead the people, could participate.

The test devised by the Exalted Wings was cruel.

The soldiers, who fought for a cause, couldn't take part multiple times, and it wasn't like the soldiers who fought in the first advancement evaluation received any special benefit.

Some families, who hadn't fought in both tests, were fine, whilst Lee Jinhee's parents had passed away even though she had played an active role in the first advancement evaluation.

Conditions which supported Choi Hyuk's strong views were being established.

At the same time, there would be inevitable friction between colonizers whose non-awakened family members had not participated in the fight and other awakenees.

One of the Exalted Wings asked,

{However, isn't it a loss to annihilate 1/5 of the population to take out only one dimensional wasps' nest? We never know if there are soldiers with outstanding talent amongst them.}

Another Exalted Wing replied,

{We may never know. However, finding them incurs a cost. It has already been well over 2 years since Earth received a deferred judgment. Yet, if they still haven't chosen to fight, then isn't it best to think they never had the talent of a warrior? As you all know, Earthlings aren't generally a species with incredible fighting talent. And if they don't even have the will to fight, then I believe they are useless. Using our budget to screen warriors amongst them will be nothing more than a luxury.}

A quick counterargument. The Exalted Wing who asked the question was still unconvinced. However, he simply nodded his head and said,

{... I understand.}

The war was too monstrous and Earth was, like a speck of dust, too insignificant of a planet to waste time on.

Chapter 75: Advancement Evaluation (9)

Alexei's Youtube channel had become incredibly famous. At first, it started off as his own hobby, but now people started to regard it as the Berserkers' official channel. This was because the Berserkers were such an unsociable group, and besides Alexei's channel, there were no other outlets which released information on them.

Even Choi Hyuk ended up regarding Alexei as the Berserkers' spokesperson.

The night they failed the second advancement evaluation, the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, held an extensive press conference and also uploaded a video on Alexei's Youtube channel, which clearly indicating his stance, before midnight. The video created such immense waves that it reached 100 million views in a day.

The message of the video was simple.

"This is a fight with humanity's survival on the line. It is difficult to tolerate selfish actions. I will give a penalty to those who do not participate in the fight."

"The method is simple. All citizens and colonizers of the Berserkers' cities, Barhaloleun, Spartoi's Fortress, Grassland Castle, Zhiyu, Pyungryu, Wanwu, and Yeshi, will assemble at their city square by noon tomorrow starting now. Remain there until all advancement evaluations have ended. We will use a recording medium and mobilize people to identify those who did not participate in the advancement evaluations from now on. Also,

those who have already participated, please immediately come to the administrative office of your city to prove your participation. This action applies to all citizens and colonizers who are over the age of 14."

"Also, from this moment, all assets within the colonized land will be frozen. Furthermore, I will not allow anyone to leave the colonized land. Those who have been determined to have not participated in the advancement evaluations until the end, regardless of their status, will be kicked out from all Berserkers' territories. Of course, your assets will be confiscated."

"Due to the current urgency of the matter, we will only be conducting this within the Berserkers. However, we will need the joint response of many more sovereigns. No matter who it is, those who do not participate in the advancement evaluations need to pay a price. Especially the Clown Sovereign, Freeman, and the Sovereign of Opportunity, Nasir, who abandoned their duty as sovereigns. They will need to pay a harsher price. Times have changed. You cannot survive on the blood of others. If you want to survive, you must be ready to spill your own."

While this announcement, which became known as 'Choi Hyuk's Statement', received strong support from one side who reacted by saying, 'Refreshing!' 'Great!' 'I'm going to join the Berserkers,' it was also met with concerns such as, 'A dangerous thought that will push those who aren't ready to fight towards their deaths!'

A fierce dispute erupted. Whether it was on Earth or in the colonized lands, whenever people gathered, they would always get into a heated discussion about this issue. The purpose of Choi

Hyuk's decision was clear.

"Can you still talk about different methods at this time? 1/5 of the non-awakenees died! Within our team, Kim Daeri and Lee Hojin have already died. In this situation, you still want to look at different methods? What? Not ready to fight? Who fights because they're ready? And what's better, dying dejectedly or dying while fighting?"

However, while Choi Hyuk's method was strong and simple, it lacked polish.

"However, this sort of forceful push will only increase unnecessary casualties. How can the elderly or handicapped, who have never fought in their life, be able to fight overnight? Even though you are able to overcome the deficiencies that come from age and most disabilities when you receive karma, won't they need to fight while they still haven't adapted to their new physical state? That's like telling them to die. Instead of foolishly saying, 'Everyone fight!', they should receive the help of supporters who are physically healthy and give them a big reward."

When two company employees were discussing in a bar, there were times when a colonizer sitting next to them would abruptly join in,

"Ha-I'm speechless at your words. Look. Don't you know how it was for 1st generation awakenees? Don't you know that a ring suddenly appeared and that they had to kill each other regardless of age or gender? Handicap, your mother. Doctors murdered patients at a hospital. Although patients also killed doctors as well.

What? Not ready to fight? How can they fight when they've never fought in their life? Motherfucker. If you need to fight, you fight."

Then another colonizer would join in,

"Hey. You're right. But aren't you mistaken about something? The subject is the Berserk Sovereign's territory. His colonized land. Barhaloleun, Zhiyu, Pyungryu... Hey. Everyone there is already an awakenee or colonizer. Even if you considered non-combatant members, they are still people who aren't afraid to die in these advancement evaluations. But, why do we need to risk our lives for these non-awakenee scum? And why do we need to lose our possessions? Fuck, does that make sense? You need to solve your own problems, you non-awakenee bastards. Or just die."

Occasionally, dissatisfaction grew larger amongst awakenees than non-awakenees.

Even though it was a strong cause, Choi Hyuk's decision was embroiled in negative public opinion. That was because Choi Hyuk's statement was a 'wide scale provocation'.

Choi Hyuk directly targeted the majority, who didn't participate, and the targeted majority wanted to justify their decisions in any way they could. It was difficult for there to be a good public opinion of him after making the majority his enemy. On top of that, because Choi Hyuk's decision forced the hand of the colonizers and awakenees who were his support, he wasn't able to get an amicable reaction from them either. Whether they were awakenees or not, they disliked Choi Hyuk's statement. This was even so when considering the fact the ones who benefitted from

this were the non-awakenees.

Even the colonizers who thought they had the responsibility to successfully complete the advancement evaluations even if it meant taking sacrifices were unable to readily support Choi Hyuk. The majority, who had not seen a monster before, were influencing the judgments of the colonizers they were close with. It didn't matter what the colonizers thought inwardly, they were unable to thoughtlessly tell others to fight just because they fought. The decision was so difficult that even the top executive of the Berserkers, Lee Jinhee, mumbled, "If my mom was alive, I would have opposed this decision. But... I don't know what's what anymore..."

That was why other sovereigns had to find a more polished, yet effective, method than Choi Hyuk's. However, was such a method easily found?

In contrast to them, the starting time of the advancement evaluations was all over the place. There was a day grace period between the first and second advancement evaluations, but the third one began the early morning of the day after the second evaluation. It was even before everyone in the Berserkers' territories could gather at their city squares.

The third advancement evaluation progressed the same way. An announcement appeared to those who did not participate in the first or second evaluation, and an offer was only given to 10 of the sovereigns, excluding the ones who participated in the second evaluation.

Was it because 1/5 of the non-awakenees lost their lives? It was counted that more people participated in the third evaluation than the second evaluation. However, the absolute majority was still hesitant. ‘I’m just one person.’ Many still thought this as they aimed for a free ride. There were even some who held baseless confidence that they would be able to survive this time as they had survived the first 1/5 probability.

In the end, that night as well, they failed the advancement evaluation.

It was better than the second advancement evaluation. That time, they weren’t even able to go beyond the 1st Stage – Dimensional Wasps’ Nest Boundary Region before the majority of people decided to return. Because the number of participates was unconditionally small, they failed to deteriorate the growing wasps’ nest. This time was much better since they were able to attempt the 2nd stage. However, they were unable to go to the end. With the 3rd stage left, everyone returned. It was because they didn’t have sufficient soldiers remaining to aim for the queen wasp.

The only reason why they were barely able to attack the 1st and 2nd stages was because the Sovereign of Paradise, Camilla, who had participated twice, and her clan members fought hard and didn’t give up until the end. The number of warriors who participated in the evaluations was still too small, but the Camilla clan fought with all they had, and the beginner warriors were influenced by them and fought fiercely as well. It was to the point where each beginner warrior attacked more than 10 times. However, ironically, the desperate fight caused their already small troops to reduce even further, and the attack eventually failed even

after taking immense losses.

The night sky, containing snowflakes left behind by the non-awakenees who ceased to exist on Earth, was beautiful.

Frustrated, Choi Hyuk was about to go out on a walk.

“Ah…”

From the hair of a passing person, inside a passing car, and above buildings, white snowflakes flew up like a snowstorm. People disappearing, scattering without a sound.

More people died. At least 1.2 billion people. All in an instant.

Choi Hyuk was depressed.

Life and death. There were scenes he recalled whenever he thought of these words. He didn’t know why, but he thought of the last smile Jung Minji showed him, the Marronnier Park incident where he bawled while hugging his mother’s gravestone, and the funeral that day which still felt unreal to this moment.

At times, he wouldn’t feel anything when he killed another person, but at other times, the person’s dying figure seemed so sudden and painful.

Choi Hyuk held one of the gently rising snowflakes in his hand.

The snowflake passed through his hand as if it didn't exist. It was pure karma. It was the purification of karma which had been accumulated over long periods of time by natural beings. Only, it wasn't the life of one being, but his father's father's father, and his mother's mother's mother. The decisions made through the accumulation of billions of years of crying, laughing, deception, and more deception. That was karma.

In other words, when a living being died and its karma was scattered away... it didn't simply mean the death of one life. The billions of years it took for that living being to be born, the history of his ancestors which had never been broken since being a single-cell organism. It meant that the genealogy of their evolution was erased.

The reason why Earth was dying wasn't simply because the ground was drying up. Earth was burning its history to give humanity the strength to fight against the monsters. Earth would disappear. Forever within the endless loop of cause and effect that is karma, as if it never existed in the first place.

Choi Hyuk didn't know all this in his mind, but he could somehow feel it. As his Retribution increased, and he could more sensitively sense karma... he instinctively realized that the extinction of the non-awakenees was something more saddening than death.

Then, as he was walking absentmindedly, something small and warm slipped into Choi Hyuk's left hand.

"There's no way you're alright, right?"

When did she appear… It was Flame-Rain. Choi Hyuk didn't grab her hand nor did he shake her off, he just halted, vacantly.

Choi Hyuk stood still before abruptly asking,

"This… is a best 3 out of 5, right?"

"… Probably?"

"…"

Choi Hyuk shut his mouth in frustration.

It was as Naro predicted. 5 evaluations, 1/5 of the non-awakenees each time. The current score was 1 win and 2 losses. This meant that they absolutely had to win the next one.

However, there was a problem.

Would Choi Hyuk be given the opportunity to participate in the next evaluation? Also, even if he was given the opportunity, would he be able to pass through the 1st and 2nd stages? The 1st and 2nd stages were games they needed an absolute advantage in numbers for. The burden was heavy as that wasn't something he could accomplish with his own power.

He was crazy for revenge.

Unfortunately, in the end, he was unable to do everything by himself… For it to be this hard to get rid of their Consumables fate, he felt a sense of shame.

"Why is it that the Exalted Wings don't distinguish between the families of those who participate and those who don't when ceasing their existence? If it's like this, there isn't a big merit in participating in the fight. Instead, the participants face the risk of losing their lives in the fight as well as losing their family."

Choi Hyuk expressed his frustrated thoughts to Flame-Rain.

Flame-Rain only slightly held his hand before letting go.

"That's because the test you are taking is a qualification test on becoming a member of the alliance… So… a citizenship. It's not a problem of who's strong or weak, but a qualification test of whether you are existences who can develop alongside the alliance in the long run… The treatment you described just now is more fitting of consumables, not citizens. 'You fight. Or else I will kill your family.' Those who move because of these threats cannot be seen as equals. The alliance wants those who judge for themselves, without the need for threats. A person who says, 'Even though there isn't an immediate benefit, if I judge that I need to fight, I will willingly fight.'… That is what the alliance is testing right now."

Choi Hyuk was silent. Indignation rose up from inside. 'Why are you the one testing that? With what right? Have you ever proved

your qualifications to us?'

Flame-Rain inspected his expression and continued,

"... Is what they say. I don't know much either. I don't like it as well."

She turned her gaze towards the sky where the karma snowflakes shined white.

"Isn't it pretty? Purely refined karma. The history of one species... Remember, they are much more powerful than you think. An incredible power that melted the endlessly growing dimensional wasps' nest within a dimension in an instant... A power that would still have a lot left over after that."

Then she turned her gaze towards Choi Hyuk. The flames which covered her face had, at some point, faded away and disappeared.

"If it's you, you might be able to produce a true flame."

Her lips smiled, though her eyes were sad.

Blaze.

With those words, Flame-Rain was engulfed in flames and disappeared. They were familiar flames. It looked similar to the skill Choi Hyuk had endlessly been practicing to control more

finely.

"... Flaming Wing..."

However, it was a true flame, purer and clearer than Choi Hyuk's, writhing with its own living will.

Chapter 76: Advancement Evaluation (10)

The second extinction occurred. What was especially shocking was that the meaning behind the extinction of 1/5 was not of the ‘surviving ones’ but 1/5 of the ‘initial population’. People who were already aware of game design style of the alliance reacted with an ‘Of course,’ however, those who were inwardly optimistic received a huge shock. If it was like this, probability-wise, it would become more and more difficult to survive.

The number of non-awakenees sharply dropped to 60% in two days. All this happened while they were still bewildered. From 80% to 60%, the difference they experienced was drastic.

Up until yesterday morning, many people still went to work.

Although they were able to see who lived and who died by the scattered desks of the absentees. Although there were many people who held onto their phones, calling their family and friends instead of working. Although the break rooms were filled with people, who broke out sobbing, as they watched the news of missing people and the government’s response. Although arguments broke out on whether Choi Hyuk’s countermeasures were right or wrong…

Up until yesterday, people still went to the places they would normally go.

Up until yesterday, there were still quite a few lucky people who hadn’t had any of their friends or family die.

However, after failing another advancement evaluation last night, by morning, the world had completely changed.

Some woke up this morning to see that their wife or husband had disappeared. Parents, who went out last night, looking for their children who had gone missing from their rooms, and came home with the sliver of hope that their child would be home when they returned, despaired once more. Although there were still people who went to work, they were met with an empty office. Amongst them, department heads and section chiefs attempted to call their subordinates. The majority of them didn't answer. Occasionally, when someone answered, they were met with curses and swears when they asked whether they were coming to work or not.

The extinction felt too unreal. Although they didn't feel it yesterday, they felt it today. What if they failed another advancement evaluation? Only 40% would survive. Not even half. And if they failed again? 20% would remain. While the remaining 20% may be thankful for the first successful advancement evaluation... The remaining 80% would forever be dead. Even if they didn't die, their loved ones would most definitely die.

For the first time, people's blood began to boil. Liquid didn't change its state until it hit a boiling point. If 100 degrees was the boiling point, 10 degrees or 99, there wasn't a big difference to the naked eye. However, if the temperature increased by 1, the true nature of what had been calm at 99 degrees would be revealed. It was the critical point. The change was dramatic. If it was 99 degrees yesterday, it was 100 degrees today. No, it was at 150 degrees. If it was a liquid state yesterday, it was gaseous today.

These people didn’t know what to do as their blood boiled. They wanted a method. What did they have to do in order to recover from this crisis? And one answer spread out like wildfire. Although it was unknown who spoke it first, through the web and through speech, it was transmitted to everyone.

{Let’s gather at the Berserk Sovereign’s colonized land!}

The Berserk Sovereign.

When they looked back, he was the only person who gave a responsible statement to this situation. When they looked back, he was the only person who had the will to resolve this problem.

In a single day, people’s opinion of Choi Hyuk had changed. What was thoughtless yesterday was a hope today.

By lunch time, the portal in Yeouido was crowded with waves of non-awakenees... It had come to the point where it was useless to count them all.

A hundred thousand? No, a million, no, 10 million. The numbers grew minute by minute. It seemed like all the non-awakenees in South Korea had gathered here. People suddenly showed up in Seoul. They gathered in Yeouido. Traffic was frozen. As Yeouido Park was too small, the waves of people were pushed as far back as the 63 Building and the National Assembly building. People pushed

and entered into the buildings lining the streets. They took their spots in offices which barely had any employees in them. They sat near the windows and looked outside. They sat on roofs and looked out.

Global reporters, who loyally did their job even in this situation, rode on helicopters, flew above Yeouido and live broadcasted this bizarre sight to the world. Foreigners who saw the broadcast were of the same mind. They too, like the Koreans, went out into the streets to find their country's sovereign, or they gathered in front of a large screen and watched the broadcast relaying the situation in Korea.

It was the largest gathering since Dangun. During the June Democracy Movement or the 2002 World Cup, there were, at most, hundreds of thousands of people gathered at one location. There was never a time during any revolution when the number of people gathered in one location exceeded the millionth scale. Just looking at this sight was magnificent, frightening and exciting. It was something that awakened all the senses a human could feel.

Dangun – the legendary founding father of Gojoseon, the first ever Korean kingdom. This is basically saying that it was the largest gathering since the inception of Korea.

June Democratic Movement was a nationwide democracy movement in South Korea in 1987.

There were times when someone would suddenly ask,

"But why are we gathered here?"

“To change the world!”

The shock from the fact that they gathered was already surpassing its cause.

People had gathered with the thought that they had to do something. What would they do once they were gathered?

There was only a single person who could answer this. It was the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk.

During this time, Choi Hyuk was in Naro’s spaceship. He normally spent his time in Naro’s spaceship these days. It was the same for the other Berserkers as well. They would either be in the spaceship or in the colonized land.

“How unpleasant…”

Choi Hyuk wet his lips as he stared down at the endless crowd below his feet. The spaceship was currently in stealth mode. From the outside, they would only see the blue sky. On the other hand, the inner walls of the spaceship were transparent like glass, and he could clearly see the outside. It was normally a metallic wall, but depending on the situation, he could switch it as he pleased.

“… Really, I never imagined that it would turn out like this. As expected, you can’t predict the future in politics.”

Baek Seoin stood in front of him with his hand placed on his

thumping chest.

Tens of millions of people were gathered to see Choi Hyuk.

Just the fact that they had gathered made Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, Ryu Hyunsung... and all of the Berserkers, including Choi Hyuk, become embroiled in an incomprehensible worry.

Gatherings had that sort of strength. Green migratory locusts were normally cute. However, when they started to gather, their bodies would rapidly produce serotonin and change their shape. They would grow and their color would change into a reddish-brown. They would devastate people's fields as they traveled in swarms. A cute insect would turn into a fearful locust swarm. Gatherings weren't simply a quantitative change, but also brought a qualitative change in the individuals.

Humans, who were social animals, were the same. With the simple action of gathering together, they were becoming completely different from normal. They hadn't done anything yet, but they were already immersed in this feeling of having accomplished everything. If Choi Hyuk showed up now, it would be like the second coming of Christ.

However, Naro warned,

"Please be careful. You cannot leave them alone to be intoxicated by this feeling."

Choi Hyuk, who had been about to leave, halted and asked,

“Why?”

“From my deductions, the chance that the fourth advancement evaluation will not happen soon is high. They are going to test the humans. From when I’ve investigated, humans are outstanding at gathering, but at the same time, have the characteristic of being unable to maintain such a large gathering for a long time. In a short while, the crowd will disperse. Also, the more intoxicated they become from this feeling, the greater the dejectedness would be once they disperse.”

“… Ah…”

Choi Hyuk let out a sigh. There was a break period of a day between the first and second advancement evaluations. There was no break between the second and third advancement evaluation as they commenced the day after each other. Then, it was obvious he would expect the fourth evaluation to take place within the next two days. The reason why over 10 million people gathered in a cramped Yeouido within half a day was because they were nervous that there would be another evaluation soon.

However, what if the evaluation didn’t occur right away? No, since when was it guaranteed that it would occur right away?

Naro pushed its hands out and did a pressing down gesture as if telling him to calm down.

“The message master has to give now is to actually calm the crowd down.”

“… Calm the crowd down?”

“Yes. So that this passion can continue to persevere like a charcoal fire.”

“…”

Choi Hyuk acknowledged its words.

Choi Hyuk discussed general ideas on what to say with his top executives and Naro as ‘calming them down’ was something he wasn’t confident in. However, that didn’t mean he wanted to send a follower out to say memorized words without sincerity in this current mood.

Once he finished his preparations, Choi Hyuk exited the spaceship.

Naro prepared the effects.

The blue sky rippled like waves. Its stealth mode had been deactivated. The enormous fortress-type spaceship, covered in white metal, was revealed in the sky above Yeouido. Yeouido became dark, almost as if it was about to rain.

<<<Woah...>>>

Shouts of admiration. The people, who covered the ground, made a commotion. It felt as though the ground itself was shouting.

A ray of light, piercing through the darkness, came down, and Choi Hyuk walked down the path of light.

Cheers erupted. Their shouts shook the buildings.

Choi Hyuk, who had been walking slowly, stopped in midair. They could clearly see his silhouette from afar. It was like the descent of a god.

Yeouido, which had been shaking from the cheers, instantly became silent. Worried they might miss even a word of Choi Hyuk's speech, they shut their mouths and perked their ears. The whole world perked their ears for Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth. Due to the application of Naro's telepathic skill, his voice was as clear as if he was speaking right next to them.

To the people who were awaiting his words, like the voice of god, he said,

{Are you happy?}

What did this mean? Their brains couldn't easily interpret the words they had heard. Only silence. Choi Hyuk continued,

{Now that you're gathered like this, do you feel that you've accomplished something?}

His voice was filled with criticism.

{Dream on. 40% of the population has died already. We are halfway to losing. What were you people doing while 40% of the population died, and why have you come crawling out now? I don't trust you people. Nor do I care about you. It's your job. Do what you want. If you don't want to die, fight or don't. Do you want me to compliment you? But, you all probably won't fight then either. If there was an evaluation now, maybe the majority of you will fight. Because you are intoxicated with the mood. However, 2 weeks from now, a month from now, the majority of you will not fight. Since the mood will have cooled. I hate you all. I hate the people who haven't fought until now and will hate the people who do not fight from now even more. I will definitely find a way to make you pay the price. Now then... Since you're disrupting the traffic, break it up.}

It was as though cold water had been poured on them. Rage, as well as a sense of crisis, burrowed into their hearts.

Only then did the people realize the gazes of colonizers looking at them. The ones who died were the non-awakenees. To the colonizers, this was someone else's concern. This tendency was

especially strong in the first generation awakenees, who had lost all their family and friends. They had long since become disgusted with the non-awakenees, who didn't even fight for themselves.

This was the major reason why they returned from the third advancement evaluation in failure. To attack the queen wasp in the 3rd stage, they needed to pierce through the strong guardian wasps which were at 2-3-star level. It was during this time that they needed more experienced colonizers than beginner warriors. However, as they progressed with advancement evaluations, the number of participating colonizers gradually decreased. Even if each sovereign and the Camilla clan fought with all they had, it was insufficient. From the start, there were many followers under sovereigns who didn't participate, and there were even more colonizers not affiliated with sovereigns.

The number of experienced colonizers, that was the key.

Even during the first advancement evaluation, the Berserkers, who were the first team to attack, didn't face too many losses. If the teams following behind them didn't separate the guardian wasps, even Choi Hyuk wouldn't have been able to target the queen wasp.

Also, there were still many colonizers who were skeptical.

"Isn't it obvious we're going to be consumables anyways? Let's enjoy the rest of our lives."

It had come to a point where words like these were openly

circulated amongst colonizers.

The effort the non-awakenees showed was still disappointing. To ensure their lives for the time being, they spent enormous sums of money to head to the colonized lands and become awakenees. The meaning behind it was clear. ‘I won’t participate in the advancement evaluation after becoming an awakenee.’ It was because they wouldn’t cease to exist even if they failed the advancement evaluations.

Looking at this, someone said,

“Look, typical of humans.”

Two weeks passed like this. Nothing happened.

Two weeks was an iffy timing. Although the shock didn’t recede, it didn’t mean they couldn’t do anything during this time. They still needed to continue production to live. Like that, one by one, their minds changed. It changed from an emergency crisis to normal life. And at that point, the fourth advancement evaluation began, burrowing into the cracks in their hearts.

{Participate? Or not?}

When the announcement appeared and the opportunity arose, people suddenly remembered Choi Hyuk’s cynical remarks. There were people who chose to participate due to the sudden surge of rage.

Yet, there were still many who did not.

Their tense hearts had become soft, and 10 seconds was too short.

“Wha… What do I do?”

During the short time they were indecisive of their decision, 10 seconds had passed. Only then did they dejectedly say,

“… Fuck… It’s just as that bastard, the Berserk Sovereign, said…”

Still, there were at least ten times the number of non-awakenees who participated in the fourth evaluation than the third. Some said it was because of Choi Hyuk’s speech, and others said to stop spouting bullshit.

However, the number of colonizers who participated was actually less than the third evaluation. The colonizers, who received the announcement this time, didn’t want to fight for the non-awakenees. At least the followers affiliated with sovereigns followed their sovereigns and participated, but the majority of those who weren’t affiliated chose not to participate. It was more so because the colonizers, who were willing to fight for the non-awakenees, had already fought during the first, second, and third evaluations, and so the ones remaining were those who had consistently chosen to not participate.

In the fourth advancement evaluation, the one known as the

strongest, Choi Hyuk, participated. Even still, many predicted they would fail.

"What's the point if there are a lot of non-awakenees? No matter how berserk the Demon King runs around, they won't be able to attack the 3rd stage with that many colonizers."

"If they attempted the 3rd stage with a noticeably smaller number of colonizers... Then well, the beginner warriors will just be annihilated. How can no-star awakenees fight 2-3-star monsters?"

However, that evening, people witnessed a countless number of survivors. Many beginner warriors survived and returned. Also, no one ceased to exist that day.

The keywords, 'Berserk Sovereign, Demon King, Choi Hyuk, Flames,' were plastered on portal sites.

2 wins, 2 losses. It was a dramatic draw.

Chapter 77: Advancement Evaluation (11)

During the 2 weeks without an advancement evaluation, Choi Hyuk spent his time thinking about fire.

What was fire?

Fire symbolized wisdom, it symbolized virtue that could not be hidden when one attempted to. It also symbolized enlightenment, but at certain times, it also stood for humanity itself. At the same time, it meant destruction and annihilation as well.

What was fire?

The four states of matter are known as solid, liquid, gas and plasma. Some say fire is plasma while others say that it isn't.

Fire was something so close that it defined humanity, but was difficult to comprehend. If it was instead light rays or a lightning strike, he felt he would be able to describe it somewhat, but when asked what fire was, his mind would become complicated. Just what was fire? Was it matter? Or was it simply only a heap of heat and light? If fire was matter, where would it fall between solid, liquid, gas and plasma? If fire was simply a heap of heat and light, would they have to call a hot incandescent light fire as well?

Choi Hyuk was continuously consumed by this question.

The skill Choi Hyuk was training, Flaming Wing Dance, was

something he couldn't control by himself and was a high-level skill that he couldn't comprehend. At first, he started to train in hopes of controlling it more efficiently. To reduce the consumption of Stamina. However, his training was met with a completely different development.

It was because of his meeting with Flame-Rain and the flames she showed. Her flames were purer and clearer, and above all, tenacious. Choi Hyuk was captivated by this new revelation.

'Why are her flames and mine different?'

What made the difference in flames? Just what were flames?

Choi Hyuk had no choice but to first start with the 'fire' he saw in nature before expanding beyond. The fire Flame-Rain and Choi Hyuk used wasn't something that existed by burning matter but rather by burning karma, the retribution of living beings. Then, it became more complicated.

'What is fire anyways? Then just what is karma-burning fire?'

It was a completely different kind of training. The training Choi Hyuk had done until now was that of 'looking', 'sensing', and 'trying'. If he saw it, he could get a sense of what was going on, and depending on the sensation, he could try it out. His entire training regime was centered around constantly practicing until he became used to the skill and improving on it. It was training comprised of his instincts and physical body.

However, the training this time demanded contemplation and enlightenment.

‘What is fire? What is karma-burning fire?’

To find the answer, he had asked Naro, Baek Seoin, and Lee Jinhee. It had been his first time asking someone else about his training.

Naro restrained from explaining karma.

“I’m not sure. Karma isn’t something that falls within the logic of science. It is hard for an artificial intelligence like me to explain. Since it is subjectively similar to a ‘feeling’... Instead, try asking humans, who can generate and control karma, what they think fire is. Only, the entire population will probably describe the natural phenomenon they call ‘fire’. What is fire? The reason why the true nature of fire is so confusing is... the phenomenon known as ‘fire’ is actually an accumulation of various different essences rather than of a single one.”

“An accumulation?”

“Yes, it’s like a guitar performance. Guitars are made up of their body and strings, correct? If either one of those is missing, then it will be impossible to play.”

“Yeah.”

“You also need a guitarist. As well as a song to play. The gathering of all these is a ‘guitar performance’. If you ask, ‘What is a guitar performance?’ Asking, ‘Is it the guitar strings? Its body? The performance? The song?’ doesn’t have any meaning. From the beginning, a guitar performance is not of one essence but the continuous reaction of various essences. It’s the same with fire. It is a phenomenon which occurs when fuel is heated. If we use a candle as an example, when the wick, which is solid, is lit on fire, it will burn and turn to ash. The wax will melt into a liquid, and a portion of that will evaporate into a gas, and a portion of that gas will be ionized, temporarily turning into plasma. The plasma is unstable and will be unable to maintain its state for a long time before returning to a gaseous state, emitting a light which creates the fire’s light. So fire is the accumulation of all these essences. Fuel, the heat applied to the fuel, the gas produced by the fuel, the temporary plasma generated from the gas, and the light due to this. So, fire, in the context of light, is similar to neon signs and auroras. Since they are phenomena created through plasma. However, when humans talk about ‘fire’, they aren’t only talking about the light, but its fuel, the ashes which remain afterwards, the evaporated smoke, the light and the heat. This is the reason why the name of this combined chain of phenomena feels different from everything else.”

Surprisingly, Choi Hyuk was able to understand this right away without much scientific knowledge. This was the not often revealed effect of his Retribution stat. Retribution improved the caliber of the living being itself. A Retribution of 421 (4★), which Choi Hyuk possessed, allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of the origin of the world. His senses and cognition, which had reached a superhuman level of sensitivity, allowed him to process information humans normally wouldn’t be able to sense and allowed him to more easily comprehend these phenomena. On top of that, since Naro used its telepathic abilities to light a candle in

Choi Hyuk's mind and allowed him to closely examine it, it would have been weird if he didn't understand it.

"Aha. Thanks."

"No, it was fun for me as well. Since fire is wonderful. Like the guitar."

The simple appearance of Naro's hologram imitated playing a guitar. Then it stared at Choi Hyuk. Even when he was leaving, it followed behind him. In the end, Choi Hyuk reluctantly asked,

"... You like the guitar?"

Naro leaped up and down as it replied,

"Yes! The thing known as music is so surprising. Narolings didn't have anything like it. Since they didn't communicate through sound... Perhaps they may not have felt anything even if they heard music. But, for some reason, I, the artificial intelligence which they created, can appreciate it. So I know that music is a marvelous culture of the earthlings. I like all instruments! However, at this moment, I like the guitar the most."

Then, it stared at Choi Hyuk again. Feeling a strange pressure, Choi Hyuk asked,

"Don't tell me... you want one?"

Naro leaped up and down. As expected, it wanted one. Choi Hyuk was taken aback.

“You can just make one instead.”

Naro’s spaceship was the last heritage of a highly advanced civilization. Of course, it had the ability to create any object which existed on Earth. However, as if it found Choi Hyuk’s words absurd, it exaggeratedly shook its head and arms before saying,

“Haa… How can it compare to a handcrafted instrument made with the heart and soul of a master craftsman?”

This was the reply of a certain artificial intelligence that loved analog items.

Choi Hyuk, who had promised to buy Naro a guitar, went to find Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee this time. What they thought about fire was a level simpler.

“Are you talking about fire? Isn’t it something that spreads as it burns?”

“Fire? It’s incredible. It’s bright, and when you approach it, it’s hot. When you touch it, it hurts like stinging needles and gives off a scent. But leader, the advancement evaluation is really taking a long time to start… Don’t tell me no one participated again? Haa… I really don’t like it.”

These replies didn’t directly help Choi Hyuk. But, it became a chance for Choi Hyuk to look back on it himself.

‘What do I think fire is?’

To him, fire was destruction. Something that burned everything. Killed everything. Brought pain. Perhaps it was because of this, but the flames he burned felt somewhat heavy. Instead of burning, it felt like he was smashing things with fire. On the other hand, the fire Flame-Rain showed him was light, yet strong. It possessed the power to penetrate through any strong material and lightly burn it.

After long contemplation, Choi Hyuk was finally able to realize what fire was.

Choi Hyuk had thought that fire was simply heat until now. So he could melt his opponents with this heat. Because of this, his fire didn’t comply with his will. This was because the true essence of fire wasn’t heat. Naro’s words were right. Fire was a series of processes. It was a continuous reaction which changed the state of materials. This meant that fire didn’t stop and was continuously changing. Light and heat as well as their by-products, the result of which was fire.

Its essence was the simultaneous coexistences and changes of states itself. The more states it included and the more dramatic its change was, the more destructive the result would be.

‘If I want to manipulate fire, I need to focus on the effects and changes of these essences instead of its destructive power.’

Like how he needed to grab his collar instead of his shirt to take it off, and how he needed to grab the handle of a fan and shake it open rather than opening each and every fold.

When he realized this, Choi Hyuk’s flames evolved.

These flames first made their appearance during the ‘3rd Stage – Wasps’ Nest Inner Region’ of the fourth advancement evaluation.

The fourth advancement evaluation.

When they were about to start the 3rd stage, the atmosphere felt hopeless. There were simply too few experienced colonizers remaining. During the 3rd stage, the beginner warriors played a supportive role. No matter how many there were, it was useless with only them. Many sovereigns felt that it was better to retreat rather than causing needless sacrifices.

‘Will a billion people die again?’

‘Are humans consumables as expected?’

Although they hated it, their strength was insufficient. They despaired.

The speeches began within this heavy silence. Choi Hyuk was the first to start speaking. Like always, he didn't have retreating on his mind this time as well. He simply issued the order in which they would infiltrate.

"The first to infiltrate will be me. Next will be the Berserkers. After that… do what you want."

Then he really jumped down towards the dimensional wasps' nest by himself. As if he didn't care whether they followed behind him or not.

Everyone thought he was crazy.

Pssssh!

Vooom!

The dimensional wasps densely gathered towards the falling Choi Hyuk. Each one was a monster at the level of a veteran colonizer. Choi Hyuk looked incredibly small in the middle of them. They couldn't watch with open eyes.

On top of that, at first, Choi Hyuk absentmindedly stood there. People were suspicious whether he was stricken with fear or not.

However, soon, there was a reversal.

Choi Hyuk wasn't standing there absentmindedly, but he was preparing to burn his flames. He linked his thumping Karma Heart to his mind.

At first, his Karma Heart was filled with emptiness and despair.

When he closed his eyes, his Karma Heart, which had been hollow with emptiness, achieved a calm peace.

As the tips of his lips curved upwards, he started to become excited.

When he opened his eyes and looked straight at his enemies, his eyes were dyed with hostility.

The hostility turned into rage.

The rage then turned into madness, and the madness left behind ashes, returning back into emptiness and despair.

It was a sequential change, but at the same time, it was a simultaneous change. His Karma Heart simultaneously went through emptiness, despair, peace, joy, hatred, hostility, rage, and madness as it changed into each one in succession. Karma boiled. No, it burned.

"Flaming Wing Dance – Choi Hyuk Style."

His flames, which started in one corner of the dimensional wasps' nest, spread endlessly. It was different from Flame-Rain's clear flames. His distinctive scarlet flames, which looked like gushing blood, burned the wasps' nest as well as the dimensional wasps. The dimensional walls, which divided the dimensional wasps' rooms, melted down. They shriveled up. The nest itself let out a scream. This wasn't the 'Flaming Wing Dance' which had been deteriorated to the 4-star level. It was a true Flaming Wing Dance which Choi Hyuk, who had become enlightened in what fire was, created. The purification of the essence of karma flames.

{You have attained a deep understanding of karma on your own. Retribution increased by 30, free karma points increased by 40.}

<<Kiyeeehh>>

The wasps let out a scream the onlookers had never heard before as they died.

Victory was decided that moment.

"As expected, the Berserk Sovereign did one for us."

When Richard, who had been inwardly anxious, heard that they won the fourth advancement evaluation, he clenched his fists. It

was the moment where, if they weren't careful, all his preparations would have been for naught.

"Now, if it's a best three out of five... It will start soon?"

Richard thought.

If it was a best three out of five, then there was one more evaluation left. If they were in the middle of testing humanity, then when would humans reveal their weakest point? In Richard's mind, that was...

"Now."

The moment they were drunk with victory. It hadn't even been 2 hours since the fourth advancement evaluation ended when the always insincere announcement woke those who were asleep up and awakened those who were drunk with alcohol.

{Advancement Evaluation. Same as before. Participate? Or not?}

Richard smiled.

"I knew it."

It had already been a long while since he had finished his preparations. The moment he had a hunch they would lose the second and third advancement evaluation, Richard put everything on the final evaluation.

He used both carrot and stick methods. He gathered experienced colonizers and promised them benefits within his colonized land. He persuaded the sovereigns who had yet to participate and rallied the non-awakenees within their groups before promising them suitable benefits if they cooperated. On the other hand, he quietly purged those who did nothing but speak negatively and had a lukewarm response to participating. Also, he requested to all the cooperators, excluding the sovereigns,

“You will not participate in any of the evaluations. We will risk it all on the final evaluation. You will keep choosing not to participate and will choose to participate in the final evaluation. Also, pray. That during this time, someone, no matter which sovereign it is, will win once.”

Then he issued ‘tickets’. He printed off multiple tickets and gave them to the colonizers and non-awakenees who promised to cooperate.

“You will always keep these tickets with you. You will carry them with you even during the advancement evaluation, and when you meet members of predesignated clans, you will give them this ticket. Later, we will collect them all and check whether you participated or not.”

The reason why this system worked was because of the trust

Richard had accumulated until now. ‘Trust’ was the driving force which allowed him to mediate the countless conflicts between different forces, giving him the name ‘Sovereign of Balance’. Colonizers trusted in the fairness of his methods as well as the advantages and disadvantages he promised. They also trusted the collectors of these ‘tickets’, whom he chose.

Although it was completely different from Choi Hyuk’s method, the method Richard used to gather strength may perhaps have been the most ideal and natural method for humans.

The result of this was victory.

Choi Hyuk, who had returned from the fourth advancement evaluation, heard the news of the fifth advancement evaluation victory after he woke up.

“Already? Who?”

Baek Seoin replied,

“The Sovereign of Balance.”

“Huh…”

It had been a long time since Choi Hyuk admired someone else besides himself.

The place where enormous stone slabs gathered, the ‘Brain’ of the Flame Wing Alliance.

The Exalted Wings were discussing new information.

“The humans have passed the advancement evaluation. We have to grant them citizenship.”

“However, if you look at the process, it is hard to say they were united. In reality, wasn’t it a success created by the strength, coercion, or conciliation of individual sovereigns?”

“That is correct. The result was a victory, but there is a problem with the process. Although there were individuals who showed power beyond our expectations, we cannot grant them citizenship because of this. Amongst 5-star experts, so many species are still consumables.”

“… You say strange things. If we decided to go with the advancement evaluation from the start, then it is only right we accept the result of the advancement evaluation. I worry that the standard for granting citizenship is getting more difficult as days go on. If we don’t respect other species as karmalings like us and use them as tools, how are we different from monsters?”

“I am not saying we shouldn’t grant them citizenship. I am only suggesting to limit their rights. Earthlings are a species that will not be able to function properly without an outstanding sovereign. Also, we observed that they cannot unite if there are too many

sovereigns. Following this, I request we limit the number of sovereigns who can represent the earthlings. We need to only acknowledge three sovereigns to have the political rights and right of passage as members of the alliance. Sovereigns besides them… Even if, in reality, they possess an occupation as a sovereign, we cannot acknowledge them as representatives of Earth as per the alliance's principle."

