

# 심판의 1 군주

오늘도요 현대 판타지 장편소설  
DONG-A MODERN FANTASY

# **Sovereign of Judgment**

- 심판의 군주 -

- Episode 5 -  
**Citizenship**

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[ **Myoniyoni Translations** ]

# CHAPTER 67

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (1)

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This time, the fight really had ended.

There were 8,000 surviving Berserkers. The fight this time had left an unprecedented number of casualties in the history of the Berserkers. There was nothing more to say when 1/5 of their total members had died.

“By the looks of it, it seems the losses from the second free-for-all are large.”

Baek Seoin’s voice was depressed.

What they earned was significant. With the completion of the Sovereign Mission, even if they only considered the indirect rewards the Berserkers earned, everyone’s Retribution had increased by 10 and they also received 3 free karma points as a reward for being the first to succeed in an exchange between colonized lands. (Choi Hyuk’s Retribution increased by 10, and he earned 10 free karma points.) Not only that, but due to the unprecedented level of intensity from their fight, the ‘Combat Addict’ traits had activated, and they each received a plentiful amount of karma.

However, the losses were too large for them to simply be happy. 4,000 casualties. If they accounted for the wounded as well, no one was unscathed.

Although the Berserkers were known to have the highest casualty rates compared to other organizations, the majority were from the deaths and injuries of new recruits. The veterans, who had polished themselves in the Berserkers, were monsters who were able to return from the most hellish situations with a smile. Yet, this time, people had died or gotten injured without a distinction between veterans and new recruits.

The mental blow from this was just as large.

“...”

Alexei silently bit his lip as he followed behind Lee Jinhee.

Lee Jinhee was looking for her left arm that had been sliced off while she was trying

to save Alexei. However, she was unable to find it. Alexei's expression became gloomier.

Lee Jinhee roughly stroke his head with her remaining right arm.

"It's fine. Lyosha, I can get the guardian to regrow it, so don't worry."

"..."

Alexei didn't reply and only bit his lip harder. Of course, Guardian Bae Jinman could regrow her arm. However, when there were this many patients, he couldn't help but feel burdened by using such a high skill like regrowing limbs. Since it wasn't like she would die right away if she didn't have her left arm, there was no doubt she would have to wait 1-2 weeks to regrow her left arm.

"I'm sorry... I will get stronger..."

Alexei thought that Lee Jinhee, who he idolized, became hurt because he was weak. Although he was only barely able to speak those words because he was deeply ashamed, his insides were boiling.

When she saw Alexei like this, Lee Jinhee clicked her tongue.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Lyosha. If you can't distinguish between when you should jump in and when you shouldn't, you will never be strong. Okay? Burning heart, cool head."

As she said this, Lee Jinhee placed her remaining hand onto Alexei's forehead. Her fingers, which had become chilly due to blood loss, cooled Alexei's burning forehead.

Perhaps it was at this moment when Alexei completely fell for Lee Jinhee. Of course, he was unable to express this in the current mood... Alexei's eyes quaked. He bent his waist and bowed.

"I will bear that in mind, teacher!"

"What teacher?"

Lee Jinhee snorted and left. From a distance, Choi Hyuk shouted.

“Directors, gather for a moment!”



The directors gathered. Even though they had won, none of them were excited. They were all ill-tempered as if they were asking why he called them when they were dead tired.

He couldn't blame them either. Lee Jinhee's left arm had been cut off, Artillery Captain Handke's thigh was still bleeding, and Chu Youngjin was standing blankly. Ryu Hyunsung was better off than them, but his eyes were filled with drowsiness. An expression that said he wanted to quit everything and sleep. Guardian Bae Jinman was unable to attend because he had to treat the wounded.

“Damn... That stubborn old man. We're both getting old, and he's like that...”

The person Handke was bitching and grumbling about was Bae Jinman. Since he thoroughly treated people in order of dangerous wounds instead of rank, Handke was pushed back even though he was a top executive. No, he was refused. ‘Fix that sort of wound with your own Recovery!’ was what Bae Jinman prescribed him. Although his life wasn't at risk, someone like Handke, who had low Recovery, would have to bear this pain for half a day.

Because they had gathered disorderly, Handke's mumblings were buried under the racket. Once they had each found a spot and quieted down, Handke's mumblings clearly stood out. Handke, who was diligently cursing Bae Jinman, suddenly felt embarrassed and closed his mouth.

Only then did Choi Hyuk open his mouth. He got straight to the point.

“We are going to explore.”

At his words, the top executives raised their heads like zombies. ‘Explore? Right now? Seriously?’ That was what was written on their faces.

“We can't move while the critically wounded are being treated anyways.”

After saying that, Choi Hyuk gestured to the back with his chin. There was a white building which looked to be a fortress. In the beginning, the monsters were gathered around that building as if sieging it.

“Since we don’t know what’s in there, executives need to take the lead. Ah, mister Handke can stay here since he’s wounded.”

Handke clenched his fists in happiness at Choi Hyuk’s consideration for him.

“Jinhee nuna stay here as well.”

Choi Hyuk called out Lee Jinhee a tempo later. Then, like he expected, Lee Jinhee opposed,

“What! You’re telling me to stay here when there’s a trace of an alien civilization right in front of me? That’s not right, leader!”

Even though one of her arms were cut off, she was still full of vigor. She added grumpily,

“I’m already upset because so many died, don’t take away my joy as well.”

Choi Hyuk looked at her. She clearly distinguished between her likes and dislikes. However, she didn’t dawdle in what she didn’t like and needed to find what she liked.

