

# 심판의 1 군주

오늘도요 현대 판타지 장편소설  
DONG-A MODERN FANTASY

# **Sovereign of Judgment**

**- 심판의 군주 -**

**- Episode 3 -  
Age of Ghosts**

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오늘도요**

**[ Myoniyoni Translations ]**

# CHAPTER 33

## BREAK TIME (1)

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“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 them 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)

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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 'Woowoowo' 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.

"Hooooo..."

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 ones who created this game. He hadn't even seen their shadows, let alone the names of the ones 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)’ judgment. You are as weak as they come but due to some interesting cases, you received a deferred judgment. 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<sup>{1}</sup> or even drinking sujeonggwa<sup>{2}</sup>.

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'<sup>{3}</sup>.

"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 than you. (Current Retribution: 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: 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 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.

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{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)

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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, Hyeeyeon..."

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)

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{Searching for the appropriate mission based on Retribution... }

{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 judgments 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!”

“Kiiii!”

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)

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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 his arms and legs, and flew one palm-width above the water.

Next to them, a 3-meter tall alien with antlers protruding from his head was running in large strides. The water that was knee-deep actually only reached his 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 he was dragged away by his leg. "Kiwoo! Kiwoo!" He shouted sorrowfully but there weren't any aliens who could understand him. 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 he was able to avoid the attack of the tentacles. That wasn't all, he seemed like he was about to retaliate as well.

Pazik! Pazizizik!

His 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 he 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 he wanted the aliens to die with the monster, he didn't distinguish friend

or foe and relentlessly blasted his electric current. Choi Hyuk and his followers were also swept up by its attack.

His electric current was much stronger than he had anticipated. He 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 him 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: 20 (3★)

\*Free karma points: 173

\*Skill: {Soaring Slash}

\*Innate Skill: Eyes of Distinction

-----

Currently, besides his Control and Retribution, his other 5 stats were only 2-star. If he looked at his stats as a whole, he wasn't a 3-star or 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 increased.

Choi Hyuk currently had Control and Retribution 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: 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 would be 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, thick 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<sup>{1}</sup>.

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<sup>{2}</sup>. 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 Kabkun – 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 21<sup>st</sup> division.”

He replied calmly when he looked into the binoculars that had been handed him. The 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

His 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. He was surprising fluent in human language. No, like when the Giant Orc Karik spoke, he 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 his eyes. Unexpectedly, he didn't see any malice from him this time. Instead, looking at how he was emitting a faint white light, it seemed that he had 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.”

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{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)

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{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. His words were as if he 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 your 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 his 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 his expectation. Keholeun wasn't able to react in time.

Pizizik!

Instead, the Karma Device-01 he 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!! @#%!!}

He seemed to be in such a hurry that he 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. He was definitely strong. He may have even been strong enough to roast the Wyvern of Destruction without much difficulty. However, his figure was similar to that of a human's. Even with the fact that he was small enough to be sliced by a sword; he had overrated himself in front of Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk didn't even give Keholeun the chance to show his skills.

Something came out of his body and was ingrained into Choi Hyuk's body. The corpse was a bit haggard but it didn't completely 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 310 (★★★). Absorption rate increased. Granted 16 free karma points.}

Choi Hyuk possessed Retribution 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 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!”

Dududududu!

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!}

He was an enormous alien. He was 5 meters tall, had deer-like antlers that shined in various colors and wore gauntlets made of metal on his hands. His long, coiled rope-like muscles rippled as he kicked the ground with his long leg and closed in on the squadron.

“Fire!”

At Major Kang Choongil’s scream-like shout,

Dududududu!

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 his arms and pierced the chests of Major Kang Choongil and the youngest. It all happened in an instant.

{What the? How boring.}

He grumbled as he bit off the head of Major Kang Choongil who was pierced by his 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 him and close ranged fighters couldn’t keep up with his charging speed.

The sight of an overwhelming alien, who was 5 meters tall, eating Major Kang Choongil and the youngest's heads (what was more, he 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. He was the one who killed Major Kang Choongil and the youngest. His timer had already ended but he 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 his 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. He didn’t even turn around and kicked his chest with his hind leg.

Bang!!

“Kehuk!”

Captain Lee Kangjin flew off while spurting blood.

{Oh? You weren't pierced?}

He 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?}

He crouched down next to him.

Although Lee Kangjin was in shock and his arm was trembling, he decided to use his 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 he 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 him 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 he had because he was an alien, he was painfully aware that he was mocking himself and humanity.

{That's why it's your fault for being weak. You Consumables.}

His 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 his 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<sup>{1}</sup>, 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.

"Kiiiieek!"

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.

“Kihiiyaah!”

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<sup>{2}</sup> 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.

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{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)

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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 and crazy, 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 but the rest of your stats seem low. You obtain more karma if you kill someone with a lot of Retribution... 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 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.

Whiiiiing!!

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.

Jjijjik!

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.

Jjijjik!

The cocoon split apart.

"Grrrrr..."

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 ¼ 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<sup>{1}</sup> 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.

“Eagyagyagyagak!”

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.

"Hooooo..."

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 Youngjin 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 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.

---

{1} Korean Cold Noodle Dish <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naengmyeon>

# 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  $\frac{1}{4}$  return rates."

Leader Cha Taeshik replied with a sound argument.

"You're right. But, isn't there a saying, 'more haste, less speed'<sup>{1}</sup>? 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  $\frac{1}{4}$ , 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<sup>{2}</sup> Post}

1. The 'dragonics' died off due to the invasion of the monsters. Using the corpses of the dragonics, 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.
2. Clear the spartoi group inhabiting Barhaloleun Hill.
3. 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.

"Krrrereek! 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.

---

{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. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartoi>

# 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 of all participants increased by 10. Granted 10 free karma points.}

{Colonization Sovereign Choi Hyuk's Retribution increased by an extra 30 points. Granted 30 free karma points.}

-----

{Succeeded in Colonizing the Starting Point! – Spartoi Post}

The 'Dragonics' planet has become occupied by monsters. Although still surviving members continue their resistance, their prospects are bleak. Liberate the 'dragonics' and prepare a human settlement.

1. Barhaloleun Hill 1 is now a human territory! The portal has been activated.
2. Passage management authority granted to Colonization Sovereign 'Choi Hyuk'
3. 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 dragonics 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... 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<sup>{1}</sup> to help you?}

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. 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 to once you connected to it with your karma and even cold weapons<sup>{2}</sup> that had what looked to be magic symbols engraved on them.

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.

---

{1} Hyung – What a young male calls an older male.

{2} Cold Weapon – Any weapon that does not use explosives. I believe this word is translated literally from other languages.

# 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 to 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 instead 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}

1. Battle 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.

2. Undying One: 93% Aptitude

Every time you survive a life-threatening situation, your karma will develop in large leaps.

3. 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 Battle 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, 'Battle 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 Battle 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.

{'Battle 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 ‘Battle 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, ‘Battle 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.



PDF by: traitorAZEN