"… Three is too few. It's not like the number of earthlings is small, we cannot reflect their will with only three people. It makes no sense to restrict a species' potential for our own convenience."

"Then let's go with seven people."

"…"

The decision of the Exalted Wings was normally very quick. Even if they didn't speak, they knew each other's circumstances, and thus, the conversation and compromise ended in an instant. Seven people. Even the objectors felt this was the best they could do.

Silence. This meant agreement.

"Then, we will leave the method of selecting the seven up to the earthlings. As they are now a species that possesses the right of autonomy and is affiliated with the alliance."

That was how the fate of Earth was decided once again.

Chapter 78: Musical Chairs (1)

That day, the sun had momentarily lost its light. As if a light switch had been flipped, the sun suddenly turned off. Instead, an aurora was cast over the entire Earth. It was as if the clothes of god or the dance of spirits had been cast on the sky. It was as if spirits were showering.

The aurora, which was Latin for dawn, swayed and shone above the heads of people who were celebrating the fifth advancement evaluation victory.

“I never thought there would be a day where I’d see an aurora in Seoul.”

The aurora, which started off green, shortly changed its color. It gradually became redder, and from red, it changed to pink before turning yellow at its ends. The morning aurora changed into the color of a sunset, and the 63 Building and Han River shined alongside it.

This ridiculous combination in the sky made even those who shut themselves at home come out and look up at the sky.

Even people in windowless study rooms were pulled by an unknown premonition and stood below the aurora-splashed sky.

The aurora swayed as it slowly began to form letters. Letters which didn’t exist on Earth. However, for some reason, even children, who had yet to learn to read, were able to read the

letters.

{We sincerely welcome you on joining the Flame Wing Alliance. Let us fight together until the day of eternal victory. We hope that peace and prosperity will cover the entire universe.}

{A notice from the Alliance's 103rd Barred Spiral Galaxy Administration Bureau.}

<Release of Information>

Currently, Earth is in the process of extinction. That is to say, this was an inevitable decision so earthlings could carry out the alliance's monster-fighting missions, and using your obtainment of alliance membership as an opportunity to look back, this will not be repeated.

The karma extracted from Earth will be prioritized for the awakening of earthlings and the dimensional teleportations used to carry out missions. The rest will be used as necessary resources to investigate other karmalings and to have them take part in this sacred war.

There are 1,197 days until the complete extinction of Earth,

and due to the fact that after 900 days Earth will become a land uninhabitable by living beings, we hope that you will hasten your colonization and migration to the planet ‘Dragonic’.

However, if the migration is taking longer than expected, you can file a claim to the alliance, asking for the postponement of Earth’s extinction.

As alliance members, all earthlings have the right to be respected and protected according to alliance law. However, following the decision of the top legislative organization of the alliance, the ‘Brain’, the earthling’s exercisable rights will be limited. All rights of earthlings will be entrusted to seven sovereigns. Those who do not have the approval of the selected sovereigns will not be able to, among others, exercise their rights of using the supply store, entering other planets, picking missions, establishment and suggestion of tactics.

Because earthlings need to choose the seven sovereigns whom they will entrust their rights to by themselves, this will be done through a self-application process. Any earthling, who possesses an occupation as a sovereign, will be able to apply to be one of the seven sovereigns. The list of applicants and their current locations will be revealed and constantly updated. Anyone will be able to read the current list of applicants simply by thinking of it in their minds. In the case there are more than seven sovereigns, no sovereign applications will be accepted. Also, as it is expected that there will be many applicants during

this first time, we hope that you understand we will only record the seven chosen sovereigns once a 24-hour-period has passed without any additional applicants.

Hostile actions between alliance members are absolutely forbidden. In fact, as the laws that apply to you are now different from when you were outside the law as consumables, from now on, we hope that you will pay special attention so that there are no clashes between other alliance members. However, the alliance will not interfere in conflicts between earthlings as we consider them internal affairs.

That was what was written.

People absentmindedly looked up at the sky which contained the shining aurora. Soon, the aurora disappeared, and the sky returned to its normal hue. However, as if those sentences had been engraved in their minds, they didn't forget them.

The advancement evaluation which had snatched away almost half the total population...caution spread between the joy of surviving through this ordeal.

"I think I can smell the stench of blood already?"

Alexei sniffed his nose.

“Don’t say such unlucky things,”

Criticized Lee Jinhee as she jumped over a gap between two tall buildings.

“But, this is no joke. I really think that tons of people are going to die this time. The moment the announcement appeared, all 40 existing sovereigns applied. Although some came to an agreement nicely amongst themselves… From the start, the announcement stated, ‘We will not interfere in disputes between earthlings.’ Then there will undoubtedly be sovereigns who fight with their all. Also, our leader will definitely be on the side of fighting with his all.”

“… Yeah, you go ahead and kill a lot.”

“Ah… That…”

Alexei, who knew Lee Jinhee’s hate in killing humans, showed an uneasy expression. He had misspoken. Although it couldn’t be helped, there was no need to remind her of it.

“It’s fine. Alexei. Don’t follow me. I have somewhere to go.”

Lee Jinhee didn’t even call him by his nickname, ‘Lyosha’. She was upset. Then-

Thump!

She stomped on the roof banisters as she began to jump over three to four buildings at a time. This wasn't a speed Alexei could follow.

"Euack! I'm sorry!"

He shouted as he tried to catch up, but Lee Jinhee didn't turn back as she went further away.

Alexei mumbled,

"Ah... Damn it."

However, he didn't stop running. Since he already knew where she was going and-

"I need to help her as best as I can today."

Since he knew better than anyone that she didn't have a harsh personality.

A fast pace. It felt good as the wind brushed past his ear. Then, at some point, the stench of blood permeated in the wind.

<<Euu>>

The moment he thought he heard the screams of patients, who had been sliced and ripped apart, they filled his vision.

The number of casualties after every advancement evaluation was incredible. The survival rate hung at 1/3 each time. The third advancement evaluation the Camilla clan participated in was known to be especially fierce, and the rate of beginner warriors who returned alive was only 10%. It was the same during the fourth advancement evaluation Choi Hyuk participated in. The reason why they said that the survival rate was high for that evaluation was not because the survival rate was actually high, but because they had expected for them to all have died, yet a lot more than expected had actually returned alive. Even if they had wasp-hunting items, there were still many casualties, and the majority of survivors were wounded because civilians, who have never fought a monster in their lives before, suddenly had to fight 1-star monsters and above.

This had all taken place in only 17 days. It was a very short time.

However, over two billion people had ceased to exist due to their losses. That number easily overcame the number of deaths accumulated by the bubonic plague, measles, and other infectious diseases over a long period of time. Tens of millions of the people, who chose to participate and fight, had either died or were wounded. A number comparable to the world wars had either been killed or wounded in half a month.

Still, although people began to return to their daily lives, it had become difficult for society to maintain its various functions. This

was especially the case in what was currently the biggest issue, medical treatment.

Although the number of doctors and nurses who had simply ceased to exist were critical, if they also considered the pharmaceutical companies, the companies who produced and repaired medical equipment, the companies that supplied raw material for these companies, and each and every transportation company, there was not one company that was functioning properly. Additionally, because of all this, it was impossible for hospitals to run properly. However, there were more wounded people than at any other time.

This was precisely the reason why the only healer in Korea, Bae Jinman, spent his days in the streets.

He set up a treatment center amongst empty offices to take care of those who weren't accepted into hospitals, and anyone who possessed some medical knowledge was able to come out and tend to the wounded.

There was a pungent stench of blood. As long as they had awakened, most wounds would close after time passed. However, the healing abilities of the beginner warriors were weak, and on the other hand, the wounds they suffered were fatal, such as severed limbs and spilled guts. If they were civilians, these wounds would have killed them already, but they were able to endure it with their regenerative abilities. They moaned in pain as they waited for their turn even though it was unknown when that would be. Volunteers carried patients, who seemed close to dying, to Bae Jinman.

“Move! Move! Emergency patient!”

Lee Jinhee piggybacked a patient who had gone into shock and rushed into the lobby of the large building which was Bae Jinman’s treatment center. Ever since the advancement evaluation began, she had always volunteered to move patients.

Thud!

Lee Jinhee, who roughly opened the door and entered, opened her mouth at the sight in front of her. It was because the fourth and fifth advancement evaluations had occurred one after another. The number of patients reached a point of helplessness. The wide lobby was completely filled with patients that there wasn’t a single place to step. All of them were in a critical state, almost about to die. No, there were people who had already died. Blood, blood, there was blood everywhere.

Now that she looked, there were dying patients lined up outside the building as well.

“Grrr…”

The patient on her back let out a strange sound. Before he had been screaming in pain, but now he let out an ominous sound. It was critical. Feeling the warm blood wetting her back, it seemed he was spilling a lot of blood.

Tears welled up in her eyes. What was more hellish than war was what came afterwards. The despairs which repeated persistently and didn't die down in a day or two.

"Mister. Pull yourself together. Okay? Mister. Don't lose your mind. Karma is a power that reacts to your mind. Mister."

She didn't dare shake him. As she called out to him with her voice, she felt a heavy sense of hopelessness. Although Bae Jinman could treat people with his karma, Lee Jinhee couldn't. Her karma trait was 'Explosive Blood'. If she inserted her karma into healthy people, it may prove fatal.

As it was incredibly difficult to obtain a karma trait that could help others recover, there were only two healers in South Korea. As Choi Hyuk's mother had passed away, the only remaining one was Bae Jinman.

"Can't we cultivate healers like the Camilla clan..."

As she said this in a sullen voice, she felt the patient on her back becoming cold. The life on her back was in the middle of flickering out.

Even if she had experienced it multiple times, it was tragic every time. Lee Jinhee absolutely hated the feeling of someone dying on her back. Yet, she couldn't bring herself to let him down either. He would die either way. This had simply occurred suddenly.

“Wait.”

Then someone placed his hand on the patient on her back. Seeing as their language resonance activated, it seemed he was a foreigner and not Korean. Then-

{Recover}

With the activation word, he activated a healing skill.

Whoosh.

Green light surged. Lee Jinhee thought the light was similar to the aurora she had seen not long before.

“Grr... Eeuuu... Ah..”

Hwoo, haa.

As the light gradually died down, the patient, who had been screaming strangely, regained strength in his voice. He breathed comfortably.

The man that healed the patient asked,

“Whew~ That was lucky. Is this the treatment center Guardian Bae Jinman resides?”

He was a middle-aged man with green eyes. He grew a graying beard on his chin.

“Ah, yes… And you are?”

“I am a healer from the Camilla Clan, Le Guin. I have been sent here as a show of respect to the Berserk Sovereign, who took part in the fourth advancement evaluation.”

“Hee… The leader?”

“Ah, are you a Berserker? Anyways, I was surprised. When I met with the Berserk Sovereign, he suddenly told me to go find Mr. Bae Jinman. For South Korea’s only healer to be under the command of the Berserk Sovereign… If you don’t mind me saying, there was a bit of an image gap. Haha.”

Le Guin said this in a friendly manner,

“Then, it looks like there’s a lot of work… Let’s meet again.”

And went inside the building. Now that she looked around, she saw figures with the Camilla’ clan’s leaf emblem here and there. They appeared suddenly before mixing with the patients without any hesitation. They skillfully stanched bleeding wounds, and although it was unknown where they procured it, they

administered antibiotics and pain killers.

"Woah... How wonderful."

Lee Jinhee's heart, which had become depressed due to the endless fighting and killing of people recently, slightly relaxed from the heartwarming feeling.

Alexei, who had found Lee Jinhee a little late, hit his chest with a thud.

"Hey. Stop beating so fast."

Patients were everywhere, as were volunteers and Camilla clan members who took care of them, and Lee Jinhee, who stood in the middle, wiped the sweat from her forehead. The sunlight was incredible as well.

"... It would be great if this mood continued. Instead of fighting between one another."

Even though he was only a 15-years-old youth, Alexei was still well aware that the way in which the world was run was somewhat insane. Even still, because he liked seeing this scene, because he like seeing Lee Jinhee's smile, he sincerely wished... that the seven sovereigns could be elected without anyone dying.

Chapter 79: Musical Chairs (2)

That night, they were able to save the patients, who had been in a critical state, with the cooperation of Le Guin of the Camilla clan. There was a bit of time to rest afterwards.

The wind was refreshing that night. Le Guin, who had been absentmindedly resting, suddenly said,

“This was quite unexpected.”

“What was?”

“If you don’t mind me saying, but... before coming here, my impression of the Berserkers wasn’t very good. I acknowledged their contributions to humanity, but they brought too much blood? Stubborn? It was that sort of image.”

Lee Jinhee grinned at Le Guin’s words.

“Well, that’s not wrong.”

“However, the guardian and even Director Lee Jinhee... I didn’t think that the Berserkers would have this side to them. I was honestly impressed.”

Even Bae Jinman, who had slumped down in exhaustion, chuckled at his words.

Lee Jinhee looked up at the sky. The night sky was filled with stars. As almost half the world's population died, there were many homes with their lights off, and there was no way stores would be open to nightlife in this mood... The sky, which had been created out of tragedy, was a beautiful pale.

"I don't know... I think of it like this. That people will eventually die. Mr. Le Guin isn't a first generation awakenee, right?"

"Ah, yes. I joined later. I accepted the 'Savior' fate from the Camilla clan, and when it was revealed that I had a talent for the 'Heal' trait, I received the support of the Camilla clan and was developed as a healer."

Besides awakening as a guardian due to a special occupation like Bae Jinman, the conditions in becoming a healer were very picky. Three conditions were currently known. One must have a 90% aptitude to the 'Savior' fate, must be able to pick the 'Heal' trait, and must possess both Control and Retribution stats that are at least 3-star.

That wasn't easy. Even if they possessed the first two conditions, there was still a problem. As the 'Heal' trait wasn't much help in fighting, it wasn't only difficult to increase their stats to the 3-star level, but it was even harder to survive the compulsory missions that would occasionally occur.

There was also a problem after growing with such difficulty. Their physical states as well as their buffs and recovery skills, in all

aspects, were much weaker than guardians like Bae Jinman. To develop a single healer, the clan had to consistently support them. The benefits they would earn was comparatively small. This was especially the case because, when awakenees reached the 2-star level, most wounds would regenerate by themselves. As long as their arms or legs didn't get cut off, they didn't desperately need the help of a healer.

That was why only clans like the Camilla clan, who pursued justice and benevolence, would professionally train healers. The majority of clans simply equipped themselves with one or two healers and that was it.

Also, Lee Jinhee knew another reason why healers weren't popular.

"I knew it. The people of the first generation who endured that hell all know. That, in the end, they can either kill or be killed. What they need first in order to live is military power. If they don't have it, they'll die. Also, to save more people, what is necessary is military power. If they don't have that, then they will have to watch their loved ones being violated by devilish people. Although you are both healers... Guardian Bae Jinman and Mr. Le Guin give off different vibes."

"..."

Le Guin was silent.

"That is probably why Mr. Le Guin doesn't feel we are very

‘Berserker-ish’. Although we are currently saving people here… we are a little different from Mr. Le Guin at a fundamental level. Because we can kill a person at any time. At the very least, we aren’t just. No, we are closer to being evil.”

Lee Jinhee’s voice sounded somewhat bitter.

“The actions of the Berserkers aren’t righteous. However… at the very least, I believe in one thing, and that is the direction our leader has set. His direction hasn’t wavered. To take revenge on those who started this whole tragedy. To stop anyone from playing with human lives. I agree with his cause. And if it is for that cause, I can commit gruesome murder any time. Only…”

Lee Jinhee paused momentarily. The wind blew.

“Only, I don’t want to become numb from killing people. That is why I lost my temper with Lyosha this morning.”

Alexei, who had been slowly falling asleep, crouched in a corner visible to Lee Jinhee, perked his ears and raised his head when he heard Lee Jinhee say his nickname.

“Go sleep, kid.”

Alexei smiled at Lee Jinhee’s words and tried to sleep again. He looked like a small animal.

Le Guin, looking at the two, said in a passing tone,

“Really… How was it that we were born in this damn world…”

“Keuk, keuk. Tell me about it.”

“Huhu… Yeah.”

As if they felt the expression, ‘damn world’, was fitting, Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman laughed bitterly.

‘All rights of earthlings will be entrusted to seven sovereigns.’ This was troublesome beyond imagination.

As soon as they became a member of the alliance, a network took position inside their heads. If they followed the feeling which tickled the insides of their heads, as if they had suddenly remembered after forgetting for a long time, earthlings could learn of their new right.

‘Mission Selection’.

{Missions within range}

Defend Depina, Reward – Base Mission Points 5,000, Limited to those with Retribution 0 (5★) or above.

Recapture Lejour, Reward – Base Mission Points 800, Limited to those with Retribution 200 (3★) or above.

Attack the 5532nd Dimensional Gate, Reward – Base Mission Points 3,000. Limited to those with Retribution 400 (4★) or above.

…

The long list of missions excited Choi Hyuk's heart. The selection of missions had been small up until now. It wasn't like now where he could choose as he wished, but instead, a mission would be announced, and he had to choose whether he was going to participate or not. To someone like Choi Hyuk, who wanted to take many more missions that were much more dangerous, this system was frustrating. Also, the majority of missions given to him were too easy. It was because, as they received a deferred judgment, humans were rarely given dangerous missions which could annihilate them.

That was why just seeing this list, from which he could choose as he wished as if he was at a buffet, made him feel refreshed.

"So they use Retribution as the cut-off point…"

Retribution was the requirement for choosing a mission. Those who possessed high Retribution would be able to choose better rewarding and more intense missions.

Unfortunately, he hadn't reached 5-star Retribution yet. Choi Hyuk chose a mission that matched his current Retribution.

“Attack the 5532nd Dimensional Gate.”

Even though he expected this, he felt good the moment he said those words. And, as he expected,

> {As you have not received the approval of the seven overseers, you are unable to choose a mission.}

He received an excitement-dampening reply.

Choi Hyuk thought for a long while. What actions did he have to take? Was there even a way to choose seven people in this current situation without spilling blood?

After completing his thoughts, he called for a meeting.

“We can’t let this absurd situation continue for much longer.”

Choi Hyuk had a bit of an agitated tone.

“Even though we finally got rid of our Consumables fate, there isn’t much of a difference.”

The meeting room was so large that his voice echoed. The place they were in was the King Castle in the Berserkers' capital city, Barhaloleun. The 'King Castle' was a facility that buffed allies and debuffed monsters, and at the same time, it also observed all trades within the territory and automatically set the tax as well as other administrative functions. It could be said that it was a higher ranked facility than the 'Territory Pyramid', which was the most basic territory facility.

Currently, all the Berserkers' top executives were gathered in the King Castle. Even Bae Jinman and Lee Jinhee, who had been treating the patients, had been called here.

"Hmm... But it's not like we can kill all the other sovereigns either."

Lee Jinhee said in a helpless voice. It was true. Only seven could remain out of the 40. 33 people had to give up. However, there currently wasn't anyone who had come out and said they would give up. But choosing to kill them all looked almost physically impossible, and the mental repulsion was great as well. It was different from when they were attacking Lao Ban since he had a clear cause back then.

"... Well, if we really needed to, we could kill all 33 of them."

Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman showed ugly expressions at the words Choi Hyuk mumbled. If he chose to do that, they would undoubtedly oppose it. Still, Choi Hyuk's thoughts were that he would only do it if it was necessary.

“Even if we don’t kill all 33 of them, there’s a need to firmly push forward.”

Choi Hyuk said,

“If we continue to read each other’s moods like this, it will never narrow down to seven people. We need to flip this around. Even if we get criticized, it’s fine. Even if we get attacked, it’s fine. If sovereigns unite to face us, even that is fine in its own way since it will be easier to elect the seven representatives if they form groups.”

When Choi Hyuk said these words, Chu Youngjin recalled the Throne Game which had taken place in the school gymnasium in the past. Even then, Choi Hyuk had been the first to act. He created chaos, which brought on a free-for-all, and as a result, the Throne Game concluded much quicker.

Choi Hyuk continued,

“First, there is a definite starting point. Sovereigns we need to straighten out.”

He briefly looked around at the people present before saying,

“The Clown Sovereign Freeman and the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.”

“Hmm…”

Even as they murmured to themselves, they all nodded their heads.

“Those two didn’t participate in the advancement evaluation. And they had the nerve to apply as one of the seven sovereigns. I can’t tolerate this.”

As Choi Hyuk said, the Clown Sovereign Freeman and the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir did not participate in the advancement evaluation even until the very end. Instead, there were rumors that they gained quite a profit by providing medical service at an exorbitant price to those who returned after participating in the evaluations.

“These two don’t have the right to call themselves sovereigns. We will clearly inform people of this rule. That those who do not fight when they have to will face greater consequences.”

Choi Hyuk’s voice was resolute. In the very least, he would not compromise about attacking these two. Everyone had already realized that he had come to the decision to face them as their sovereign. Which was why they were worried.

“Hmm… So are we taking the bullet again?”

Baek Seoin said in a weary voice.

The current situation was similar to the Mafia game{1}. They had to eliminate 33 people but were currently unsure of how to start. What would happen if someone came out and accused, “Let’s kill A first! There’s no doubt he’s the Mafia!” at a time like this? If they felt their accusation was valid, there would be a trial against A. From this trial, A could be killed, or he may not be. Either way, what was certain was that the next person to go on trial would be the one who accused A. Being the first always came with a risk.

“If we took the lead, isn’t there a chance we’ll become the next target?”

The artillery captain, Handke, expressed his concern in a low voice.

Yet Choi Hyuk simply smiled.

“Then, isn’t that good? Since we’re doing this to end it as quick as possible.”

Of course, if people recklessly started accusing others, the Mafia game would end more quickly. For better or for worse.

Lee Jinhee shook her head and said,

“Haa… As expected, our leader is crazy.”

The situation came to a momentarily lull before Ryu Hyunsung raised his hand and asked,

“… How will we do it? It will be difficult to punish those who hide in their colonized land.”

They had endured all sorts of hardship trying to punish Lao Ban, whose colonized land was relatively close. It may be even harder when facing Freeman and Nasir, whose territories they hadn’t yet located.

However, this was Ryu Hyunsung’s mistake. Baek Seoin sorted it out,

“Let’s see… Freeman is in a place that is around 5,200km away from Barhaloleun Hill, and Nasir’s a bit further away. He around 11,3000km beyond Zhiyu.”

“… How do you know so specifically… Ah!”

“Yeah. They said it was possible to check the locations of sovereigns who applied.”

Ryu Hyunsung quickly became embarrassed after Baek Seoin’s explanation. However, even if they knew the location, it didn’t mean the expedition would be easy. Baek Seoin turned around and asked Choi Hyuk,

“Still, isn’t it too far? Wasn’t Lao Ban’s territory around 1,000km away? It still took over a week. Even if we say that our troops can run faster than most trains, we still need to go through monster territories throughout the journey… 5 thousand and 10 thousand kilometers is too troublesome.”

“There’s a way.”

The instant Choi Hyuk said those words, a white hologram appeared next to Choi Hyuk with a crackle. It was Naro’s hologram.

“I can answer that.”

Everyone was surprised by Naro’s sudden appearance.

“What? Naro? How are you here?”

People were surprised by the fact Naro appeared in the colonized land.

The volume and mass of Naro’s spaceship were too large to pass through Yeouido’s portal. It said that it would be possible if it could connect to the portal and leap through space, but the energy it needed to perform this had already been depleted. It wasn’t possible with normal energy, and it needed specially accumulated karma fuel, all of which had been used up during the dimensional transmission to Earth. Until it found a special substance that could be used as fuel, Naro’s spaceship was unable to activate its true

function, leaping through dimensions, and head for outer space.

That was what Naro had said. After hearing that, they couldn't help but be surprised by its appearance in the colonized land.

"Don't be so surprised. My main body hasn't crossed over. I am in the middle of using the portal to transmit information."

Crackle, crackle.

Like its words about how it was transmitting information, slight static hung on Naro's body. Still, Naro gestured exaggeratedly as it continued,

"I have been very busy creating a network between dimensions up until now. But, my efforts paid off. I am able to create a hologram within the colonized land and have investigated nearby topography and distribution of monsters by sending out radar through each sovereign's portal. I also developed a means of transportation that is suitable for traveling in Dragonic. Whether it's 5 thousand or 10 thousand kilometers, I will guide you through it all."

To sum it up, it was saying that they possessed the foundations to attack Freeman and Nasir with Naro's help.

"Really... I smell blood..."

Lee Jinhee said as she shook her head.

Chapter 80: Musical Chairs (3)

Nothing went the way you planned or the way you wanted. No, in fact, anything that occurred would always be a mess, a cesspool of filth. You only desperately wished to accomplish your original goal, perhaps fishing out the ring you had dropped, even if it meant dirtying your body with that stench and dampness.

The Berserkers' mobility was astonishing. Naro was extremely proud as it revealed the 'shoes' it called 'Karma Characteristic-Changing Mobilization Device TYPE A'. It had a friendly design which clearly reflected the traits of bipedalism, converted karma into force, was rechargeable and easy to use, all while being effective. It used energy fields located on the soles of the shoes to accelerate instantly and could maintain its speed with zero friction. Because it used charged energy, they could maintain a 300km/hr speed without consuming much energy. Not only that but because they moved with Naro's preliminary exploration as their guide, they could concentrate on advancing without worrying about getting lost and could keep encounters with monsters to a minimum. The Berserkers dubbed these shoes the 'Shoes of Hermes'.

The Berserkers' procession drew a line below Dragonic's milk-white sky.

The Berserkers' first target was the Clown Sovereign Freeman. Freeman was 5,200 km away from Barhaloleun Hill. He was an American and was known to be one of the strongest sovereigns. He was also one of the four sovereigns who defeated the final boss of the [Survive and Escape] mission, such as the 'Wyvern of Destruction' or the 'Flaming Devil'. The four were Choi Hyuk,

Richard, Camilla, and Freeman.

He was a black man with white hair. He possessed outstanding insight and was skilled in crafting his own playing field by always being a step ahead of his opponents.

“I never knew we would get through the advancement evaluations. I suffered a huge loss. Since I never knew the Berserk Sovereign would do so much. However, my prediction this time is 100%. The Berserk Sovereign will invade in 3 days. I will bet on that.”

He said, wearing a comfortable t-shirt and jeans,

“But, since his military power is beyond prediction, I will suffer a loss if we fight. To block a bigger loss, I need to endure a smaller one.”

With a leisurely smile, he assured,

“Watch. I am going to survive and the Berserk Sovereign will become everyone’s enemy. I will bet on that.”

His fate was the ‘Gambler’. It was a trait that increased his karma whenever he accomplished difficult goals or he succeeded in predicting the future. On the other hand, if he was wrong, he would lose karma. Freeman was certain he would be able to earn a significant amount of karma this time.

That was why…

The Berserkers were met with an absurd situation after reaching Freeman's colonized land in a day.

"… The U.S. army."

The ones guarding Freeman's colonized land were not his own clan members but a troop of awakenees under the United States of America.

"Oh, my god… Did he make some sort of deal with President Frank?"

Baek Seoin's mouth was agape.

The Clown Sovereign Freeman's actions were lightning quick. The moment he realized that the Berserk Sovereign was targeting him, he had made a deal with President Frank.

[The Clown Sovereign Freeman transferred 50% of his stake in his colonized land to Frank, who is the president of the United States as well as a sovereign. Freeman's colonized land has been incorporated into the United States of America as a special self-governing state and receives the U.S.'s protection.]

The Berserkers were fast, but the actions of the United States

were faster. Freeman's clan members had retreated to the back and the U.S. army blocked their path at the front. There was no way to attack Freeman without passing through the U.S. army.

"This place is U.S. territory. If you approach any closer, we will treat it as a declaration of war."

When the Berserkers had slowed down and approached the border, they received a warning from the U.S. army. Although tension flowed throughout the U.S. army as they faced the famous Berserkers, on the other hand, they showed a certain confidence. 'They won't attack us, right?' It was a rational confidence.

The Berserkers murmured amongst themselves. They had rushed here to attack the Clown Sovereign Freeman, but the ones who were waiting for them was the U.S. army. Weren't they like dogs chasing a chicken?

The 'full idiom' is something like 'The dog chasing the chicken only looks at the roof.' The English equivalent is 'So much for our plans' or 'It was all for naught'.

Even the Berserkers, who had experienced all sorts of situations, were quite perplexed. Did they have to return like this without any results? They, the Berserkers? Everyone examined Choi Hyuk's expression. However, there wasn't much of a change.

In Choi Hyuk's perspective, they looked like a group of baby chicks. That was it. The way others viewed the world was fundamentally different from Choi Hyuk.

The U.S army which looked confident, while actually being nervous, and the Berserkers, who got into a fit but were hesitant when seeing the U.S. army, were both groups of people who weren't free from the stereotypical mold they had formed throughout their lives. To them, the U.S. was the U.S, the strongest country in the world. The most important diplomatic partner. Becoming at odds with them was the same as fighting the world, and creating conflict with them would result in a situation where countries would start fighting against each other. Even Berserkers who weren't in their right mind couldn't help but hit the brakes.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn't like them. He didn't feel any intimidation from the U.S. army blocking his path. They were weak. To him, baby chicks were simply baby chicks.

Choi Hyuk shouted,

"Move. I have come to capture the Clown Sovereign Freeman. If you do not move out of the way in 5 minutes, I will regard it as though you are taking Freeman's side."

At Choi Hyuk's words, the Berserkers made a loud commotion.

'Wow, really? Are we really going to fight against the U.S. army?'

'As expected of our leader.'

'... Is this really okay?'

‘What’s there to think about? Just go berserk like always and the higher ups will deal with it.’

There were various reactions. While there was a sense of awkwardness and confusion, there was no fear.

“… Ah, damn… Baek hyung. Will we be alright like this?”

Lee Jinhee was anxious. To fight with the U.S. army? Then they might have to kill much more than they initially expected. She hated that.

Baek Seoin shook his head.

“I don’t know… But…”

Baek Seoin’s eyes shined in a cold light.

“The ones who first colluded politically was them. I don’t know what they received from Freeman, but we can’t allow them to protect a criminal who discarded 40% of the population.”

Then he said bitterly,

“Still, if it was me, I would have looked for a more moderate method, but the leader probably won’t. First, let’s see how the U.S. army reacts.”

The commanding officer of the U.S. army was surprised at Choi Hyuk's strong response.

He came out to talk with Choi Hyuk.

"Sovereign Choi Hyuk. I acknowledge that the Clown Sovereign Freeman must pay some sort of price. However, the U.S. will make him pay a price our own way. He has already forfeited half his colonized land, and his colonized land is now under the jurisdiction of the U.S. However, this may not be the end. If you go back and wait, you will see Freeman pay the appropriate price."

He had packaged the negotiations between Freeman and President Frank as if it was a 'penalty' the U.S. had enacted. However, even if that was a penalty, it was too inferior for Choi Hyuk's standards.

"Not all, but half? On top of that, he is not just a clan leader but someone who possesses the occupation of a sovereign, a representative of humanity. Then his punishment must be that much harsher. I want his life. Please bring Freeman's head in front of me right now or move."

To bring Freeman's head. This was an impossible request for the U.S. as they had made a contract with Freeman.

"That is an excessive request. Even if it's not that method, we will make him pay the appropriate price..."

The commanding officer continuously requested Choi Hyuk to yield, but Choi Hyuk cut him off.

“But how is it that Sovereign Freeman, who has paid a price, is still applying to be one of the seven overseers? No, from the start, is this even paying a price? Isn’t this just the U.S. gaining something from Freeman? All of humanity suffered from Freeman’s actions, yet the U.S. is campaigning that they made him pay a price after taking whatever Freeman coughed up for themselves?”

Choi Hyuk’s words had at some point changed to informal speech, and the respect he had for them had disappeared. What made him especially angry was the fact that Freeman still had not withdrawn his application.

In the U.S.’s perspective, it was best to have more than one American sovereign be part of the seven overseers. This was especially ideal if, because of this incident, the one who came under President Frank’s command was Freeman. This was why the U.S. did not request Freeman to withdraw his application.

This made Choi Hyuk retch. For a sovereign who did not participate in the advancement evaluations to be one of the seven overseers?

Choi Hyuk’s tone became harsher.

The commanding officer became angry.

“Such an insult…!”

“Whatever. 5 minutes have passed. I warned you.”

Flames erupted from Choi Hyuk’s body.

This was the start of a gruesome war in which he would lose his nickname as the Berserk Sovereign and only his nickname Demon King would remain.

Death. And death again.

The U.S. exaggerated the clash between the U.S. army and the Berserkers at the border of Freeman’s colonized land before reporting it. Instead of reporting specific numbers, they recited provocative remarks such as ‘annihilation’, ‘overwhelming defeat’, ‘there may be even more casualties…’

No… Perhaps the number of casualties wasn’t important from the start. In any case, the Berserkers were a foreign group, and the ones who were sacrificed were U.S. citizens. The U.S. became enraged. No matter how messed up the world had become, the once-formed national identity would not easily disappear. The U.S. awakenees united. Vows to drive out the invading foreign power were declared one after another.

Even though Freeman had gone through the portal to Earth and fled to the U.S. the moment he heard the news of Choi Hyuk’s

advance, Choi Hyuk… did not retreat.

They annihilated the U.S. defense troops and occupied the colonized land that Freeman's clan members had fled from. In this situation, no one thought that they would chase Freeman to Earth. Yet, Choi Hyuk decided to advance to Earth, to the U.S.

"We can't retreat now. We return after killing the Clown Sovereign Freeman."

The one who opposed his decision the most was Lee Jinhee.

"But too many unrelated people will die! The losses the Berserkers will face will be large as well!"

Still, Choi Hyuk did not change his mind. He, instead, raised his voice so everyone could hear.

"Unrelated? They became related the moment they protected Freeman. The U.S. came out and made a power play ahead of the selection of the seven overseers. However, they chose the wrong opponent."

"But…!"

Choi Hyuk cut her off. In his mind, he didn't think this problem was one to debate over.

“Jinhee nuna. What do you think is the power that maintains the Berserkers?”

In reality, the group known as Berserkers made no sense. They didn’t offer large benefits or convenience like other sovereigns gave to their clan members. They didn’t attempt to protect normal civilians either. Instead, they only participated in fights in which their clan members’ lives were always at risk. The Berserkers were lunatics who harmed normal people, let alone protect them. Their reputation was the worst. Their enemies were everywhere. Even still, the Berserkers could maintain their group. Even still, the Berserkers were influential and had an endless stream of new recruits. What was the reason?

“It is because we do not lose.”

Choi Hyuk said,

“I cannot give my followers wealth and honor. I cannot make rational deals like other sovereigns. I cannot protect the vast number of non-clan members well. The reason why people follow me despite all this is because I do not lose. I can only give them one thing. Endless victory. When I don’t lose even once, and once their assurance in my victory becomes deep-rooted in them, then, even if my opponent is the entire Flame Wing Alliance, people will trust and follow me. That is my goal.”

Choi Hyuk’s eyes flashed like a maniac’s.

“But, the U.S. tried to compromise with me. They took the

possible escalation of war as a hostage and threatened the Berserkers' foundation of 'Zero Losses'. I can't retreat from this. No matter what price I pay."

Now, Choi Hyuk looked around at everyone and said,

"We will win this time. We will be so overwhelming that casualties will be low. As always."

Lee Jinhee's eyes, which looked at Choi Hyuk, trembled. Choi Hyuk looked at her and said in a quiet voice,

"You were already aware of this."

This was why Lee Jinhee, who was comparatively in her right mind, couldn't leave Choi Hyuk. Lee Jinhee... She was more considerate than anyone else, but on the other hand, she also possessed an ambition to improve herself that approached madness. Lee Jinhee read Choi Hyuk's eyes. She read his will and assurance that he would not lose even if he fought the entire universe. In front of this immense scale, there was nothing she could do.

"... Since you're my hyung. I will follow you to hell."

She called Choi Hyuk hyung for a change. Choi Hyuk simply smiled.

The Berserkers went through the portal and advanced to the U.S.

Chapter 81: Musical Chairs (4)

Freeman's colonized land was connected to a portal in the middle of New York Central Park.

The U.S. blocked off and surrounded the entire Central Park area. Tens of thousands of soldiers from the infantry regiment, artillery regiment, mechanized infantry brigade, special forces brigade, as well as others, gathered here. At the same time, they were also awakenees. Although the soldiers were approximately at the 1-star level, and although they may not possess the ability to threaten people at the 3-star level, their equipment surely possessed enough firepower to threaten those with 2-stars.

Even though they were on full alert as they assumed an all-out war against the Berserkers, the leaders didn't believe that the Berserkers would make such a crazy move like passing through the portal. This was simply a state of alertness just in case.

Because of this, when someone came through the portal which had been idle until now, the U.S. army thought that he was an ally who had escaped late. However, the tall man with black hair and a resilient figure was strikingly similar to someone who had become incredibly famous recently.

'Huh?'

Their confusion was short-lived. The commanding officers recognized that the most dangerous person in the world had passed through the portal.

"Fire!"

The command to fire was given before even 3 seconds had passed since Choi Hyuk had come through. It was a response following the rules of engagement issued beforehand. However, 3 seconds was too late. No, whether it was 0.3 or 3 seconds, from the start, this didn't make much difference to Choi Hyuk.

The barrage of bullets, shells, and even the long-distance attacks by the so-called 'magicians' all-

"Flaming Wing Dance."

-Turned to ash along with Choi Hyuk's words.

'Scarlet flames vividly licked their surroundings.' Even if this description was a bit comical, it was well-suited. The first line of the encirclement turned into ash where they stood. A slaughter without the slightest mercy.

The blood-red flames fluttered like feathers of an angel. They burned in the air and devoured the soldiers' fear-stricken pupils, open mouths and their blackened throats were revealed within. Depressing fireworks...

Kiririk, clang!

The Predator’s Blade’s body distorted as it came out of its sheath.

Choi Hyuk blinked his eyes once before running in a certain direction. He clearly recalled the location of the Clown Sovereign Freeman in his head.

“Block him!!”

The first line had fallen, but there were still the second and third. Yet…

“How can we block that…”

The scarlet flames devoured everything. The infantry regiment fell into a state of confusion. The artillery regiment was powerless. The armored brigade collapsed. The special forces brigade was annihilated. The awe-inspiring encirclement became desolate.

The Berserkers went through the portal following closely behind Choi Hyuk. There was more confusion. Each team leader ordered and the directors emphasized it once more.

“Push! Push! Secure some room!”

“Completely fuck them up! Make a solid retreat route!”

“Don’t go easy and kill them!”

The U.S. army, which had focused on Choi Hyuk, was easily wiped out by the Berserkers' charge.

The U.S. army's tactics were to use quick 1-star awakenees to target their enemies with powerful firearms from afar. That was why the moment they let the Berserkers rush in close without suffering any damage, they couldn't help but collapse hopelessly.

Before one could even shudder from flesh-boiling heat, wet blood spilled and seeped into the ground. The Berserkers weren't merciful in the slightest. Their mercy was, on the contrary, inflicting them with the greatest possible fear. 'Watch and shiver. Flee in fear. If you don't flee, you'll most definitely die.' They clearly engraved this certainty into their hearts. They made it so that they would flee to the ends of the Earth, unable to raise their swords again. That was their mercy.

They were torn apart. When they thought a soldier was being taken out, a squad had been torn apart. Platoons, no, companies were massacred. Regiments defeated. The U.S. was routed.

The Berserkers were like a wedge splitting a rock. They drove into the cracks of the U.S. army and split them into small pieces.

Choi Hyuk left Central Park. Following his steps, the park, which used to be the resting area for New Yorkers, was erased. The grass turned into ash and the lakes evaporated.

Choi Hyuk was simply taking the shortest distance to reach his target, the Clown Sovereign Freeman. He didn't care about what

was happening behind him. It was because he had the Berserkers. He didn't conserve any karma. Freeman was currently in the underground bunker of the White House and was attending a national security conference. Choi Hyuk didn't plan on giving him the opportunity to escape. By the time he received a report about how Choi Hyuk was terrorizing the White House and that he should escape, Choi Hyuk would already be there.

Zzziing!