Alexei, who overheard her, shouted, “Director, are you crazy?!” But Lee Jinhee counter argued, “Is getting your arm cut off something to fuss about? In such a great world where you can regrow them?”

Choi Hyuk simply grinned. She was definitely an interesting person.

“Then, do what you want.”

The exploration members were decided.

Starting with Choi Hyuk, it included Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung, Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee and Alexei, who begged to participate.

“We leave in 30 minutes.”

Choi Hyuk needed a break as well. Since he had also used ‘Heart Injection’, his karma had completely collapsed. Although the 1-hour exhaustion period, which didn’t let him recover, had ended, he hadn’t recovered enough yet. He didn’t show it, but his body was heavy like a cotton ball doused in water.

Once Choi Hyuk ordered, the executives vigorously shouted, “Yes!”, then staggered away like zombies.

As if he found this amusing, Baek Seoin laughed as he stood next to Choi Hyuk.

“Still, because they survived due to our leader, we are able to see them like that. I really thought we might’ve died for a change.”

Baek Seoin would normally take command and handled household matters in Choi Hyuk’s stead. He was a talented advisor. However, things that were impossible for him to handle with his own power were eventually resolved by Choi Hyuk. It was the same this time as well.

“Thank you.”

Said Baek Seoin bashfully.

However, as if asking why he would say such pointless words, he didn’t reply and sat down on a moderate pile of machines.

Then he pointed to another pile and said one thing.

“Baek hyung should rest as well.”



Deep into the night, the exploration began.

The alien ground that took over all of Seongbuk District. The endless desert of broken machines. Within, there was only a single trace of civilization, and the closer they got, the more certain they were that it was a fortress. Its surroundings were blocked with solid metal, and machines were destroyed around it. It seemed like there was a large battle, as various places were dug up or melted. It was definitely different from other places where there were only endless piles of machines.

“What kind of attack were they prepared for to create such a fortress...?”

Baek Seoin mumbled and Lee Jinhee answered,

“Isn’t it obvious? Aliens probably made it to defend against monsters.”

“Then how did the monsters invade this alien world, what eventually happened, and why did it appear here?”

“Portal? Annihilation?... Rescue request?”

The two gossiped like always. Baek Seoin’s questions and Lee Jinhee’s light replies, uncertain whether they were conversing or talking to one’s self, they continued endlessly until they arrived at the fortress’s outer walls.

When they arrived at the outer wall, Ryu Hyunsung sluggishly said,

“This... there is no entrance.”

It was exactly as he said. The metal, which was white like milk, was coiled around the walls like croissants, not leaving a single space.

“...Do we need to smash it?”

Choi Hyuk gripped his sword handle. However, the monsters were unable to smash open this outer wall. Would it break easily? As his body wasn’t in a good condition yet, it wasn’t a welcomed situation.

Just then, a hologram appeared in front of their eyes.

Cheng!

At the hologram’s sudden appearance, the lax atmosphere instantly tensed as the executives unsheathed their swords. However, they realized it was a hologram with no substance.

A simple, white silhouette that looked like a stickman. As if miming, the fellow looked around in an exaggerated motion before letting out a sigh of relief.

‘There are no monsters nearby,’

It expressed what was on its mind.

It was an unusual method of communication. It wasn’t transforming its thoughts into symbols known as language, instead, the emotions it was feeling and its decisions were clearly conveyed to them.

The white hologram raised its hands high up at the sky, then dropped its shoulders towards the ground. At the same time, an indefinable emotion was conveyed to them.

Baek Seoin attempted to change its emotions into human language.

“Hello... However, you are a bit late...?”

The fellow momentarily stared at Baek Seoin. Then, this time, it imitated Baek Seoin’s voice perfectly.

“Hello... However, you are a bit late...?”

At the same time, they felt another emotion.

Baek Seoin translated it again.

“Continue?”

“Continue?”

The hologram perfectly imitated him.

“You want to learn the language?”

“You want to learn the language?”

“You’re saying if we continue to talk like this, you’ll learn it by yourself?”

“You’re saying if we continue to talk like this, you’ll learn it by yourself?”

As if it was happy with Baek Seoin’s reaction, the white silhouette strutted around, almost like it was dancing.

When the fellow knocked on the outer wall of the fortress, the outer wall, which had no openings, wobbled like a liquid and created a path.

‘Follow me. I’ll tell you.’

Choi Hyuk looked at Baek Seoin once.

Baek Seoin replied.

“I’m getting good vibes?”

If that was the case, it shouldn’t be dangerous.

They followed the white silhouette and entered the fortress.

The fortress was one large city. The city was so advanced that it was unimaginable with Earth’s current scientific knowledge, yet it was currently a ruined city.

The emotions and thoughts the hologram conveyed as it walked were cooperatively translated by Choi Hyuk’s group.

This place was an alien city where ‘language’ didn’t exist. Since they were able to use telepathy by nature, they communicated purely through impressions and thoughts and not language. Following this trend, there wasn’t a name designated for this species.

Their ability was excellent at sending and accumulating information, and their science advanced brilliantly. It had reached a point of being able to trade with other alien civilizations. They began space commerce and continued to flourish.

Unfortunately, the monsters invaded one day, and everything changed.

At first, they were able to defend without difficulty. Their weapons were incomparably stronger than weapons from Earth. They didn’t even need to personally get involved. Their machines meant for war were able to face the monsters by themselves. But, that soon reached its limit.

The ‘karma’ awakenees and monsters controlled was a power that ranked above all other sources of energy. After monsters of a particular level appeared, weapons that did not use karma were ineffective. Then, when high-ranked monsters appeared, their war machines were all pitifully destroyed. The aliens experienced defeat, after defeat, after defeat.