The 'Karma Characteristic-Changing Mobilization Device TYPE A', also known as the Shoes of Hermes, which Naro had shown off, were burning red due to the excessive amount of karma being injected into them.

There was around 360 km between New York and the White House, yet Choi Hyuk was planning on covering that distance in 30 minutes.

Choi Hyuk passed through while the Berserkers cleaned up after him.

"Secure a retreat route from New York to Washington! Guardian, artillery captain, and Hyunsung, stay here, Chu Youngjin and Lee Jinhee, follow me!"

Ordered Baek Seoin. Approximately 8,000 out of the over 10,000 Berserkers remained in New York to completely crush the U.S. army. The remaining 2,000 elites charged towards Washington, following behind Choi Hyuk.

No matter how strong Choi Hyuk was, because there was a limit to his stamina, the existence of the Berserkers, who cleared a safe retreat route, was indispensable.

The Clown Sovereign Freeman was someone who made very quick decisions. However, even he would make mistakes. Like how he didn't immediately flee the moment he heard the news that Choi Hyuk had pierced through the encirclement in Central Park and was on his way to Washington.

Of course, he was quite busy at the time.

"Sorry. Mr. President."

"Keu... Keuah..."

The president of the United States, Frank, was dying in the security meeting room, which was meant for his safety, in the underground bunker of the White House.

"Freeman...!!"

The Chief Officer of the Presidential Security was filled with rage. Although he was a well-known expert in the U.S., he was currently unable to move even a finger. With his eyes glaring, he could only tremble as his whole body stood rigidly.

“You traitor worse than a dog! You…”

“Ah, stop there.”

When Freeman waved his hand, the chief officer couldn’t let out a voice.

“Krr… Hic…”

He tried so hard to speak that the veins on his face were bulging, yet like a person who was being choked, he couldn’t let out a proper sound.

“Ah… Still, as the Chief Officer of the President, do you have one stat at the 4-star level? Quite bothersome.”

Freeman leisurely leaned against the sofa and waved his hand a few times.

Then the security guards and government cabinet members, who had been won over by Freeman, stabbed their swords into the chief officer’s body.

Kiririk! Kirik!

As he had a high Endurance stat, the chief officer’s body let out metallic sounds, however, he was unable to block the attacks

covered with karma blades. His arms fell, then his legs; his body fell in pieces and dirtied the floor of the security meeting room. Like that, corpses and puddles of blood littered the floor like garbage. This was treason.

As if the meeting room, which was filled with the stench of blood, had become his own, he sat comfortably with a dull smile.

“When I thought about it, it was too much of a waste to give you 50%.”

Only after that commotion had passed did Freeman recall the report that Choi Hyuk was charging towards Washington. He laughed like a child.

“That, that Berserk Sovereign. So bad, how could he kill the president of the United States?”

Freeman believed that he would live and that the Berserk Sovereign would become humanity’s enemy. He believed in the troops guarding Washington, his clan members who were second to none, and the volunteer troops who had come from various places enraged that their mainland, the U.S., had been invaded.

Freeman thought that, even if half the rumors about the Berserk Sovereign were true, he would be able to push towards the White House. However, that was it. He would have simply fled to the back by then. If anything, he needed him to push towards the White House so that he could accuse the Berserk Sovereign of assassinating the president.

“Work hard. So you don’t disappoint me.”

That was when an urgent message was sent to Freeman, who had been sitting comfortably.

“The Berserk Sovereign pierced through Washington’s border!”

Even until then, Freeman was relaxed.

“Already? He’s faster than I thought.”

However, urgent messages followed one after another, almost simultaneously.

“The Berserk Sovereign entered Washington!”

“He will soon enter the White House! He’s too fast. Sovereign, you need to escape!”

Freeman was taken aback as he said,

“Wh… What?”

Then,

Blaze!

Just when Freeman was about to leave, sunlight entered the underground bunker.

Whoosh. Ashes fell. Even the metal didn’t melt but instead burned, turning into ash and smoke. This was something that wouldn’t happen in the bunker even if a nuclear bomb had been dropped. Yet, in front of the ability of karma, which approached a superhuman level, material protection was of no use.

Thud.

A man fell, accompanying the pouring sunlight.

“Found you.”

Said the man.

The events of that day were an unparalleled humiliation in U.S. history.

A one-sided defeat. The number of dead soldiers approached the thousands, Central Park, which was one of the symbols of the U.S., had turned to ash, the White House had collapsed, and President Frank and the Clown Sovereign Freeman had been killed in the middle of the White House. The Berserk Sovereign, who had

stomped on the U.S., leisurely went back through the portal while receiving the protection of the Berserkers.

The citizens of the U.S. were furious.

And the only U.S. sovereign who could answer their rage was Jessie. The sovereign who had uploaded lectures on fighting techniques on Youtube and had gained great popularity. The sovereign who some had thought was the strongest before Choi Hyuk revealed his true worth. That was Jessie. The sovereign who opened the fate 'Superstar', which increased his karma the more compliments he received from people and the more influential he became. Unlike the others who had nicknames, he was simply a celebrity known as 'Sovereign Jessie'.

Jessie who was visiting the place of the incident, the White House, smiled awkwardly.

"... So. You're saying you think it was one-sided?"

"Yes."

Asserted his follower, who had gained a perception-type trait. Even though Jessie had never doubted his insight... it was difficult to accept this time.

"Does that make sense? You know it as well. How strong that old snake, Freeman, was."

Even when everyone praised him, saying he was the strongest, he never once thought he was. Since there was Freeman. Although he had never directly fought against Freeman, Jessie always anticipated that Freeman's karma stats was either at the same level as or above his. He expected that Freeman would likely have had around three of his important stats at the 3-star level. Of course, fights weren't fully determined by this, but either way, looking at the indicators objectively, he always believed he wasn't the strongest. Because of Freeman... the one who had just been one-sidedly killed.

"Does that even make sense? I admit that the Berserk Sovereign is strong. I admit that. But Freeman was killed one-sidedly? And that's even when President Frank was with him as well?"

"From what traces are left, that seems to be the case."

To be honest, it wasn't the traces but the situation. The only trace left here was the enormous pile of ashes. Not even corpses remained. Only, the fact that Freeman and Frank were killed was definite, and the problem was that the time Choi Hyuk took to rush into the White House and leave wasn't even 10 minutes. It was hard to accept that time unless they were one-sidedly killed.

Although he couldn't believe it, he had no choice but to.

Jessie became momentarily silent.

Currently, the entire U.S. was requesting him for revenge in blood. Against the Berserkers who invaded their mainland and

against the Berserk Sovereign who made soldiers and innocent civilians lose their lives. As their last remaining U.S. sovereign, they called for him to take revenge.

Because the compliments of others and their influence were important to the Jessie clan, who had the fate ‘Superstar’, this request was hard to refuse. However… The enemy they would have to face may be much stronger than they thought. An opponent who may have been strong enough to kill that Freeman with ease…

When Jessie’s thoughts reached that point, he suddenly became delighted.

“Wow… This will be quite the picture. What do you think of the concept of a hero challenging the demon king?”

They spread this material everywhere. Ridiculously strong. Ruthless without hesitation. If they used this, they could definitely make a picture. This fact delighted Jessie as the driving force which made him stronger was fame after all.

There was another meaning behind this fact… It was that the Jessie clan possessed excellent ‘directing’ skills.

Chapter 82: Musical Chairs (5)

‘Outbreak of war.’

This was the keyword that struck the world. Death was broadcasted on all the screens and speakers of the world.

War. The death of others. When it didn’t concern you, it would never be anything beyond tiring, unpleasant news. Instead of feeling pain for another’s death, you would click your tongue, “Tsk, humans,” then change the channel. However… the moment you thought that their death was related to you, it would become a completely different problem. This was why a terror attack in Paris was slightly more sorrowful and shocking than the slaughter of thousands in the Middle East.

The reason why the Berserkers’ ‘slaughter’ resounded so loudly was because this carnage was an incident that could occur anywhere in the world. There weren’t any countries free from the competition and conflict between sovereigns which occurred to select the seven overseers. An uneasiness similar to standing in the middle of a pile of explosives with tangled conductive wire. The world received a shock and was uneasy. Public opinions scrambled to criticize Choi Hyuk.

Of course, the Jessie clan’s superb directing skills had contributed to the situation progressing as it did.

In a video, Jessie was walking down the streets of Washington. He followed the steps the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk had taken,

and the places he passed by went up in flames before turning to ash. The wide-angle shot captured the ruined scene which looked like the aftermath of God's punishment. Since the soldiers, who resisted until the end, had been burned cleanly, it was hard to find any corpses.

{… Is this the act of a human?}

Jessie's depressed voice was heard. It was as if he was surprised by the Berserkers' overwhelming strength and was saddened by the unbelievable horror.

The main battlefields were Central Park and Washington. There was a clash between Choi Hyuk, who had been charging towards the White House, and the mechanized infantry division, who tried to stop him. Choi Hyuk, who had activated the Shoes of Hermes to its maximum, passed through this place like a jet and his flaming feathers burned everywhere. This was where the most civilian casualties took place.

Jessie, who had been walking slowly, discovered the corpse of the young girl amongst the pile of ashes. Although her face had been stained with dirt and ashes, she was beautiful. When only looking at her face, it felt as though she would open her eyes at any moment, yet everything below her chest had all turned to ash and scattered. Just looking at this sight made people want to cry.

"Ah…"

Jessie held the girl's corpse in his arms. The camera perfectly

captured Jessie's trembling fingers. He slowly stood up, holding the girl in his arms.

He didn't say anything. He simply raised his head and looked directly at the camera. His fingers and eyes no longer trembled. They stayed frozen. A freezing aura hung in the air. Jessie gazed at the camera with tightly shut lips.

The screen gradually turned dark and a single word appeared.

{ REVENGE (복수) }

The U.S. stood up. The world became enraged along with it. To have invaded the U.S., slaughtered civilians and killed the president without a declaration of war... The Berserkers were branded as the world's worst terrorist group and as warmongers. In the end, Freeman's prediction, 'I will survive and the Berserk Sovereign will be the enemy of the world,' had become partly true.

{We need to make the Berserk Sovereign, who abuses his strength, pay a price.}

Sovereign Jessie formed the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Heroism struck the U.S. and half the clans spread throughout the world joined the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Soon after, sovereigns of other countries participated in creating allied forces. The mood progressed this way. There were both moral obligations and benefits. The Berserk Sovereign was an intimidating existence that

they feared, and there were many sovereigns who wanted to use this opportunity to eliminate him. ‘If so many forces participate, won’t the Berserk Sovereign definitely be constricted?’ was what they thought.

However, Choi Hyuk simply moved per his schedule.

Now that he had disposed of the Clown Sovereign Freeman, it was time to deal with the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir. He wasn’t the least bit concerned about the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Only Baek Seoin grew fretful.

“There are a lot of enemies. There’s no chance of winning in an all-out war.”

Warned Baek Seoin on their way to deal with Nasir.

The intelligence Naro had sent them was proof. An intelligence that, with Sovereign Jessie as their head, around three or four sovereigns were gathering their troops on their path to Nasir. Because the locations of all the sovereigns who applied for the seven overseers were revealed, it had become easier to navigate through Dragonic and was also why Sovereign Jessie’s Anti-Berserker Alliance was able to gather together so quickly.

“Not only that, but even the Camilla clan evacuated the healers they dispatched to South Korea and insisted that we resolve this through words and not military strength. We currently do not

have the moral high ground. Also, we are the minority. Although it is true that leader is strong, don't you have a limit to your stamina? You cannot win against all of them."

Even when Baek Seoin earnestly said this, Choi Hyuk didn't change his mind.

"We can't back down."

Then he added,

"Don't worry. We won't fight them."

"What? They are currently blocking our path so how are we going to not fight?!"

At Baek Seoin's sullen protest, Choi Hyuk gave a short reply,

"We aren't fighting. We are going to jump over them."

"... Pardon?"

The monsters that attacked tirelessly throughout their advance gradually died down and suddenly hid their whereabouts. The reason was clear. The Anti-Berserker Alliance filled the plain they saw on the horizon. It was because they, who had arrived early, had cleaned out the nearby monsters.

Baek Seoin sighed.

“… So many… Our side doesn’t even have ten thousand left…”

{I estimate there are around 50,000 people.}

Reported Naro. Tension flowed throughout the Berserkers. The Anti-Berserker Alliance didn’t simply have more numbers. They caught sight of experts who possessed strong karma in various places. They even felt their strong determination. They expected that there would be many casualties if they collided head-on.

Sovereign Jessie came out first. He shouted with the attitude of a high schooler picking a fight,

“Berserk Sovereign! Do you have anything to say about the civilians you slaughtered in New York and Washington?”

Choi Hyuk answered,

“Nothing to say. I’m on my way to attack Nasir so move.”

A commotion erupted.

The Anti-Berserker Alliance became noisy at Choi Hyuk’s half-hearted response. The rage amongst U.S. citizens was especially strong. After the short outbursts settled down, Jessie raised his tightly clenched fist. At his signal, the noisy crowd became quiet.

"... Looks like words won't work."

He said as he raised his suspended spear. He shouted, his clear voice resounding,

"All forces... Spread out!"

Whooosh.

It was like a surging whirlpool. Tens of thousands of colonizers spread out at the same time, leaving a certain distance between each other. If one had stood in arranged rows during school assemblies, they would know that, due to the characteristics of a line, the people further out would have to move a lot more. It was close to impossible for an army of tens of thousands to spread out at the same time.

However, each person was an awakenee who transcended human capabilities. They showed explosive power as they spread out, leaping tens of meters each stride, and the ranks of the Anti-Berserker Alliance, which already filled the plain, instantly expanded to the point of being unable to see the edges.

"It's not like we don't have any countermeasures."

Jessie clenched his spear. It was because the 'Flaming Wing Dance' Choi Hyuk had shown multiple times possessed an extreme range, making fighting against him in a concentrated formation

impossible. That was why he planned on maintaining his spread-out formation to tire out Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers in an endlessly rotating fight.

He stood here to truly win against the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk.

“Surround them!”

As Jessie’s command sounded out, the plain stirred up. It was a magnificent sight as it felt like the entire world was moving. Some even began using alien means of transportation that they had obtained from the supply store to quickly surround the ground the Berserkers were standing on. It was swift as well as unbelievably systematic.

However, Choi Hyuk’s eyes showed a pleased look, let alone nervousness.

“… For them to spread themselves out on their own.”

It had become easier since…

“Berserkers. Don’t fall behind.”

Choi Hyuk wasn’t planning on fighting the Anti-Berserker Alliance, but instead, jumping over and ignoring them.

Kiiiaaang!

The Berserkers' Shoes of Hermes let out a deafening noise simultaneously. A deafening noise they didn't hear when they ran on land.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk ran forward.

The Berserkers followed after him.

"It's no use!"

Shouted Jessie, yet-

"... Huh?"

The Shoes of Hermes, which were emitting a deafening noise, created repulsive forces in midair, and with a bang, the Berserkers stepped on air and flew above the Anti-Berserker Alliance.

"What... What the! Block them!"

Since they could only obtain alien objects through direct transactions at the supply store, the numbers, and their capabilities, were limited. Unlike the Berserkers, who could freely

step on air and fly due to Naro's abilities, there weren't many amongst the Anti-Berserker Alliance who could partake in an aerial battle. There were only experts who jumped extremely high by relying on their own abilities and the minority of colonizers who possessed flying-type tools.

Although they quickly flew up-

"Screw off!"

Crash! Bang!

They were beaten up by the team leaders and directors of the Berserkers and sent plummeting to the ground.

There was nothing they could do. If, instead, they were in a tight formation, they could have all jumped up at once and attacked, or shot from afar to somehow damage the Berserkers. Since they were in a spread-out formation, they didn't have any suitable way to block the Berserkers.

"Euaahhh! Berserk Sovereign!"

Enraged, Jessie stepped on air and jumped up. He didn't borrow the power of any tool, instead, this was a movement technique which required precise control over karma. He blocked Choi Hyuk's path, who had been running faster than anyone else. He used this moment to stab his spear.

Kiririk!

The Predator's Blade deflected Jessie's spear to the side as it passed by.

It let out a metallic screech.

Choi Hyuk smiled.

"Not bad."

Bang!

Then he just passed Jessie.

"Berserk Sovereign!!!"

Jessie, who had been left behind, shouted, but Choi Hyuk didn't face him, and Lee Jinhee, who had been following behind him, smacked down at Jessie's back.

"Shut up!"

"Who are you?!"

Kakang!

Jessie easily blocked Lee Jinhee's attack by flipping his body, but that was it.

"Now screw off."

He couldn't endure Chu Youngjin's attack as he followed up behind her as well.

Rumble!

His downwards strike was accompanied by the sound of thunder. Although Jessie had blocked it, he was pushed back from its strength and fell to the ground.

The resistance of the Anti-Berserker Alliance ended with that.

The Berserkers passed over the Anti-Berserker Alliance without much loss. The alliance felt hopeless, like a dog chasing a chicken.

"Ueahaha! Did you see their faces?"

Lee Jinhee's voice was filled with excitement. She repeatedly imitated Sovereign Jessie's dazed expression while bursting into laughter. To her, it was a fun battle for a change. Not a lot of blood was spilled either.

“Puhahaha! Did they think we would face each and every one of them? Keuhihi! Us Berserkers don’t stop for nothing!”

Lee Jinhee shouted like a drunken middle aged man.

It wasn’t only her, but overall, the Berserkers were in a good mood. As they toyed with enemies multiple times their number, there was no way they didn’t feel good.

It was while they were advancing in a good mood.

“Huh?”

Choi Hyuk, who had been running, suddenly let out a sound of surprise.

“Huh?”

Baek Seoin, who was following behind him, was surprised as well.

“What? What is it? Huh?”

Curious, even Lee Jinhee was surprised.

It was because the information on Nasir’s location, which had

been clearly indicated just now, had suddenly disappeared.

Choi Hyuk turned towards Baek Seoin with confused eyes. Baek Seoin said with a dazed expression,

“Uh… Leader… Uh… It looks like Nasir withdrew from the application for the seven overseers?”

“Why?”

Choi Hyuk asked as he didn’t understand. Baek Seoin told him his assumption. Although it was a bit disappointing.

“… That’s because leader is chasing him?”

“Because I’m chasing him?”

“Yes… To hide.”

“…”

Nasir had not participated in the advancement evaluations even once. Even still, he applied to be one of the seven overseers. The Nasir who had met Choi Hyuk’s criticisms with a “What did I do wrong!” had hidden his tracks. Because he became scared when Choi Hyuk truly came out to kill him.

“… What kind of bastard…”

Choi Hyuk was taken aback by his despicable behavior. He shook his head as he said,

“Let’s go see first.”

Since he couldn’t retreat without any profit, he continued to advance.

“Haa…”

Someone sighed.

They couldn’t do anything about the disappointing mood.

Chapter 83: Musical Chairs (6)

A fierce wind blew as it kicked up desolate sand.

In this desolate desert, ‘rain-trees’, known to spread their roots up to 100 meters below the ground, were spread out here and there as a drizzle poured down between their leaves. They drew water from deep underground up through their roots and drizzled light rain from their gypsophila-like leaves. It was a desolate area, but, at least near the rain-trees, it was green like an oasis. The rain-trees filled their roots with water, and moss, grass, and small flowers grew around it. The wind swept through as it shook the rain-trees. The drizzle the rain-trees shook off fluttered like a fog. The rolling sky of Dragonic, which was thick and white like milk, formed abnormally fast whirlpools and blew fierce winds.

The capital city of the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir was called ‘Nasari’. Although it looked desolate from outside, because there was an enormous reservoir of underground water deep down, Nasari was actually a beautiful city which built springs and fountains from this water. It was even known as the ‘Jewel of the Desert’.

This beautiful city was currently noisier than usual.

“Hurray for the Berserkers!”

“Hurray!”

“Hurray! Welcome!”

With Choi Hyuk as the lead, the Berserkers entered Nasari without a fight.

Everywhere they went, they were met with a loud welcoming ceremony, let alone a fight.

The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir took his followers and fled, but the non-combatant colonizers as well as small and medium-sized clans, who were active in this city, were unable to leave the city, which was the foundation of their lives. Their actions of welcoming the occupying forces were, in their own way, their survival method.

The gathered people flicked colored water. The colored water that was created by squeezing oil from the rain-trees was fragrant and light but also easily washed off with normal water. The colored water, which was being flicked from every direction, dyed the Berserkers in natural colors.

Whooosh!

A gust of wind swept up the colored water and surged towards the sky. Even the whirlwinds looked like they were blooming with flowers.

“Kah! This is good!”

The artillery captain Handke shouted in a good mood. When had

they ever received such cheers? It felt like they were being rewarded after the hollowness they felt for losing the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.

"It's worrying since it's so good... Is this really alright?"

Ryu Hyunsung looked back at Baek Seoin with an uneasy expression. Baek Seoin nodded his head as he replied,

"My Intuition is fine. I only feel good."

While receiving endless cheers, the Berserkers advanced towards the center of Nasari, where the portal was located. Until then, the people didn't scatter and followed the Berserkers, cheering them on.

Just then, they arrived at the center of the city. Choi Hyuk stood in front of the pulsating portal and raised his hand. The portal was the source of a sovereign's authority. It didn't only make passage between Earth and the colonized lands possible but also allowed them to tax those who entered and deport those who entered through their portals as they wished. Choi Hyuk had just placed his hand on the authority Sovereign Nasir left behind when he fled.

The surroundings became silent. Everyone held their breaths as they watched. 'What will happen?' All previous cases of taking colonized lands up until now had been by killing the sovereign and succeeding their authority. That was how Choi Hyuk obtained Lao Ban and Freeman's colonized lands. However, it was a bit different

this time. Choi Hyuk occupied this territory while Sovereign Nasir was still alive. The people's opinions were divided. There were some who thought that since Nasir was still alive, the authority would belong to him, and there were others who thought that since, in reality, Choi Hyuk captured this territory, the authority would be passed to him.

It was an important issue. While the people gathered here had cheered for the Berserkers' entry for their own immediate safety, they couldn't be seen as being 100% on Choi Hyuk's side. In fact, they would make their final decision on which side to take depending on whether the authority was passed to Choi Hyuk or not.

Just then, Choi Hyuk's hand touched the portal, and at the same time, the troubling, yet annoying calculations of the Nasari citizens ended as well.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk has captured Sovereign Nasir's portal. If Sovereign Nasir does not retake the portal within 24 hours, the authority of the portal will be passed over to Sovereign Choi Hyuk.}

Announced a pleasant voice. After they had become official alliance members of the Flame Wing Alliance, excluding the mission announcements, the announcements began to use polite, formal speech. Although it wasn't much, their moods became pleasant whenever they heard the announcements.

Choi Hyuk grinned.

“We didn’t take a loss.”

If 24 hours passed, this colonized land would become Choi Hyuk’s as well. Naro’s scan confirmed that there weren’t any movements of a large-scale army within a day’s distance from here.

Finally, Choi Hyuk checked the surrounding combatants. The city reflected in his Eyes of Distinction was completely white (goodwill) or a light gray containing a little black (hostility). Although there was hostility due to fear and uneasiness, he couldn’t find any traces of killing intent. A color which signified complete surrender to the Berserkers.

This place was now Choi Hyuk’s new colonized land.

Choi Hyuk smiled slightly before turning around towards the Berserkers and shouting,

“Today, we feast and enjoy ourselves to the fullest!”

“Waaahhhh!!!”

A thunder-like shout erupted from the Berserkers, and soon after,

“Please come this way. We will take care of you!”

Prominent figures in Nasari stepped forward. To leave an impression on Choi Hyuk and his executives, they began to provide the Berserkers with the best food and residence.

An excited atmosphere boomed.

Although they killed Freeman, they couldn’t kill Sovereign Nasir. Still… they obtained 3 colonized lands from this expedition. A victory was a victory.

There wasn’t a specific banquet. All stores opened their doors wide and provided room. Each street had a banner. An inexhaustible amount of food and drinks were provided to the Berserkers free of charge. Due to Nasari citizens’ endless attention, the Berserkers didn’t have a chance to be bored. The Berserkers would become the ruling party of this place. As there could never be too many friends of the ruling party, the Nasari citizens’ excessive goodwill wasn’t unreasonable.

Amongst them, the attention on the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk couldn’t help but be different. Berserkers who were at least of a captain rank were gathered at a splendid banquet. Prominent figures of Nasari were gathered here as well. They all wanted to leave an impression on Choi Hyuk. However, as Choi Hyuk didn’t even give them a glance, they couldn’t gather up the courage to start a conversation with him. In the end, they only attempted to create friendly relationships with Baek Seoin, Ryu Hyunsung, and

other top executives.

It was a banquet filled only with good things for the Berserkers. They all paid attention to their moods and tried to keep them happy. Occasionally, when the Berserkers frowned in annoyance, they would back away.

To the prominent figures of Nasari, this banquet was like a nerve-wracking battlefield. Due to their efforts in wanting to create strong ties with the Berserkers, the Berserkers were able to spend their time more happily.

A man and woman pair entered this noisy banquet. A handsome, grey-haired middle-aged man and his beautiful aide.

Choi Hyuk, who sat comfortably as he ate quietly, naturally turned his gaze towards the newly arrived pair. Slowly, Choi Hyuk's waist stood up. Choi Hyuk's gaze was fixed on the grey-haired man. On one hand, it was because his face seemed familiar, but the effect from reading the other's karma was greater.

'... He's strong?'

The grey-haired man. The karma emitted from him was unbelievably strong. He was constraining his karma with his outstanding control abilities, but Choi Hyuk was able to see through it. That was why he was surprised.

'... At least one of his stats is at the 5-star level.'

Choi Hyuk himself had only recently been able to raise his Control to the 5-star level. He had been able to reach the 5-star level with the free karma points he obtained through the attack on the dimensional wasps' nest, where he unleashed true flames instead of the heated flames of the Flaming Wing Dance. Only after experiencing fierce battles one after another was he able to barely reach this stage. He didn't know there was someone else who had reached this stage as well.

{Comparison of Stats}

<Choi Hyuk>

Power: 365 (+213) (4★) Speed: 371 (+201) (4★) Control: 8 (5★)

Endurance: 100 (3★) Stamina: 0 (4★) Recovery: 371 (3★)

Retribution: 0 (5★)

<Richard>

Power: 278 (2★) Speed: 0 (5★) Control: 411 (+400) (4★)

Endurance: 137 (2★) Stamina: 340 (3★) Recovery: 237 (+57) (4★)

Retribution: 321 (4★)

Of course, strictly speaking, Richard wasn't a 5-star level expert. Even though his Speed was 5-star, his Retribution hadn't reached the 5-star level. Retribution indicated the difference between existences, like a CPU for a computer. No matter how great your graphics card was, if your CPU couldn't keep up, it was useless. In the case where Retribution was lower than their stats, it would be difficult to display 10% of their power. Their cognitive abilities would stutter, unable to keep up with their 5-star stats, and they would be unable to use 5-star skills. Even if they invested their free karma, the amount their stats would increase by would be drastically reduced. People needed to gather 500 points to reach 5-star, and to Richard, who had only now reached 321 (4★), it was a critically negative factor. Not only that, but because he had focused on raising his Speed and Control, his Endurance and Power were only at the 2-star level.

Even still, Choi Hyuk had never seen anyone with karma as powerful as this besides himself. To be honest, he was a bit amazed. Only then did he remember his face. When he wondered where he had seen him before, he realized he had seen him during the attack on the dimensional wasps' nest.

The most famous sovereign in the world.

"Sovereign Richard."

At Choi Hyuk's mumble, everyone's gaze focused on Richard and his aide, Leah. Silence fell on the noisy banquet.

Only looking at their expressions, the Berserkers' faces seemed to indicate 'Why is Sovereign Richard here?' while the prominent figures of Nasari showed compliant expressions, 'So he came.' From this, they could tell that Richard had already arrived at Nasari before the Berserkers.

Richard walked towards Choi Hyuk with surefooted steps. He maintained an appropriate distance before stopping and said,

"Can we talk for a bit?"

Instead of replying, Choi Hyuk got up from his seat and walked outside. Richard didn't seem taken aback and followed behind him leisurely. His aide, Leah, gulped her saliva with an extremely tense expression and simply followed behind.

Choi Hyuk walked out of the city.

Whooosh.

The whirlpools in the sky were still moving faster than normal, and the wind kept sweeping in various directions. Dirt and dust kicked up. Occasionally, the drizzle from a rain-tree touched his

cheek.

After leaving a suitable distance from the city, Richard immediately went straight to the point as he began to talk, facing Choi Hyuk's back.

"Seven need to remain. But who among them will remain... That's your worry, right?"

Choi Hyuk halted abruptly. However, he didn't reply. Richard didn't seem bothered as he continued with a friendly tone as if speaking to a long-time friend,

"You didn't kill Jessie on your way here. Yeah, if it's him, he possesses the qualifications to make humanity stronger as one of the seven overseers. Jessie, you, me. Even if we count this way, there are still four spots left. Who will survive? Who will be of use in this fight? It won't be easy deciding."

Choi Hyuk slowly turned his shoulders and looked directly at Richard. Richard came closer little by little as he continued to speak,

"However, I bet you already know this. That the longer we spend locked in a battle of wits, the greater our loss. We need to exercise our full rights as soon as possible, and we also need to improve this damn situation surrounding us a little."

Every word resonated with Choi Hyuk. However, as he was

unaware of Richard's intentions, his eyes gradually deepened, turning black.

Richard stopped at an appropriate distance. Then, he lifted one finger and said,

"One month."

The wind blew between them.

"I will end this fight in one month."

"... What?"

Choi Hyuk was taken aback. A month was extremely short. Dragonic was estimated to be much larger than Earth. How was it that he was going to make the sovereigns, who were spread throughout the lands, submit in a month? Visiting each of them once would take over a month, let alone capturing them.

Nonetheless, Richard was carefree as if 'it would obviously progress that way'. He made a proposal.

"But, let's negotiate on who will be the seven overseers ahead of time."

Choi Hyuk frowned. To be honest, Choi Hyuk didn't know many sovereigns. Richard, Jessie, Camilla was all. Although he did know

Nasir, he was trash he would take out anyways…

So, his suggestion of deciding the seven overseers ahead of time seemed frank.

“Negotiate ahead of time?… Who are you thinking of?”

“First, Camilla?”

At his reply, Choi Hyuk nodded. Richard followed by nodding his head as well. Although he didn’t know her well, Choi Hyuk felt that if it was Camilla, she had the qualifications to be one of the seven overseers.

Richard smiled.

“Yeah. The majority are understandable. But, there is someone we absolutely need to discuss.”

Richard hesitated momentarily. It was different from before when he had continued to talk without hesitation. By the time doubt started to condense in Choi Hyuk’s eyes, Richard suddenly spat out a name.

“The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.”

Choi Hyuk’s face stiffened.

“… Who?”

“The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir. Let’s add him as one of the seven overseers. Then I will make this fight end in a month.”

Said Richard calmly while looking at Choi Hyuk’s chilling expression.

Choi Hyuk’s lips twisted.

“Don’t tell me… Nasir’s choice to flee was something that came out of your head?”

Richard faced Choi Hyuk directly and said,

“That’s right.”

Their gazes clashed fiercely. A wind continued to blow from somewhere.

Chapter 84: Musical Chairs (7)

The victory banquet continued in the city. Sometimes, there would be a gust of wind which would blow past the banquet feast prepared out in the streets. Although annoying situations like tablecloths being flipped over or salad flying away would occur, even those were fun. While they were unable to become drunk due to karma, the Berserkers went on a spree of eating and drinking. As they were already in a good mood, even if they didn't get drunk, their moods heated up like drunken men. The wind blew again.

Suddenly, a loud explosive sound erupted from a field outside the city.

Booom!

Familiar flames surged upwards immediately after. Blood-red flames burned in the sky before dispersing.

The Berserkers, who had been enjoying themselves to their heart's content, stood up like a spring. Surprised, the citizens of Nasari stood up after them.

Someone said,

"... Isn't that leader's Flaming Wing Dance?"

The Berserkers' eyes cooled to a chill. The heated mood became chilly like the edge of a blade. The festival streets instantly felt

menacing as if they were in the middle of a battlefield. The gusts of wind, which previously felt like an enjoyable game, now felt bleak as if hinting at death. This wasn't a mood colonizers who weren't used to fighting could endure.

'We... We're going to die...'

The citizens of Nasari felt death approach the tip of their noses. A warm stench of urine arose as someone had wet themselves. No one laughed.

Tap, tap.

With quiet footsteps, the shadows of a few people shot through the air like arrows. Lee Jinhee, Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung, as well as other top executives of the Berserkers, had quickly gone to figure out what happened. However, they stopped before they could even leave the city. It was because Choi Hyuk had returned within that short period of time.

His serious expression showed that he was deep in thought. Three people, Richard, his aide, Leah, and Choi Hyuk, had left the city together, but only Choi Hyuk returned.

"Leader, what about the Sovereign of Balance?"

When Lee Jinhee asked, Choi Hyuk replied half-heartedly,

"He left."

“Umm… You didn’t kill him, right?”

Choi Hyuk tilted his head in an obscure manner and replied,

“He wouldn’t die.”

Then he said as he passed Lee Jinhee,

“Gather once you’ve eaten your fill. Let’s have a meeting in the evening.”

Choi Hyuk continued to go further away with a serious look. Looking at his figure, Lee Jinhee shook her head.

Rumors spread wildly. There were many people who had participated in the banquet that day. They had seen Richard and Choi Hyuk leave together and witnessed Choi Hyuk return by himself after a large commotion. Soon after, a rumor that Richard was seriously wounded to the point of immediately requesting healers spread. Although no one confirmed it publicly, one story went around as fact.

‘Richard proposed something to Choi Hyuk, and Choi Hyuk, enraged, attacked Richard!’

Sovereigns, who were already concerned with the Berserkers' forceful actions, looked at the situation this time with gravity.

"To even attack Richard... Does he not distinguish his opponents? He isn't someone who we can get through to with words."

There were rumors that the Anti-Berserker Alliance was preparing for their second expedition. They said that there were many more sovereigns participating this time than in Jessie's first expedition where he failed hopelessly.

{The Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk. Savior? Or Demon King?}

{The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla, "He is a warrior who can save the world. This isn't something we should decide hastily..."}

{Prosecute the Berserkers for their brutality.}

All sorts of articles were published.

While the public opinion of the Berserkers was gradually becoming worse, Choi Hyuk, instead, continued forward with surefooted steps.

Whoosh.

A storm formed in Dragonic as winds were getting fiercer. The white, heavy sky rippled frighteningly. Grddk, grddk. Every time the sky swayed and shook, revealing its massiveness, a sound which was difficult to describe shook the land. It was incomparable to the sounds of thunder on Earth. ‘Did an enormous beast swallow us?’ Are we being digested in its stomach?’ ‘Is the sky crushing the ground?’ Even though they knew it wasn’t true, the sound made all sorts of thoughts cross their minds. That sound and the appearance of the sky rippling, as if it would pour down, brought on a fear exceeding their imaginations. And this fear brought forth an abnormal state of consciousness as if one had been possessed by a spirit. They said that your mind would waver when simply looking at rippling water for a long time. The scene of the sky, which filled their vision, couldn’t help but be on another level as it tossed and turned while screaming… The consciousness of the colonizers was not free from the storm’s influence.

Grrddl. Grrddk.

Below the wailing sky, Choi Hyuk gathered the Berserkers and the citizens of Nasari and declared,

“We leave on an expedition. Until the seven overseers are decided.”

Choi Hyuk’s voice pierced through the screams of the sky and clearly rang in people’s ears.

“Those who wish to continue to live in Nasari must participate in

the expedition. I don’t need anyone who does not fight with me in my cities.”

At first, the citizens of Nasari whispered to each other with perplexed expressions. Soon after, once they realized Choi Hyuk’s meaning, ‘If you don’t participate, you will be deported from the city,’ their faces turned deathly pale. They looked towards the Berserkers, whom they had formed friendly relationships over the past few days, and asked what was going on, inquiring whether he would really do that, through their gazes, but the Berserkers showed a ‘So what?’ expression. Endless battles. This was their daily life. In the Berserkers’ perspective, they were actually taken aback when the ones who hated fighting were taken aback.

“Some may say this is crazy and swear at us, but don’t worry. Isn’t this the case? This is a world where two to three billion people die within half a month. There’s no way rational thoughts will work in this world that is already as crazy as it gets. Let’s become crazy. Instead, let’s become even crazier.”

The rising wind drove into Choi Hyuk’s voice and created a bigger, bleaker echo. Choi Hyuk continued on with a voice similar to that of a god’s.

“I will make you victorious.”

Grrddk. Grrrdddk.

Some felt fear from Choi Hyuk’s words, while others became excited.

That was how a storm began to sweep through Dragonic.

The storm blew. The Berserkers rushed forward along with the storm. Their cheeks were endlessly wet with red rain.

Slice.

“Geu…”

The corpse, which had his head sliced by Ryu Hyunsung’s sword, was swept up by the storm and disappeared. The crowded, heated ground flung corpses that had lost their karma up towards the sky. Ryu Hyunsung and the teams following him were ‘technicians’, who represented the Berserkers. They used the trait ‘Mind’s Eye’ as a foundation and released precise sword strikes at their opponent’s weak points. Even if it felt like there was an even battle, once a few swords suddenly flashed, their enemies would break like scarecrows and be blown away. Even their blood drew beautiful arcs.

Rumble! Rumble!

Chu Youngjin and the teams following him were incarnations of destruction. With a single strike created by exploding their karma like an internal combustion engine, they turned their enemies into blood geysers and mist. As their fighting method wasted a lot of their strength and because they would lose out if they missed even

a single time, Chu Youngjin's team members undoubtedly pushed forward and killed their enemies with a single strike even if it meant getting wounded themselves. A bloody charge. Because of their chaotic appearance, this troop was the symbol of the Berserkers.

"Rotate to the right!"

A group of Berserkers followed Lee Jinhee's shout and ran to the right while stepping on the enemies' shoulders or weapons.

Bang, bang, bang!!

Pushed back by the impact, their enemies' tight formation collapsed.

"Suppress the magicians!"

The dashing groups jumped over or slid past the guards and attacked the long-range attackers behind them. Their enemies simply stumbled at the mobile striking force they had never experienced before, unable to react.

Lee Jinhee and her team were famously known as the world's fastest speed demons. As someone whose fame increased daily through Alexei's videos, Lee Jinhee's team members had an especially large portion of foreigners, and the majority of them had enjoyed extreme sports before awakening their karma. They stood at the very front, jumping over their enemies and attacking their

long-range troops, assassinating their commanders, and at times, even led a riot to collapse their enemies' formation.

"Director, are you okay?"

Alexei, who slashed at his enemies, read Lee Jinhee's expression. It was because he knew that she didn't want people to fight against each other. Lee Jinhee glanced at Alexei and roughly ruffled his hair.

"Lyosha. Are you worried about me? Don't worry. I already talked with the leader..."

As she said this, she nailed her gladius in her enemy's forehead. The moment she pulled out her sword, the spurting blood formed a small whirlwind due to the wind. With his eyes still open, the corpse was flung into the wind and disappeared.

Looking at that, Lee Jinhee bitterly said,

"To be honest... I didn't think they'd be so weak."

'For there to be so much of a difference.'

In fact, it wasn't only Lee Jinhee who thought this. Not only the Berserkers, but even the non-combatant colonizers of their captured cities, and the medium and small clans that felt the same.

The enemies they felt were powerful when they had fought them, now collapsed like scarecrows when fighting the Berserkers.

Even though there was already a large difference in fighting experience, due to the intense successive battles the Berserkers had experienced recently, their senses had reached their peak. In their enemies' perspective, they suffered before their bodies could even warm up. They simply couldn't stop them. When the Berserkers' swords pierced their enemies' neck and hearts, their enemies' swords were unable to touch them. It felt as though the Berserkers were swinging their swords one step in front of them while they were swinging their swords ten steps away.

"Only two and a half years... We all awakened at the same time, but if there's such a big difference..."

Lee Jinhee, who sighed bitterly, raised her sword yet again.

"... I wonder if there really is anyone who can stop us."

Lee Jinhee smiled bitterly as she sliced another enemy's neck.

"Euah... Euaack!"

Another enemy who witnessed this fell into a state of panic and began to flee. That was the start.

"Euaahhh!!"