Eventually, they learned how to fight with karma from another alien civilization, and afterwards, they had no choice but to personally take part in the battle. At first, it seemed to be effective. But... once the eyeless observers were dispatched, everything ended. Their species, which was proficient at telepathy since birth, suffered a mental

attack which brought them to despair. They always had their minds wide open for each other.

In the end, the planet had completely collapsed.

They built a city and flung the city and its surrounding land into a dimensional gap.

Hoping for someone to save them, sending a rescue signal.

'But no one came to rescue us... and the monsters followed us through the dimensional gap.'

The city floated around within the dimensional gap. Accepting such a city itself would consume a lot of resources. But, there were no species who wanted to go through that and risk bringing monsters into their planet.

Ultimately, they had to chase the monsters away to survive. Unfortunately, their natural enemy, the eyeless observers, were among the monsters, and they were unable to personally attack, only sending out the war machines. They were all destroyed. That was the identity of the pile of machines that filled the area.

The place they arrived after following the emotions and memories the hologram revealed was a tomb. The square, situated in the center of the city, was made with a glass floor, and below it laid aliens with simple appearances like the hologram's. A massive tomb.

The hologram conveyed sadness.

'In the end, they all died, isolated here.'

They could feel its sorrow, grief and something that felt like pride and fervor.

'I am the last descendant of this civilization.'

An artificial intelligence created by concentrating their accumulated techniques to maintain the city and its defenses. It existed for a long time, continuously improving itself. It was literally an existence which possessed the essence of a whole civilization.

It expressed its feelings.

'Please accept me. I will definitely be of help to you.'

# CHAPTER 68

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (2)

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'Please accept me. I will definitely be of use to you.'

That was what it seemed like it was saying. So Choi Hyuk replied,

"Okay."

Then the artificial intelligence replied, imitating Choi Hyuk's voice.

"Okay."

"..."

Now that he thought about it, this fellow didn't know human language yet.

"I said okay."

When Choi Hyuk agreed, it simply imitated him.

"I said okay."

"..."

Then it stealthily walked around Choi Hyuk's group. It seemed it was reading the mood. Choi Hyuk sighed before stretching his hand out.

It stopped in its place and calculated the countless meanings behind the action of 'stretching one's hand out'. Attack, control, help, cursing, greeting... among others. It still couldn't tell what that meant out of those countless scenarios. To learn more about it, it carefully stretched out its hand. When it did, Choi Hyuk quickly approached and grabbed its hand.

'Huh?'

He thought he wouldn't feel anything because it was a hologram, but he was surprised by the unexpected soft sensation.

Either way, it was all good. Choi Hyuk pulled on its hand.

“Let’s go together.”

Was his meaning conveyed? The fellow imitated Choi Hyuk’s words again. What was different was,

“Let’s go together.”

It took a step forward, being pulled by Choi Hyuk.

It started to eliminate the countless scenarios from its mind. Attack? No. Cursing? There was a high probability that that wasn’t the case. Rescue? No. Then greetings? Advice?

Choi Hyuk continued to pull its hand. When he took a step, so did the artificial intelligence.

The fellow spoke, changing its tone in an odd way,

“Let’s... go together.”

“Yeah.”

Another step.

Now the artificial intelligence almost knew his meaning. Since Choi Hyuk held its hand and they were both walking together, ‘He accepted my proposal!’

The artificial intelligence shouted loudly. It wanted to express its joy.

“Let’s go together!”

“Yeah.”

Choi Hyuk replied. The fellow changed its tone slightly again.

“Let’s go together!”

It would shout in a louder voice.

“Yeah. Okay.”

Choi Hyuk replied.

“Let’s go together!!!”

The fellow shouted even louder.

Punch!

In the end, Choi Hyuk hit the back of its head.

“That’s enough.”

Bzzt.

After all, it was a hologram. Once a strong force was applied, the electromagnetic field, created to replicate a sense of touch, distorted. Choi Hyuk’s hand passed through its head, and the hologram’s head, which was covered with a fog-like static, crackled. After a few seconds passed, it returned to its original form. The scene was quite scary, but the artificial intelligence didn’t seem to mind.

The fellow simply judged. ‘Okay, yeah’ -> ‘Assumed to be a positive signal.’ ‘Raising one’s voice or tone’ -> ‘Increased probability that this is to express joy. If repeated, an aggressive reaction will be observed, but not enough to cause harm.’ -> ‘Assumed to be a negative expression.’ That was how, at the moment, it was able to learn the information it needed.

As if it had practiced and was happy, in a cheerful voice, the fellow stretched out its hand and said,

“Let’s go together~”

As if this phrase had become a command, the city vibrated smoothly.

Whoooo.

That sound... was similar to a computer booting up.

Whoosh!

They heard the whirring of a rapidly spinning fan when suddenly, their bodies became heavier. It felt like gravity had grown stronger.

“What the?”

Choi Hyuk and his group were taken aback. The artificial intelligence’s thoughts were transmitted to their minds.

There was the Earth... And the fortress-city Choi Hyuk and his group were in was hovering in the air and orbiting the Earth.

The fortress-city was currently getting ready for take-off, and their bodies were pushed downwards due to the upwards acceleration.

“Holy... This was a spaceship?”

Lee Jinhee’s body trembled. Even Ryu Hyunsung, who had constantly been tired, had shining eyes, whilst Baek Seoin had an amazed expression. Feeling the force pulling him downwards, he excitedly said,

“...If what we understood just now is true, since it said it was a frame that traveled through dimensions... It’s not just a spaceship, but a spaceship that can warp and be used for deep space exploration!”