In various places, their enemies began to retreat like a tide. It definitely wasn't a wrong choice. The enemies, who were being overwhelmingly crushed since the start of the battle, fled soon after. Then, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers would leave their fleeing enemies alone and chase the enemy sovereign... capturing and killing him. There were no exceptions.

The Sovereign of Counterattack, the Sovereign of Expectation, the Sovereign of Blood, all were unable to live up to their names and were killed off. In the end, the sovereigns located in the place the Berserkers were advancing to withdrew their application for the seven overseers and began to flee like Nasir.

Dragonic's storm didn't cease, and the Berserkers' madness didn't cease either.

Within three weeks since going to battle starting from Nasari, Choi Hyuk had captured five colonized lands.

As revenge, the enraged colonizers turned the base of the Berserkers, Barhaloleun, to ash and collapsed the Berserkers' residence in Yeouido. Yet, Choi Hyuk didn't care in the slightest. He simply advanced with the attitude of killing them all. Necessary supplies were handled by the colonized lands he captured. As all citizens who surrendered were thrown into the army whenever he captured a city, the number of his army gradually grew. The concern that all sovereigns would submit to Choi Hyuk was slowly becoming a reality.

Around this time, Choi Hyuk was more often called the Demon King than the Berserk Sovereign. Humans faced repeated, futile defeat against the Demon King. Whether he was a demon king or whatever, since Choi Hyuk continued to be victorious, the wide recognition which vilified the Berserkers as ‘crazy bastards’ changed every day. People wanted to stand on the side of the victor.

There would be a dispute every day.

“To be honest, the Demon King is right.”

“Right, my ass… Are you a psychopath? Killing all those people is right?”

“Now, really… Do you really think the world is the same as it was three years ago? Are we in a peaceful time where, if the Demon King doesn’t kill people, no one will die? If anything, if it wasn’t for the Demon King, I bet blood wouldn’t have had time to dry as the sovereigns fought amongst themselves to choose the seven overseers or whatever. The casualties from that would be higher.”

“So, are you saying Choi Hyuk is right? You crazy… Is pulling those who were running their business well into the battlefield a good thing to do? If that’s so good, why don’t you go out to the battlefield yourself? Why are you here?”

“Why are you like this? You already know that I fought as much as I should. Also, to be honest, that isn’t normal either. In the end, we’re in a situation where people will have to risk their lives and

fight... But does it make sense for only a portion to do that? They both awakened at the same time, yet does it make sense if some can stay at the back and run their business with ease, while others have to deal with missions, the war between clans and fight with their lives on the line every day? When we're in a situation where we might be annihilated because of monsters?... We all need to fight. Don't you know that billions of people died during the past advancement evaluations because of those who didn't participate?"

"Of course, there was a problem then... Still, this isn't right. We need to do this rationally, pushing forcefully isn't everything. Haven't you heard of division of labor? Everyone has something they're good at, and if they don't consider that and just make everyone fight... well, that's not good."

"Fuck that. Then do those who aren't good at anything need to fight with their lives on the line while others who are talented in a lot of things can just stay at the back in safety? Even though they are protecting their lives?"

"Why are you getting so emotional? I'm saying this because this is more effective."

"Effectiveness, your mother... If they are so effective, why are they being broken to bits by the Demon King?"

"That's...!!"

"If that's more effective, then they need to beat the Demon King!

Don’t you see that those who divide labor are being knocked out? Come to your senses. This isn’t just a war between countries but the fight that determines whether humanity becomes extinct or not.”

“No, how can you put this so simply…!!”

The voices of those who supported Choi Hyuk became louder every day. It was as if Choi Hyuk’s victories themselves were proof that Choi Hyuk’s method was right.

Would the Demon King continue to unite humanity like this? Was the Demon King Choi Hyuk someone who had the capacity to lead humanity? Was Choi Hyuk’s method truly right?

Even though it seemed wrong, there were no alternatives. The majority who opposed Choi Hyuk simply didn’t know what to do about their growing uneasiness and conflict. It was as if the storm had snatched the people’s cool-headedness.

That was why Richard’s joint agreement created a sensation.

{Sovereigns who will calm the storm in Dragonic sign this agreement. We will drive out the Demon King’s army, who slaughter indiscriminately. We promise that sovereigns who sign will be under a mutual non-aggression agreement. We promise to dispatch troops within our power to the allied forces. - Participating Sovereigns: Richard, Camilla, Baijan, Nasir, Ichiro…}

This was a change to the people who constantly heard news about the Berserkers' victory and their opponent sovereign's defeat and death. A different wind from before. A new wind that may be able to calm the storm.

'Something is happening.'

'It's different this time.'

'Will the Demon King be able to win this time?'

'Which side will we have to take?'

Whether they supported Richard or not, everyone, young, old, male, or female, couldn't help but be interested in the formation of this large-scale allied force.

Because the reveal of the joint agreement occurred after all under-the-table negotiations had ended, the advance of the allied forces began at the same time as the reveal. The allied forces symbolically trampled through Barhaloleun, which used to be the Berserkers' base, and advanced past Zhiyu, which had previously been Lao Ban's colonized land.

Hearing news of the allied forces' advance, the Berserkers' army assembled.

The location they met at happened to be in a desert near where the Berserkers' indiscriminate capturing of colonized lands began, Nasari.

The storm, which had entered its final stages, swept dirt and rain-trees to the right and left, and between them, the Berserkers and the colonizers of the allied forces stared at each other, standing firmly as if they had been nailed to the ground.

Chapter 85: Musical Chairs (8)

Richard looked at the Berserkers and the allied forces standing in the storm. His handsome face was different from before. The left side of his face was disfigured due to horrifying burns. Wounds left behind by Choi Hyuk's Flaming Wing Dance could not be healed, even with healers. Hopelessness, despair, peace, happiness, hatred, rage, and madness, Choi Hyuk's flames, which seethed with these seven emotions, had invaded Richard's soul and left a mark. Even if they dug his wounds out and regenerated his flesh, the burn engraved on his cheek would not disappear. A disfigured face.

However, Richard's eyes were no different from before. He was confident and at ease. It was as if mere wounds were unable to shake his composure.

He recalled the conversation he had with Choi Hyuk.

"You want me to acknowledge Nasir as one of the seven overseers...."

Choi Hyuk raised the pitch-black Predator's Blade and said,

"There is no need for further words."

Choi Hyuk stood within the storm. The vigor Choi Hyuk emitted was indistinguishable from the sweeping storm. Richard felt a cold sweat run down his back.

Yet, he didn't back down. Instead, he tossed away the easygoing attitude he had until now. He spread both his arms and said in a serious voice,

"Of course, I am in no mind of accepting him as one of the seven overseers wholeheartedly. He will be detained. He will be unable to decide anything by himself."

Even as Richard was speaking, Choi Hyuk slowly raised his sword. However, if Choi Hyuk was determined, he would have already swung his sword down on Richard's head. The fact that Choi Hyuk was taking his time was proof that he was listening to Richard's words.

Inwardly relieved, Richard continued,

"He'll be sort of like a puppet. I am not saying that we will let him enjoy his power as one of the seven overseers but more like make him serve humanity."

Grip.

The tip of the Predator's Blade stopped after taking precise aim at Richard's heart. 'Clink.' It felt like there was a metallic sound, and even the violent storm felt as though it was raising its blades.

Choi Hyuk coldly asked,

"Why do we need to do this?"

Richard replied,

“Nasir is an opportunist. A human who can cleanly give up his pride and cause for his own safety. However, he himself is not especially evil or foolish. In fact, the majority of humans are like him. However, they, or their opportunistic traits to be exact, are also one of humanity’s strengths. To be able to survive in any situation. Not because they are strong, but strong because they survived. This is what it means to be a human. To preserve humanity’s strength, we need to be able to embrace them. Also, Nasir is a sovereign who can represent this majority.”

Richard provided a lengthy reply, but Choi Hyuk’s sword didn’t waver in the slightest. Choi Hyuk simply asked again,

“Why do we need to do this?”

Richard’s shoulders fell slightly.

“… Yeah. I know this won’t work. In fact, I predicted it would go this way. I felt that that was probably the reason why we needed to let Nasir live.”

There was a strangeness in Richard’s words. As if the decision to save Nasir wasn’t his own. When Choi Hyuk frowned, Richard elaborated,

“I’ll be honest. I have a special innate skill… If I were to compare,

it is similar to Baek Seoin's 'Intuition'... But my hunch says it's more similar to 'your skill'."

Richard said, 'Your skill'. Although Choi Hyuk didn't show any reaction, Richard, instead, felt more assured from his lack of reaction and asked,

"You... see something, right?"

Richard's question was precisely directed at the 'Eyes of Distinction' Choi Hyuk possessed. A skill that even those closest to Choi Hyuk didn't know about.

Although he didn't show it, Choi Hyuk was inwardly shocked. Richard continued,

"I'm the same. I see things as well. I possess an innate skill known as the 'Eyes of the Judge'. If I set a goal, I can distinguish who I need to kill and who to save to reach my goal. But... I was truly surprised when I saw you for the first time. It kept changing for you. Sometimes as someone I needed to kill, others as someone I needed to keep alive. Even though it may change depending on the situation, it was the first time it kept changing back and forth like that. So, I thought that there was something special about you. Perhaps, you have a similar skill as me and that it may have been our skills conflicting with each other."

Choi Hyuk motionlessly stared at Richard. He activated his 'Eyes of Distinction'. At first glance, the light Richard emitted was white (goodwill)... but when he looked closer, all sorts of colors were

added in like static. Colors he had never seen before like blue or green were like a rainbow in a mist as they incoherently distracted Choi Hyuk's vision.

Richard seemed as though he saw something as he examined Choi Hyuk before shaking his head and saying,

"It's a very difficult problem. Who to kill and who to save. If you don't have that standard, you won't be able to accomplish anything no matter how strong you are. But, you sometimes acted like you would kill everyone while, at other times, would coolly gloss things over. This is proof that you are making judgments every moment unlike the image the world has made for you. And your judgment was incredibly quick. You especially filtered out those who would become your enemy with extreme precision."

This was obvious as Choi Hyuk could grasp his opponent's motives. Perhaps Richard had paid attention to Choi Hyuk when he easily figured out Lee Kijin's betrayal and the sudden attack of Lao Ban's remnants.

Richard said in a voice now filled with confidence,

"I have a similar skill as you. That skill tells me that we need to keep Nasir alive. So, I think that if we are going to keep him alive anyways, we should use him properly. So that we can use Nasir and unify humanity's power."

"..."

Choi Hyuk was momentarily at loss for words. He felt quite a bit of trust to the skill he possessed, the ‘Eyes of Distinction’. At least, he thought that it had never failed him until now. Then, did that mean he had to trust the ‘Eyes of the Judge’ that Richard claimed he possessed?

He shook his head. There was still a reply he had yet to hear to do that. A skill that could distinguish who to kill and who to save once he set a goal. If he took that as a fact, then what goal did Richard strive for?

Grip.

Choi Hyuk tightly clenched his sword handle. Then asked,

“… Why do we need to do this?”

Richard immediately replied,

“So that we can take revenge.”

Grip.

Revenge. At that single word, the handle Choi Hyuk held creaked as though it would shatter.

“… Against who?”

“Those who started this game.”

Richard’s voice was serious and clear to no end. The Predator’s Blade, which had been tautly aimed at his heart, fell slightly.

Choi Hyuk felt Richard’s reply was quite unexpected. Richard, he was famous for being a sovereign who could see the big picture. That was why he was known as the Sovereign of Balance. However, Choi Hyuk had never imagined that the picture he was drawing was beyond the power struggle between sovereigns and that it even reached the Flame Wing Alliance.

‘Is he telling the truth?’

Still suspicious, Choi Hyuk slowly opened his mouth,

“Why are you trying to get revenge?”

Even Choi Hyuk felt this question was unreasonable. Why did he want to get revenge? If someone asked him this question, he would be at loss for words.

Yet, he still asked. When he did, Richard revealed a dumbfounded expression. It was an expression Choi Hyuk would have shown if he was in that situation.

Richard slowly answered,

“Why? Why…? Good, then first, let’s think about it in reverse? What reasons are there not to take revenge? They aren’t an opponent we can face with our strength. It is more important for humanity to survive this war against the monsters. You can’t change what happened even if you take revenge. Something like that? But…”

Richard paused for a moment. His spirit was completely different from before. He changed as if he had taken off his mask. His calm demeanor, which seemed to approach everything from a step back, disappeared, and in its place, was a growling face, which seemed ready to lunge forward at any moment. His karma moved by itself as they were influenced by his emotions, and his eyes shined with a piercing golden light.

“However, I only have two words for those reasons – Fuck. Off.”

“…”

Strictly speaking, Richard’s reply wasn’t an answer to Choi Hyuk’s question. As he didn’t give any reason for enacting revenge. However, precisely because it was like this, he was able to touch Choi Hyuk’s heart. ‘What do you mean ‘why do you want to take revenge?’’ If there were three to four reasons why they shouldn’t take revenge, there were countless reasons why they should. Earth was becoming extinct. Billions of people had already ceased to exist. The majority of the combatant colonizers had experienced murder. Also, the Flame Wing Alliance, didn’t they themselves say it? ‘Get angry.’ To ask why they needed to take revenge in a situation like this… Asking that question was more

foolish.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head. He had somewhat decided. The Predator's Blade that Choi Hyuk had held up slowly relaxed as it was lowered. Then, he flexibly and resiliently relaxed his karma which filled his whole body.

"You said you will end this fight within a month? How?"

Richard asked back,

"Before that, let me ask. When I first said to include Nasir as one of the seven overseers, what did you want to do? Your expression was crazy."

"... Just thinking... about whether I should kill you on the spot and make all the other sovereigns submit."

Richard asked, 'What did you want to do?' in past tense, yet Choi Hyuk answered in present tense. However, maybe he didn't catch it, but Richard didn't look surprised as he cleanly nodded his head. As if he was satisfied.

"Good. Then do just that. Then I will make it so that this fight will end within a month."

Richard didn't seem concerned with the fact that he said he was

going to kill him and revealed an unfounded confidence. At this Richard, Choi Hyuk shot,

“Do you have the capability to?”

“Of course.”

Richard didn’t provide a lengthy answer. Choi Hyuk didn’t hate his confidence. Nodding his head, Choi Hyuk raised the Predator’s Blade above his head. Richard had said to ‘do just that’ so there was no need for hesitation.

“Good. Then should we start right away?”

“Yeah. Uh… but, hey? Right now?”

Surprised at Choi Hyuk’s sudden change, Richard pulled his aide Leah into his arms.

Looking at this, Choi Hyuk coldly declared,

“If you survive this, that proposal, I’ll think about it.”

Blaze. Scarlet flames gathered on his sword.

“Flaming Wing Dance. Instant Void Annihilation.”

That time, Choi Hyuk had really planned on killing Richard. Although he agreed with many of his words, because of this, he felt that he was even more of a threat. He didn't have enough evidence to trust Richard while his 'Eyes of Distinction' didn't work properly. That was why he decided. 'Let's kill him first. But if he survives, if he has the skill to do that, then let's trust him this time.'

That was why he used his strongest attacks one after the other. His Flaming Wing Dance, which burned everything, and his Instant Void Annihilation, which could even split air. He was certain that even Richard, who had reached 5-star stats, would have a hard time surviving this. Yet, he survived. He then fled and created a great army known as the allied forces.

Following Choi Hyuk's words, now was the time to 'think about it'. However, he had made no contact with Richard during this time.

'Is the conversation back then still valid?'

Choi Hyuk thought. He was at least influenced by that conversation. Like Richard had said, 'Good. Then do just that,' Choi Hyuk ran amuck as he wished. Since there wasn't really any other alternative, it was good for him. While he had been running amuck, Richard rallied many sovereigns and led the allied forces here.

There were around five days until his promised one month.

Was Richard's proposal still valid? Well… either way.

'It'll end today.'

In the end, this would be the place where the seven overseers would be decided. Although it was yet to be seen whether it would be through elimination or if a stronger system would be born.

Chapter 86: Musical Chairs (9)

The storm swept through the desert and whooshed with an oddly lengthy rhythm. Richard thought that, for some reason, the wind sounded like music. Like slow Lindy, which he occasionally danced back when things were peaceful. The dance where he held his partner's hand and danced slowly, sweetly… and playfully.

"… Now, shall we dance?"

Richard recited in a quiet voice and advanced.

In the end, there was no exchange between Choi Hyuk and Richard. There wasn't even the process commonly seen in movies where the leaders of both sides came out, scolding each other and justifying their causes.

The Berserkers and the allied forces only shortened the distance between each other within the storm, and then at some point, they rushed forward without even a shout. Blood splattered like always. Corpses flew up in the air. As it had now become such a common occurrence, it didn't seem out of place.

Choi Hyuk momentarily became immersed in his thoughts.

'Is this the right way?'

He couldn't tell at this point. Perhaps what laid at the end was the annihilation of everyone. However, he couldn't stop in the

middle either. Richard's thoughts? What did he care. Choi Hyuk only thought of one thing.

'Finish this fight as fast as possible.'

He needed to take down his opponent before the casualties became too large. Like always.

"Flaming Wing Dance."

Accompanied by Choi Hyuk's mumble, scarlet flames erupted, even burning the storm.

"Guaaah!"

Would hell be like this? The allied forces' formation burned like dry firewood. The Berserkers poured in after Choi Hyuk, who left everything burning behind him, and the allied forces, who had become flustered at the flames burning their bodies, eventually had their necks sliced off.

The Berserkers collapsed the allied forces' formation. However, there was another formation behind that. They collapsed that as well. There was still another formation behind that. Even though the Berserkers increased their army by recruiting at each captured city, they were still absolutely outnumbered against the allied forces made up by 30 sovereigns.

However.

Blaze.

Every time Choi Hyuk's flames burned the sky, the Berserkers and the drafted soldiers following them didn't doubt their victory. It was always the same pattern. No matter how numerous their opponents were, they were unable to endure their overwhelming military strength and would begin to flee. It would be no different this time as well.

Yet, the condition of the fight this time was different from before.

"Flaming Wing Dance!"

Blaaze!

The flames Choi Hyuk erupted-

"Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!"

Zaap!

-were struck by a golden lightning, which had come down from somewhere, and dispersed.

Choi Hyuk's advance paused. His gazed turned towards Richard, whose face was half-disfigured by the burns.

“It’s that skill again.”

This was the skill which allowed Richard to survive Choi Hyuk’s attack before.

It was a skill that was well suited with Richard’s trait ‘Penetration’. His karma, which struck like lightning, would create vibrations, shattering its target. Even if he didn’t know it well, it was a top-level skill that didn’t fall behind the three skills he was proud of (Heart Injection, Instant Void Annihilation, and Flaming Wing Dance). It also matched Richard well. As Richard possessed a 5-star level Speed, there was no one who could match him in creating intense vibrations with karma.

However, he couldn’t fully block Choi Hyuk’s flames with just that. Choi Hyuk caught a glimpse of ten people who seemed special even amongst Richard’s hundred guards.

“Was it a skill that can be activated as a group?”

Although he didn’t know what methods he had used, Richard was currently strengthening his Lighting Quake with his ten special followers. The result was the complete destruction of his Flaming Wing Dance.

“… It’s fun.”

A smile unknowingly hung on his lips. If he thought about it

rationally, this was a frustrating situation. He had resolved himself to end the fight as quickly as possible, yet there was an obstacle that could threaten his resolution. Still, Choi Hyuk couldn't stop his lips from curling upwards.

This was the first time his Flaming Wing Dance had been completely blocked since he had unleashed his true flames at the dimensional wasps' nest. His heart thumped with a thrill that he hadn't felt when he captured those five colonized lands.

"Try to block this."

All of his emotions seethed more intensely. Choi Hyuk's flames gradually tinged blood-red before beginning to drip like blood. He was excited.

But, Richard, who had been observing this scene silently, said,

"Okay. Retreat to the left."

"Retreat!"

Then Richard's guards retreated like a receding tide.

"Wha... What the?!"

Flustered, Choi Hyuk quickly activated his Flaming Wing Dance, but, since Richard's guards specialized in speed, they had already

retreated out of his range.

“Huh? Euaaack!”

Only random forces who had been advancing forward were burned by his Flaming Wing Dance and turned into ash.

“What is this… What are you planning?”

They retreated when it was starting to become fun. Not only that, but their retreat was well-timed. Because Richard’s troops had retreated abruptly, the troops behind them began to collapse in vain.

“… What is he doing?”

It wasn’t only Choi Hyuk who was experiencing this perplexing situation.

“Euack! Where are you running?”

Lee Jinhee attempted but failed to chase Jessie’s troops, who had suddenly retreated after fighting properly. She couldn’t remember how many times this had occurred. She was becoming crazy with irritation. But this didn’t mean the progression of battle was disadvantageous. In fact, it was better for them.

“I mean, why is he doing that? When their side dies if they retreat in this situation?”

The Jessie clan was as skilled as they were famous. They were skilled enough to completely block Lee Jinhee’s troop, which had been able to go in and out of their enemy territory like it was their own home. Obviously, Lee Jinhee’s fighting spirit couldn’t help but surge, and they began to fight a battle staking everything. However, every time they did, the Jessie clan would cop out after fighting well for some time.

If the Jessie clan, who had been resisting the invasion of Lee Jinhee’s troop, suddenly retreated, the troops behind them would be met with a sudden attack. Because of this, Lee Jinhee’s troop was able to run even wilder. That was good... but Lee Jinhee grew irritated since Jessie didn’t face her.

This weird phenomenon occurred everywhere. The elites of the allied forces would defend properly before, without any warning, repeatedly acting in a fashion that hurt their formation. Because of this, even though the Berserkers’ advance kept getting blocked, a strange scene, where they still continued to inflict heavy losses on the allied forces, occurred.

After around 30 minutes had passed since the start of the battle, the other sovereigns of the allied forces, who had been focused on fighting, felt that something was strange.

“Sovereign of Balance! What is this? Don’t you know my clan members will all die if you retreat from there?”

Protested the Herculean Strength Sovereign Zakan when Richard suddenly retreated after blocking Choi Hyuk once again.

Richard simply clicked his tongue at Zakan’s cold protest.

“Darn, we were discovered already.”

“What…?”

Richard’s eyes tinged gold. Richard’s fighting style was using long distance attacks, leveraging his outstanding karma control and speed. His golden karma, which shot forward like a lightning bolt, infiltrated the Herculean Strength Sovereign’s body and turned his insides into a paste.

Clench!

“Grrk… You… You… Wha… What…”

Perhaps it was because of his high Recovery stat, but the Herculean Strength Sovereign didn’t die, and instead, endured as he recovered from the internal wounds. His eyes were bloodshot with anger.

Slice.

However, with a silver streak, the Herculean Strength Sovereign had his neck sliced through while his eyes were still open. The one who appeared like a ghost and cut his neck was Richard's aide, Leah.

"What do you mean 'what'? It means it's time to clean up."

The Herculean Strength Sovereign's guards, who saw this scene with blank expressions, became surprised and prepared for combat.

"Betrayal...! Ergh!"

No, to be precise, they attempted to prepare for combat. They died before they could. The Herculean Strength Sovereign's guards had their heads drop to the floor before they could properly express their rage. It was the price they paid for having come deep within Richard's guards without being alert. The corpses, who had died hopelessly due to the sudden attack, flew up with the wind and disappeared without a trace.

After watching this with cold eyes, Richard spoke into a dimensional slate,

"Team 7, solidify your defenses and slowly retreat to your 6 o'clock direction."

Team 7 was the President of South Korea, Shin Woojin. He followed Richard's secret command and slowly retreated his troops towards his 6 o'clock direction.

Blaze!

Even from this distance, Shin Woojin could feel the heat from Choi Hyuk's flames on his cheeks. President Shin Woojin recalled what Richard had said.

"I'm sorry, Mr. President. However, let's think about this logically. No country can have two overseers. The others won't sit idly. Sovereign Jessie is the only one from the U.S., and I'm the only one from Germany. At most, there will be one or two from a single continent. If, in this situation, Korea comes out and says they want two overseers, there's no way the people will accept that. Then, who is the overseer Korea should dispatch? Mr. President, you need to think about this logically. Are you confident in winning against the Demon King Choi Hyuk?"

Shin Woojin shook his head. Even other sovereigns didn't look easy to beat, let alone Choi Hyuk. Richard nodded his head and said,

"Please pass the seat of the overseer to Choi Hyuk. Instead, I will let you exercise your voting rights through the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir."

Shin Woojin had no choice but to accept Richard's proposal. At the same time, Shin Woojin felt fear towards Richard. Even though

he had been inflicted with a burn which disfigured half his face, he wasn't hostile towards Choi Hyuk. No, it felt as though he was aggressively using his burn. Who could have predicted this? That someone who had been inflicted with such a wound wasn't hostile to the one who inflicted that wound. Everyone believed in the Anti-Berserker banner Richard put out, and because they did, they would die.

Currently, there were fourteen sovereigns here who knew of Richard's secret intentions, including himself. Amongst them, there were five who were promised a position as one of the seven overseers, and the remaining nine were promised the next available seats in return for giving up their positions now.

These fourteen sovereigns moved strangely within the formation as they killed those who were to be killed and kept those who were to survive alive. They followed the hit list Richard had created beforehand.

The war against the Berserkers was in fact... a purge disguised as a war.

The battle was fierce.

Even as they endured tremendous losses, the allied forces didn't retreat. The Berserkers began to tire as it became difficult to move their bodies properly from continuously slashing at the allied forces. The desert became muddy as it was mixed with corpses and blood.

However, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers' directors (Baek Seoin, Chu Youngjin, Lee Jinhee, Bae Jinman and others) still stood at the front, alive and well.

The allied forces were the same. While they were being squashed like a well-ripened, soft peach, at some point, as if its hard seed was revealed from within, troops, which were on a different level from before, made their appearance in good condition.

These troops were those who, instead of aggressively taking the lead, had repeatedly attacked and retreated throughout the battle. The fourteen sovereigns. Only they remained and appeared on the frontlines.

Only then were Choi Hyuk and Richard able to face each other from a close distance. There was a short lull.

"I don't know what you're up to..."

Choi Hyuk looked at Richard and said,

"We need to end this now."

Richard laughed at Choi Hyuk's words. Four sovereigns walked up beside him.

Sovereign Jessie, Sovereign of Paradise Camilla, The Queen of England Diana, and the Ethiopian Sovereign Johan.

Richard looked at them and came forward with steady steps.

Then, he suddenly gave a proposal. In a voice only Choi Hyuk could hear.

“Now, how about we call a truce now? If we count Nasir, there are exactly seven people.”

“Ah…”

Choi Hyuk simply opened his mouth. He was sincerely in admiration in this moment.

‘Did he really plan all this?’

If this was true, then it was truly an outstanding tactic. The fact that he had gathered thirty sovereigns in one place was amazing. It was also amazing that he was able to persuade thirteen of them and control the formation during the battle to skillfully purge the remaining sixteen.

Richard did everything he could.

He survived from Choi Hyuk’s hands and laid the groundwork for choosing the seven overseers within a month.

“Amazing…”

“I know, right? Now it’s your turn. Did you think about it?”

Like Richard said, it was now time for Choi Hyuk to decide. Would he accept? Or would he flip the situation on its head?

However, at this point, he no longer had the heart to flip it all over. He felt this way in all aspects. He had admiration and goodwill towards Richard’s abilities, and he also had a practical reason. If both sides were to clash, there was a higher chance it would result in the destruction of either side rather than a safe conclusion. Since the elites of the allied forces were strong enough to hold back Choi Hyuk’s army.

‘Did he do this on purpose as well? To show that they aren’t weak?’

If he did this on purpose, then it was quite successful. Choi Hyuk’s mind leaned towards a truce. It was a choice that was akin to killing two birds with one stone, as they would be able to decide on the overseers earlier than he expected and preserve their forces.

Only, there was something tugging at his mind.

“What about Nasir?”

“Nasir is already detained. Nasir will be the puppet of the nine sovereigns behind me. He will be unable to act on his own intentions and will move according to the decisions these nine people come to.”

This was the future system Richard had prepared. There were 6 overseers and the remaining seat would be shared between the nine sovereigns through Nasir. Anyone who might have become an obstacle to his plan had already been killed in battle.

Choi Hyuk’s tense heart slowly relaxed.

“… Is it a truce?”

“It’s a truce. Since we need some tension.”

As if he felt something from Choi Hyuk’s question, Richard already stretched out his hand for a handshake. Choi Hyuk grinned and grabbed his hand.

Then he politely said with a little respect,

“I look forward to working with you.”

An extremely large number of colonizers died. However, the colonizers who had survived were stronger and more robust than before. After the ‘Great Nasari War’ and the truce between the Berserkers and the allied forces, the entire world was reorganized under a new order.

At the same time, the storm in Dragonic died down.

In the desert where the storm ceased, rain-trees, which drew large amounts of blood, occasionally sprayed a blood-red drizzle.

Chapter 87: Debut (1)

{The seven overseers, who will exercise the right of earthlings in their stead, have been confirmed.}

{The seven overseers can exercise the following rights as alliance members.}

Enter and trade with other species on their planets.

Freely use the supply store.

Select missions.

Plan and propose tactics.

Run for public office.

View information.

Overseers can permit other earthlings the above rights.

The seven overseers had been decided.

The Demon King Choi Hyuk.

The Sovereign of Balance Richard.

The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla.

The Sovereign Jessie.

The Queen of England Diana.

The Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan.

And, the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.

13 sovereigns remained besides them. Among them, the nine sovereigns who cooperated with Richard managed Nasir's recruits and could exercise Nasir's rights themselves.

The four sovereigns besides them were all in a miserable condition. They didn't cooperate with Richard nor were they on Richard's hit list either. After the Great Nasari War, they, themselves, had withdrawn their applications to preserve their lives and had laid low.

The world population did not know what exactly went on in the great war. They only heard that the Berserkers and the allied forces came to a truce after a fierce battle. All they heard was the announcement that ten sovereigns had died in combat on the allied side and that the sovereigns, who had been chosen to be overseers from the allied side, were to protect their colonized lands which were now in a state of anarchy.

Conspiracies were rampant. There were even rumors that this was all self-fabricated. The people were suspicious, and they were enraged that they had lost their country's sovereign, but what could they do? Things had already taken place. It was now a time where it was difficult to survive if you didn't curry favor with the surviving sovereigns. Whether they were happy or not, they had no choice but to gather under the mantle of the sovereigns, who were in command of the colonized lands, as Earth was gradually getting drier every passing day and there was no harvest even when fall came.

More and more people began to migrate to Dragonic. The colonization of Dragonic became more active, and Earth was becoming empty.

Still, Choi Hyuk spent most of his time on Earth. Although his previous residence had turned into ash, it didn't matter since he had Naro's spaceship.

Choi Hyuk would conduct all sorts of training, but when night fell, he would make the spaceship walls transparent and blankly watch the sunset. As the rotation of the collapsing Earth slowed, days were slowly becoming longer as did the sunset.

"Hmm~ ♩ Hmm ♬ Hmm... ♩ Nana~ ♬♪ "

Naro waved his mitten-like hands as it played its guitar. Even though its hands were like that, it skillfully strummed and plucked

the guitar with precision in a cheerful manner. It always improvised its songs, yet they were all pleasant to listen to.

Training and handling duties regarding his colonized lands during the day and watching the sunset while listening to Naro's performance at night was Choi Hyuk's daily life.

While he blankly looked out at the sky, reminiscing his memories, the shrinking sunset slowly became hazy like a candle that would go out at any moment, and twilight set in the sky.

As people left the city, only one house would be lit across another. Even the red-light district, which had been bustling with nightlife, was now deserted. There was now less light pollution, leaving the sky above the city filled with stars.

"Yaah-As expected, the sky of the cold universe is pretty."

Flame-Rain appeared this time as well. He didn't sense her arrival, yet at some point, she was standing next to him, starting a conversation. Still, Choi Hyuk wasn't taken aback. He was now familiar with this, and he had also predicted it as well. Since the advancement evaluations had ended and they had chosen the seven overseers, it was about time for her to make her appearance.

Instead, it was Naro who became taken aback. The fellow jumped up, raised both its arms and shouted,

“Invader? While we are maintaining a karma barrier? Master! Be careful. She’s strong beyond my perception!”

“I know. Don’t worry. She’s my friend.”

Choi Hyuk calmed Naro down and looked at Flame-Rain. Her bright, hazy flames, which covered her surroundings, first caught his attention. She uncovered her face and had wrapped the flames around her like silk clothes.

Choi Hyuk carefully examined her before letting out a sigh.

“… I still have no idea.”

He had reached the 5-star level. He was enlightened and could unleash his own flames. Yet, he was still unable to estimate Flame-Rain’s level. It seemed as though the difference between them hadn’t shortened in the slightest.

Although he was confident that there was no one on Earth who could match him, there were rows of unimaginably strong experts one step outside Earth. If Flame-Rain was already like this, then what monsters were those known as the ‘Exalted Wings’?

Whether she knew Choi Hyuk’s frustration or not, Flame-Rain looked away and showed interest in the scared Naro.

“Huh? The Armored Soul tribe? That’s not it… Hmm, it looks like it’s still being born. Hyuk, you found a good friend.”

Flame-Rain said ambiguously after approaching the wary Naro and examining it from different angles.

Choi Hyuk concealed his frustration and asked, hoping to listen further,

“Armored Soul tribe?”

“Yeah, one of the most influential tribes of the Flame Wing Alliance.”

Although she said they were one of the most influential tribes… Choi Hyuk, an earthling, didn’t know this information even though he had become an alliance member.

“Just what is the identity of the alliance? I still have no idea.”

At Choi Hyuk’s grumble, Flame-Rain patted his shoulder.

“That’s why I’m here. I came here today on more official business.”

She took two steps away before waving her right hand and placing it on her chest.

Blaze.

Flames surged.

After getting in a decently official looking position, she said in a polite tone he had never heard before,

“I truly congratulate you on being chosen as one of the seven overseers. I am Flame-Rain and I have been dispatched as your guide for the welcoming event commemorating earthlings joining the alliance, as well as for the overseers’ membership training.”

“Welcoming event? Membership training?”

“Yes. There will be a banquet in commemoration of earthlings joining the alliance, and then, lessons on the composition of the alliance, the progression of battle against the monsters, and battle objectives, amongst others, will be held afterwards. All seven overseers and major figures in charge of the Laniakea Supercluster, especially Dark-Sound of the Dark tribe, a key figure of the Exalted Wings, will attend.”

For some reason, Flame-Rain’s expression looked bitter when she mentioned the Exalted Wings. However, Choi Hyuk didn’t notice. Only the words ‘Exalted Wings’ rang in his ears. Nothing else mattered. ‘Exalted Wings’, weren’t they Choi Hyuk’s enemy? The existences who sat at the top of the alliance. The ones who started this damn game.

‘Does that mean I get to meet them?’

His heart beat with a dangerous urge.

However, now was not the time. Choi Hyuk tried his best to hide his thoughts. With an indifferent face, he slowly said,

“I must go. How do I get there?”

When he did, Flame-Rain, who was standing in an official position, relaxed her posture and said friendlily,

“What do you mean ‘how do you get there’? I will take you there. Haven’t I personally come to bring Overseer Choi Hyuk there~”

She stretched her hand out and said humorously,

“Hold on. Nuna will take you to a nice place.”

Choi Hyuk was in a serious mood as he was going to confirm his enemy’s face, yet Flame-Rain’s unhesitant attitude was that of a friend cajoling him to come to a party. He smiled.

‘This isn’t bad.’

This mood was actually good.

It was currently time to hide his inner thoughts. If he was agitated and revealed his hostility, he would only arouse the Exalted Wings' attention. He currently didn't have the strength to take revenge. In a situation where he had to force himself to smile and conceal his inner thoughts, he was thankful to Flame-Rain who naturally created a good mood.

'... Don't tell me, she did this on purpose?'

Although he suddenly had this suspicion,

"Hurry, hurry! Let's go! Earth is wonderful but Dark City in Laniakea is marvelous too! To repay you for the coffee last time, I will buy you something delicious!"

Choi Hyuk's doubtful mind disappeared when he saw her jump up excitedly like a young girl. He shook his head as he stretched out his hand.

"Okay. Let's go."

Their hands touched.

Flame-Rain's hand was cool and soft. The moment the tips of their hands touched, she retracted her hand slightly, seemingly surprised, before aggressively latching onto his hand and pulling him in. At her strong pull, Choi Hyuk's body leaned towards her, almost touching.

“Huh?”

Choi Hyuk became surprised, but Flame-Rain shouted,

“Let’s go!”

Blaze!

Before Choi Hyuk’s body could touch hers, surging flames swallowed the two of them.

Whoosh!

The extreme heat melted the space around them. The two of them, wrapped in flames, traversed through dimensions like a comet.

“... Wow. To be able to pass through the extremely distant dimensional passage with her own body...”

In the place Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain left, Naro analyzed the remnants as it fell into a trance.

As karma developed, it would slowly transcend existing matter and approach pure karma. Because of this, Choi Hyuk could stare directly at the sun without blinding his eyes when he was at the 2-

star level.

However, Flame-Rain's flames were currently so bright that he couldn't open his eyes. He could still see the bright light even through his closed eyes. He kept his eyes closed until darkness pushed its way back into his eyelids.

When he opened his eyes, he was in a place which seemed to be from a dream. It definitely wasn't Earth.

"... Could dimensional travel be so comfortable?"

Choi Hyuk said in slight admiration. To earthlings, dimensional travel was uncomfortable, always accompanied by the urge to vomit, as their bodies felt like it was being flipped inside out. A discomfort that they could never get used to. However, it was comfortable this time, as if he had just woken up from a nap.

"Of course~ Because I'm the driver,"

Boasted Flame-Rain. Choi Hyuk somehow didn't want to acknowledge it so he changed the topic.

"Where are we?"

"Hmm... Earthlings call this place the Great Attractor? In your terms, you can consider it the center of the Laniakea Supercluster."

Although Flame-Rain used names from Earth in her explanation so he could understand, Choi Hyuk was still unable to.

"... What's that?"

When he asked, Flame-Rain said in an overly boastful manner. She... was the type to mess with people the closer they got.

"Huh? You don't know that? Can't you even memorize your own address? This nuna will teach you just once, so listen carefully. They say that Laniakea means 'immense heaven' in Hawaiian. Earth is a part of the Milky Way Galaxy (what we call the 103rd barred spiral galaxy). And the Milky Way Galaxy is part of the Local Group along with the Andromeda Galaxy, Triangulum Galaxy and others, and the Local Group is also a part of the Virgo Supercluster along with countless other groups. And this Virgo Supercluster, along with the Hydra Supercluster, the Centaurus Supercluster and others, is part of the Laniakea Supercluster. Of course, the Laniakea Supercluster is also part of a bigger supercluster... but let's stop here. Anyways, this place, in the scope of the entire alliance, is equivalent to a capital city of a small country. How about it? How do you feel coming to a city for the first time?"

Earth -> Milky Way Galaxy -> Local Group -> Virgo Supercluster -> Laniakea Supercluster.

According to her, Dragonic, which was Earth's colonized land,

was also within the Local Group, and the majority of the missions entrusted to earthlings took place in the Local Group. She said that very rarely did earthlings take part in a mission somewhere within the Virgo Supercluster…

As she explained, Naro sent him telepathic messages to help him understand. Because of this, Choi Hyuk could understand the vast scale of the universe. The universe was too enormous. To the point where Earth was too small to even call it a speck of dust…

"… Amazing."

Forgetting to scold Flame-Rain, who had been extremely boastful, Choi Hyuk blankly looked around at his surroundings.

Dark City of Laniakea. It was a city composed of dark matter, which humanity had yet to observe.

Chapter 88: Debut (2)

Scientists discovered that the galaxy was much heavier than they initially thought. The galaxy rotated at a much faster velocity than what was calculated through Newton's law of gravity, and stars would be pulled into what they observed to be empty space. This meant one thing, 'There is matter that we cannot observe with our eyes and equipment out there.' That was how humanity anticipated the existence of 'dark matter'. Not long after, they found that the universe was filled with this dark matter. There was 6 times the amount of dark matter than matter humans could see and touch. Humans could only see an extremely small part of the universe.