Intergalactic exploration!

How many hearts wouldn’t flutter at that word?

Yet, Choi Hyuk hit the back of the artificial intelligence’s head.

Punch! Bzzt!

The hologram’s head distorted with static.

“That’s too much!”

Lee Jinhee protested, feeling sorry for it, but Choi Hyuk didn’t have a choice. Since he couldn’t communicate with words, there wasn’t any other way.

The spaceship’s take-off, which was even able to make Chu Youngjin’s eyes wistful,

came to a stop with Choi Hyuk's words and a hit to the back of its head.

"Hey. Go down."

Then he added,

"Our friends are down there."

The artificial intelligence wasn't able to completely understand his words, but the moment it was hit on the back of its head, he understood, 'Ah, it seems he doesn't want me to do this.' He canceled the take-off. The fortress-city, which landed on the ground, took off only after the Berserkers, who were resting, had gotten on.



"Oh my god... Oh my god."

Lee Jinhee twirled around excitedly. Seoul's night scenery was spread out below her feet. The night scene they saw in the air gifted them a surprising sense of freedom and sweetness. She twirled around with her arms spread. Because she only had one arm, her body was tilted.

"It's unfortunate. I thought this place's technology could have helped."

Baek Seoin clicked his tongue as he watched Lee Jinhee twirl.

"What can we do? Naro says it's still unfamiliar with earthlings. It said all the equipment here was meant for narolings. And this isn't as bad as it looks."

Lee Jinhee coolly glossed over it as she twirled her arm around in the air.

Naro was the name she gave to the artificial intelligence. It seemed that their takeoff had left quite an impression on her. Baek Seoin said that the name felt unlucky, but Lee Jinhee stubbornly said, 'Our Naro isn't like that!' and that was how its name was decided.<sup>{1}</sup>

"But, I never thought that video calling wouldn't work on this great spaceship and that we would have to resort to simply calling."

The president, who had escaped from the mess, wanted to video call, but because they

were in outer space, they ended up communicating through a simple phone call. If Naro analyzed human technology, then it would definitely be able to support video calling, but that was too much right now since they weren't able to communicate smoothly yet.

Baek Seoin looked at Choi Hyuk, who was on the phone.

Choi Hyuk and the president's conversation couldn't help but be sensitive. There were too many casualties on both sides.

Although they could agree that this accidentally began because of the eyeless observers' curse and that either side had no intentions of fighting each other, the problem was how the situation was resolved.

Choi Hyuk acted in a way to minimize losses in the Berserkers, but that looked like excessive killing from the president's perspective. The mood of his military was chaotic. They wanted Choi Hyuk's apology.

{So I clearly understand Leader Choi Hyuk's circumstances, however, in their perspective in which their comrades died, they can't help but feel disappointed. It's a formality. Please express your condolences to the dead and apologize. If you say those few words, we will also give the Berserkers the appropriate compensation for their losses.}

That was President Shin Woojin's proposition. But, Choi Hyuk felt that his words were useless efforts. The perspectives they viewed this situation in were too different.

Cho Hyuk flipped the president's proposition.

"No. I will offer you a proposition. Hunt down everyone under your command who is affiliated with Lao Ban's followers. They are the ones who are fully responsible for today's event."

Yet, President Shin Woojin continued to bring up Choi Hyuk's apology.

{I know. But, to do that, there's a need to smooth our relations with an apology. In this current mood, those who would normally cooperate won't.}

However, Choi Hyuk ignored him and continued,

“Lao Ban and the groups who cooperated with him are no help to humanity’s fight. They will only create unnecessary division and casualties like today. We need international cooperation.”

{Yes, yes. But, don’t we need to resolve national matters first? If things continue like this, the relationship between the Berserkers and the military will reach a point of no return. Please think of the citizens.}

“Because we left them alone while knowing it was wrong is why it came to this point. We can’t push it back further.”

{Of course. We will definitely look into that issue. However, first... }

The president felt like his throat was burning.

This wasn’t even a conversation. Choi Hyuk didn’t bother to respond properly. As if reading a script, he only said what he had to say. The president was suffering because their conversations were parallel. He even felt frustrated. ‘Is this guy even understanding what I’m saying?’

Just then, Choi Hyuk changed the mood.

He, who had taken a ‘listen if you want to’ attitude, began to directly interrogate the president.

“Let’s properly divide right and wrong. We can’t overlook the government’s liability in this incident. The majority of the assassins who targeted me were foreigners. What did you do while they entered the country and were crawling up Marronnier Park? Did you not know that Lao Ban was targeting me? There’s no way you didn’t. You clearly knew this. Yet, you didn’t do anything. What was the result of that? From my perspective, is there any reason for me to not believe that the government was on the same side as the assassins? If you want to smooth our relationship, first hunt down those who are related.”

The frustrating mood turned razor-sharp like the tip of a blade.

The president felt a chill on his throat.

{No, that is... don’t tell me you think that I had a hand in this? That’s a misunderstanding. Leader Choi Hyuk. You know the circumstances on our side.}

As he listened to the president's excuse, Choi Hyuk turned his gaze to the outside of the spaceship. Although he wasn't sure what technology it was, he could clearly see outside as if it was made from glass. From the outside, however, it was definitely an opaque fortress, but he never thought he would be able to see something like this. He could see Seoul's night scenery beneath his feet. If they went a bit higher, he would be able to see the world below his feet.

Choi Hyuk felt that all of this was comical. He replied to the president, who was justifying himself.

"I know. Your circumstances. You can't perfectly control the country. The discipline of public officials has slackened, and the majority of the colonizers and soldiers under your command only look for what's in front of them. It was probably the same this time. There will certainly be those in important positions who had connections with Lao Ban, and you were unable to control them. You consider them as a strength that is maintaining Korea. For the security of the country, you can't hastily wipe them out. Isn't that right? So you need my apology. Since you need to cater to them so they continue to cooperate with you. So that you can continue to maintain Korea."

Shin Woojin was momentarily at loss for words. Choi Hyuk plainly knew what was going on. Which made him even more uneasy. 'A person who knows all this still acts this way?' Although bitterness surged inside, he worked hard to appease Choi Hyuk.

{That is right. It's all because I am lacking. I am truly sorry. However, please reconsider and take a step back this time. I don't plan on continuously minding them. I will definitely handle this once I can maintain safety. However, it isn't possible right now. I still need their strength. And there is a need in setting them at ease. Taking a step back in order to take two steps forward. If you yield this time, I can repay you by double or triple the amount. Please. Look at it from the long run."}

Shin Woojin suggested once again. Choi Hyuk snorted,

"Long run? From the long run, you say?"

Then he spat,

"Do we even have the time to?"

{... }

Shin Woojin couldn't reply. Choi Hyuk exposed the president's inner thoughts.

"Mr. President, I will say this clearly. Country, safety, forget them. Can't you see? The Earth is collapsing. The only thing we need is an army. Not an army that uses its brain to fill their bellies. A real fighting army. Trashy soldiers aren't soldiers but trash. They aren't needed. Clean them out. Only then, can we live."

He was disgusted.

While the world was collapsing... there were those who were satisfied, those who only thought to fill their own bellies, those who plotted and killed outstanding warriors, those who stepped on potential, and those who made unity difficult.

"Where is safety when we're already living in hell? Now is not the time to be looking for safety, but a time to cut things down and rebuild. If we don't, the world will die out. Don't you understand?"

{... }

President Shin Woojin was silent.

However, his silence wasn't of agreement but of helplessness. He was currently thinking that Choi Hyuk's words just now were immature.

Choi Hyuk realized this as well. He judged that there was no meaning to talking any further.

"Okay. Do as you wish. Act like a king in a collapsing world. However, don't get in the way when I deal with Lao Ban's followers. You will regret it."

{Leader Choi Hyuk... Don't act so emotional... }

The president tried his best to appease Choi Hyuk, but Choi Hyuk cut him off. It was comical. They still didn't understand their reality.

"But do you even know what we obtained from this Sovereign Mission? You don't, right? Your air force is in an utter mess. I hope you live long with them. S-a-f-e-l-y."

Then he hung up.

“Hoo...”

A sigh came out by itself. He was frustrated.

The reason why he decided to attack Lao Ban was due to his endeavor to colonize and to concentrate the colonizer’s capability. However, when he opened the lid, it felt as if the dirty politics of different influences were clearly seen. As if you pulled on an annoying thread, only to make it longer?

Those like Lao Ban were simpler to handle. Since he could simply kill them all. This was simply frustrating, and it wasn’t like he could just kill them...

“Earth... collapsing. Earth... collapsing.”

Behind Choi Hyuk, who hung up, the artificial intelligence, Naro, mumbled as if babbling. It was currently gathering the conversations of the 8,000 Berserkers onboard and analyzing the human language system.



While Choi Hyuk was sitting still and organizing his thoughts, the Blue House was going crazy.

“What? What? There’s what above Yeouido?”

“UFO? The castle in the sky, Laputa? Military spacecraft? Just what is above it?! Either way, you said the Berserkers are aboard it?”

“Why is this report only coming in now?!”

“Whether it could or couldn’t be detected with radars, you should have seen it if you have eyes! What was the satellite doing?”

“What? It was under maintenance because you were lacking technicians? What the...!”

It wasn’t only the Blue House.

Every organization, that observed the fortress-city take off from Seongbuk District, was going crazy. While they were already astonished by the Berserkers’ military strength, an aircraft of unperceivable over-technology<sup>{2}</sup> fell into the hands of the

Berserkers.

“Just what is going on...”

The playing field they had become familiar with over the past two years had collapsed, and a new one was created.

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{1} Naro-1 is South Korea’s first carrier rocket. The first two attempts failed to reach orbit, succeeding on the third attempt.

{2} Extremely advanced technology on a similar level to alien technology.

# CHAPTER 69

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (3)

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From afar, it looked like a graveyard. Stones, which looked like gravestones, were erected in a circle. Yet, the closer one came, the clearer it was that they weren't gravestones. The erected stones were enormous. When one came even closer, they looked to be taller than humans. They may have made one recall the Stonehenge in England. But up close, one would realize that that wasn't enough. If one stood right next to one of the erected stones and looked up, one would tilt backwards to the point of falling and still not be able to see the end. The erected stones were frighteningly tall, each one the height of the Lotte World Tower<sup>{1}</sup>.

Beautiful, abstract symbols were carved and engraved onto the surfaces of these stones. The peculiar lights that emerged from within the rocks dyed the symbols in various colors. When closely examined, each erected stone had different patterns of symbols and colors.

This place was the most important location of the Flame Wing Alliance. The place where all matters of the alliance were decided, it was the 'Brain'. The 'Exalted Wings', who were scattered throughout outer space and different dimensions, conducting war, were able to communicate in real time through these erected stones (dimensional stone plates). Each stone plate indicated one Exalted Wing.

They would decide on more matters than there were grains of sands every day. As the war waged at a cosmic-scale, there were countless matters that needed to be decided by the greatest committee, the 'Brain'. Each decision would decide the fates of planets and entire species.