Flame-Rain said,

"Not only is this place a capital with an administrative bureau which observes all the civilizations within the Laniakea Supercluster, but it also has a weapon factory that produces the weapons the alliance uses. As you can tell, since it is composed of dark matter, you won't be able to see it clearly with your eyes."

"Dark matter you say..."

Choi Hyuk's voice erupted with admiration.

"Yeah. It's matter that can be felt but not seen by living beings, who are made up of matter which reflects light, until they reach the 4-star level. Still, you are an intermediate ranked warrior... I mean, since you reached the 5-star level, you can sort of see it,

right?”

It was as she said. Choi Hyuk could see the ground and buildings, which made up Dark City, hazily as if he were seeing the shadows of tree leaves under the moonlight.

Maybe it was because they took alien species that were unable to see dark matter into consideration, but they had lit lights along the edges of buildings. Their appearance was similar to Christmas lights as they gave off a bright, festive look. A Christmas in a city of shadows.

“Anyways, what floor is this? What is up, and what is down?”

Choi Hyuk wandered around like a child. They seemed to be on an overpass. The dark buildings lined up on either side were so frighteningly tall that he couldn’t see the top or bottom of the buildings. As if the buildings and streets were on top of a Mobius strip, they tilted horizontally or hung upside down at some point, and a zero-gravity area (a gravity balancing area to be exact) also existed in between, allowing people and buildings to float. It seemed as though there wasn’t a predetermined gravitational force.

“That’s because Dark City isn’t built on a planet, but made by processing the randomly distributed dark matter. It might be pointless trying to figure out what floor you’re on since those tall buildings may warp and contact a dark matter ground somewhere else.”

Flame-Rain smiled as she saw Choi Hyuk looking around with interest. In Choi Hyuk's perspective, although he had gone to outer space on missions many times, this was his first time visiting a properly functioning alien city. On top of that, because this was a city at the center of the Laniakea Supercluster, a place so massive that it could be considered as a 'city' by the alliance, he couldn't help but look around like someone who had lived in the countryside for 80 years coming to a city for the first time.

Flame-Rain pulled on Choi Hyuk's arm and said,

"Now, hurry up. There's a place we need to go before we attend the welcoming event."

Pulled unexpectedly, Choi Hyuk began to run, and the two ran through the city of shadows decorated with brilliant lights.

They jumped down from the overpass three times and passed through around 5 buildings before jumping up into the sky and landing on a street, which was upside down, passing by members of the Dark tribe, who were also composed of dark matter.

The streets were beautiful. The lighting technology of Dark City was so advanced that they could create crystals of light. Even lights that seemed to be traffic lights, upon closer examination, looked like beautifully split ice crystals. Some lights spread out like fountains while others floated around like fireflies.

The residents of Dark City were spending their happy everyday lives here. Flame-Rain guided him around friendlily.

“Do you see that candy over there? That is an incredibly small nuclear bomb. They have around 1/10,000 the power of the nuclear bombs from World War 2? Still, nuclear bombs are nuclear bombs.”

Dark tribe couples walked around, hand in hand, sharing these small nuclear bomb candies. Flashes of light were occasionally emitted from their bellies, momentarily dying them white, but they were fine. In fact, they shook their bodies as if they were enjoying it. They had absorbed and digested the energy from the nuclear reaction.

There were fun sights to see, and there were other species besides the Dark tribe.

1023-Quasarlings whose bodies emitted silver lights, Armored Soul tribe members whose bodies were covered in metal like Mechas, whom he had seen in the past, and even members of the Speckled Light tribe, who went around in groups.

It was fun watching them go on with their peaceful lives as they walked down the beautiful streets. And as fun as it was... the more disharmonious it felt.

Flame-Rain, who had been walking briskly, slowed her walking pace when she saw that Choi Hyuk’s expression had stiffened. Choi Hyuk’s face was rigid, and his eyes were dyed with faint fury.

Flame-Rain cautiously asked while reading his mood,

“As expected… Is it awkward?”

As he turned to look at Flame-Rain, he nodded,

“… Yeah, it feels awkward. Isn’t this place in the middle of war?”

The reason for the sense of disharmony was that this peaceful scene was too different from Earth. It hadn’t been long since billions of people ceased to exist. It had only been three years since the {Ring of Rebirth} appeared during math class, where students had killed one another. Even at this very moment, Earth was heading towards extinction. What was the reason for this?

They said it was because of the monsters’ invasion. That they had no choice as they needed to block the monsters, whose goal was to wipe out all karmalings. That existences in the universe had no choice but to partake in this war.

… Yet this place was too peaceful. As if things like war didn’t exist.

‘Maybe earthlings are being used as cannon fodder for their peace and enjoyment?’

The moment he thought this, Choi Hyuk found it hard to hide his

rage. It currently wasn't time to reveal his rage, and he lacked information to act rashly… however, this was difficult to endure.

Flame-Rain gazed at his face before stretching out her hand.

"Let's go. I think it's time I give you my present."

She took the lead.

The further he followed her, the rarer traces of people became and the more intimidating the buildings he saw were. The walls made of dark matter weren't simply walls but had been condensed with aggressive karma, revealing a menacing aura. No matter how he looked at it, this place wasn't an area open to civilians. He even saw guard posts and defense facilities. However, for some reason, he didn't see any security guards.

"This is…?"

Flame-Rain simply smiled mysteriously at his questions and didn't reply.

Doors, which looked as solid as those on a safe, stood, layered in front of each other, yet none of them were locked. They would open automatically when Flame-Rain placed her hand on them.

As there was no one in the enormous, menacing buildings, it even felt as if they had come to steal something. However, Flame-Rain passed through the passage and gateways with familiarity and

without hesitation. Then, when they got on an elevator and went up, an ‘ocean’ appeared.

Stumble.

Choi Hyuk stumbled without knowing. It was hard to stay standing as the gravitational force in his surroundings was swaying in every direction. His surroundings were vast, boundless like the universe. It was filled with special dark matter that rippled. Every time the dark matter, which possessed strong gravitational force, rippled, it would change the direction of the gravitational force, shaking Choi Hyuk’s body. Although it was fine if he put his strength into it, Choi Hyuk, who had reached the 5-star level, still felt the ripples in gravity very strongly.

“This is the forge – A place that will let your worn sword be reborn.”

Flame-Rain said as she spread her arms. Then she pointed her finger at the Predator’s Blade on Choi Hyuk’s waist.

“You used that sword for a while, right?”

“It has been with me since around the time I awakened.”

“That’s perfect.”

Nodding, Flame-Rain took out a radiant jewel from her bosom. It was a jewel which possessed karma hot enough to heat his cheeks.

“We are going to re-smelt that sword now. By borrowing the strength of this Essence of Fire and the dark ocean, that is. Once the smelting is done, that sword will break through its limits and be reborn. This the present I’ve prepared for you.”

Flame-Rain’s gaze, as she looked at Choi Hyuk, was clear and upright. The white light (goodwill) she emitted put Choi Hyuk at ease like it always did.

Feeling somewhat awkward, Choi Hyuk turned his gaze away and asked,

“… Why a present all of a sudden?”

“Just, there are things I’m sorry about…”

Flame-Rain, who dragged out her words in an obscure manner, shook her head and said in a cheerful voice,

“Either way, just accept it since I’m giving it to you. First, hold your sword properly with both your hands.”

Choi Hyuk couldn’t deny her words for some reason. Although he wanted to ask her a lot of things, his mouth wouldn’t open. He simply did as he was told and held his sword properly with his hands.

“Huuu…”

After letting out a deep breath, Flame-Rain brought the Essence of Fire close to the Predator’s Blade. Then, she stared at Choi Hyuk’s eyes and said,

“Bring your emotions to their peak. Like when you unleash your flames.”

Choi Hyuk’s emotions always started with ‘rage’. He also felt rage not too long ago. The clear difference between the lives of earthlings and the residents of Dark City. Rage towards this injustice. This rage was vivid whenever he recalled it, no matter how much time had passed.

Blaze.

Flames surged naturally from his body. However, Flame-Rain shook her head.

“Don’t create fire. Bring your emotions to their peak, but don’t unleash your flames. Keep that balance.”

That wasn’t easy. His body was swaying due to the endlessly changing gravitational force of the dark ocean, while his mind was swaying due to his emotions which surged in his mind on their own. However, Flame-Rain didn’t move, only watching with her hand holding the Essence of Fire as she waited for Choi Hyuk to achieve balance on his own.

Clench.

Choi Hyuk bit his lip. He was angry. Although he didn't know exactly what it was, there was no doubt that the present Flame-Rain wanted to give him was extraordinary. However, he himself was too unskilled to receive her present. Choi Hyuk, who had resolved to make the Flame Wing Alliance and the Exalted Wings kneel someday, was unable to even overcome himself.

'How am I going to take revenge like this...?'

Clench.

Massive rage rose up like a hail and covered Choi Hyuk's emotions.

Clench.

Choi Hyuk's body, which shook imperceptibly, locked in place as if it was nailed in.

Choi Hyuk's mind, which was engulfed by extreme rage, instead calmed to a chill. Like a sword forged tens of thousands of times, his mind became cold, sharp, yet serene. A chilling rage.

Flame-Rain smiled.

“Then, here I go.”

The Essence of Fire entered the Predator’s Blade. At the same time-

Kuoooohh!

Wailing, the dark ocean began to rush towards the Predator’s Blade.

It was so fierce that it shook Choi Hyuk’s mind, which had become serene and sharp like a sword. Even his body swayed again.

“Endure it! If your emotions scatter here, then the power contained in your sword will be that much weaker!”

Flame-Rain ordered in a strict voice he had never heard before.

Choi Hyuk grit his teeth. His face distorted brutally, and the veins in his eyes popped, dripping blood. Yet, soon, Choi Hyuk’s distorting face calmed, becoming expressionless. Even his lips, which he had bit to the point of dripping blood, returned to a bland horizontal line.

Choi Hyuk was only shouting one thing in his mind.

‘Rage.’

‘Rage.’

Choi Hyuk slowly raised his sword, which he had held straight, above his head. He wasn’t concerned about the torrent of the dark ocean. Even if his skin burst and his joints broke under the immense pressure, he didn’t care. He only thought of one thing.

‘Kill. Only then can you kill.’

That was what they had said.

Words invoking unmatched hatred, words he had always remembered and followed.

Perhaps, at this moment, Choi Hyuk felt as though these senseless words that invoked killing might even have been directed at himself.

Just then, the Predator’s Blade, which had been raised completely above his head, split the dark ocean as it fell.

Slowly, following his sword, the ocean in front of Choi Hyuk began to split.

Between the split ocean, the Predator’s Blade revealed a transparent blade.

Chapter 89: Debut (3)

The moment the sword swung down completely, and the dark ocean completely split in half in front of him, the world began to look completely different.

Choi Hyuk's body trembled. It felt as though his perception was expanding endlessly. He could perceive all 360 degrees around him simultaneously. He could clearly see his own face and the hair jutting from the back of his head. He could clearly see things he wasn't able to see before.

He could see the transparent sword in his hand and even the radiant colors of the rolling dark ocean around him. It was a light he was seeing for the first time in his life. It was a color humans couldn't see.

Normally, humans possessed three types of cone cells in their eyes that could distinguish red, green and blue. However, there were rare cases where people were born with four types of cone cells. Where normal people could distinguish a million colors, they could distinguish a billion. The way they saw the world completely changed with the addition of another type of cone cell.

However, Choi Hyuk completely surpassed that.

He was surprised, like a man who hadn't been able to see red seeing the natural sunset for the first time. No, his surprise surpassed that. Since Choi Hyuk could 'see' dark matter, which didn't react to light. From the start, what Choi Hyuk was seeing

now wasn't a color which could be explained through light.

He was currently seeing karma.

'How was it that I didn't know of this light until now?'

As if enchanting him, he gazed at the mystical light running down his sword. However, that light soon only left an afterimage as it darkened. The dark ocean and the sword in his hand turned dark and transparent. No color remained. His vision, which could clearly see 360 degrees around him and his own face, gradually narrowed. Although he still felt his surroundings, it felt frustrating as if he was in a fog.

"Oh, my god..."

Flame-Rain exclaimed.

{You have completed a Weapon of Vow. You have glimpsed at an enlightenment beyond your current level by relying on your preposterous will. Your Retribution increased by 200 points with this glimmer of enlightenment. As praise to honorable overseer's will, you have been granted 30 free karma points.}

After reading the message, Choi Hyuk brought the sword up to his eyes.

Swish-

He had only raised his sword, but he could hear sounds of it slicing something.

His sword had lost all the light from before and was now dark and transparent. If it was a shade of pitch-black which drew light into it previously, it was now a semi-transparent shadow. When he raised his sword, information about it appeared. Its name had completely changed.

{Choi Hyuk's Imprint} Weapon of Vow

Rank: S-Rank (Growth-type, Awaken-type)

Durability: Limitless

Close combat +300~ (Power, Speed, Control, Stamina, and Endurance)

A sword imprinted with the 'Deadly Will' through Earth's overseer Choi Hyuk's own soul and retribution. Imprinted with his will, it will not break or dull. Weapon of Vow is rare even in the universe. Theoretically, there is no limit to its power. It grows alongside its soul partner, Choi Hyuk.

Originally, 'Predator's Blade' was a growth-type weapon made of the metal ore 'aerium' from the 384-eclipse cluster of the Hydra Cluster. Mixed with the Essence of Fire, the Dark Ocean,

and Overseer Choi Hyuk's soul and retribution, it has been reborn as 'Karma-Sword, Weapon of Vow, Choi Hyuk's Imprint'. It will normally be an alloy of aerium and dark matter, but depending on its owner's capabilities, the material may be replaced by karma and display a stronger power.

It was a weapon that made him shiver just by holding it.

Only, the name of his sword was a bit awkward even though the name change was proof of the fact that the blade itself had completely changed.

"The name is a bit awkward. Predator's Blade wasn't bad..."

When Choi Hyuk mumbled, Flame-Rain leaped up and down.

"What are you saying? It's actually 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'!"

"It doesn't really sound like the name of a sword."

As if frustrated, Flame-Rain pounded on her chest.

"Urgh. All karma weapons have names like that. First, the owner's own name is in front. Then the type of weapon. Do you even know how amazing the name 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' is? Just hearing the name will make others attend to you. Since, inside the alliance, it's as though you are only recognized as a true warrior worth his salt when you have a karma weapon."

Even at Flame-Rain's passionate speech, Choi Hyuk showed a matter-of-fact expression. His expression clearly asked, 'Isn't it only natural and not amazing they are doing their worth?'

Flame-Rain flicked the tip of her finger on Choi Hyuk's forehead. He rubbed his forehead. It didn't feel all too bad.

"Listen to the end. From the start, there was no doubt it would be a karma-sword. It should have been a given since I gave you the Essence of Fire and this place is the Dark Ocean... However, what's really surprising is the 'Imprint' part rather than 'Choi Hyuk' of 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'. That means you completed a Weapon of Vow! I only expected a Weapon of Calling! If you did better, I expected at most a Weapon of Sentiment...! But an 'Imprint'?! A Weapon of Vow?!"

As she seemingly renewed her excitement as she talked, Flame-Rain examined 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' once again.

"Imprint... Even that doesn't seem like a sword's name."

At Choi Hyuk's begrudging voice, Flame-Rain once again pounded her chest.

"Listen to me! There are four types of karma weapons."

Following Flame-Rain's explanation, the types of karma weapons are as follows.

‘Weapon of Calling’. The most common karma weapon. The unification of the weapon and its owner is the lowest. A form where its owner normally grants the weapon a calling. They possess names related to actions, such as ‘Revenge’, ‘Arbitration’, and ‘Protection’, among others.

‘Weapon of Sentiment’. A karma weapon that can be called a work of art. Its owner’s emotions permeate the weapon, and the weapon and its owner understand each other like twins. They possess names related to emotions, such as ‘Rage’, ‘Anguish’, and ‘Desire’, among others.

‘Weapon of Vow’. A powerful karma weapon rare even in the macrocosm. Its owner’s most powerful will solidifies into the shape of a sword. It is difficult to distinguish between the weapon and its owner. They possess names related to pledges and hopes, such as ‘Pledge’, ‘Imprint’, and ‘Prayer’, among others.

‘Weapon of Conclusion’. An exalted weapon that can be counted on fingers in the macrocosm. The weapon itself is granted with the same fate as its owner. They possess names related to the conclusion of one’s fate, such as ‘Glory’, ‘Hell’, and ‘Salvation’, among others.

“So ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ is a rare Weapon of Vow even in the universe. What does that mean? You just completed a weapon that should be impossible at your level! You, who is only a middle ranked warrior (5-star), just created a weapon that can only be attempted once you are at least a high ranked warrior!”

Flame-Rain’s voice was close to shouting. Choi Hyuk simply thought, ‘So I guess it really is amazing.’

After hearing her words, he could guess one thing.

‘Ah, so is that why I could momentarily see my face and the color of dark matter?’

His perception grew explosively in that instant. Although he didn’t know the reason, he had taken a glimpse beyond his limits. It was probably a world he could see once he reached the 6-star level. It seemed that he gained a once-in-a-lifetime enlightenment moment. It seemed he was able to create a Weapon of Vow because of this as well.

Anyways, he felt pleased since she said it was a good result. He looked down at his sword, ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. A deeply satisfying feeling surged from deep within him. It didn’t feel foreign at all. The sword was his own will.

“… It really is amazing.”

Choi Hyuk could tell now. That this was an incredible present. Although it seemed as though it came out better than Flame-Rain expected... the reason he could create such a treasure was because she had invested equally amazing resources.

Choi Hyuk gazed at Flame-Rain with a complicated look. While he was grateful for her kindness... it wasn't a light kindness he could just gloss over this time.

Choi Hyuk asked,

"Flame-Rain. What's the real reason you are acting this way towards me?"

Flame-Rain's eyes wavered. However, she replied cheerfully as if they had never wavered in the first place,

"Just because!"

"..."

When Choi Hyuk stared at her, Flame-Rain sighed exaggeratingly. Then started to speak.

"I am from the Flame Wing tribe."

"... The Flame Wing tribe."

Choi Hyuk rolled those words in his mouth. It was a name he was already well familiar with. Choi Hyuk's own karma foundation was precisely the Flame Wing tribe's Karma Heart. Even his strongest skill was the Flame Wing tribe's fighting technique, Flaming Wing Dance.

In fact, he had already guessed that Flame-Rain was from the Flame Wing tribe. He was able to complete his Flaming Wing Dance due to her help... and her name contained 'Flame'.

However, it seemed that he didn't want to acknowledge this fact. Because there was another organization with 'Flame' in its name.

Choi Hyuk felt somewhat choked up. Although he wanted to ask, his mouth wouldn't open. Still, he asked, pretending to be calm.

"... I was curious for a while, but what is the relationship between the Flame Wing tribe and the Flame Wing Alliance?"

At his question, Flame-Rain showed a gloomy face. Then, as if she had memorized a script, she replied quickly,

"The Flame Wing tribe is the tribe who established the Flame Wing Alliance. You can call them the leader of the alliance. Since they already hold all the key positions within the alliance, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that responsibility for all actions the alliance takes falls on the Flame Wing tribe."

"... Okay."

Even though he thought this was probably the case, when she confirmed it, he felt something surge within him, though he wasn't sure whether it was a sense of loss or betrayal. Flame Wing Alliance… Flame Wing tribe. The Exalted Wings.

'Are they all my sworn enemies? Or only a portion?'

He still lacked information. However… their vague existence was gradually taking form.

Choi Hyuk kept his heart from stirring.

Flame-Rain gazed at him. The two met each other's gaze.

Choi Hyuk had a hard time asking,

"Okay… So, you're from the Flame Wing tribe. But why?"

Flame-Rain replied in an indifferent tone. However, her tone of speech slowly became higher and faster.

"Yeah. Since I'm from the Flame Wing tribe. As a member of the tribe responsible for the alliance, when I think about the events earthlings had to endure, I felt sorry, I wanted to atone for it, yet I still wanted to be friends with you… Ah, damn! I'm not being nice to you because of these emotions!"

“What?”

“I’m definitely not being nice to you because of these emotions!”

With her eyes wide open, Flame-Rain continued her empty bravado. Even though he could see how sorry she was through her eyes, she continued to argue until the end.

That she was definitely not acting this way because she was sorry. She argued while shouting.

It was comical, yet it was precisely because of this that he felt her sincerity truly came through.

Flame-Rain said,

“Please, don’t think of such complicated thoughts and just accept it. A present is only a present!”

Thud.

Flame-Rain hit Choi Hyuk’s chest with her small fist. Choi Hyuk simply laughed.

That she was doing this because she was sorry. His pride might have been hurt if she said that… but because she acted like this, his tense shoulders relaxed, and he laughed.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

‘Later… Yeah, I think I can think about this later.’

Choi Hyuk bumped his fist against Flame-Rain’s, which had been on his chest, by moving back a little and said,

“Okay. Thanks.”

Flame-Rain guided Choi Hyuk to the welcoming hall.

Although he had learned of this later, compared to the others, Flame-Rain’s guide had quite a bit of extra service. Other overseers of Earth didn’t have time to look around Dark City and were immediately brought to the welcoming hall. They debuted before the universe without any preparations.

Not only that, but they weren’t able to properly adjust to Dark City. When he met the other overseers in front of the event hall, he couldn’t help but laugh.

“Why are they like that?”

When Choi Hyuk asked, Flame-Rain shrugged her shoulders.

“There’s nothing we can do. If their Retribution isn’t at least 5-

star, then they can't properly perceive dark matter."

Besides Choi Hyuk, the other six overseers were flailing as if they had fallen in a swamp. Richard was better off as he was only sunken up to his ankles, while Camilla and Jessie were sunken up to their knees. The other sovereigns were sunken up to their waists and didn't know what to do.

It was because, although dark matter possessed a strong gravitational force, it barely interacted with the matter which made up earthlings' bodies. Without the help of karma, the bodies of earthlings would sink through dark matter like ghosts.

Flame-Rain leisurely explained,

"Although you can feel dark matter with 4-star Retribution, it's hard to stand up and balance yourself properly without being able to see it. It's like standing on one leg with your eyes closed. You don't have this problem since you can see the outlines as a 5-star."

Choi Hyuk rubbed his chin.

"... How pitiful."

He was distressed as the overseers representing Earth were acting this way.

However, soon, something which made him more distressed occurred.

“Yaah, those kids over there are the earthlings who newly joined the alliance?”

Four aliens appeared noisily. Unlike Flame-Rain, who could speak Korean fluently, they appeared while speaking in an alien language. Although there wasn’t a communication problem because of {Language Resonance}, their attitude and tone mixed together and seemed even more ill-mannered.

{Hey! Your seniors are passing by and you don’t salute?}

{Kids these days are so rude.}

{Why are you like this? They haven’t even been commissioned yet so we don’t know whether they will be under our command or not. They say their population is quite big and if they are overseers, don’t you think they’ll be assigned as independent troops?}

{They can’t even stand on their own feet, what do you mean independent troops?}

They approached the overseers representing Earth, who were flailing on the floor, while mocking them to their heart’s content.

Then a 3-meter-tall ‘robot’ alien kicked the Queen of England Diana with its enormous foot. She was the only child of Elizabeth and had lived her entire life as a princess. The young, beautiful

overseer Diana, who had been flailing with her body sunken up to her waist, was kicked down and was now sunk up to her shoulders.

{When your seniors come, you need to salute. How dare you lie down!}

{Ah, that was her lying down? Kekekeke. What an idiot.}

"... Ha..."

Choi Hyuk's eyes ignited with fury. His hand naturally headed towards 'Imprint'.

He even felt that this was a good chance. He was curious about his new weapon's power. An S rank weapon that could slice into a high ranked warrior, a 6-star enemy. He also wanted to test the different indication of stats now that it had received the name 'Imprint'.

Only, there was something that held him back.

"Listening to how they talk, it seems that they are our seniors... Will it be a problem?"

He asked with his hand on his sword.

"Looking at how they are acting, it seems they are commanding officers of the Virgo Cluster you are a part of. They are experts in

their own right, and if you guys are officially commissioned, then they really might be your superiors. Since the alliance is one big military organization, command and discipline are quite rigorous.”

Choi Hyuk frowned at her words.

“So… There will be a problem?”

As it wasn’t time to oppose the alliance, Choi Hyuk was approaching this carefully. Flame-Rain shrugged her shoulders.

“Although you are protected by the alliance law when you join the alliance… Rights are like this. Rather than a set amount, your rights grow in accordance to your demands and accomplishments. Although earthlings have been formally granted citizenship… It is still unknown how respected your rights will be. That’s why they are trying to get the drop on you.”

As she said this, Flame-Rain lightly took Choi Hyuk’s hand off his sword.

“Only, you can’t use your weapon.”

“…”

As if he felt unsatisfied, he clenched the air once. He heard that the abilities of ‘Weapons of Vow’ would differ depending on the type. Weapons with the name ‘Imprint’ like Choi Hyuk’s would be imprinted with one will and was optimized for one function. In

Choi Hyuk's case, it was optimized for close combat, perhaps because of his Deadly Will.

The 'Close Combat +300~ (Power, Speed, Control, Stamina, and Endurance)' written in the description meant that over 300 points of karma would be distributed amongst those five stats, which were related to close combat, in the most ideal manner. Since the weapon was an S rank on top of that, he could theoretically unleash a power close to that of someone at the 6-star level the moment he struck his target in close combat.

However, it was useless if he couldn't unsheathe his weapon. He heard that 'Prayer' and 'Pledge' types of 'Weapons of Vow' could increase one's karma normally, yet 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' would only display its might when wielded it with his own hands. It seemed that he would have to test his weapon later.

"Nothing I can do."

Instead, Choi Hyuk clenched his fists. There were four enemies. Looking at their vigor, they all seemed to be 5-star level warriors. Even if it was Choi Hyuk, he couldn't look down on them. Choi Hyuk coldly and heavily shrouded his spirit and waited for an opportunity.

Just then-

"Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!"

He heard Richard’s clear shout.

Bang!

The metallic alien, who kicked Diana, was blasted away.

“Acting all cocky…”

The platinum-haired, middle-aged Richard looked down on the aliens and stood up with his hair tangled. With his entire body covered in golden karma, he seemed to have become used to Dark City as he could stand firmly on the ground.

He used his specialty, speed, and rushed towards the detestable aliens. There was a storm of karma.

“Good.”

Looking at this scene, Choi Hyuk smiled. Richard created a great opportunity for him.

“Flaming Wing Dance.”

Blaze!

Flames erupted, and Choi Hyuk’s fist-

Bang!

Smashed into the chest of a 1023-quasarling, whose body was shining with a silver light.

“You bastards!”

The alien from the Dark tribe, who was preparing to counterattack, was restrained by Camilla and Jessie who suddenly got up. A brawl broke out as they tangled together. Although Earth’s overseers were usually the ones who flew out and vomited blood, they didn’t lose out in malice.

The combination with Choi Hyuk as the lead and Richard as support even fought quite well.

“Wow… Good fight.”

Flame-Rain sat down and watched.

The welcoming event in commemoration of earthlings joining the alliance opened with a group fight between the overseers of Earth and the existing members of the alliance.

It was a splendid debut.

Episode 6: Mafia Game

Chapter 90: Independent Troops (1)

The sudden group fight ended with the appearance of Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster. She looked like a human and was beautiful. She had sapphire blue hair and a pair of golden horns that grew in a diagonal line near the back of her head. At a glance, however, they didn't seem like horns but rather an elegant hairstyle.

"Haa..."

When she held her forehead and sighed, the aliens dropped to their knees with a thud.

"Cough... What's this? Cough."

Camilla, who had been hit by the aliens and knocked out, slowly got up and looked around.

She caught sight of the blue-haired Commander Mack. Commander Mack, who floated slightly in the air, was slowly sliding down towards the middle of the group fight.

"Pathetic fools."

Her voice was chillingly cold. As if the four aliens in the group were pressed down by something, they couldn't get up easily.

Commander Mack, who was a high ranked warrior (6-star), possessed an excellent ability that allowed her to invade and change other people's karma. Alliance members called it 'Laying down fate' when she used her power. The fate the aliens were currently receiving was the fate of Atlas, who held up the sky. Commander Mack changed their karma and made their arms and legs rigid and heavy. To those experiencing it, it felt as though an enormous weight was weighing down on them.

"As those who are attending the welcoming event, you pick a fight with the main stars of the event? You who call yourselves warrior leaders of the Virgo Cluster?"

The four aliens, who fought against the overseers of Earth, were the warrior leaders of the Virgo Cluster division troops.

"Erk. For life and freedom."

Tangka of the Armored Soul tribe, who was the leader of the four, stood on its trembling legs and saluted. It looked as though the 3-meter-tall, steel 'robot' was lifting the Earth as steam was emitted from its entire body. All it was doing, however, was barely straightening its legs and standing up. It displayed a karma light when it saluted, but it seemed even that was difficult as its shiny, metallic karma light swayed in different directions.

"Kik." The Queen of England Diana, who had been hit by Tangka, laughed cutely, seemingly pleased at its current figure.

Commander Mack didn't accept its salute.

"That's enough. You guys are going to 'lift the sky' for the whole day. If any one of you frowns or if your legs tremble during the welcoming event because it's too difficult... prepare yourselves."

Mack said in a chilling voice.

"Bu-but commander. The new recruits committed mutiny!"

Tangka showed a dejected face as it protested.

Thud!

Its knees touched the ground once again. The burden pressing down on its body had increased.

"Looks like you have the strength to talk? You get double."

"Keuk..."

Tangka couldn't speak anymore and kept its mouth shut.

Mack clicked her tongue while looking at it.

"Pathetic, who's a new recruit? They haven't even been commissioned yet. Strictly speaking, what you committed was an

abuse of authority and an assault on citizens. You're lucky that you aren't going on military trial."

At the mention of a military trial, the four, including Tangka, became pale.

Only then did Mack turn her gaze towards the overseers of Earth.

'How gruesome.'

That was the first thing Mack thought. The arms and legs of Earth's overseers were broken, and their insides were injured, resulting in blood dripping from their mouths.

This was because of the big difference in levels even though they had the numerical advantage of 7 against 4. Tangka and the rest were above-average middle ranked warriors (5-star), while, on the other hand, Earth's overseers were all hovering at the level of low ranked warriors (4-star) excluding Choi Hyuk, who had just become a middle ranked warrior. Even Richard was only at a level between middle and low ranked warriors.

'But they fought well considering the difference in level.'

Mack glanced at the four warrior leaders standing as they endured the weight. They weren't fine either. A bruised face wasn't unusual, but there was even a fellow whose arm was broken due to burns.

Sighing, Commander Mack looked at the overseers and said,

“Nice to meet you. I am Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster. Since Earth is part of the Virgo Cluster, if you get commissioned, you will be under my command. And you will occasionally see dimwits like them.”

Mack glanced at the warrior leaders again and then said to the overseers,

“You came here for the welcoming event, but you had a hard time from the start. Still… It was impressive.”

Grinning, she turned around and headed towards the event hall.

“Now, let’s head to the event hall. Everyone’s waiting for you.”

“Huh? Do we just go like this? What about our wounds?”

When the Queen of England Diana asked, Mack didn’t even turn around as she replied,

“Wounds at that level will heal by themselves. Don’t worry about it. Everyone attending the welcoming event is a warrior. If you have a few wounds, there will be something to talk about so it’ll be fine.”

Even though a civilization was newly joining the alliance, there wasn't a particular ceremony or order to the welcoming event.

When they arrived at the event hall, it was bustling with aliens from various places throughout the Laniakea Supercluster. These aliens identified the 'earthlings', whom they were seeing for the first time, and greeted them.

Going around, greeting others and eating was all there was to the welcoming event... and it wasn't all too bad.

Like Commander Mack said, the attendees showed interest in Earth's overseers' injuries. Each and every one of them wanted to gather around and listen to the story of the group fight between Earth's overseers and the Virgo Cluster's warrior leaders.

They crowded around and greeted them to the point Choi Hyuk's eyes felt dizzy. And Choi Hyuk was surprised at the fact he memorized all their names. As his karma grew, the limit of living beings gradually became non-existent.

There weren't only warriors who attended the event. They were surrounded by the Seo tribe, who weren't skilled in combat but could make incredible weapons, the Thumb tribe, who were responsible for gathering and analyzing information, as well as other various tribes.

"Cough."

Choi Hyuk, who was surrounded by all types of aliens, was conversing with them with a mixture of bewilderment and joy, occasionally coughing up a bit of blood. He had been hit in the chest by Tangka of the Armored Soul tribe, and it seemed as though it was taking a while to heal since it was an internal injury. Looking at this, the alien warriors made a fuss.

“Oh, earthling’s blood is red too?”

“Of course, blood has to be red to be genuine.”

“What are you saying. Warriors without blood are true warriors. Like me.”

Unsure whether they were always like this or because they could finally let loose after a long time, but the aliens joked non-stop amongst themselves and laughed as they floated around.

The event hall was a zero-gravity area made with a specially produced dark matter. It was dark and transparent all around them, but they could occasionally see a bright comet rotating around the event hall. The comet had a set rotation and, like a replaying video, continuous circled around, and when one saw it, they would become hazy as if hypnotized.

“Of course, blood has to be red to be genuine… Huh? Didn’t I say this already?”

“You did. You did. Puhahaha. You were caught by the time gap!”

Deja vus didn’t cease throughout the event.

“Aah, is this the first time in a <Repeated Time Zone> for earthlings? Since we are in the middle of a war, we don’t have enough time. That’s why they set up this <Repeated Time Zone> when we need to gather like this. Inside, time continuously repeats, so if we play all the time, time doesn’t pass. Only, the side effect is that you constantly say the same thing. Meaning there are a lot of deja vus.”

It was good anyways. Choi Hyuk swallowed the ‘Karma Pop’ drink floating next to him. The moment he swallowed the drink, the karma within his body bubbled like soda and gave him an exhilarating feeling.

“Keu…”

When Choi Hyuk’s body shivered, an alien warrior laughed,

“This guy here knows how to drink some Karma Pop, doesn’t he?”

“However, nuclear bomb candies are the best at giving an exhilarating feeling.”

“Let your Dark tribe eat those.”

Drinks and food floated around, and time continuously repeated itself, giving off a pleasant mood that seemed like peace would continue forever.

Thud.

Someone hit Choi Hyuk, who was enjoying himself. When he turned around, it was Tangka of the Armored Soul tribe. Since it was still pressed down with weight, its actions were somewhat unnatural, but it seemed like it was enjoying itself as well.

“Hey, you were quite good at fighting. I was honestly surprised.”

It put out its hand as if trying to reconcile with him.

“Although I don’t know which troop you will be assigned to, please take care of me. To be honest, it’ll be good if you came under my command.”

Choi Hyuk grabbed its hand and said,

“… Can we assign ranks through battle?”

“What? Puahahaha!”

At his words, Tangka burst into laughter and introduced the other warrior leaders.

1023-quasarling Bilu, Whalubo of the Dark tribe, and Lamiain Dalaenalae. They too held Choi Hyuk's hand and said, "You were pretty good."

As they talked, other overseers of Earth began to gather one after the other. The mood was pleasant. The four warrior leaders told them the general information about the Virgo Cluster.

"To be honest, the Laniakea Supercluster is at the border among the other superclusters in the universe, and among them, the Virgo Cluster we're in is at the utmost border. As the exploration isn't complete, we don't know exactly how many civilizations are inside, but currently, there are over 1,000 civilizations that have been discovered. Among them, only three have obtained citizenship. Now that you guys joined, there are four. Among them, there are some who haven't yet been granted independent operational authority and have been organized as the division troops of the cluster army, and those who have been granted operational authority and have independent troops... I don't know how it'll be for you."

Lamiain Dalaenalae, who came from a galaxy known as the Large Magellan Cloud on Earth, gave the overseers a meaningful look.

"What is the difference between independent troops and division troops...? Do the division troops receive more dangerous missions?"

The one who asked was the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir. As

he was one of the seven overseers, he had also attended the welcoming event.

Choi Hyuk's mood spoiled when he saw Nasir, so he swallowed a Karma Pop floating next to him. Karma bubbled inside him. Since he had already made a promise with the Sovereign of Balance, he had no intention of acting against him.

Dalaenalae replied to Nasir's question,

"That depends on the mission. Since independent troops can choose their own missions, it could be safer... but division troops are made up of a mix of different species, so they will be able to deal with a variety of situations more safely. I can't straight out say which is more dangerous... Why? Do you want safe fights?"

Dalaenalae gave a provocative look.

However, Nasir didn't pay any heed as he asked again,

"Then does that mean there are only two cases? One where all seven of us become part of the division troops or one where we are combined together to form an independent troop?"

At Nasir's composed reaction, Dalaenalae replied with an unsure gesture.

"I don't know. Depending on the civilization, there are cases where they are all moved together and cases where only a portion

become part of the division troops and the rest become independent troops. It all depends on you. You could be organized as a group, or each of you may lead your own independent troop.

Listening to their conversation, it was an interesting and important topic. This time, the Sovereign of Balance Richard joined the conversation and asked,

"How do we decide?"

"It's obviously based on your test results. Once the welcoming event ends soon, you will be commissioned under the supervision of the Exalted Wing Dark-Sound. Then you will be appointed once you complete your training and assessment test."

'Exalted Wing.'

Choi Hyuk brooded over that name.

The moment he heard it, he felt as though his surroundings had become quieter and darker.

His heart pounded.

A survival game that started one day. And Choi Hyuk who had lost everything dear to him because of it.

Unsure of the reason or when it would end, he had overcome

countless drastic changes and catastrophes to finally get here.

Existences he would come across if he went up the stream of events which caused all the disasters that occurred on Earth. He would soon be able to meet one of the Exalted Wings.

Although he was only meeting one,

‘It all begins now.’

This place was the starting line. A signpost clearly lit by his rage and pain, which had been previously faint and vague.

Chapter 91: Independent Troops (2)

Dark-Sound appeared suddenly.

The noisy event hall abruptly became quiet. There were still people talking, but as if they were muted, only their mouths opened and closed, no sound was heard.

Then, it became dark.

Like a TV suddenly shutting off, a pitch-black darkness suddenly entered and covered their eyes. There was no difference between closing your eyes and opening them. It was simply dark. Choi Hyuk couldn't even see his own hand.

'What's this?'

A frightening feeling sent shivers down his body. He became dizzy as if he was falling endlessly. He had never felt this facing any opponent before. Even Commander Mack, who was a high ranked warrior and was so strong Choi Hyuk had no chance at winning against her... he still felt a desire to defeat her. However, this was different.

Choi Hyuk had never experienced this feeling from anyone until now. This emotion he was feeling for the first time in his life tickled his heart. It was the emotion known as 'fear'.

His heart trembled nervously. His vision narrowed, and it felt as

though his already dark surroundings became darker. Trembling impalpably, Choi Hyuk's hand moved up, as if he was floundering, and abruptly stopped, seemingly stuck in the air.

Grit.

He ground his teeth.

'... Fuck.'

His chest trembled nervously, and then, the emotion known as fear turned into ash and faded away. A rage, more deeply rooted than fear, began to burn. His body began producing adrenaline, and his karma began to boil. Each of Choi Hyuk's hairs stood on end one after the other.

Although his surroundings were still dark and he couldn't see anything, for some reason his eyes felt a bit brighter and refreshed.

Then, he suddenly realized the man standing there. In the corner of his eye. A man whose tall, thin figure looked sharp. He was motionlessly staring at Choi Hyuk with his pale face. Choi Hyuk couldn't place the man at the center of his vision no matter how much he turned his head. Like a picture stuck to his cornea, only the man's pale shadow followed behind. In the darkness when he closed his eyes and in the darkness with his eyes open, the man was there.

"You got out of it yourself. Is your source rage? Amazing."

He said. His gaze turned towards ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ hanging on the left side of his waist.

“On top of that, a Sword of Vow… Someone already made you a karma-sword? Ah, is it her?”

“… Are you Dark-Sound?”

“Yes.”

At the same time as his answer, the world brightened.

In front of him was Tangka with its mouth agape. The Queen of England Diana looked around as if she had just woken from a nightmare. However, there continued to be no sound. Suddenly, he heard a faint, echo-like voice in his ears.

{Welcome, earthlings on joining the alliance. I look forward to you becoming warriors powerful enough to end the long war between karmalings and monsters. In the name of Dark-Sound, an Exalted Wing, I grant Overseer Choi Hyuk with the title of middle ranked warrior and Overseers Camilla, Richard, Diana, Yohan, Nasir, and Jessie with the title of low ranked warriors. As overseers representing Earth, they will carry out the mission of a commander. I hope they will be able to obtain peace and freedom with their swords.}

Everyone heard that voice at the same time.