One of the Exalted Wings, who accessed the dimensional stone plate, spoke,

{Earth... Although we decided to put an advancement evaluation in motion in our last meeting, I am still pessimistic about this. Even if they become lowest ranked warriors, the moment they rid themselves of the Consumables judgment, they would be protected by the laws of the alliance. They would become our members. I am worried whether they have the qualifications... We have to conduct the evaluation with great impartiality.}

There was no reply. The Exalted Wings had the ability to process the entire human population's day's worth of conversations in the blink of an eye. If they had a different opinion, they would be able to refute with 1,000 different reasons within that time. Due to this trait, the momentary silence was treated as an agreement.

The suggestion of an 'impartial evaluation' was unanimously approved.

Another Exalted Wing suggested.

{During the new soldier training, it was judged that the free status earthlings pursued their own safety and that there were many cases where they would become an ill influence on their species. However, their war-fighting abilities aren't bad. With the representatives of Earth, that is, the sovereigns as a center, there were a few instances where they revealed excellent results. It seems that we need to focus on evaluating the limits and potential of their abilities. We need to use the 'Dilemma' evaluation method.}

There weren't any replies again.

It was decided. The evaluation would be 'impartial' and the evaluation method would be 'Dilemma'.

This only took an extremely short period of time, less than 0.01 seconds. The fate of the Earth was decided in the time it would take light, which could travel around the world 7 times in a second, to reach Busan from Seoul.



The daily life on Earth was fragmented.

Fragments of reality and unreality, daily life and non-daily life, war and peace all floated without mixing with each other. People's experiences and their outlook on the world were vastly different from each other.

The gap felt similar to the awkwardness a South Korean soldier would feel when he went on a break. It was similar to the strange feeling a soldier, who suddenly had his breaks and overnight privileges cut due to North Korea's provocation, and had spent the whole night sitting in a car in full military gear, would feel when he walked out onto the streets filled with couples excited for Christmas once he finally went on his break. No, multiplying that feeling by a hundred would be appropriate.

Even though the world had come to this point,

There were undoubtedly people who went on with their lives no different from yesterday. They hadn't witnessed the common conflicts between colonizers, the bankruptcies of companies, which were commonplace, and their families were safe... There were quite a few lucky people who lived their lives like that.

The colonizers fought endlessly and tirelessly, but there were others who were tired of working overtime and enjoyed watching TV while lying down during the weekends. Because the media didn't report on grave news to avoid disorder... The world was cozy for those at home. They thought that the warnings that the world was collapsing were instigated by those who were pessimistic about everything. They believed that if people actually tried living, then they would find that the world was quite safe and livable, and as such, they continued on with their daily lives.

To them, Alexei's Youtube video was an overly aggressive incitement video. This video contained a conversation between the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, and the alien artificial intelligence, Naro.

Choi Hyuk: So... All this is a war between dimensions?

Naro: Yes. The monsters aren't from our universe. They are from a different universe, meaning that they are existences who have crossed over from another dimension. Their inborn karma is unable to mix with ours. They move in order to annihilate all our karmalings. Conversation and compromise are impossible.

Choi Hyuk: Karmalings?

Naro: The intelligent beings living in our universe each have their own appearance and physiological function. However, there is one similarity. The retribution we accumulate, in other words, our karma, is the same. Happiness, anger, sadness, joy, love, hate and desire... The accumulation of the world's energy through these emotions, what we call retribution or karma, is the same. That is why we are able to generalize the intelligent lifeforms in our universe as karmalings despite the vast differences between species.

Choi Hyuk: But the monsters are different from us?

Naro: Yes. That is why it is impossible for karmalings and monsters to coexist. Also... the situation of the war wasn't good from the start. Because of this, narolings were

isolated and annihilated. The alliance had turned their backs against us.

Choi Hyuk: The alliance? The Flame Wing Alliance?

Naro: Is that their name now? Yes. The alliance of the most advanced species in our universe. They traded amongst each other before the war, but once the war broke out, they established an alliance to take joint action. Although the alliance members pledged to help each other... the narolings were eventually cast away and annihilated... The progression of the war was most likely not very good. In fact, there was a gradual increase of species who fled to the dimensional gap like the narolings.

Choi Hyuk: Are they like the naroling's land which swallowed Seongbuk District this time?

Naro: That is right. They floated around in the dimensional gap and desperately sent out rescue signals, but the alliance was usually silent. They most likely thought that it wasn't worth the risk. In the case of narolings, although we had advanced scientific technology... that sort of technology was common within the alliance. And they were also not very useful in the war.

Choi Hyuk: Is that why they said you weren't of much worth even though you are a B rank...

Naro: Is that what they said? Yes, that's right. That would be the case in their perspective. However, I can be of great help to earthlings. You are aware that the situation on Earth isn't very good, correct?

Choi Hyuk: Explain in detail.

Naro: You can tell by the fact that they sent the narolings' land, which they thought was worthless, here. The method of procuring energy necessary for dimensional transmission is like this. They disassembled the earth... and the karma of the people living here to procure energy.

Choi Hyuk: Seongbuk District... was disassembled?

Naro: Yes. But there are a few reserve areas for dimensional transmission on Earth. Even in Seoul, there are two places, Mapo and Kangdong District. They will attempt dimensional transmission at the cost of sacrificing Earth's land. The dimensional lands transmitted here will all be of little interest to the alliance. The expected worth is low,

while the risk of monsters that will follow is large. A land that has been completely destroyed might be transmitted. Earth is getting the short end of the stick.