That was the end. Their surroundings became disorderly. A few of the aliens who had been noisily enjoying the welcoming event said their farewells to the overseers of Earth and left the event hall.

It felt like it had ended abruptly.

“… Is this the end of the commission?”

The Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan rippled his black muscles as he felt this was strange. Dalaenalae replied,

“Since there was a speech by Dark-Sound, it’s the end. Anyways, haa… I thought I’d be scared to death.”

She rubbed her skin, which had become bumpy and was reflecting light like a mirror, as she calmed herself.

“Why did he appear so terrifyingly?”

The moment Sovereign Jessie grumbled, a message appeared.

{You have faced the source of your heart. Your free karma increased by 10 points.}

“Ah?”

Looking at Jessie who let out a foolish sound, Dalaenalae showed a ‘Now you know’ expression.

That was how the welcoming event ended and the recruit training began.

Because they were in the <Repeated Time Zone>, they didn’t have to worry about Earth during their training. They turned the event hall into a new recruit training area and used it. They said they specially made it familiar to earthlings, but it felt weird since they set it up to look like a school. It looked like a combination of different schools on Earth, and the chairs and desks seemed familiar. When they sat there and looked at the blackboard, an alien instructor would go on with the class, and holograms would appear on blackboards and around the classroom, clearly displaying images. It was strange as if it were a dream.

The training started by explaining the system which began the awakenings on Earth. An instructor from the Thumb tribe, who was as small as a thumb, stood on the podium and began her lecture.

“Your karma development is on the quicker side. You should have especially experienced rapid growth up until the 3-star level.”

According to her, it was all achieved through the artificial

intervention of the alliance.

“Although earthlings have been assessed as having high combat skills, in reality, the karma earthlings are innately born with isn’t anything special. This is because your species hasn’t accumulated a lot of retribution. It is said that it would take 1,000 more years until there would be a naturally self-awakened person. But, how were they able to dispatch a middle ranked warrior, so a 5-star warrior, within 3 years? Simply put, it is because of the alliance’s new recruit fostering system.”

And, as everyone already knew, it wasn’t all good.

“The karma you awakened for the first time, the karma you obtained by killing your species, the karma received when you unlocked an achievement, and the karma given after you completed a mission… Where did it all come from? It is all karma obtained by burning your homeland, Earth. We unsparingly released the karma that had accumulated in the last 60 billion years, a period where the Earth was formed, and on it, life was born and continuous reproduction occurred, leaving behind descendants. Although, as a result, Earth will cease to exist… But you should all know this.”

She said these horrible words in an unconcerned tone. As if this sort of tragedy was common throughout the universe.

Earth’s overseers weren’t shaken up when they heard this. They already knew all this. There was no one who would express themselves about something like this as their rage had already cooled and solidified, taking root deep within their hearts.

After the explanation of the system concluded, an introduction on the composition of forces in the alliance began.

4 species existed within the alliance who were strong enough to be called the top 4.

Among them, the Flame Wing tribe was first.

They were a species born alongside the beginning of the universe. They were born right after the Big Bang, when the universe was filled with extreme heat and energy. When hearing this, they could naturally understand why they were a species stronger than any other in the universe. Unlike other species born in the cold universe, their world was filled with extreme heat and energy. They lived in a world which living beings on Earth couldn't endure for even a second before turning into ash. This was why species of the cold universe would turn into ash at the flick of their hands.

On top of that, the Flame Wing tribe was born with strong karma. It was because they, being a species that was present since the formation of the universe, had accumulated a massive amount of karma. They awakened karma before they were born, and their karma would reach 3-star level without any effort or training.

As a species with such an outstanding talent, they established karma skills more excellent than any other species. It was part of their struggle to survive as well. Since the universe was quickly cooling after the Big Bang, they had to research karma to adapt to the cooling universe. The Flame Wing tribe, which was born in a

fiery world, could live in the cold universe without any discomfort because karma, the energy of the fate of the universe, allowed living beings to overcome their limits and allowed one to communicate with the universe itself. The Karma Heart Discipline, which Choi Hyuk was familiar with, was developed as the foundation for the Flame Wing tribe to move as freely as possible within the cold universe.

"... What the? Isn't that too much?"

Sovereign Jessie's mumblings were heard during this explanation. He slouched in his chair as he sighed,

"The reason why earthlings are able to develop karma quickly is because we are burning and distributing the karma Earth had accumulated over the past 60 billion years... Even then, we have to kill each other or monsters to reach the 3-star level... But they have a free pass to the 3-star level once they're born."

As if she heard him grumbling, the instructor from the Thumb tribe shrugged her shoulders.

"Well... The universe is unfair."

The Dark tribe was a species that had become powerful enough to compare to the Flame Wing tribe. They were karmalings born from dark matter, which made up 24% of the universe. (The instructor said, "For reference, matter you can see, like on Earth,

only makes up 4% of the universe.") Although they were collectively known as the Dark tribe because they shared a common ancestor, apparently, there would be a big difference in their individual capabilities depending on where they were born and their lineage. That was why those who were born in the heaviest and densest dark matter regions and were pure-blooded were separately called the Dark clan. The Exalted Wing Dark-Sound was from this Dark clan.

Also, there were occasionally cases where extremely advanced machines and artificial intelligences would inherit the fate of the extinct karmalings who created them, and those existences made one of the top four, the Armored Soul tribe.

Lastly, the Speckled Light tribe, who were weak individually but displayed powerful group intellect and willpower, took the lowest spot of the four.

"To be honest, you can think that these four are supporting the bulk of the war. The Laniakea Supercluster is like the countryside compared to the regions these four are active in. In terms of Earth... It'll be like the difference between the U.S. and Greenland."

Greenland was a self-governing country in the Danish Realm and had a population of 55,000. Their individual GDP was $37,000, and their capital city, Nuuk, had a population of 18,000.

"Isn't it difficult to call Greenland an independent country as it is still in the Danish Realm?"

Camilla raised her hand and asked. Like a star student, she straightened her back and wrote notes from the beginning.

The instructor from the Thumb tribe shrugged her shoulders at her question.

“That’s why the Laniakea Supercluster is, in fact, maintained through the support of the army from the alliance. More than half the personnel in the Virgo Cluster army you will be part of have been dispatched from the central.”

This time, Jessie asked,

“But is our military strength even helpful? I mean, from the start, the Flame Wing tribe, the Dark tribe… Why is the war taking so long when we have such powerful beings?”

The instructor’s small face made a stern expression.

“The monsters are strong. We have been able to defend because they are from another dimension, if that limitation didn’t exist and there was an all-out war, it is difficult to predict what would have happened to the universe already. Every time the monsters slaughter karmalings and expand their territory, they are able to create a bigger passageway into our universe… That is why this is a war determining the fate of all karmalings. Whether you are weak or strong, we need to resist them. At first, when the number of monsters coming into our universe was small, the major species who formed the alliance didn’t find their invasion all too serious.

But then, they occupied more and more galaxies, and there was a point where a ‘demise-rank’ monster crossed over. It was a disaster. During the fight that day, the one known as the strongest, the King of the Flame Wing tribe, Flame-Sky, died in battle. It was an event which alarmed the entire universe and made them unite their power under the alliance.”

“Flame-Sky?”

Choi Hyuk mulled over that name. The Thumb tribe instructor turned her gaze towards Choi Hyuk.

“Yes. Because of that incident, the Flame Wing tribe, which had been a monarchy, changed into a prime minister system. This was because the successor of Flame-Sky was too young to lead the entire tribe.”

It seemed like the aliens had their own complicated circumstances. He had thought that they were toying with earthlings… but they too had quite the intense history.

Choi Hyuk felt a slight sense of remoteness.

This war might be a long, intense war that earthlings couldn’t even imagine with their narrow vision. Just how long would it last? Where would it go?

The instructor’s explanations continued. They heard introductions on the indigenous species within the Laniakea

Supercluster and the species within the Virgo cluster.

There was no break, but none of them tired with just this much.

Choi Hyuk suddenly looked out the window. When they said they designed it to be familiar... They even made the sky outside the window the same as the one on Earth.

He felt a sense of déjà vu.

It was strange.

When he closed and opened his eyes, it was almost like the math period before the Ring of Rebirth was made. That time when he would blankly stare at the sky whenever he got the chance. The classroom where Kang Minho and Lee Mingi bullied him and Jung Minji would look at them with an irritated expression.

However, when he opened his eyes again, he was at the core of the Laniakea Supercluster, Dark City. He was sitting in class beside Jessie, a sovereign from the U.S., and Richard from Germany, and an instructor from the Thumb tribe, who came from a place much further away from the Laniakea Supercluster, was lecturing them on top of the podium.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

The blue sky tilted to reveal a red sunset.

Chapter 92: Independent Troops (3)

The instructor said,

“Forget the monsters you’ve fought until now. From now on, you will begin fighting real monsters, not those dumb, low ranked monsters. This means that the monsters aren’t simply strong. They will infiltrate your weak points. Let’s see... You said earthlings have fought with dimensional wasps and eyeless observers before? Remember the lessons you learned then, that monsters don’t fight us purely through strength.”

They learned about monsters through actual battle. They were personally fighting against various types of monsters that were active throughout the universe.

Kakakang!

The monster, a jaksam, was a giant with an outrageous amount of endurance. Sovereign Jessie stabbed the monster’s third eye, but his spear curved like a reed and bounced off.

Clang!

The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla’s sword, shining with silver karma, slashed down at the jaksam’s arm, but it bounced back like an explosion. There wasn’t even a scratch on its arm.

{Keulaahh!}

The jaksam's mouth opened. Its face looked like it was splitting in half, and they could see teeth covering its throat.

"Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!"

Richard's Lightning Quake pierced into its throat.

Woosh!

An intense vibration swept across its head, and it staggered as if dizzy, but that was it.

"... Crazy."

Dumbfounded, Richard closed his mouth.

They heard their instructor's voice in their head.

{The monster jaksam, while weak in offensive power, is agile and possesses an enormous amount of endurance. No middle ranked warrior, using any method, can inflict an effective blow on it. That fellow will target and rush towards the troop's commander or experts. If you are blocked by it, the key personnel won't be able to fight properly, but that's not all...}

The Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan momentarily revealed an opening while fighting. He was too close, and his body had

temporarily exhausted its karma after launching a powerful attack.

{Kuoooh!}

Bang!

The 4-meter-tall mountain launched a swift advance. Its entire body suddenly emitted light, and that light gathered towards its fist. The moment the light gathered, its fist had already punched Yohan, and the light that had gathered in its fist was sucked into Yohan's body before exploding.

Bang!

Yohan's tough body flew away like a rag.

"Yohan!"

The Queen of England Diana shouted. Perhaps it was because they both became overseers who had been their respective country's leader and because their fighting capabilities were low amongst the seven overseers, but the two quickly became friends.

Yohan staggered as he stood up within a cloud of dirt. Seeing this, Diana let out a sigh of relief.

"That light... scatters karma... cough."

As if he had been inflicted with an internal injury, Yohan's lips were pale, and blood dripped from the corner of his lips. Even though he was weak compared to the other overseers, he was still one of the seven overseers. A top warrior of humanity. Someone like him had sustained a significant injury with a single punch.

{The jaksam sticks to its opponents and launches a deadly attack when it sees an opportunity like that. The attack itself contains a lot of destructive power, but it's even more difficult as it momentarily scatters the target's karma. To receive its attack, a warrior with outstanding endurance must block it after properly preparing himself so his karma doesn't scatter. After three attacks, its body will be unable to keep up the defensive strength it once had. If you attack then, you can kill it.}

"Do we have to receive them? Can't we avoid them?"

Grumbled Jessie. It was immediately followed by the instructor's remark.

{The jaksam is careful. It won't punch unless it knows it will definitely hit. Even outstanding warriors take three hits from the jaksam before attacking it.}

"... Fuck."

Sovereign Jessie clicked his tongue as he looked around. Eventually someone would have to take two more hits from that monster to take it out. However, there was no way anyone would want to be hit by such a powerful attack.

Only then did Jessie realize the fear of the monster known as jaksam.

'It's set up so someone has to sacrifice themselves. If a monster like that rushed into our headquarters during a war, then it would difficult to command the troops.'

The instructor pointed that out.

{Do you get it? A fight with a monster can't be settled with only power. Monsters will endlessly drive into our selfishness and try to disassemble our unity.}

When everyone nodded their heads with heavy expressions at the instructor's words, Choi Hyuk stepped out by himself.

Kiririkang!

He unsheathed 'Imprint' from his waist.

{Ho? A karma-sword? He already got one? Is it a Weapon of Calling?}

The instructor showed interest. The other sovereigns reacted with a 'What's that?'

However, Choi Hyuk was simply curious.

‘I finally get to use this sword.’

If he used this sword, at least 300 points of karma would be distributed to stats relating to close combat (Power, Speed, Endurance, Control, and Stamina). Ideally it would supplement his weaker stats and enhance the stronger ones. Depending on Choi Hyuk’s capability, the distributed amount of karma could be 600 or 900 points instead of 300. A sword that theoretically didn’t possess a limit. A sword awakened with Choi Hyuk’s ‘Deadly Will’.

Grrrp.

He gripped his sword as if he were trying to shatter it. His wrist became firmly fixed. His joints, such as his elbow and shoulder, became reinforced with karma. It was ‘Imprint’ supplementing his weaknesses.

The lowest stat Choi Hyuk possessed was ‘Endurance – 100 (3★)’. Although he was making up for it with his superb Control stat, the low endurance of his joints, which had to endure the impact of his close-ranged attacks, was an important reason for why his attack power lowered.

From the sensation of his firmly fixed wrist, his confidence surged as if he could even slash apart a star. Choi Hyuk’s arm easily rose above his head. Like a breechblock fixing into place with a click, the karma pathway connected to his Karma Heart added resilience to his arm. Choi Hyuk could feel the power from his raised arm. In that moment, he surpassed his Power, which was at

the 4-star level, and his Speed, which was at the 5-star level. He was brimming with power. Choi Hyuk's sword swung down like a ray of light.

"Instant Void Annihilation."

Sliiiice!

At the frightening sound, which seemed to rip the world apart, the shoulders of the six sovereigns, excluding Choi Hyuk, shivered.

Then, the body of the jaksam slowly split in two. The body, which could take any blow before it launched three lethal attacks, was easily cut as if it were paper.

{Impossible!}

Astonishment filled the instructor's voice.

The training was like this.

{Like you know, the Dragon race was a tribe that once prided themselves on being a strong force. Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster could be considered a part of the Dragon race. And the colonized land of earthlings, Dragonic, was a region where a lot of large Dragon races lived. However, at the beginning of the war, the monsters' invasions were concentrated on the homeland of the

Dragon race, and now, the tribe's scale has been reduced significantly. Also, a portion of the monsters parasitized and caused a change within dragons. They are known as 'changed dragons'. They are monsters that inherited the Dragon race's characteristics. They are tough like jaksams, and they can use their breaths, which could be considered as lethal attacks, multiple times. Since they also possess the ability to fly, they could be considered as wide-scale killing machines.}

When the instructor's explanation ended,

"Instant Void Annihilation."

Sliiiiice!

Choi Hyuk, who was having fun using 'Imprint', immediately split his opponent.

{Overseer Choi Hyuk... Can't you step in later for the other overseers? The training can't progress properly like this... I'm really about to go crazy. For someone who just reached the level of a middle ranked warrior to possess, not a Weapon of Calling or a Weapon of Sentiment... but a Weapon of Vow! Now, really... Damn it...}

Although there were small events like this, the training went smoothly.

The time for the placement evaluation approached while he was having fun learning about and fighting middle ranked monsters he hadn't faced until now. The placement evaluation took place in virtual reality.

"Leader, I'm going in first."

In the virtual reality, there was Lee Jinhee,

"Do we charge in?"

And Chu Youngjin,

"Hmm... There are a lot of monsters we're seeing for the first time, leader. Do you know anything?"

And, of course, there was Baek Seoin as well.

They had transferred key figures' abilities and mentality using the data they obtained from observing Earth as a base.

"... Ah, uh. We are in the middle of our first mission, right?"

Choi Hyuk, who had been absentminded, was barely able to answer.

It was because the overseers had undergone a memory distorting

procedure when they entered the virtual reality in order to evaluate them under normal circumstances. Currently, Choi Hyuk didn't know that this was a placement evaluation. He simply thought this was a real situation.

There were hundreds of monsters on the other side, and each of the seven overseers was gathered on his side with their respective troops.

The monsters varied from low ranked monsters, which they had commonly seen before, to middle ranked monsters that they had learned about during their training. As the overseers' memories had been fabricated, they simply thought that what they learned during the training would be helpful.

Choi Hyuk began immediately.

"First, Baek Seoin's troop's team 1 and 2 are special teams. You see those 4-meter-tall giants over there, right? They are known as jaksams, and they will rush into our formation and target the commanders. We won't be able to stab them with swords until we block three of their lethal attacks so those with tough bodies in team 1 and 2 need to receive their blows."

"Understood."

The Berserkers under Baek Seoin's command equipped their swords and shields. They were influenced by the survival-optimized Baek Seoin and were famously known to survive in any battle. They were nicknamed 'Berserk Roaches'. Of course, they

themselves hated their nickname.

"Retreat when those changed dragons over there approach. Their breaths target a large area and have amazing destructive power. Even if the formation breaks a little, if you retreat, I'll take care of them personally."

The Berserkers' normal tactic was to just charge in, but currently, because there were so many different types of monsters, there was a need to put more thought into it. Of course, Choi Hyuk never thought to think of it all by himself.

"Also, that monster over there is known as the surprise box. If you kill them, there's a small chance they'll explode. Also, that monster over there is called the 'event'. If you kill them, then your karma will increase exponentially, but if you get crazy for them and only run around to hunt them, the formation will completely break."

Among others.

Choi Hyuk tried to explain the various monsters' characteristics to Baek Seoin as briefly as possible. Then, he patted his shoulder.

"Baek hyung, you got all that, right? Then, work hard. I'll do my best to shake them up."

The true commander of the Berserkers was Baek Seoin anyways. Choi Hyuk's best talent was his strength that could change the

outcome of a war.

"Then! Off I go!"

Bang!

Choi Hyuk rushed into the fray of monsters.

At the same time, the other overseers set their own formations and began to advance.

{... They are fighting well. I heard that they aren't good at cooperating... Their fighting and commanding potential are really top level.}

Like the instructor's admiration, the overseers of Earth were fighting well. Although the monsters tried to use human's mentality to break their formations and turn them passive, it was no use. Regardless of what anyone said, the seven overseers had been screened from approximately 30 sovereigns. They had a definite hold over their direct followers.

If various humans gathered, they would fight and steal amongst themselves to fill their own selfishness, but when humans gathered together with those of the same mind and they had a leader they could follow with their heart, they would often display actions where they risked their lives. The troops led by the seven overseers were the top troops on Earth. This might have been an inevitable result.

As a result of the intense battle, the monsters' formation was ripped to shreds. The encircled monsters would be ground and smashed into the ground by the falling spears and artillery.

Although he didn't know why, the sky had suddenly become dark and then bright again as if he blinked his eyes. Choi Hyuk rubbed his eyes. 'Did I see wrong?' Although there was no way he saw incorrectly with his karma-enhanced eyes, the sky had turned dark then bright for some unknown reason.

"I think we won... Leader."

Chu Youngjin brushed off the blood on his sword as he approached.

"Looks like it."

When he casually turned towards Chu Youngjin, his eyes narrowed. 'What the? Why would Chu hyung?' Before the sky had suddenly become dark, and now, he was seeing another unbelievable scene. Thinking he saw incorrectly, he raised his Mind's Eye to the limit and examined him again, but it was the same. He was Chu Youngjin... and he was emitting a red light.

Puzzled, Choi Hyuk relaxed his shoulders and turned his defenseless back on Chu Youngjin.

"Is this the end?"

That moment.

Rumble!

Slice!

The unique sound of Chu Youngjin's karma explosion was heard, followed by a frightening sound. Chu Youngjin launched a surprise attack, stabbing at Choi Hyuk's back, while Choi Hyuk turned his body and sliced Chu Youngjin's sword and legs. Chu Youngjin miserably rolled on the ground like a garbage bag.

"I was doubtful but... why is Chu hyung trying to kill me?"

Choi Hyuk coldly stared at Chu Youngjin.

"..."

Chu Youngjin was blankly staring at his sword, the red sword created from his lover, Lee Hyejin's death, and didn't let out a single moan. His eyes flared as he began to crawl towards Choi Hyuk.

"Stop."

Choi Hyuk warned.

However, Chu Youngjin continued to crawl with a rigid face.

Pscht.

‘Imprint’ pierced through the back of Chu Youngjin’s head and into the ground.

Choi Hyuk’s expression was cold. Since he wasn’t aware he was in a virtual reality, he was currently in a very disturbed state.

‘Should I have listened to him instead of killing him?’

Although he was swept with regret.

‘He already had the face of someone determined to die.’

He simply shook his head. Above all, he was surprised by how uncomfortable the sensation in his hand was. Even though he was someone who lived thinking ‘I can kill anyone’, killing Chu Youngjin was too unpleasant. It was to the point where he thought, ‘If I have to kill him again, would I be able to?’ Choi Hyuk had grown attached to him more than he thought.

While Choi Hyuk was standing absentmindedly, similar events occurred around him. The angel-like Penelope stabbed the

Sovereign of Paradise Camilla, and Richard's aide, Leah, stabbed him. Five overseers were simultaneously logged out due to the betrayal of those close to them. The ones who survived were Choi Hyuk, who killed Chu Youngjin, and Richard, who was injured but managed to kill Leah.

Choi Hyuk had been able to notice Chu Youngjin's killing intent with his 'Eyes of Distinction', and Richard had seen Leah change from 'someone to keep alive' to 'someone to kill' though his 'Eyes of the Judge'.

Although they survived, the shock from the fact that the people they trusted attacked them was huge. 'Did I do something wrong?' 'Did I miss something?' While Richard and Choi Hyuk were standing absentmindedly, wondering about something they would be unable to find an answer for, the world suddenly brightened before darkening.

"... Hrk."

Choi Hyuk opened his eyes. His surroundings were in a mess.

"What was that at the end? If that was a joke, it was really unpleasant."

He heard Camilla's icy voice.

"It's not a joke. That is also a type of monster."

He heard the instructor's serious voice as well. Then he said,

"To be honest... Since the 'doppelganger' is a very rare top ranked monster, it isn't part of the evaluation. It is customary to put that monster in during the placement evaluation to make you alert after dying once... but to catch that... Two people to boot."

The instructor shook his head as he looked at a frowning Choi Hyuk and a dazed Richard.

Then he said,

"Overseer Choi Hyuk and Overseer Richard, your placement evaluations... were a perfect score."

Chapter 93: Independent Troops (4)

Since they were in the middle of a war, all the procedures were simple.

“With the name of Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster, I grant the seven overseers of Earth the authority to use the military gate system.”

Along with those words, fingernail-sized metal shards floated up and rotated around the overseers, imprinting their souls and karma.

“Now, you have become warrior leaders of the independent troops of the Virgo Cluster. The exploration of the Virgo Cluster hasn’t finished yet. Your mission is to explore unknown regions and destroy regions occupied by monsters and their supply routes, ‘Kaluh Kapkun’. As you aren’t being dispatched to other troops and are establishing your own independent troops, I hope for your energetic participation in this mission.”

The earthling’s placement evaluation grades were excellent. It showed that the seven overseers all had the qualifications to be assigned as independent troops. Two of them even received a perfect score.

Still, the opinion that a portion of them would join the division troops for balance was predominant. However, Commander Mack broke their expectations and gave every overseer of Earth the right to form independent troops. That was how seven independent

troops were formed. It was thought to be because she hoped they would participate in the exploration more proactively.

Independent troops were granted the right to plan their own strategy while carrying out their missions without the interference of higher ranked troops. It was even possible for them to take action first and report later.

It was also normal for missions to be vague like ‘Explore XX Region’.

However, as their first mission was also a test, it was quite specific.

> <Recover the Cayenne star, which has been occupied by monsters, and use the information left behind on historic sites to explore the space around it.>

Tangka, who heard the mission Earth’s overseers received, evaluated it like this,

“It’s a practice game. The Cayenne star system is a region discovered not too long ago, and the monsters there are weak, normally at the 2-3-star level. Also, that entire area doesn’t have the supply route, Kaluh Kapkun.”

Simply put, it was an easy mission. Perhaps it was because of

this, but the day of the mission was imminent.

“Finish your preparations and leave in two days.”

All that remained for the seven overseers to do was run around hurriedly.

The most important thing to do was without a doubt ‘getting supplies’.

“Woahahahaha! What is all this! Did leader pop in and out of a place like this all by himself?”

“It’s my first time as well.”

It was Baek Seoin, whose mouth was agape, and Choi Hyuk who was shaking his head. Behind them were Ryu Hyunsung, Bae Jinman, Handke and Chu Youngjin. 6 people in total. That was the limit he could bring. The maximum number of people he could bring from Earth to the Laniakea using the ‘military gate system’ for ‘free’ was five people excluding the overseer. The cost would increase by an astronomical amount of Mission Points for every person he added after that.

“Looking around once will be like going around the entire world…”

Ryu Hyunsung said as he looked around with a pale face.

It was as he said. The ‘Laniakea Supply Store’ in front of them looked more like a planet than a supply store. Like those who believed the Earth was hollow, the floor of the enormous sphere curved upwards until it formed a complete loop. Countless buildings, some which surged up towards the sky and others which surged towards their heads, were erected on the floor. There were buildings floating in the space in between the buildings with pathways going off in all directions. It was a suitable size for a supercluster which possessed countless clusters within it.

They soon heard the voice of the artificial intelligence in charge of this supply store.

{Welcome to the Laniakea Supply Store. Wherever you are in the supply store, you will be able to search through the supplies and receive samples through me. Also, it is possible for you to teleport to any store you like.}

They were currently in a situation where they didn’t know what supplies there were. What item would increase the entire strength of the Berserkers? Choi Hyuk suddenly recalled something and asked,

“Do you have a store that sells karma weapons?”

{We do. 6 People. It will cost 1,000 points to teleport there. Will you teleport?}

"Is there a cost even though we're a teleporting within the supply store?"

{Yes. You need to be at least the rank of a commander of a cluster to teleport for free.}

"... We'll teleport."

Warriors who could fight better would be able to obtain more Mission Points. If they didn't have any Mission Points, they wouldn't be able to receive any service. Although he was uncertain whether this was a ploy to train better warriors through competition or not, but the Flame Wing Alliance persistently fleeced its warriors' currency, Mission Points, off them.

Whoosh.

The moment they felt their bodies float up, they had arrived at their destination. The store which sold karma weapons.

There was a black pond in the middle of the room. A red carpet surrounded the pond, and the walls were built out of old-fashioned timber. An elderly alien was sitting in a jelly chair with his ears drooped downwards. When he saw Choi Hyuk's group appear, he

mumbled,

“Earthlings? Hmmpf. It’s good that they aren’t from the damn top 4 tribes.”

By the top 4 tribes, he meant the Flame Wing, Dark, Armored Soul and Speckled Light tribes.

The elderly alien bluntly asked,

“This is your first time, right? How much did you pay to teleport here?!”

Unsure whether he was asking or picking a fight and while everyone showed awkward expressions at the elderly alien’s blunt behavior, Baek Seoin alone answered right away,

“1,000 points.”

“Damn. Although that’s not much... Did you know those from the top 4 tribes don’t have to pay that?”

“Pardon? It said that you needed to be at least a commander rank for it to be free...”

“That’s only for scraps like us. Those exalted top 4 tribes, who made this alliance, can use it for free, regardless of their rank. Those bastards need to work in black-hole mines for the rest of

their lives.”

As the elderly alien swore, he got up from his seat.

“Anyways, why have earthlings come here? You shouldn’t be at a level to come to a store like this yet.”

“You know about earthlings?”

“Of course I do, you scoundrel! It’s been a long time since another species joined the alliance. The top 4 tribes constantly make all sorts of excuses as they look down on other tribes. ‘You got lucky’ is what I thought. Either way, this is a high-rank facility that can make karma weapons. It’s too expensive for rookies like you.”

The elderly alien continuously scolded.

While Baek Seoin felt awkward, Choi Hyuk asked,

“How much is a karma weapon?”

“Karma weapon? Ha! It’s the most expensive! You need at least 1 billion Mission Points to create a Weapon of Calling!”

“…!”

A billion points. Everyone’s jaws dropped at that unreal sum. As

Consumables, they only earned 100 points after completing their first mission. Even until recently, they could earn thousands of points per mission, which took a few days to complete. They couldn't earn 10,000 points per mission just yet. Until then, they didn't think that they were 'only' earning thousands of points.

As a sovereign, Choi Hyuk earned at most 1 million points a day through passage and trade taxes. A billion points was an exorbitant sum, which Choi Hyuk, who was one of the richest people on Earth, would have to save every day for three years to collect.

"It's expensive, isn't it?"

The elderly alien giggled and said,

"But do you know what's funnier?"

The elderly alien paused for a moment before breathing raggedly, as if he was mad, and said,

"The top 4 tribes get them for free. If they want a karma weapon, the alliance just hands them the points to make one! Those monster-asshole-licking bastards."

They received not 1,000 points but a billion points for free? Shocked, Baek Seoin asked,

"Why do they do that?"

“To other species, they are saying that if you don’t even have the ability to collect a billion points, don’t even think about attempting to get a Weapon of Calling. That they’ll fail to complete one anyways. However, since their species are so great and because they will always succeed, they don’t even need to earn a billion points. Damn bastards… Do you know how many I’ve seen fail?!”

Listening to him, even Baek Seoin became furious.

‘I thought that if we became alliance members, we’d all be equals in formality at least, but I guess not. For discrimination to exist in space, how disgusting. Still, for a billion points to be free. I’m jealous!’

All kinds of thoughts crossed his mind. However, since the elderly alien was already raging with ragged breaths, Baek Seoin felt odd to rage together with him. All he did was sigh in exasperation.

“Haaa. Now, really…”

Then, Choi Hyuk, who had been silent, suddenly asked,

“Then how much does a Weapon of Sentiment cost?”

Choi Hyuk wasn’t really interested in the unfairness. He simply wanted to use this opportunity to figure out the value of the Weapon of Vow he received.

The elderly alien replied,

“So you heard something, eh? But why are you looking for a Weapon of Sentiment here? At most, you can make a Weapon of Calling at the supply store. If you want to make anything beyond a Weapon of Calling, you need to go to the forge in the center of Laniakea, where the Dark Ocean is. Of course, that place can only be accessed by acknowledged warriors.”

‘The forge in the center of Laniakea…’

Choi Hyuk remembered it. As expected, the item Flame-Rain gave him as a present wasn’t normal. Which meant her identity wouldn’t be normal either.

After confirming it, Choi Hyuk asked nonchalantly,

“I see. Then, elder, can we see equipment and enchants for 4-5 star warriors?”

The lowest ranked supply store they had used until now was meant for lowest ranked warriors, so 4-star equipment and skills were rare. Eventually, everyone was fitted with equipment unsuitable for their level.

They wanted to use this opportunity to change out their equipment and skills and planned on using the remaining Mission Points to purchase items that would increase the strength of

normal members.

The elder tilted his chin and answered crookedly,

“There are, but it looks like you’re a middle ranked warrior… It’ll be incredibly expensive to buy equipment for middle ranked warriors and engrave them… Will you be fine? Of course, it won’t be much if you think of it as a graduation expense…”

“Graduation expense?”

“Yeah. The moment you become a high ranked warrior, it is impossible to increase your karma artificially. There’s no use for equipment or enchants. From that point, you can only increase your karma through your own effort and karma weapon. You didn’t even know that? Karma weapons aren’t expensive without reason.”

Then the elder began to explain various items while mumbling.

Like the elder said, the equipment was really expensive. It cost over 200 million Mission Points to buy equipment and skills for Choi Hyuk and 6 of his top executives. With that, they used up all the Mission Points Choi Hyuk and his top executives had saved up. The elderly alien scolded them, saying, “You only have that much?” and looked like he was going to give them a discount, but it seemed as though he had to sell items at the set price. He only showed his regret by swearing, “Those damn top 4 tribes. They take whatever they want without paying a cent. Those bastards should be ripped up by the Big Bang.”

While paying, Baek Seoin worried,

“But leader, if it’s like this, then we can’t change the equipment of the other members.”

Choi Hyuk said,

“Nothing we can do since we never knew 4-5-star equipment would be so expensive. Since our members are at around the 3-star level on average, the equipment we bought from the lowest ranked supply store should still be useable... And we need to wait for the good news from Director Lee Jinhee.”

While Choi Hyuk and his top executives were busy going back and forth between the elderly alien’s store and other stores, where they were suggested to buy their equipment and skills from, Chu Youngjin stopped in front of an item.

The elderly alien explained,

“Ah, you sort of know what it is, right? It is a reinforcing stone. It’s called the Essence of Blood.”

The Essence of Blood repeatedly became soft, as if it would drip any moment, and then taut like jelly. It also looked similar to a beating heart.

“Normally… it’s better to get a new sword than reinforcing your old one… But it looks like you reinforced that sword multiple times as you used it in fights? Is there a story behind it? Either way, if you are planning on reinforcing it this time as well, then it’s a good choice. It looks like the Essence of Blood suits your temperament.”

As if he sensed there was a story behind his sword, the elderly alien didn’t swear and explained to Chu Youngjin in a relatively considerate manner. He glanced down at the red sword, which Chu Youngjin was very affectionate towards.

The red sword, which had been created when Chu Youngjin’s lover, Lee Hyejin, died. Chu Youngjin couldn’t give up on this sword. When everyone else changed their weapons, Chu Youngjin foolishly used this sword, which was an E rank, a weapon suitable for 1-star warriors. Then, when they gained access to the supply store, he requested Choi Hyuk to buy reinforcing stones and was able to raise the sword’s rank to C rank. This was the limit to what he could do at the lowest ranked supply store.

Currently, as a complete 4-star warrior, he needed a B rank weapon, but Chu Youngjin stubbornly used his red sword.

He now had a chance to overcome its limits. It had been a long time since Chu Youngjin smiled brightly.

“Yes. I’ll reinforce it.”

Ddang!

The elderly alien combined Chu Youngjin's red sword and the Essence of Blood together, placing the sword into the pond of Dark Ocean water and swinging down at it with his hammer.

Chu Youngjin gazed down at his red sword, which was gradually becoming redder, as his eyes silently reddened.

Chapter 94: Independent Troops (5)

{Chu Youngjin's Protection} *Weapon of Calling

Rank: B+ Rank

Endurance: 1,000,000 / 1,000,000

Combat Endurance Ability +100 (Stamina, Endurance, and Recovery)

Earthling Chu Youngjin's soul and retribution permeated this sword. Although he doesn't have someone to protect, his heart, which longs to protect, permeated the sword, and it will not break or dull even if it supports a mountain. It is a Weapon of Calling, the most common type of karma weapon. As the level of its owner, Chu Youngjin, is low and the materials are slightly lacking to create a karma weapon, its performance is low in comparison to other Weapons of Calling. It can be strengthened later with more reinforcing.

It was originally an insignificant weapon made with steel, commonly found on Earth, and karma left behind by Lee Hyejin. Due to earthling Chu Youngjin's devoted reinforcing, it has been reborn as a karma-sword, a Weapon of Calling.

"… What is this?"

The elderly alien blinked his eyes. All he wanted to do was create the best weapon a low ranked warrior could use. The materials used and the amount of effort he put in were only for that purpose. However, for it to result in a karma-sword used by those above low ranked warriors…

"… It seems there's an extraordinary story behind it."

Mumbled the elderly alien as he took the sword out of the black pond and cleaned it. He handed it to the teary-eyed Chu Youngjin and said,

"Congratulations. Although after staying in this industry for so long I knew that occasionally incomprehensible weapons would be born… It's my first time seeing it for myself. If it's already like this… You might be able to complete a 'Weapon of Sentiment' someday. No, no, perhaps you might even see a Weapon of Vow be born."

The elderly alien, who had been blunt until now, currently showed a somewhat careful attitude.

"My name is Gallahan. Come again."

He even introduced himself in the end.

Baek Seoin, who had been watching them closely, said,

“Leader. Don’t you have a Weapon of Vow?”

Crackle!

Flames erupted above Gallahan’s head. It seemed this was how his species expressed surprise.

“Wh-what? What did you say just now?”

Astonishment filled Gallahan’s voice.

Choi Hyuk turned towards Baek Seoin as if asking why he brought up something so bothersome.

Baek Seoin quietly explained,

“Looking at the mood, it seems like he’ll treat us better if we say it. Maybe even give us a discount.”

Thinking Baek Seoin had a point, Choi Hyuk briefly showed his sword to Gallahan before sheathing it.

Crackle, crackle!

Flames similar to that of fireworks erupted above Gallahan's head.

"I am happy that rookies like you joined the alliance. I hope that you will be able to knock those damn top 4 tribes down a peg or two."

Due to Gallahan's aggressive discounts and advice, as well as his suggestions of other stores, they were able to successfully finish their shopping.

Before Choi Hyuk's group left, Gallahan praised them and left them a strange warning.

"Anyways, you're from the Virgo Cluster, right?"

"Yes."

"Be careful. I overheard a few things while working here, and it seems there's something going on over there. There's something going on, but seeing that everyone is hush-hush about it... It might be something dangerous. A wretched danger that those conducting the mission won't know."

After saying their farewells to Gallahan and going out to the streets, they met Tangka from the Armored Soul tribe. It looked like it had been looking for Cho Hyuk's group as it hurriedly ran towards them.

"Haa... So here you were."

When Choi Hyuk gave it a questioning look, Tangka opened its chest, and a black, 1-cubic-meter cube emerged.

"What's that?"

Tangka replied as it handed the item to Choi Hyuk,

"I don't know much about it either. They said it was some sort of exploration device. We suddenly got an order from the higher-ups to take it on the Cayenne exploration. Here's the order."

Tangka's hand was dyed in golden karma light. Tangka's karma was originally a metallic color closer to silver. It was an order encrypted in karma form, making it impossible to fake.

"... This isn't an order from Commander Mack?"

"Yeah. It came from the higher ups above her. When we reported that the Cayenne exploration had been confirmed, the higher ups hurriedly sent this down."

“Even Commander Mack doesn’t know?”

“Yeah. When she requested to know, they simply said it was a secret… Still, relax. They said it wasn’t anything dangerous. There were talks about how it might be for exploring whether there were any scarce resources or something.”

Maybe it was because he had just heard Gallahan’s warning, but he felt uneasy. However, that didn’t mean he could refuse the order either, nor did he want to.

Choi Hyuk placed the cube in his bag.

Seeing this, Tangka suddenly seemed to think of something as he advised,

“Ah, although you guys are the ones who are going to choose the composition of your army and its numbers, if I were to give you advice… Take as many as you can. It’s not occupying a planet but a star. No matter how many you take, it still won’t be enough. Also, the more battle experience earthlings have, the better. From what I’ve heard, this mission should be easy, but you need to train in times like this.”

Gallahan told them to be careful while Tangka told them to use this opportunity to train… Choi Hyuk simply grinned.

“Yeah, thanks.”

“Let’s have a drink after you complete your mission.”

Tangka waved his hand as he left.

They had now finished what they came to Laniakea to do.

Choi Hyuk activated the ‘military gate system’ and returned to Earth. It was an extremely long distance teleportation from the center of Laniakea to the Milky Way galaxy in the Virgo cluster, which was located on the outer boundaries of the Laniakea Supercluster. His mind momentarily went blank, and when he suddenly regained his senses, he had already arrived on Earth. He was inside Naro’s spaceship, which was rotating in an orbit above South Korea. Although teleportation was now much more comfortable compared to when they were Consumables, there was no helping the slight nausea he felt.

“Leader, you’ve arrived?”

The one who met Choi Hyuk’s group was Lee Jinhee, who was lying on the sofa exhausted.

Choi Hyuk asked,

“How was it on your end?”

“It went well.”

The moment Lee Jinhee flicked her finger, Naro appeared and began to report,

“The deal between Director Lee Jinhee and the El tribe ended successfully. Since technicians, weapons, and resources have already arrived, we are producing our first round of equipment.”

While Choi Hyuk’s group was shopping in the Laniakea Supercluster, Lee Jinhee alone was roaming around Dragonic and completing missions. Among them, the most important mission was a deal with the El tribe, who lived in the inverted tree.

“Wasn’t it difficult?”

Asked Baek Seoin. While still lying down, she massaged her shoulders and legs as she replied,

“It wasn’t that hard. It seemed they gave us additional points for cleaning and occupying the entire region. Since, if a strong monster strikes, it’ll have to face us first. And they can retreat in a pinch. They were also surprised by our fast growth.”

Choi Hyuk nodded and asked Naro,

“Good. Then there aren’t any problems with supplying basic weapons for the Berserkers, right?”

“Yes, no problem. We can create the first round of necessary equipment in a day.”

Naro’s tone, which made it sound like it wasn’t difficult to do, was trustworthy.

The El tribe’s technology was much more advanced than Earth’s. Earthlings could produce weapons with physical power as their base, but they still couldn’t create weapons containing karma. On the other hand, the El tribe possessed the techniques to mass produce 3-star weapons consistently and could even produce a 4-star weapon if they put a lot of effort into it.

Although Naro possessed knowledge of weapons used by narolings, narolings were different from earthlings in various aspects. It was difficult to adjust their weapon systems for humans. In the end, the key point of the deal this time was to receive the support of the El tribe, who were similar to humans, and for them to supply new weapons to the Berserkers.

Also, the Berserkers’ side of the deal was to give them a city. They handed ‘Pyungryu’, the slave city previously governed by Lao Ban, over to the El tribe. This was also the first step of their promise where they would allow them to come out to the surface.

“Also, I got the pledges of all the small and medium-sized clans active in our various colonized lands. Now we can dispatch their forces however we want when we go on missions.”

Lee Jinhee's speech sounded a bit boastful, 'How about it, didn't I work hard?'

She had the right to. In a single day, she had gone around to all the five colonized lands Choi Hyuk governed. It wasn't just going around but also gathering the people in every city, bearing threats and receiving their pledges. That was why she was constantly massaging her arms and legs.

Currently, Choi Hyuk was the sole sovereign who governed five colonized lands. Including the Barhaloleun region he had governed over originally, he merged Lao Ban, Freeman, and Nasir's colonized lands as well as Lilo's, who had unluckily been caught up in the war. In reality, the Berserkers occupied many more colonized lands during the past war, but as there was a limit to the Berserkers' numbers, they couldn't continue to occupy all of them. In the end, excluding those five, the rest were left as they were. There were some that were returned to their former owners, and the ones without owners were distributed between the other overseers.

"Ah, the Great Warrior of the El tribe Lantz said something strange."

"What?"

"About being careful, and that even if the colonization has been going smoothly until now, the monsters aren't easy opponents."

It seemed Lee Jinhee didn't find Lantz's warning important as she told them his warning with a lofty tone. The reason was because the monsters, which felt quite strong when they first started colonizing, were now not much of a threat. This was because humans had been continuously growing stronger through repeated intense battles.

Just then, Naro said,

"I think there is value in heeding his warning. There are still places in Dragonic that haven't been scanned by my radar. Although more people have migrated and there has been more trade between colonized lands after the war... From my calculations, the regions concentrated with colonized lands don't make up more than 30% of Dragonic."

Naro opened its arms wide and continued,

"We don't know what kind of monsters live in the remaining 70%."

Although it wasn't something they could do much about right away, Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

There were too many matters to handle at the same time. They had to comfort colonized lands that had become devastated, continue colonizing Dragonic, and finish the migration of earthlings... On top of that, they had to conduct the mission given

to them by the Virgo Cluster. Also, why were there so many people giving him warnings...

The more he thought about it, the more complicated his mind became. Choi Hyuk decided to set aside his problems for the time being as it was now time to successfully complete the first mission.

Choi Hyuk displayed his motivation,

“From now on, we cannot fail any missions. Okay? We will go towards the center.”

The Virgo Cluster earthlings were active in was located in the utmost boundary region. For earthlings to approach the innermost core, the ‘Exalted Wings’, and get revenge, there was only one way.

To complete each mission with overwhelming success. And make those at the center have no choice but to call for them.

Although there were some who said that the fact earthlings had become alliance members was a miracle, what Choi Hyuk sought to achieve from now on was an even greater one.

After finishing their preparations, Choi Hyuk went to battle faster than any other overseer.

The ‘military gate system’ operated following Choi Hyuk’s will.

{Destination, Cayenne star.}

{The applicant for troop transportation, Overseer Choi Hyuk.}

{Confirming whether there is a mission in the specified region... Confirmed.}

{Please choose participants of the mission.}

Choi Hyuk felt an odd sensation. After having always received missions from the system, he was now personally handing down a mission through it.

“Participants of the mission are all Berserkers and all small and medium-sized clans under the influence of the Berserkers.”

{Targeting complete. Please create a mission message.}

“Subjugate all monsters existing on the Cayenne star. Clans have the autonomy to command themselves.”

{Mission announcement complete. Beginning to transmit.}

…

{Subjugation of the Cayenne Star}

Subjugate all monsters existing on the Cayenne star.

Clans have the autonomy to command themselves. – Overseer Choi Hyuk

This was the first mission announcement under Choi Hyuk's name. The moment the announcement arrived, millions of warriors crossed through the dimension and over to the Cayenne star.

Chapter 95: At The Ruins (1)

The Cayenne star.

They had imagined a fiery land akin to the Sun because it was a star and not a planet.

They had thought that for those at the lower levels, even if they had awakened karma, it would be difficult for them to endure the heat.

However, the reality was very different from their imaginations.

Lee Jinhee mumbled,

“Wow… What is all this?”

It was a star filled with life. Although it was very different from Earth… It could be called something close to an ecosystem.

The red and yellow flowers, which bloomed plentifully on the ground, absorbed the star’s heat energy and were composed of a mysterious material. The atmosphere, which allowed living creatures to breathe, was filled with gas and wavelengths that earthlings were unfamiliar with. There were also living creatures which consumed the flowers in this environment. The field was red like the sunset and transparent like dawn. The plentiful lights in the star split into countless wavelengths. An aurora with the colors of the rainbow fluttered in mid-air.

If they were to describe the temperature, it was hot enough for water to evaporate instantly. However, even still, there was a flowing river. A material, which had a boiling point of metal on Earth, created beautiful waves as it flowed alongside the field like water.

The earthlings, who had come to the star to go to war with the monsters, were momentarily stunned at the scenery. Earthlings had spent a lot of time looking for life out in space. To find life in space, they had looked for planets with a similar environment as Earth's. A planet with water that orbited a star at an appropriate distance. A planet humans could survive on. However, in reality, alien lifeforms were born in environments unimaginable by humans, like the Flame Wing tribe born from the Big Bang and the Dark tribe born from dark matter. This place was the same. The fact that plentiful life existed on a star they had thought would be uninhabitable filled them all with emotion.

Handke, the artillery captain, said in a dazed voice,

"Wasn't this a place invaded by monsters?"

This place was too beautiful for it to have been invaded by monsters.

Even Chu Youngjin, who didn't express his feelings often, stroked his red sword, which had been reborn with a new name 'Chu Youngjin's Protection', with complicated emotions. His expression looked somewhat bitter.

“We move,”

Said Choi Hyuk, who was the most emotionless out of the bunch, in an indifferent voice. There was only the goal ‘shocking mission completion ability’ in his mind.

As if waking from a dream, the Berserkers broke out of their daze and began to march at Choi Hyuk’s voice.

When they ran wearing the Shoes of Hermes, it didn’t take long for them to discover a city. No, to be precise, it was a ruin that was once a city.

“Just looking at the traces of the ruin, it looks like it was a civilization more advanced than Earth,”

Mumbled Ryu Hyunsung.

Bae Jinman expressed a different opinion,

“You can’t necessarily say that that’s the case since it’s a star with tens of thousands of more usable green energy than Earth.”

Being an elderly professor of medical science, Bae Jinman’s explanation got a nod from Handke, who graduated with a natural

science degree.

“The ground is overfilled with energy. The flowers blooming in that field and the wavelengths that fill the atmosphere, if you know how to harness these energies, it might not be impossible for us to create a floating city during the industrial age. Of course, it’ll be difficult to make an ‘apples to apples’ comparison.”

That was right. The ruin in front of them seemed to be composed of the remnants of tall buildings, crashed floating city areas, and still floating city areas. At first glance, a high-rise floating city might seem like something from a civilization within the realm of parascience, but if there were tons of materials stronger than steel concrete, and if a random stone on the street possessed the energy of tens of liters of petroleum... it might have been much easier achieving this level of civilization than on Earth.

They looked around as they entered the city. Baek Seoin said,

“Hmm... It looks like they set up a line of defense here.”

Like he said, at the outer boundaries of the city, there were broken suit-like objects, numerous meter-tall barricades, and weapons similar to artillery.

No corpse could be found as if they had all been eaten.

When they made their way to the center, they began to see

corpses of monsters amongst the wreckage. Crooks, mountain orcs, and bladed ghosts were among the other monsters they were seeing after a long time... They were 1-2-star low ranked monsters. Perhaps they were plentiful in numbers due to their low rank because they were monsters they had seen frequently.

"Were they annihilated with just these monsters?"

Lee Jinhee seemed doubtful. Especially since guns were somewhat effective against 1-star monsters, and as they could do significant damage to 2-star monsters with the help of heavy firearms. It seemed comical for a civilization, which had developed with high-energy as its foundation, to be annihilated by 1-2-star monsters even if they hadn't awakened karma.

Baek Seoin shook his head.

"Or... It might be that the only monsters they could kill were these."

He meant that since monsters above the 3-star level were immune to physical damage, they wouldn't die in the first place, leaving no corpses behind.

"And it's strange."

Baek Seoin frowned. Lee Jinhee looked back at him,

"What is?"

“Why was it that there were no monster corpses at the outer boundaries of the city?”

When they heard that, it was strange. The outer boundaries had tons of wreckage of destroyed weapons, but they didn’t see any monster corpses. If only 1-2-star monsters invaded them, then those corpses should have been littered from the outside.

“Isn’t this more like the monsters appeared within the city?”

“Unless... Strong monsters destroyed the defensive line, leaving normal monsters to invade afterwards.”

While expanding on Baek Seoin’s opinion, it seemed like Ryu Hyunsung thought of something as he glanced towards Choi Hyuk. ‘Choi Hyuk shakes them up, and the Berserkers smash them apart.’ That was the Berserkers’ basic tactic. There was no reason that the monsters couldn’t use this tactic either.

Just then, the world temporarily became dark. It looked like it was becoming darker from afar, and then at some point, it was night. A complete darkness in which they couldn’t even see their own hands. Then, as if nothing ever occurred, it became bright again.

“Wha-what was that just now?”

People all around became confused. “Report!” “Report!” Shouting voices erupted everywhere. In less than three minutes, green flags were raised amongst the lines of millions of people. All clear.

“Huu… What was that? Was it a distinct natural phenomenon on the Cayenne star?”

While relieved, Baek Seoin didn’t lower his guard against the mysterious occurrence.

On the other hand, Choi Hyuk felt a sense of déjà vu. He had experienced this occurrence during his training.

“An evil hand of night…?”

The evil hand of night Choi Hyuk remembered was a monster with enormous eyes. It would scan an immense area with its large eyes and then figure out and share the distribution of karmalings and their weak points to other monsters. When it blinked its eyes, a darkness, so dark that it was impossible to see anything, fell on a targeted area, making it useful for sudden monster attacks. Not only that, but it also had the effect of restricting the effectiveness of karmalings’ detecting abilities.

“What the… My Mind’s Eye suddenly isn’t working properly?”

“It’s like there’s a fog in front of me…”

Were what the Berserkers were saying. It was the evil hand of night's typical detection obstruction effect. Choi Hyuk was sure an evil hand of night appeared here. At the same time, he knew what was wrong.

He had learned that evil hands of night were high ranked monsters along with doppelgangers during the new recruit training... It was a monster that shouldn't appear in this supposed easy place.

Just then, a hologram of Richard appeared in front of Choi Hyuk. It was one of the convenient functions of the 'military gate system'.

<Demon King. Was that an evil hand of night just now? I was surprised that it suddenly became dark as soon as I arrived.>

It seemed Richard arrived with his troops just now.

"It looks like it."

<But it's a high ranked monster? It looks like the information about the mission was wrong then. I think we need to report this first.>

Richard attempted to contact Commander Mack. Then, annoyed, he frowned.

<I can't contact her. Now that I think about it, didn't the evil hand of night also have a communication obstruction ability?>

Glancing at Choi Hyuk, he asked,

<What are you going to do? When we aren't sure, retreating is an option.>

At Richard's question, Choi Hyuk indifferently nodded his head as if this didn't concern him,

"If you're going to retreat, do it."

Meaning he would stay and conduct the mission. Richard frowned. It was dangerous to recklessly conduct the mission without definitive information. However, he also understood Choi Hyuk's thoughts. As someone whose priority was to take revenge on the Exalted Wings, Choi Hyuk couldn't back down.

A massive number of troops crossed over using the 'military gate system', meaning they had already consumed an immense amount of karma. Even though the Virgo Cluster paid the expenses as it was an official mission, if they retreated their army without any gains in this situation, the Virgo Cluster would suffer a huge loss. And, after retreating, was he to make a request like 'We witnessed an evil hand of night. There might be more high ranked monsters so please dispatch additional troops or take us out of here.' Although it wasn't like he couldn't do it, it would be impossible to get promoted enough to approach the Exalted Wings' side within a

thousand years at that rate.

In the end, whether the information was wrong or not, Choi Hyuk was planning on remaining here and completing the mission before returning. Although it could be considered reckless, Choi Hyuk always surpassed the limits of humanity. This might also be an opportunity to gain attention.

Richard nodded his head.

<Okay. I'll cooperate.>

Only, Richard left open an escape route as well.

"Ed. Go to the Virgo Cluster, report the situation and request for the dispatch of an investigative team before returning."

"Understood."

Richard sent one of his followers to the Virgo Cluster.

<Now. Reporting done. Let's try to raise our performance as much as we can.>

Unlike the monsters on Dragonic that only wanted to protect their territory, the monsters on Cayenne were proactively

aggressive. Was it because the evil hand of night told them their location? They crowded together in an instant.

However, the Berserker troops weren't very nervous.

"What the? Only bladed ghosts? Shadow teeth?"

The monsters they saw from afar were only 1-2-star monsters. Even the small and medium-sized clans could slaughter them, let along the Berserkers. When the monsters rushed towards them, creating deep rumblings sounds, veteran colonizers weren't very nervous.

However.

Blink.

Blink.

When the evil hand of night blinked consecutively, the situation changed.

The moment the monsters attacked the earthlings, the earthlings lost their vision, and the monsters penetrated their ranks.

"Guaack!"

Then, something incomprehensible occurred.

“What?! What’s wrong?! How could a 1-star monster stab a 3-star colonizer?”

The daggers the monsters held could pierce through veteran colonizers’ endurance. It was an incomprehensible situation. Then, those veteran colonizers, who wouldn’t die from such wounds, stood rigidly and screamed, unable to break free from the shadow teeth.

“Get lost, you bastard!”

A colonizer, who stood next to a victim, attacked a shadow teeth that was pushing its dagger further, but-

Ting!

His sword bounced off.

“Wh-what?”

“Vassal starving ghosts!!! The daggers they are holding are 3-star monsters! If you get stabbed by them, all your karma will be stolen! As the karma is been drained away, it creates a barrier around it! Attacks aren’t very effective until the victim is dead! You can’t get stabbed by them!!”

Executives, who had learned about middle ranked monsters from Baek Seoin beforehand, shouted out loud.

“Haa… Shadow teeth. This brings back memories.”

Lee Jinhee, who had been chased out of her group after fighting with the shadow teeth in Kangdong District in the past, was engulfed by a strange emotion. Although she was able to meet Choi Hyuk because she was chased out… As expected, she especially didn’t have good feelings towards the shadow teeth.

“They piss me off whenever I see them.”

The shadow teeth were using their characteristically fast movements and stealth abilities to increase the number of victims every time the evil hand of night blinked its eyes.

Of course, the Berserkers weren’t scrambling about just because they had lost their vision.

“Spread your karma out! If something enters, swing at it without hesitation!”

Because of this, Lee Jinhee’s advice and support were directed towards the participating small and medium-sized clans and not the Berserkers.

A flaming karma sword surged from Lee Jinhee's sword. Lee Jinhee's weapon was purchased from the Laniakea Supercluster. Although she didn't personally pick it out, it was a weapon Baek Seoin and Chu Youngjin had carefully chosen for her. It suited her well.

Kaching!!

Lee Jinhee split the barrier made by a vassal starving ghost and stabbed the shadow teeth within.

Splash!

"Huck!!"

When she forcefully tore off the vassal starving ghost from the victim's chest, he slumped to the ground, panting.

"Take him to the guardian!"

The colonizers nearby helped the victim get up and retreated.

Lee Jinhee's expression turned serious.

"The casualties of the small and medium-sized clans are large from the beginning..."

The Berserkers fought well without needing any advice. When it became dark, they would spread out their karma, and if something approached them, they would attack immediately. They didn't even worry about mistakenly attacking the comrades near them since this wasn't their first dogfight. However, the small and medium-sized clans had the tendency to be slow and clumsy.

Blink.

The evil hand of night blinked again.

"Where the hell is that evil hand of night bastard?"

Grinding her teeth, Lee Jinhee stabbed out with her 40cm long, silver sword. She split a shadow teeth's head without even looking.

Their surroundings became bright again.

Then she heard Baek Seoin's voice.

"Sululacks! Artillery! Focus fire!"

His voice sounded urgent.

Chapter 96: At The Ruins (2)

In the blink of an eye, the sululacks burrowed into the crowd of colonizers. The monsters, which looked like someone had piled rags into a human shape, screamed, “Shaaaaah!” an unpleasant sound, as they stood there.

“Euack!”

However, the nearby colonizers freaked out as they began to retreat.

“Karma! My karma is being sucked in!”

A fleeing colonizer screamed.

It was chaos.

Frustration surged within Choi Hyuk. Since they were told it was an opportunity to gain experience, each overseer had brought over all their combat-oriented colonizers. That was also why Choi Hyuk had brought millions of warriors himself. However, what could they do with numbers?

In Choi Hyuk’s perspective, they were pathetically weak.

Swish!

Choi Hyuk dived in. He swooped down like a ghost and sliced a sululack in two. Sululacks would try to suck in karma, and the closer you came the more quickly they would suck, however, it was all a farce that only affected low level warriors who lacked in both control and Retribution.

Choi Hyuk gave the hurriedly fleeing small and medium-sized clans a pathetic look. Sululacks weren't monsters that could be avoided like that. Instead, they were dangerous monsters that would leave a serious blow in your troops if you didn't take them out the moment they appeared. Yet, these clans didn't even attempt to attack the sululacks and were busy attempting to flee.

'When will they be worth their salt?'

Choi Hyuk felt that they would only be appropriate to use when they were at the level of the Berserkers. When he thought about how long it would take for these clans to be of use, it felt so distant... yet, he currently had to save them.

Choi Hyuk jumped around as he took down the sululacks.

Crackle! Boom!

The Berserkers' artillery focused their fire on the sululacks appearing in the distance and pre-emptively took them down.

Lee Jinhee's troops, who possessed incredible mobility, jumped around like grasshoppers.

Yet, there were simply too many sululacks appearing around them.

“Quickly, quickly! Take them out before they explode!”

Baek Seoin shouted in an urgent manner.

Multiple sululacks would appear simultaneously whenever the monster of night blinked.

At the same time as their appearance, they would quickly absorb the karma around them and would explode that energy at some point. They were a type of suicide bombers. They were a nightmare in the current situation.

Baaang!

Baaaang!

Ferocious explosions erupted everywhere. Normal explosions would spread out horizontally, but the self-destruction of the sululacks didn’t spread out like that, instead, they utterly destroyed the area around them as if it was contained in a sphere. The ground was completely shredded apart and vaporized. When the special surface of the Cayenne star, which absorbed the star’s intense heat, disappeared, the flames emitted by the star surged up like a storm. As the Endurance of the colonizers, who were swept up by the flames, was pitiful, not even their bodies remained.

"... Their locations are too good."

Choi Hyuk frowned. Sululacks were already annoying middle ranked monsters, but with the support of the monster of night, they became truly irritable existences. They appeared like ghosts the moment the monster of night blinked, but of all places, they kept appearing in areas without any experts. Hidden from view, the monster of night clearly looked at the earthlings and stabbed at their weak points.

"Kuaah! Di... e... e..."

There was a courageous 2-star colonizer who attempted to take down a sululack before it exploded. However, he couldn't endure the quickening pace of karma absorption as he approached and collapsed at the feet of the sululack. His body dried up like a mummy and scattered like dust. Only those above the 3-star level could barely endure the sululack's karma absorption.

Eventually, the sululack, which no one could take down, exploded once it had collected enough energy.

Baaang!

Every time they heard that sound, the colonizers' fighting spirit diminished.

No one knew who first started this method. However, there was also no reason to discuss it either. On the intense border of life or death, people would instinctively find a way to live.

Pcht.

Why did the completely unexpected attack emit an unfamiliar yet frightening sound? Surprised, the colonizer who had been attacked turned to look at his comrade with a pale face.

“Why... Why?”

Without a trace of apology, his comrade looked back at him with spiteful eyes. The weapon he stabbed him with was a vassal starving ghost that had been held by a shadow teeth just now.

Baang!

A sululack exploded from afar.

The man who stabbed his comrade was able to endure the explosion with the ‘barrier’ created by the vassal starving ghost. To survive, some gave up feeling sorry and rushed towards their comrades with a vassal starving ghost in hand. This occurred everywhere.

Those who could block the absorption of their karma, Choi Hyuk, his Berserkers, and the executives of the clans, hurriedly moved to take down the sululacks, but the sululacks, which were

controlled by the monster of night, always found openings and exploded, leaving behind casualties.

Also... Traitors who killed their comrades to save their own lives remained as well.

“Tsk...”

Choi Hyuk, as he ran by, cut the necks of those he saw attempting to stab their comrades with vassal starving ghosts. However, he couldn’t control the entire mood by himself. It was also obvious for those who couldn’t endure the explosion and would die either way to choose the method that had even the slightest chance of survival.

It was like an endless nightmare for those who weren’t sufficiently strong. Comrades who tried to stab them with vassal starving ghosts. Should I stab first, or should I wait for someone to stab at me and act like I had no choice, or should I be honorable even if I die? If they didn’t want to die futilely, they had to make a choice within a few seconds.

Amidst this cruel choice, the sululacks kept exploding, and the nightmare seemed to be getting worse. However, there was soon an end to the nightmare. Perhaps the monster of night was tired, but its blinking became slower. Then, it stopped. When the blinking stopped, so did the attack.

Their first battle on the Cayenne star concluded.

While the physical losses were huge, the morale especially took a hit. There were many who died in vain. There were also many who lived by stabbing their comrades. Rage and hostility towards each other and the commanders began to burn.

Conflicts were erupting in various places.

“Fuck… You bastard! You stabbed Dongsoo?”

“What are you saying?! Who’s Dongsoo?!”

An agitated voice interrogated someone who stabbed his comrade.

“Did you see those Leo clan bastards? All their executives were busy running away while our clan’s executives were putting their lives on the line whilst taking down the sululacks. They got a free pass…”

“The hell you saying? And you didn’t run?”

Disputes between clans.

“No, those crazy… How could they drag over all these troops without a plan…?”

“To be honest, he’s an overseer. Why is he dragging people around on whim...? If he dragged us out here, then he should command properly!”

There were also groups quietly expressing their rage towards Choi Hyuk.

“... I felt this during the subjugation war, but aren’t they honestly too weak?”

And Berserkers scorned other clans.

The mood of the army was the worst.

In this mood, Choi Hyuk gathered the executives of the Berserkers and the clan leaders of each clan and held a meeting.

The moment everyone gathered, Choi Hyuk went straight to the point.

“The composition of our enemy is very different from what we had heard from Commander Mack. We’ll give up our current tactic. First, we’ll establish formations and tactics to face the monsters we’ve encountered. Also, we will prepare ahead for monsters that are likely to appear.”

Then Choi Hyuk explained the new formation. The gist was that

each clan's experts and the magician troop's members would be equally scattered and prepared for the sululacks. Also, that he would create a detached troop that transcended clans to prepare in case jaksams appeared.

'Clans have the autonomy to command for themselves.' He completely retracted this plan. It was an inevitable choice. It was originally a command which reflected what the commander of the Virgo cluster and other warrior leaders had said, but currently, the situation was completely different.

"Then discuss with Director Baek Seoin about the details of the formation. Ah, also, there are people who survived by stabbing their comrades with vassal starving ghosts in this battle. Come up with a method to track them down. For the teams' trust, we cannot leave them alone."

After finishing the short meeting, Choi Hyuk stood up. Behind him, Baek Seoin's expression seemed somewhat resigned.

"Excuse me! Overseer!"

A clan leader raised his hand. Choi Hyuk, who was about to leave, stopped. Baek Seoin grabbed his forehead with an expression that seemed to know what was to come.

"Do... you have no thoughts about retreating?"

At the clan leader's courageous question, the other clan leaders

nodded in agreement. Casualties aside, their morale had hit rock bottom. Although Choi Hyuk said he wanted to track down those who stabbed their comrades to restore trust in each other, the distrust wouldn't heal easily with just that. The clan leaders felt that this situation was enough to consider retreating.

Yet, Choi Hyuk tilted his head as if asking what he was talking about,

"Retreat?"

A word expressing incomprehension. That was all. Leaving that word behind, Choi Hyuk made no other response and left.

It was a clear refusal, and from Baek Seoin's perspective, an expected one.

'The participating clan leaders might request for a retreat. Ignoring or pressuring them isn't everything. They will hold dissatisfaction. There's a need to comfort them.' Baek Seoin had already warned Choi Hyuk, but Choi Hyuk's reply was, 'Dissatisfaction? Let them have that if they want. To be honest, they were so weak that they were pissing me off.'

Baek Seoin suppressed his urge to sigh. If they showed that the Berserkers weren't on the same wavelength in this situation, it would only make things worse. Baek Seoin put on a face so cold that it looked like no blood would drip even if he was stabbed. Then, with a firm tone, he began to explain the details of the new formation to the dumbfounded clan leaders.

Although clan leaders inwardly felt dumbfounded and enraged, perhaps it was because they recalled the ‘Demon King’ Choi Hyuk’s indiscriminate subjugation during the war, but they didn’t express their emotions. They didn’t express their strife, and it only became even more deeply rooted.

When Choi Hyuk came out, he looked around at the collapsed buildings and the floating city.

“Will there be any gains?”

Lee Jinhee, with the artillery as an escort, left to explore the ruins.

Looking at the wreckage, there were suggestions that it hadn’t been long since it was destroyed, and the purpose of this exploration was to find clues within the ruins and gather information about the monsters. It was to prevent another instance of increased casualties due to unexpected monsters.

Casualties... When Choi Hyuk thought of the casualties, he felt his insides sour. He unconsciously shook his head.

“We can’t go on like this.”

Even if they considered that it was a sudden, unexpected attack,

the casualties were higher than expected. He wanted to clear away the clans and fight with only the Berserkers if he could. However, Choi Hyuk was fully aware that he couldn't.

'For an earthling to enter the core of the alliance... It is impossible by myself.'

He became convinced of this thought after experiencing Laniakea. Earthlings were currently outsiders to the alliance. They couldn't avoid being undervalued. If Choi Hyuk was to get stronger by himself in this situation, he would only become a useful tool.

That was why, whether he liked it or not, he had to make the millions of incomparably pathetic colonizers into elites.

When he thought this, Choi Hyuk heard a roar.

"Fuck! Yeah, I'm a murderer, you bastard!"

A scream erupted soon after.

"Euaaack!"

He could clearly see the situation with just the noise. They hadn't yet tracked down the traitors who had stabbed their comrades with vassal starving ghosts...

"... What a show."

Choi Hyuk sighed as he started walking in the direction of the scream.

“You bastard!”

“What?! Die!”

There was a murder. As well as a brawl.

Chapter 97: At The Ruins (3)

"That bastard attacked me first!"

Berserker Kim Minhee shouted in a dejected voice. She was currently being investigated for murder. Lee Jinhee, who was investigating her, leaned on the back of her chair, displaying an indifferent expression.

"But, you see, there are many witnesses saying that you provoked him."

"Provoke? I provoked him? That's what those Kalin clan bastards are saying, right? Director, do you believe what they say?"

"There's no reason not to. Either way, we're all on the same side."

"Same side?! I don't know about other clans but that Kalin clan isn't! Those bastards fled when we were dealing with the sululacks! How can we be on the same side as those who only look after themselves!"

"So you're saying you're innocent?"

"Ah damn… Since I killed someone, I'll take the punishment."

"What punishment?"

“… I’ll take charge of setting up the washroom pits.”

“Are you joking? Murder means a death penalty. You know this.”

“I told you! It was self-defence!”

She protested as if she truly felt this was unfair. Her voice also became louder.

“And I’m a Berserker! It’s really strange these days! Without listening to us properly about how things are unfair, you just say ‘death penalty’ like it’s nothing! We are like family! Aren’t you supposed to at least trust the words of your fellow Berserkers?! This is unfair! Unni! Are you really going to kill me? Unni, you know me! I don’t kill people for no reason!”

As if she really found this unfair, Kim Minhee slammed the table as she stood up. She was a Berserker who normally had a good and close relationship with Lee Jinhee.

This was exactly why Lee Jinhee was the one handling this incident. Although she was busy investigating the various murders and brawls that would break out every day, she wanted to personally conduct the investigation of Kim Minhee and volunteered for it.

Lee Jinhee said in a low voice,

“… Yeah. Berserkers. We are like family… Minhee, when did you join the Berserkers?”

Lee Jinhee asked as she picked up the file she left on the side. Although she didn’t act like it, Lee Jinhee was very nervous right now.

‘Please… Please…’

Lee Jinhee inwardly pleaded again and again.

“Me? About… 2 years?… Maybe 1 year?”

As if flustered by the sudden question, Kim Minhee’s answer was vague. ‘Ah…’ Lee Jinhee’s hand, which was flipping through the file, slipped. Still, she continued to question her as if nothing was wrong.

“Okay. How did you awaken?”

“Ah… Don’t ask me that. It’s horrible.”

Lee Jinhee frowned at her words.

“… Okay.”

Thud.

Lee Jinhee placed the file down on the table with a thud. She unsheathed her new sword that had been smelted with semi-transparent metal, ‘Silent Ice’, and asked,

“I get it. Then let’s check one last thing.”

Lee Jinhee placed Silent Ice’s sharp blade on her own forehead.

“Haa… I really hate this.”

After letting out a sigh, she sliced her forehead.

Pik!

Her flesh and frontal bone were cut instantly. As if she restrained it with karma, not a single drop of her blood spilled. In that state, Lee Jinhee showed the inside of her forehead to Kim Minhee. She could see a light gray brain inside.

Frontal Bone/Frontal Cranial Bone – The part of your skull in the forehead region.

“Di-director! What’s this!!”

Kim Minhee shouted as if she were freaked out by Lee Jinhee’s sudden self-inflicted wound. It seemed that Lee Jinhee found her noisy as she stretched her hand out to restrain her, and then took out two glass bottles containing a transparent liquid from her

chest. She opened one of the two bottles and poured it on her wound. The moment the transparent liquid made contact with her brain, it emitted a golden light as it protected her open forehead and began to seal her wound.

“This is a liquid made by Guardian Bae Jinman. It won’t leave a scar.”

Without showing any sign that it hurt, Lee Jinhee calmly conducted this terrifying process. Then she tossed the remaining bottle and a sharp sword at Kim Minhee and said,

“Now it’s your turn. Do what I did. That’s an order.”

Kim Minhee became dumbfounded.

At the same time, Choi Hyuk was in the middle of a meeting with the important clan leaders.

“Do you know how many murders there have been? The monsters aren’t the problem! We’ll die by fighting amongst ourselves!”

Resolutely remarked Lumin, a popular clan leader. His words were also a direct attack on Choi Hyuk’s commanding abilities. It was a ‘dangerous’ remark.

Yet, it wasn't like his words were wrong.

Choi Hyuk's army was currently swept with severe distrust and conflict. People killed each other. This didn't change even if they made the punishment more severe. Every few hours, another brawl would break out and someone would die. Whether there was a punishment or not, murders and fights didn't cease. They killed each without thinking of the consequences. They hated those next to them more than the monsters.

Even still, Choi Hyuk couldn't provide a clear countermeasure. It seemed he only wanted to quickly complete the mission as he only quickened his advance. However, the monsters didn't directly clash with Choi Hyuk's army. They simply avoided them and fled. If they kept subjugating and pushing the monsters into a corner, then they might eventually be able to take them out… But it would take too long to reach that point. The conflicts between the colonizers and clans had inflated to the point where war could break out at any moment.

Yet, there was no solution.

"… So what are we going to do?"

Clan Leader Jiro asked in an annoyed tone. He glanced at Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin and said,

"Don't you already know? We can't return to Earth now. It's already been 3 days since we've been shut out of the 'military gate system'. So what do you want to do?"

That was so.

At first, they couldn’t retreat because of Choi Hyuk’s opposition, but now, that wasn’t the case. Everyone became aware of this fact with Richard’s message.

<The messenger I sent to the Virgo Cluster Headquarters returned… He said our mission changed. To find what is going on in this place. Until we do, the military gate system will be closed… Damn, I can’t tell what they are thinking.>

The closure of the gate meant the closure of their escape route.

To the clan leaders who desperately wished to retreat, this was like a bolt out of the blue.

“That’s why if we had already retreated…”

Someone leaked the thought that everyone inwardly thought but couldn’t say. At the same time, the mood in the meeting room chilled. At that word, everyone became so nervous their spines stiffened. This was because everyone was afraid of Choi Hyuk.

However, Clan Leader Lumin didn’t read the mood and raised his voice,

“Even if we let bygones be bygones, we can’t go on like this!

Everyone will die! We can't ignore the conflicts between the clans these days either. A civil war might break out!"

"Ah, just stop it..."

Even when the clan leaders next to him tried to stop him, Lumin didn't listen.

"No! I need to say what needs to be said! Overseer Choi Hyuk! I, Lumin, have never held dissatisfaction with the Berserkers' actions! I always quietly cooperated! However, not this time. Overseer!"

When Lumin raised his voice, Clan Leader Jiro, who was very friendly towards Choi Hyuk, began to criticize Lumin,

"What are you doing? Don't you know your current actions are bringing about more disorder?"

Another heated argument broke out in the meeting room. Jiro simply criticized Lumin while Lumin, frustrated, said that they need to take note of the current situation and find a solution. Some clan leaders joined in on the debate, but the majority of the clan leaders maintained an uncomfortable silence.

Choi Hyuk raised his hand.

Everyone became quiet.

“Isn’t it weird?”

Those were his first words.

“No matter how hotheaded colonizers’ tempers are… Isn’t the current situation too strange? Doesn’t it seem like we aren’t able to control the situation at all?”

“Yes! That’s what I mean!”

Lumin raised his voice.

“Be quiet and listen!”

And Jiro scolded him.

However, Choi Hyuk still didn’t care.

“Let me tell you something interesting.”

He instead began to talk about a story out of context.

“It’s a story about the day of the first murder… So the day Richard told us it was impossible to return to Earth.”

On the day they suffered heavy casualties with the sudden appearance of the sululacks and vassal starving ghosts and the sudden murders and brawls broke out, Choi Hyuk was contacted by Richard.

<Overseer Choi Hyuk, is there anyone around you? If there is, leave. There's something we need to talk about privately.>

It just so happened to be during a meeting with the executives of the Berserkers. A frustrating meeting with no conclusion.

"... Good timing. 10-minute break. Everyone go out for a bit and come back."

Once everyone left at Choi Hyuk's request, Richard immediately asked,

<You have the black cube they said was an exploration device you received before the mission, right?>

"I do."

<Take that out. Right now.>

With a bit of doubt, Choi Hyuk followed Richard's words and took out the black cube from his bag. It was the item he had suddenly received from Tangka of the Armored Soul tribe.

“Huh?”

Choi Hyuk was surprised. The black cube was no longer black. It was tinged red as it pulsed.

After seeing that, Richard held his forehead.

<As expected, you too…>

“What? What is it?”

<The messenger I sent to the Virgo cluster during the day returned. From what he said… there’s no support. They said that they will restrict the right to use the military gate system as well. Meaning we can’t choose to retreat anymore.>

“What? Why?”

He never planned on retreating from the beginning. However, there was a clear difference between ‘not retreating’ and ‘not being able to retreat’. Even Choi Hyuk couldn’t help but become sensitive.

<This black cube… No, should I call it a red cube now? It’s an exploration device, but it’s not a resource exploration device like we thought.”

“Then what is it?”

<Doppelganger.>

“… What?”

<The doppelganger that appeared during the placement evaluation after the training. It’s a device for locating them!>

“…”

Choi Hyuk recalled the placement evaluation which allowed him to receive the right to an independent troop. Then he recalled the doppelganger that imitated Chu Youngjin at the end. If Choi Hyuk hadn’t noticed his killing intent through his Eyes of Distinction, Choi Hyuk might have been killed.

“… Didn’t they say we wouldn’t face them?”

That time, the instructor definitely said, ‘You will rarely face doppelgangers. Only, it is customary to put that monster in the placement evaluation.’

<That’s what’s strange. For some reason, they never gave us proper information from the start. Whether it was because they were purposely trying to screw us over or it was a situation where they had to keep it a secret… Either way, what’s certain is that the cube is currently red. If it’s red, that means there are doppelgangers active around you. Doppelgangers are a species that

are treated similarly to a top rank infectious disease. That means we can't leave until we completely take out all the doppelgangers or until the doppelganger-handling group arrives.>

"... When will the doppelganger-handling group arrive?"

<We don't know for sure... They are a team that is active in the vast universe... Since there aren't a lot of cases where doppelgangers are rampant, there aren't a lot of teams from the start.>

"..."

The morale of the troops was a mess because of the sululacks and the vassal starving ghosts. If doppelgangers imitated colonizers in this current situation? Choi Hyuk grabbed his forehead. It was bleak.

"How do we distinguish doppelgangers?"

Although he possessed Eyes of Distinction, it was only semi-useful. Choi Hyuk currently led millions of people. It was impossible to examine each and every one of them, and among them, there were countless people who would possess killing intent towards Choi Hyuk without being doppelgangers. It couldn't be helped due to his violent subjugation of the clans. It was difficult to distinguish whether someone was a doppelganger or not with his Eyes of Distinction.

However, the method Richard told him was even less accurate.

<Doppelgangers invade your nose or ears in the shape of a small bug. Usually, only warriors below the 2-star level are at risk for infection, but if their karma is unstable, like during a war, they could infect warriors above the 3-star level. First, the invading doppelganger eats the brain and acts as the host, but during that process, they absorb the sacrifice's memories and abilities. However... even still, they aren't able to clearly remember their past, and their combat abilities are lower than before... Well, they said we can distinguish them like that.>

That inaccuracy made Choi Hyuk sigh.

As if he noticed Choi Hyuk's gloominess, Richard quickly proposed a more accurate method. But... they couldn't use that method currently.

<Besides that... We should be able to distinguish them with the cube...>

"But?"

<Because the monster of night is blocking it, it seems it is difficult to use that high-level function.>

It was a difficult problem all around. Yet, there still seemed to be a method.

“Then we need to take out the monster of night. Where is it?”

Richard smiled at Choi Hyuk’s words. An expression showing ‘I knew you’d say that.’ In a quiet voice, he said,

<No one knows. But I have a plan.>

Choi Hyuk saw confidence in Richard’s eyes. A confidence that showed they could take out the monster of night and clear the doppelgangers if they followed his plan. Richard had come up with a plan in this chaotic situation.

‘As expected…’

Choi Hyuk nodded in admiration.

‘Ah, but?’

With his sudden thought, he cut Richard off.

“Wait. Wait, but… How about we split their heads?”

<What? What do you mean?>

“Doppelgangers. You said their larvae eat brains.”

<That’s right.>

“So if we split open their heads, can’t we see whether they are doppelgangers or not?”