Choi Hyuk: Why... is the alliance doing this?

Naro: Two reasons. To check if there are any inheritances the alliance missed... And, also, land, which contains the last retribution of the planet, possesses a lot of karma. They benefit if they obtain that. The risk falls onto Earth, which is their throwaway card, and the alliance simply takes everything of substance. I even observed that the karma the last naroling left behind as it died, had disappeared somewhere with the dimensional transmission. The alliance most likely took it.

Choi Hyuk:... That's unfair. But the Earth is a throwaway card?

Naro: Yes. The problem is 'Where did the karma earthlings awaken come from?' From what I observed, karma is being extracted from the planet itself. As more people become awakenees, the Earth is definitely approaching collapse. All that's left for planets that have expended all its karma is ruin. Earth is already at that point. So Earth is... a sort of a garbage landfill for the alliance. They bring the inheritance of ruined species floating in the dimensional gap, break them open, take everything of substance, and then throw them away...

Choi Hyuk:... Then is colonization the only way left for us?

Naro: Yes. Earth will be destroyed within 3 years. Humanity has no choice but to colonize a new planet. I, Naro, the last inheritance created by the narolings to protect karmalings and oppose monsters, will readily participate in this journey.

The conversation ended there. The frame zoomed out and eventually captured the enormous spaceship floating above Seoul. Soon, Alexei's face appeared.

"Don't let the world decide your fate. Please get stronger. There is no way back. You have to protect your own life. The enemies we will face from now are monsters that that enormous spaceship couldn't do anything against. There is only one method to face them, 'karma'. Awaken. If you aren't an awakenee, please immediately head to a colonized land and become an awakenee. If you are an awakenee, please awaken non-awakenees around you and fight more intensely for your own growth. Do not fear fighting. If you put your life on the line and fight, there will undoubtedly be Berserkers fighting next to you.... The end is coming."

That was how the video ended.

Some reacted positively to Alexei's video.

"Wow... A spaceship!"

"Let's go. If we're going to die either way, let's fight to our heart's content!"

Youths, who didn't have a proper job or family and only possessed boiling blood, joined the Berserkers. Of course, while they weren't able to officially join the Berserkers, who stood for elitism, the number of people who became awakenees after entering the Berserkers' city, Barhaloleun, grew drastically.

However, the majority reacted negatively.

"You can tell this is fabricated just by looking at it. Does it make sense that an alien artificial intelligence can speak Korean? What a joke."

Naro had reached a level of speaking Korean on the first night, but many people underestimated the abilities of an alien artificial intelligence.

"They say the spaceship only floats there. If you think about it, it might not be all that amazing."

"Just what is their purpose in aggravating unease?"

"There's no need for everyone to fight. They will need people to support them from behind, right?"

"I heard those guys are very radical."

There were many who didn't want to accept danger as danger. Their desire for safety was so strong that it made them deny obvious changes and evidence.

The awakenees weren't much different.

"I heard the Berserk Sovereign killed a ton of people?"

"Yeah. It looks like there was an especially large number of casualties in the Korean military. They say there is also internal conflict as well."

“Not only that, they say the casualties among scouts sent by other forces were also large. The mood isn’t good.”

“It was a situation where a fight would have broken out... but since that spaceship appeared, they are experiencing a headache. They probably can’t decide whether to be in their good books or to go to psychological warfare.”

“The Berserkers used their head well this time. They turned the issue around, saying that our enemies are the monsters. Even displaying it as if they were going to stand at the front when fighting the monsters.”

“I know, right? I thought they were only good at fighting, but they can even play decent political tricks as well.”

Even they were doubtful of the sincerity of the Berserkers’ claims.

Of course, there was an exception among them. A very big exception.

“Huh? The Sovereign of Balance, Richard, declared his support of the Berserk Sovereign!”

Worthy of his name, Richard, who was one of the most influential sovereigns in the world, publicly supported Choi Hyuk. It wasn’t simply through words. He clearly showed his support by tracking down active Lao Ban’s followers who were within his group and publicly resisting them. Then, they started a large-scale recruitment of new awakenees.

Once Richard acted this way, the minds of the other sovereigns became even more complicated.

One day, while they were divided by their individual thoughts and positions, the advancement evaluation began. Like the ring which appeared in the classroom, an announcement suddenly appeared.

---

{First Advancement Evaluation – Dilemma}

The monsters in Dragonic are aware of the invaders, ‘earthlings’. The monsters are planning on sending this information through a relay base to the center. Destroy the

relay base before they send this information.

If you are unable to destroy the relay base within the time frame, 1/5 of the population of non-awakenees will be sacrificed to execute a dimensional blow. The relay base will be destroyed, but the selected non-awakenees will die.

Participation in this mission is not mandatory. You have a choice. You have 10 seconds.

1. Will go destroy the relay base. (In the case of non-awakenees, they will immediately awaken karma.)
2. Will not go.

---

It didn't matter whether one was an awakenee or non-awakenee, they all received the same mission.

It was a simple choice.

To go? Or to stay?

If they were to go, they would experience fights with their lives on the line. But, they would have the chance of preventing the sacrifice of 1/5 of the non-awakenees.

If they didn't go, the chance of sacrificing non-awakenees would increase. However, if those who selected to go fought well, they could live comfortably and safely.

It was a simple, yet cruel choice.

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{1} Lotte World Tower is 554m tall.

# CHAPTER 70

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (4)

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Someone said,

“I’m not going. Why would I go?”

He had chosen the ‘Not going’ option before the 10 seconds were up and laid back down, covered in a blanket.

It was a lonely world anyways. What did it matter to him if 1/5 of the non-awakenees died or not?