Richard froze at Choi Hyuk’s ignorant statement. Then he thought about it, contemplating whether it made sense or not. Then the surprising result was that it actually made sense.

<Uh… Yeah. A completely developed doppelganger will usually imitate the brain so it might not be useful, but we should be able to reveal doppelgangers that are still developing.>

“Really? Then what happens if we pour a healer’s karma into a completely developed doppelganger? Will it receive a similar effect like healing?”

<… I don’t think so.>

That was the conversation Choi Hyuk had with Richard that day.

“So-so there are doppelgangers among us now? That’s why we are fighting more than necessary?”

Clan Leader Jiro nervously gulped his saliva after listening to Choi Hyuk’s words. His eyes became sharp as he looked around.

“Then I suspect Lumin. Isn’t he the one interrupting meetings at every step and aggravating disorder?”

“What are you talking about?! Am I a doppelganger just because you don’t like me?”

The meeting room became rowdy once again. Not only that, but there was an overabundance of killing intent. When they thought that they didn’t simply have different opinions but that there were monsters pretending to be humans, it made their blood freeze.

The clan leaders were suspicious of each other and tried their best to prove they weren’t doppelgangers.

Amidst all of this, Choi Hyuk displayed a dumbfounded expression.

“Just what were you listening to?”

As he said that, he unsheathed ‘Imprint’ and placed it on his forehead.

Pik.

His frontal bone was cut and they could see the gray internals inside. Choi Hyuk poured the liquid containing Bae Jinman’s karma in it. Nothing happened. Only his wound was healed.

While no one could take their eyes off that scene, the elites of the Berserkers moved.

Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung, Baek Seoin, Bae Jinman, Handke and the other directors, as well as team leaders like Alexei, jumped out and surrounded the meeting room, preventing anyone from leaving.

In that state, Choi Hyuk aimed ‘Imprint’ at the clan leaders.

“Now, stick your heads out.”

Chapter 98: At The Ruins (4)

“What do you think you’re doing?!”

The clan leaders were agitated and scared. ‘No matter how scary the doppelgangers are, to ask us to split our heads and show him our brains… Entrust our heads to someone’s sword? When I’m not even a doppelganger? To split my frontal bone without anesthetics and show him my brain? On top of that, you’re going to pour a mysterious liquid on it?’

Humans would unconsciously close their eyes and stand awkwardly when someone was about to flick their forehead. But to ask them to stick their heads out so that he could cut their frontal bone…!

“I, I have allergies…”

“That sword! Did you disinfect it?”

“Wait! Wait!”

Because they were in such a hurry, the clan leaders said whatever came to their minds. However, Choi Hyuk didn’t listen to them.

“Now, now. It’ll be done in a jiffy.”

Choi Hyuk stepped forward.

“Euuaack!”

Each clan ‘leader’ was at least a colonizer of the 3-star level, yet they freaked out and scattered in different directions. They scattered faster than the metal balls of an exploding claymore mine.

However, the elites of the Berserkers had already finished calculating the clan leaders’ expected escape routes the moment they began to awkwardly flee. On top of that, they had already been assigned their marks beforehand.

Bang!

Bam!

The fleeing clan leaders were blocked by the Berserkers and fell down.

“Uck! No!”

Although they pitifully attempted to stand back up-

Pik!

Drip.

Choi Hyuk appeared like a shadow, sliced their foreheads and poured the medicine into their heads.

“Euuuuooh!”

Even if they weren’t doppelgangers, they couldn’t help but freak out. They couldn’t roll on the ground, fearing foreign substances might enter their brains, and didn’t think to staunch their wounds as they spread their arms and crawled on their butts.

It was as if a tiger was released in a group of baby bunnies. Although the clan leaders tried their best to resist, Choi Hyuk skillfully stepped on their resisting arms and legs and cut their foreheads. He then poured the medicine before jumping and pressing down on another hurriedly fleeing clan leader.

Afterwards, the Berserkers standing by would rush forward and drag the treated clan leaders outside the encirclement. They put those who were so panicked that they didn’t know what to do at ease.

“Calm down. Calm down. It’s over now. To block an infection, you need to calm your heart and maintain a constant karma barrier. Take deep breaths and quickly make a karma barrier.”

“Ah… You crazy bastards, do you think I can calm down righ-“

“If you can’t maintain your karma barrier, you’ll have to be re-

examined later.”

“Hiiick!”

Through this incident, the clan leaders were able to recall what they already knew.

‘As I thought, words don’t work on those Berserker bastards!!’

Clan Leader Lumin touched his forehead. It had, at some point, completely healed without a scar. In fact, his head felt refreshed, however, he wasn’t sure whether it was because of Guardian Bae Jinman’s karma or because of the explosive amount of adrenaline produced from this terrifying experience.

What was clear was that when Choi Hyuk split his forehead, he really thought he would die right then and there.

After being dragged out of the encirclement by the Berserkers, creating a karma barrier, and forcing himself to take deep breaths, his thumping heart calmed down and he started to take in the scene around him.

It was quite a sight.

“Puha.”

Leisurely looking at the scene from a distance, it really was worth seeing. Even though those gentlemen who acted refined, saying they were clan leaders, were currently fleeing for their lives, their struggle was so easily restrained, it was almost artistic, and they screamed when their foreheads were split. It couldn't be any funnier.

Lumin watched this scene without any tension.

"Wait! Wait! Choi Hyuk! Overseer! I'm not a doppelganger! I'm not!"

Clan Leader Jiro was currently restrained below Choi Hyuk's feet.

"Hey, hey! Cheer up, Jiro!"

Lumin unconsciously shouted due to his happiness. He felt refreshed that Jiro, who kept finding faults whenever he spoke, was suffering the same humiliation he endured. It was almost as if a non-existent comradery was budding.

'Maybe I should have a drink with that guy tonight.'

Although Lumin thought such leisurely thoughts, Jiro's situation wasn't the same. No, in reality, Jiro no longer had the capacity to judge his circumstances.

As the true him had died a few days ago.

“Euuuuaaackkkkk!!”

The moment Choi Hyuk poured the healing liquid into Clan Leader Jiro’s forehead, he began to flail crazily. It was a noticeably different reaction from the others up until now. Surprised by his desperate screams, the other clan leaders froze.

“Wh-what?”

Lumin unintentionally stood up.

“Sit down. There is a concern that there might be a secondary infection.”

A Berserker blocked him with a nervous expression, indicating this wasn’t his first time seeing this.

The liquid containing Bae Jinman’s karma was normally transparent. However, once it was poured in people’s foreheads, it would turn golden, heal the wound, and protect the brain from various impacts and infections. Yet, the liquid in Jiro’s head currently surged with a copper-red light. Jiro’s brain began to boil, and the thing that looked exactly like a brain writhed its body as it attempted to flee.

“Th-that…”

Only then did people recall the reason why Choi Hyuk was splitting their foreheads. Although they heard it through their ears, the story that they hadn’t felt was real or trustworthy had, at this moment, become a reality, making their hearts freeze.

‘Doppelgangers eat people’s brains, take their bodies, and act as the host.’

Tap.

When Choi Hyuk flicked his finger, scarlet flames suddenly swept up the doppelganger that was exiting Jiro’s head as well as Jiro’s body, causing them to disappear without a trace.

Choi Hyuk, who had calmly watched that scene, raised his head and said in a tone which seemed like he was asking them to go have lunch,

“Now, shall we continue?”

The clan leaders were unable to flee or readily stick out their heads as they froze in place, reading each other’s gazes.

Blaze!

In total, he burned three corpses. Although it could be seen as though only three out of over a hundred clan leaders were infected... If they considered that they were all experts who were skilled enough to be clan leaders, it definitely wasn't a small number.

The clan leaders' expressions calmed. The cries of the doppelgangers kept echoing in their minds. Lies that seemed so true. Tears that looked real.

"Please... Please save me. There's something in my head. However, I am still Clan Leader Raley. I am fine! You know me, right?! Lumin! You know me! Right?! Save me. I want to live. Please kill the bug in my head and save me. Please. Please."

However, Choi Hyuk said,

"No. The moment a doppelganger invades your mind, it starts by killing your brain. Although it does take a while for it to fully absorb your brain, that doesn't mean your brain is still alive. You have already died. Raley. No, doppelganger."

The most terrifying scene was when they were dying. The doppelgangers never admitted they were doppelgangers until the end.

"Euuack! I'm not one of them! I'm not! What kind of bullshit is this?! This liquid is fake from the start, right?! You guys are just trying to eliminate those you don't lik-Euaack!"

Even when bugs that resembled brains crawled out of their split heads… Their mouths kept shouting that they were innocent.

Although they were clan leaders who had overcome countless life-or-death crises, the scene in front of them was more terrifying than any gruesome battle. They still felt pity and became enthralled when hearing their pleas and seeing their expressions, even as they watched the bugs crawl out of their heads. This fact made them so scared that their limbs trembled.

The doppelganger was that kind of monster.

A monster of suspicion.

“But you said the doppelganger identification cube doesn’t work. There’s a limit to Guardian Bae Jinman’s karma reserves, we can’t just split millions of heads… How will we examine them?”

A clan leader asked as they left the basement that was used as the meeting room.

Choi Hyuk opened the door. As they were on a star filled with light and one without night, the moment he opened the door a bright light entered the basement.

As he exited the building, Choi Hyuk said,

“We need to find and kill the monster of night. That’s why we’ve gathered here.”

When they exited the building, they could see troops spread endlessly in the bright light.

“Th-this.”

“The reason why we pushed ourselves to advance to this point was not to quicken the subjugation but to gather all seven overseers together.”

Wherever they looked, they saw people. As each overseer had brought at least a few million warriors, once they gathered together, there were tens of millions of warriors gathered, surrounding the boundary of a particular city on the Cayenne star.

“You finally came out.”

Richard was waving his hand. Intelligent looking colonizers were lined up behind him.

“Reflect on yourself. Among the seven overseers, the only one who didn’t properly total the total number of participants was the Berserkers.”

Choi Hyuk simply shrugged at Richard’s scolding. Richard sighed

as he turned his gaze towards Baek Seoin, who was standing next to Choi Hyuk.

“If your sovereign is like this, then shouldn’t you at least pay attention?”

However, Baek Seoin replied in a faultless voice,

“Administration personnel are almost non-existent in our clan. What can I do by myself?”

At his shameless reply, Richard grasped his forehead and gestured at the intelligent looking colonizers behind him.

“Yeah, yeah. Now, that’s why I brought over some intelligent people, so quickly put them to work. You need to assign teams.”

“Yes, yes.”

Baek Seoin brought the administration personnel and clan leaders to a different location.

As he looked at this, Richard said to Choi Hyuk,

“Please take care of me. You know it, right? That your role is the most important.”

“As long as you can gain their attention, there’s no problem.”

“Okay.”

Richard nodded and stepped forward. While stretching, he said,

“Good. Then shall we begin the game?”

Richard described the game as a ‘Mafia Game’ to bring out the monster of night.

Baek Seoin and Richard’s administration personnel displayed superhuman work performance. In a single day, they reorganized the Berserkers, numbering in the millions, into 10-person divisions. It wasn’t random assignment either. They had reorganized them into groups with people whom they were familiar with each other. It was essential to reorganize them with people they knew as questioning their past was an effective method for determining whether they were doppelgangers or not. Following their karma growth, not only would their physical abilities increase but their cognitive abilities as well.

As the other overseers had already reorganized their troops into divisions, with the addition of the Berserkers, all preparations were complete.

After those who had yet to have their brains inspected disarmed themselves, they gathered in their specified divisions.

The elites who already had their brains inspected were either dispatched amongst the divisions to dispose of those who broke the rules and discovered doppelgangers, or stood guard on the boundaries in case there was a sudden monster attack.

In this situation, Richard declared to the tens of millions of colonizers,

“There are doppelgangers among us. The characteristics of doppelgangers are confused memories and reduced abilities.”

He explained the dangers of doppelgangers and then explained what would happen now.

“After a vote in each division, the one suspected to be a doppelganger will be first bound and isolated. The observation teams will conduct brain inspections on the suspects within their capacity. Although you will be uncomfortable and uneasy, please keep in mind that, excluding the observation teams, we will not tolerate any violence or the leaving of your designated position.”

After this polite speech, Richard smiled coldly.

“Now, with information we collected beforehand, we will first conduct a public examination of those we suspect to be doppelgangers.”

When Richard declared this-

Pikik!

With a sound, a few people who had been blankly standing there had their heads split. Although this only happened to around ten thousand people of the tens of millions, these colonizers, who had great hearing and sight, had no trouble understanding the situation.

“Huh?”

“He died?”

While everyone was shocked, the dispatched observation teams wordlessly poured liquid, created with their respective troop’s healers’ karma, into the heads of the first round of examinees.

“Euaaack!!!”

Two-thirds of the first round of examinees were flustered but otherwise fine, however, the remaining one-third screamed as they rolled on the ground. The liquid surged with a copper light. They were doppelgangers.

They had been able to expose one-third because they had selected those who possessed the highest probability of being doppelgangers.

“Wh… What?!!”

The colonizers, who had been sitting in circles of ten, suddenly stood up in panic. The person next to them had their head split by the observation team, but wasn’t there a brain-shaped bug crawling out of their head?

A physiological fear overwhelmed them.

“Now, now. Don’t be nervous. They are doppelgangers. If you don’t want to be infected, please calm your minds and create a thick karma barrier.”

Richard’s words were spoken with leisure. However, the observation teams around them maintained an unmatched viciousness. A viciousness that felt like they would kill them even if they moved a finger. Although they were feeling an astonishment close to fear due to the sudden situation, the observation teams were too menacing. The colonizers awkwardly sat down. They rubbed their goosebumps and massaged their trembling legs as they gulped their saliva.

Even as he watched this scene, Richard maintained a light attitude of a show host. Although it looked inappropriate at a glance, in reality, this was all calculated. ‘No matter how many die, I will eradicate the doppelgangers. We do not fear sacrificing our people.’ This was the message he was sending the doppelgangers and the monster of night with his easy-going attitude.

“Now, you understand what we need to do now, right? Let’s hunt doppelgangers. We will now start the game.”

Was it a coincidence? At the same time as Richard’s exaggerated declaration-

Blink.

The world suddenly turned dark. The monster of night, which had been idle for the past few days, began to act now that the doppelgangers were in danger.

‘It’s here.’

At the same time, Choi Hyuk concentrated.

This situation, where they had gathered tens of millions of people to track down the doppelgangers, was in fact somewhat of a show. It was a trap to make the monster of night make its move.

‘I need to find it.’

The one acknowledged as the strongest on Earth, and the one who possessed the best detection abilities, Choi Hyuk, was using the monster of night’s activity as a lead to track it down.

‘If you can’t do it, no one can.’

That was what Richard had said. Choi Hyuk thought the same as well.

‘I will make it blink countless times, so find the monster of night and kill it.’

He liked Richard’s request. What Richard was good at and what Choi Hyuk was good at, they were both doing things they were good at.

‘We completely cleared the monsters in this area while gathering here. Still, there will be monsters rushing in from afar. I will take down the monster of night before they arrive.’

It was a difficult situation. Choi Hyuk caught his breath and concentrated his mind.

Blink.

The monster of night blinked again.

The doppelgangers, whose identities had been discovered, used this darkness as cover to find other hosts.

Choi Hyuk fumbled around in the edges of this darkness.

He began to track down this shadow to see where it led.

Chapter 99: At The Ruins (5)

A dark night. When he got on the elevator, the child tightly held onto his mother's hand.

"Mom, mom, there's no ghost, right?"

However, the mother didn't reply. Her hand was unusually cold.

"Mom!"

The child pulled on his mother's leg. His mother's leg was cold and rigid.

"Mom?"

For some reason, he couldn't see his mother's face clearly. Like a foggy mirror. The child's neck suddenly became cold.

The mother said.

{Do I still look like your mom?}

This was a moment that made people recall those ghost stories of their childhood.

"... It's scary."

A weak-hearted person eventually spat those words as he steadied his shoulders. The doppelgangers were different from any monster they had faced until now. They were scarier than any foe.

It was as if they were standing in the valley of death. They couldn't see the ground, as it was covered by a thick fog, and if they took a wrong step, they would fall endlessly and die. The hairs covering their bodies were raised. They were suspicious that their comrades, who were protecting their backs, might be monsters. They were dismayed as if the ground they had always walked on had disappeared.

The colonizers were stricken with fear.

Still, they clenched their teeth as they began to question each other.

"What monster killed your grandmother?"

There were only two points that could be used as clues.

> Confusion in their memories.
>
> Reduced ability.

“My grandmother? I didn’t personally see it so I don’t remember exactly.”

“… Use all your strength and activate your karma.”

“Why, why are you like this? You know me! I’m not one of them!”

“Be quiet! Quickly activate your karma!”

“Why are you all like this? Are you acting like this because my fighting skills have dropped recently? You know me! It’s a commonly experienced space syndrome!”

“Shut it! Your grandmother wasn’t killed by a monster but passed away from cancer! Much before all this mess!”

“… Wh-what?”

Clang, clang, clang!

A plenitude of weapons aimed at him.

“W-wait! Don’t be like this! You! You’re the one that’s strange! You’re just trying to push me to a corner to kill me! I’m not a doppelganger!”

Panic obstructed one's ability to make rational decisions.

Paang!

The person who started the questioning activated his karma to his fullest. His karma had become stronger due to the recent battles against monsters. There was no reduction in its capacity.

"You see it, right? Now it's your turn."

"Don't joke with me... There's no way you can pick out who's a doppelganger by activating your karma!"

His words were true. The 'your abilities will drop' was only a statistic, a common opinion. When looking at specific cases, there were countless exceptions. There was no way they could confirm whether someone was a doppelganger by only questioning them and making them reveal their karma. If it was that easy, then the alliance wouldn't fear doppelgangers. This was a matter the alliance had already thoroughly investigated and was one that Richard already knew. However, Richard didn't tell them details like this. The game Richard had started was a cruel tactic where it would be sufficient to sacrifice 5 people to take down 5 doppelgangers.

Yet... It seemed they were right this time.

"Kuaaah!"

He didn’t reveal his karma in the end and slashed his sword at the person next to him. It might have been because of panic, but in this case, it only made the others feel stronger about their suspicion that he was a doppelganger.

Puscht! Slash!

At the same time, the weapons aimed at him stabbed and slashed at his body, turning his body into tatters. Especially his head, which was where a doppelganger would reside, that was sliced into three to four times. Brain matter dripped. Looking at the cross section of his gray brain, which had been split into multiple sections… They saw the appearance of a bug.

“Euwack…”

Someone vomited.

“Lao Min… Lao Min…”

Someone sobbed. Then-

Blink.

Darkness fell. They could hear Richard’s voice in the darkness.

“Be careful of the darkness! Doppelgangers will look for another host within the darkness!”

“Aaack!”

Screams erupted all around them at the same time. Low level people couldn’t even sense anything in the darkness, let alone see, as the doppelgangers attacked those near them.

Some died, and others became infected by the doppelgangers while attempting to block their attacks.

The darkness cleared up. People’s faces were pale.

“Ahh…”

A more intense fear overcame them.

Just now, some were attacked by their comrades standing next to them and had become cold corpses. They didn’t know whether others were infected either.

“Who is it… Who is the doppelganger?”

Their comrade had died after being suspected of being a doppelganger, but the situation didn’t improve in the slightest. The divisions of 10 had instantly turned into 8, but their suspicions only deepened.

“I’m… I’m really not one of them! Alexei! Alexei! Split my head

and confirm it! I'm not a doppelganger!"

A Berserker grabbed onto Alexei, who was patrolling as a member of the observation team.

"Nuna..."

Alexei looked at her with sad eyes. Although he was at the rank of a team leader, Alexei was still only a middle schooler. There were considerate Berserkers who were like older brothers and sisters to him. Even the currently suspicious Cao Lu was one of them. However, Alexei couldn't listen to her request.

"Sorry, nuna. Just endure it for a bit longer. There is a limited supply of medicine, so we can only use it during critical moments. It's not like the group vote is in, and they are only suspicious of you. If we kept using it for situations like these, then the medicine would quickly become scarce. I'm really sorry... It's a guideline I received from the higher ups."

He said this to her while tightly holding her hands. However, she shook her head.

"Do it now, Alexei. Look at everyone. They are becoming distant from me."

The indiscriminate attacks of the doppelgangers when the darkness fell had an effect. The colonizers distanced themselves from those who they were suspicious of being doppelgangers and

grouped up with members they could trust.

“If darkness falls again, then I’ll only be prey.”

When Cao Lu said this, Alexei couldn’t help it.

“… I’ll go get the medicine.”

In the end, Alexei bit his lips as he ran towards the observation team that possessed the medicine. Just then-

Blink.

Darkness fell.

“Aaah!”

Once Alexei returned, holding the medicine, and after the darkness passed,

“Nuna…”

He knelt next to Cao Lu’s corpse, who had her throat sliced and whose body had rolled onto the ground.

“Cao Lu died! Cao Lu wasn’t a doppelganger! Who was the bastard who said she was a doppelganger?!”

“Wh… Why are you looking at me?! You agreed to it as well!”

Endless suspicion. He seemed like a doppelganger because of this, and she seemed like a doppelganger because of that.

Grit.

Alexei ground his teeth.

“Shut up! Shut up! Calm down a bit! Slowly confirm their pasts and don’t just blindly accuse people!”

No matter how much they emphasized rationality, the situation kept becoming extreme.

There was a problem even if they caught a doppelganger. If there were two doppelgangers, what would they do if one of the doppelgangers had sacrificed the other to avoid suspicion? Although he doesn’t look like he’s infected, was that true? Could I entrust my back to him? What if I were to suffer because of it? Actually, dying was better. I would not want to have my brain eaten and become a doppelganger.

A game of suspicion with tens of millions of people.

While there were many cases where they had successfully eliminated the doppelgangers, the number of innocent sacrifices

was no less.

They were in hell.

Blink.

The monster of night continuously blinked its eyes.

The darkness continued to eat away at their minds.

The ‘blinking’ seemed like it would make them neurotic.

However, Choi Hyuk was precisely waiting for this ‘blinking’.

“Yeah… Keep blinking.”

Choi Hyuk’s eyes were dyed blue with karma. He had activated Mind’s Eye to the fullest as he tracked down the monster of night. However, the darkness didn’t come from anywhere. It would suddenly appear as it was always there. No matter how much he tried to look through his Mind’s Eye, he couldn’t see it. Even when he concentrated so much that he felt as if he could grab the tail of light, which was the fastest thing in the universe, darkness fell without a trace. The speed at which darkness fell was faster than the speed light spread, as darkness would always be there.

Choi Hyuk couldn’t look through the darkness.

“I’m lacking…”

Choi Hyuk clenched his sword, ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. However, his sword only provided additional beneficial effects during close-ranged attacks, and it would not strengthen his Mind’s Eye. Although, if Choi Hyuk’s weapon possessed the name ‘Pledge’ instead of ‘Imprint’, it might have been useful when using Mind’s Eye, however, currently it wasn’t of any use.

“I can’t see… it.”

Huuuu…

Choi Hyuk closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. In this short period of time, many hypotheses and methods for dealing with the monster of night were proposed, compared and rejected in his mind. Although he considered countless solutions, it all took place in an instant. It was an investigation that went on within the boundaries of his instincts rather than logic.

“… I think I know.”

That was Choi Hyuk’s talent. A talent that only strived for victory. He would always find the weakness of any skill, no matter how difficult or complicated it was. If he saw it, he would know how to confront it. Also, if he knew it, then he could execute a method for dealing with it as easy as breathing.

The new method he had come up with was more time

consuming, the reason being because Choi Hyuk had to come up with a skill he had never attempted before. But now he knew, and because he knew, he could do it.

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth.

“Mind’s Eye.”

Whoosh.

When he opened his closed eyes, his eyes surged with a blue light. Mind’s Eyes was the first karma trait Choi Hyuk had awakened back when he was at the 3-star level. The karma supporting his body became endlessly more sensitive. He received information about the world around him without any distortion.

“Identical Mind.”

Choi Hyuk’s entire body was flooded with a blue light. Identical Mind was the additional karma trait he had awakened when he reached the 4-star level. His karma went beyond being sensitive and stealthily, and naturally invaded into his surroundings. Based on the information he was receiving through his Mind’s Eye, he interfered with the matter, energy, and karma around him. He wasn’t only seeing what could be seen, but he was also unraveling what was ‘inside’ and exposing what was hidden.

However, he still lacked the power.

“Explosive Blood.”

This was precisely the trait Chu Youngjin and Lee Jinhee used as their main.

The moment he activated the trait, his karma, which was softly coiled around his body, began to go berserk. It felt like his blood vessels and muscles would rip apart. However, Choi Hyuk didn’t even blink an eye as he controlled this power.

He activated three traits simultaneously. Choi Hyuk was able to smoothly complete this task, but it definitely wasn’t easy. As ‘Mind’s Eye’ and ‘Identical Mind’ were still interrelated traits, they were comparatively easier to fuse, but ‘Explosive Blood’ was the complete opposite of them, which used Control as a foundation. A wanton result could come about by the clash between these traits when one thoughtlessly activated all of three of them.

Yet, Choi Hyuk harmonized these three traits like it was nothing.

“Ah…”

At the same time, Choi Hyuk felt a sense of self-fulfillment from deep within him. He now felt as though his karma was truly his. He felt a sense of satisfaction that was similar to when clothes, which were close to being a perfect fit, fitted perfectly.

In fact, Choi Hyuk’s karma had been too tame up until now. Mind’s Eye and Identical Mind, which used Control as a

foundation to see through and affect his opponents, were more like the traits of a magician than a warrior's.

However, as soon as Explosive Blood was added, everything fell into place perfectly like a jigsaw puzzle.

Choi Hyuk's fighting talent was composed of three elements: the ability to see through his opponent's weakness, no matter who it was, the ability to perfectly execute any attack he envisioned to pierce his opponent's weakness, and lastly, a ferocity that could crush his opponents with his vigor alone. These three talents perfectly suited the three karma traits known as Mind's Eye, Identical Mind, and Explosive Blood. They literally formed a trinity.

His karma, which was interlinked with these three traits, was like a perfectly fitted item of clothing to Choi Hyuk.

Boom!

Choi Hyuk's karma explosively increased its presence.

His Mind's Eye would look, and then he would search thoroughly with his Identical Mind. Explosive Blood reinforced these two abilities. It allowed him to look further and deeper.

Just then, Choi Hyuk's lips curved into a smile.

"Found you."

Choi Hyuk now knew that it wasn't somewhere far. It was in a four-dimensional space which lifeforms living in three dimensions couldn't see. Although it was right next to him, it was curled up, hiding in a small, hidden space folded in four dimensions.

Choi Hyuk's karma permeated into that space. According to his will (Identical Mind), Choi Hyuk's body was sucked into the folded space.

Chapter 100: At The Ruins (6)

The place Choi Hyuk arrived at was a completely unfamiliar darkness.

It was different from the dark matter of Dark City. Although Dark City was dark as well, it was still a place within the third dimension. It wasn't very different from the familiar darkness of the night sky. However, this place was a darkness within the fourth dimension. It wasn't a place a lifeform from the third dimension could perceive.

Shapes in the third dimension looked completely different in the fourth dimension. His arms and legs curved however they wished, and his back stretched and curled around. Like a surrealistic picture, Choi Hyuk's body lost the original shape he was familiar with. Even the darkness was the same. When he thought there was light, it was dark, and what he thought to be dark seemed to shine as if there was a light. The darkness felt like a hard surface, then rolling waves, and then an endless fall.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't fall into a state of confusion. Karma was a power of fate created by lifeforms. It didn't adhere to the fourth dimension. That was why, even though his senses were chaotic, his mind was clear.

"Is it you?"

Choi Hyuk asked. The darkness all around him was leering at him. Perhaps Choi Hyuk was already within the monster's maw.

Tik.

Choi Hyuk unsheathed ‘Imprint’. Instead of a pleasant ringing sound, a flat ‘tik’ noise sounded out. Imprint had lost its shape in the darkness as well. It became wide, flabby, and mushy. It didn’t look like it could slice anything.

However, that was only for a moment. When Choi Hyuk raised ‘Imprint’ above his head in preparation for a close-range strike, the blade of the mushy ‘Imprint’ formed a cold, sharp line. ‘Imprint’ surged with karma, stood rigidly and displayed its vigor. A Weapon of Vow could overcome matter and become a weapon of pure karma. This limit, however, depended on its owner.

Currently, at this moment, over 80% of ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ was composed of pure karma. The karma, which reflected his will of wanting to deliver a fatal blow with one strike, surged dangerously. Along with it, Choi Hyuk’s body, which had been scattered like a mist, had returned to its original form in the darkness.

In a darkness where everything was distorted, only Choi Hyuk was clear.

“Instant Void Annihilation.”

Riip!

His sword, which could even rip apart space, swung down. The fourth-dimensional darkness was sliced and ripped apart. Like in the moment of creation, darkness retreated for light to fill the surroundings.

{Heuuuu.}

He could hear the monster of night's scream from somewhere. It had been wounded. However, it wasn't a fatal blow. Choi Hyuk's strike missed its core.

Seu...

Darkness, once again, clouded the momentarily bright surroundings.

Choi Hyuk could tell instinctively that if he didn't slice its core, it wouldn't die no matter how many times he sliced it. He wouldn't be able to defeat it.

With his sword raised, Choi Hyuk closed his eyes.

Thump. Thump.

Choi Hyuk's karma heart began to pound furiously. Mind's Eye, Identical Mind, and Explosive Blood mixed together and began to search through the darkness.

Whoosh.

It felt as though the darkness became darker. At the same time, Choi Hyuk understood that the monster of night's gaze was fixed on him. It withdrew its power that been outside to 'blink'. Choi Hyuk searched for its core, and the monster searched for Choi Hyuk's weakness.

Who would find it first?

{Heuheuheu.}

An unpleasant laughter could be heard from somewhere. Then, immediately after, Choi Hyuk heard a voice he could never forget.

"Hyuk?"

"... Mom?"

The one who walked out of the darkness was Choi Miyeon, Choi Hyuk's mother.

"What are you doing here?"

She said in the same appearance and voice she had before she died.

It was her who embedded him with the order to ‘not fight’. Although he was bullied because of this, she was still the most important person in his life.

Sssss.

Karma was released from ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. The blade that had been sharp became blunt, mushy and distorted.

**

“The monster of night… Didn’t you say it was a particularly tricky monster to deal with even amongst the high ranked monsters? No matter how strong he is, Overseer Choi Hyuk is only a middle ranked warrior… Can he win?”

Leah, Richard’s aide, showed a worried look.

“There’s nothing we can do. He’s the only one who can find and approach the monster of night. Whether we like it or not, this is our only method.”

Richard had a relaxed expression. Although he said that there was ‘nothing they could do’, it seemed like he didn’t expect Choi Hyuk to lose.

“But what if he fails? Although the monster of night specializes in commanding and support rather than fighting… You said it is dangerous when it has so many monsters under its command like

now. Especially if they are doppelgangers…”

“Ah, right. The doppelgangers and the monster of night are an especially good match. Since they say monsters of night are able to use the abilities of monsters it leads as its own… Choi Hyuk is probably facing an ordeal beyond our expectations. However, I still don’t think he’ll lose.”

“In the case he does, what are you going to do then?”

Richard frowned at her words. He then carefully thought about it.

“Although I haven’t thought about it in detail…”

Richard shook his head and looked in front of him. A cold-hearted light shined in his eyes.

“Then I’ll have to kill them all.”

Leah knew exactly what he meant.

Richard possessed the innate skill ‘Eyes of the Judge’, which could distinguish between who he should kill and who he should keep alive. What he meant by ‘kill them all’ was that he would kill anyone who was identified as someone to kill. This would include doppelgangers, but it would also include countless others as well. Although they wouldn’t be able to avoid the loss of many lives, it would certainly get rid of the doppelgangers.

Gulp.

Leah gulped her saliva. She knew that Richard was someone who definitely possessed the ability to do so. No matter how great the losses or what methods he had to use, if it was for the best, then he would do it. Only, there was currently a better method, which was why he hadn't yet done so.

There weren't many who knew of Richard's true nature. There were also almost no one who knew that he was stronger than Jessie, possessing a 5-star stat. This was reasonable since Richard had become known for his politics rather than his fighting abilities.

'How was it that Richard, who fought less than Jessie, let alone Choi Hyuk, could have a 5-star stat?'

The reason was simple.

Richard had, in reality, killed more colonizers than anyone. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Richard was the greatest murderer of all-time. He had indirectly murdered people by making others act in the darkness (although the majority of them weren't aware that they were following Richard's will), and depending on the situation, he had personally assassinated others. His 'Eyes of the Judge' clearly distinguished between those he should kill and those he should keep alive. He made use of his outstanding insight by killing and saving people as nonchalantly as possible. Behind the 'balance' he created existed a countless

number of murders.

His ‘Tuner’ fate, which gained karma every time he successfully killed or saved someone, was a big help to his growth. Because of this, Richard could consider himself as having progressed at a rate only second to Choi Hyuk on Earth without any eye-catching battles.

His karma had increased rapidly by killing countless people from behind the scenes.

To be able to maintain a clean, trustworthy image despite all this was evidence of how fearful Richard’s ability was.

Leah’s shoulders trembled when she saw Richard’s cold eyes.

“I guess… I need to hope for Overseer Choi Hyuk’s success.”

“Yeah. I hope so too.”

The two turned their gazes towards the hell, in which people were divided into 10-person groups and were interrogating each other.

Right after Choi Hyuk had disappeared off to some place, the ‘blinking’ had also disappeared without a trace. Although the fear and unease the people felt lessened a little… It was still difficult to identify the doppelgangers.

The fact that there were only tens of thousands of members in the observation teams compared to the tens of millions of people was a critical problem. On the other hand, the doppelgangers were shrewd.

In this short period of time, groundless rumors had spread and the truths were covered up.

“Why are you refusing questioning? What are you doing? Please stay in your assigned location!”

“Shut up. Bring our clan leader. There are rumors that this is all a political ruse. Where is our clan leader? Did you kill him? Bring our clan leader out here immediately. Or bring Richard. We need an explanation.”

There were cases like these throughout the crowds where men, who considered themselves as having thick arms, went against their orders and gathered in groups.

“You’re going to cut my head? Isn’t this all just a witch hunt? When you cut our heads open, if there’s a bug, good job, but if there isn’t, too bad. Either way, the examinee will die!”

“No. The medicine has been made with the power of the healers. The wound will immediately close.”

“How do you know that? Do you think that only one or two

people have died up until now?”

“They died because they were doppelgangers.”

Although the majority of observation teams were composed of elites, their numbers were small. There were also an overwhelming number of elites who weren’t part of the observation teams. The control in various places began to fall through.

Also, when the doppelgangers had their heads cut, they acted out until the very end.

“Handel! Help me! I’m not one of them! I’m really not, Handel! Aack!”

When observation team members unsheathed their swords to conduct the examination, they would scream like this. The woman’s lover, Handel, couldn’t hold back any longer.

Bang!

Handel threw a punch at the observation team member, who was about to cut her head.

“As I thought, I can’t. No matter what, I can’t. I can’t hand Rika over to you. Rika isn’t one of them!”

The affection humans possessed went beyond reason. No matter how much evidence they had, showing that they were doppelgangers, it was useless. They couldn't help but go crazy when the person they loved cried and pleaded in front of them.

This was occurring everywhere. The commotion wasn't easily calmed, especially when experts, who even the observation teams couldn't restrain, joined the fray.

Then Chu Youngjin was dispatched to calm this commotion.

Rumble.

Once his characteristic thundering sound was heard-

"Gaaah!"

Both arms of the one causing the commotion fell to the ground. Shock spread amongst the crowd.

"Berserker Chu Youngjin!"

Chu Youngjin's eyes were dyed red. His heart was burning right now. When he saw those who blocked the observation teams to protect their lovers, Chu Youngjin would especially experience a deep pain. He recalled his lover, Lee Hyejin. Perhaps this was why Chu Youngjin was becoming crazier.

Chu Youngjin silently took care of those who were causing a commotion with a heart that felt as though someone had put salt on his wounds and then picked at the scabs. No one could take even a single sword strike from him.

His innate skill ‘Berserker’ was added to his karma trait ‘Explosive Blood’, while his Weapon of Calling ‘Chu Youngjin’s Protection’ added sharpness to his strikes. Due to his ‘Protection’, which rapidly increased his ‘Combat Endurance Ability +100 (Stamina, Endurance, and Recovery)’, he didn’t easily tire either. Chu Youngjin could feel at ease as he used his strength.

A crowd that had gathered together and pressured the observation teams, a clan-sized group that insisted they bring out their clan leader, and even warriors who stood in front of their lovers like vanguards... they all spurted blood under Chu Youngjin’s sword and collapsed.

Chu Youngjin was continuously controlling his mind.

‘If Hyejin was still alive... One of those fucking doppelgangers might have eaten her brain.’

When he thought this, rage rapidly surged from his heart. He projected his anger onto those creating a commotion.

“Wahh... Long Chen was defeated with one sword strike. Isn’t Long Chen a well-known expert from China? Even Overseer Jessie might not be able to do that.”

“Was Chu Youngjin this strong?”

Every time Chu Youngjin slashed out, a shock reverberated out. They knew that Choi Hyuk was a monster, but below him, Chu Youngjin was also an incredible monster as well.

This was how they were able to maintain some sense of order while Choi Hyuk was absent.

They were endlessly tangled in a fight about who was right, who was wrong, and what was real. Like always, the Berserkers would rather cut that tangled knot than untangle it. Chu Youngjin and even Ryu Hyunsung were the same. Everyone passed by others after cutting them down without asking any questions.

Choi Hyuk was the same.

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“Weakness… Yeah. You kept exposing and stabbing at our weaknesses.”

Choi Hyuk said in a tone that seemed as though he was sick of this.

“That’s why I don’t look back.”

“Uck… Ah…”

Choi Hyuk's distorted body had, at some point, returned to its clear state. His sword was pierced through his mother, Choi Miyeon's abdomen.

Choi Hyuk whispered in her ear,

"Did you think I'd give up if you hid inside my mother?"

Pscht.

Choi Hyuk twisted the sword embedded in his mother.

{Heuuuuu.}

The darkness surrounding him shook violently. Its scream continued without end. Like a song on loop, it echoed and grew louder.

"We lost everything. Because we lost everything, we have no weaknesses. Because we know all too well that we lost everything, we won't be fooled by your illusions. When we acted like we were fooled, you quickly showed your true colors. Thanks to that, we were able to end it quickly."

Choi Hyuk injected more and more karma into his sword. At some point, his sword began to burn. The flames grew as if trying to swallow the darkness surrounding him.

The night was being burned.

“It’s the end.”

Choi Hyuk stared at the face that was identical to his mother’s. Even its expression, which was distorted due to pain, was the same as his mother’s. However, Choi Hyuk’s heart didn’t waver. Choi Hyuk had already accepted her death. If he hadn’t accepted it, then he wouldn’t have despaired and the fires of his thirst for revenge wouldn’t have raged. The fact that his rage had never blown out was proof that his mother was dead. Choi Hyuk wasn’t misled by this.

“Hii… Hihi…”

It seemed it knew this was the end. His mother’s pained, distorted expression slowly turned expressionless, and a strange laughter escaped her lips. Her bright eyes turned into a deathly black. When she opened her mouth, he could see a black abyss.

It said in a voice that seemed to be neither male or female,

“Hihi… I saw it. I saw it. I saaaw it.”

Its face had become so terrifying that it was difficult to call it human. Choi Hyuk stared directly at its face as he poured the last of his strength into his sword. Choi Hyuk raised his sword, still pierced into its body, and then swung down forcefully.

“But you’re going to die here.”

Riip!

The monster of night, which had impersonated his mother’s figure, collapsed into two pieces. He had cut it cleanly. The night ripped and light beyond it began to permeate in.

The monster of night was dead.

At the same time, the doppelganger identification device Richard possessed surged with a red light. The power of the monster of night, which had been obstructing its function up until now, had disappeared.

The spreading light left a mark on specific warriors’ heads.

“Uh? Huh?”

The ones who received a mark were taken aback as they looked above their heads.

There was no room for doubt. Richard’s orders sounded out like thunder.

“Kill all the ones with marks!”

The ones with marks were doppelgangers.

A bloody wind blew.