Another person said,

“What can I do even if I go...”

He was a non-awakenee. He trembled as the 10 seconds passed.

It was better this way. Since he had never fought before in his life, wasn’t it obvious he wouldn’t be of help even if he did go and would die a dog’s death?

“People better than me probably went. It’ll be okay...”

Even if they did fail, it was only a 1/5 probability.

“It’s fine. It’ll be fine.”

The hole he could self-justify himself inside was large and wide.

Another was like this.

“Huh? Huh? What? What should I do?”

He troubled over the decision until 10 seconds had passed.

10 seconds was too short of a time to think about it. Like whether one would jump in before a child was hit by a car, they only had enough time to choose with their deeply-

imbedded instincts, without thinking.

It was very difficult to choose 'to go'.

The moment the message appeared, Choi Hyuk felt his vision and the surrounding noises fade away. Similar to how it felt when one stared into their white phone screen in the dark, the message window stood out in front of him, and his surroundings became dark. It meant that they were unable to discuss it with others, and people wouldn't know what decision others made.

The decision to go or not solely rested on each individual.

The 'Dilemma' had already started. They could choose to go out of goodwill. However, if the majority of people selfishly chose to 'not go', their goodwill would only lead to a dog's death. It didn't only depend on their own intentions. It was a problem whether they could trust others. 10 seconds was short, and the decision was difficult.

But, those, who evaluated without taking others into consideration, could easily decide.

"I'll go."

Choi Hyuk immediately answered when he read the announcement.

What did he care whether others came or not? If he went, he could get stronger. He could obtain the opportunity for revenge. But, if he didn't go, he wouldn't be able to get stronger and would forever remain as a Consumable, unable to dream of revenge. To him, it was a choice he didn't need to think about.

Even if he was by himself, he had to go and smash them apart.

The moment he decided, the dimensional teleportation began. Space inverted and swallowed him.

Crunch.

"Hmm..."

He felt his stomach being inverted. Choi Hyuk swallowed down the acid coming up. No matter how many times he experienced dimensional teleportation, it didn't get any

more comfortable.

When his vision returned, he was inside a white room. It was the size of a classroom, and the walls were smooth and cold like metal.

The wall rippled and a message was engraved.

---

### {Dimensional Wasps' Lair}

The most commonly used relay base between dimensions by monsters. Using the unusual secretion of the dimensional wasp queen, they are able to exchange information with other nests far away. The speed of information transmission is slow, but it is hard to target.

Dimensional wasps' nest replicate and multiply within the dimension.

Because of an endless line of identical looking rooms, it is difficult for invaders to locate the path to the queen's room.

The wasps, that guard the queen, replicate and multiply in each room. Every time you take them out and clear a room, the growing nest collapses and slowly becomes smaller, revealing a path to the queen's room. On the other hand, the guardian wasps become stronger and more numerous.

This place is a 'dimensional wedge' created by the alliance to find the path to the queen's room and to protect and support their allies. In this place, allies can take a break or receive support, and they are also transported to the next path they will enter.

Take out the queen within 10 hours.

1. In order to deteriorate the growth of the dimensional wasps' nest and search for the path that leads to the queen's room, each member will enter different rooms.
2. You are able to return to the dimensional wedge once you are done clearing your assigned room of dimensional wasps.
3. Warriors, who have weak karma and are able to disguise themselves, are given a camouflage incense pouch and an awl.

---

There were eight people inside the room. There was no way only 8 people came from Earth, so he could simply tell that there were countless dimensional wedges.

On a whole, the mood of the eight people was stiff.

There were five who were trembling. He could tell they were non-awakenees with a single glance. The mission this time was given to all earthlings. Since awakenees made up less than 10% of the total population, probability-wise, it was normal for there to be more non-awakenees than awakenees. They raised the 'camouflage incense pouch' and the 'wasp-hunting awl' which appeared in mid-air. They held the two items in their hands and broke out into a cold sweat. They each had their own reasons for courageously choosing 'Go', but now that they were about to fight, they were unable to steady their nerves.

Besides them, the other three, including Choi Hyuk, had their own weapons. Since it was common sense for colonizers to sleep with their weapons next to their heads, they had all brought their weapons even though it was unexpected. However, the only person who had also brought their defensive gear was a South American woman with large eyes.

"Wow... Still, it's nice to see people gathered here for a good cause."

She said so refreshingly and comfortably as she blinked her large eyes. Seeing as he could easily understand her even though she was South American, she possessed a 'Language Resonance Device'. The defensive equipment she wore was decent... Unlike her innocent face, she was an expert.

"Really... I feel a strange sense of hope seeing the people gathered here. Haha."

A youth chimed in.

The South American woman looked in each person's eyes as she greeted them, starting with that youth. It seemed she was trying to make them relax. She looked like she was trying to make the novice fighters relax by telling them some things they should be aware of. She was unbelievably kind.

"What is your name? I'm Penelope."

Eventually, she attempted to introduce herself to Choi Hyuk.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't give her the slightest attention. He simply approached the wall and shouted,

“We enter.”

Then, the metallic wall ripped and turned into a transparent membrane. Choi Hyuk entered inside without hesitation. “Hehe...” Penelope awkwardly laughed behind him.



The dimensional wasp’s room was a throbbing purple. It pulsed as if it was alive.

Psshhh.

The dimensional wasp was sort of... It was more like a skeleton angel or devil than a wasp. Tough, black exoskeleton and pulsating muscular fibers. A sharp stinger hung at the end of its tail. The reason why it gave off an angelic impression despite these features was due to its wings that distorted their surroundings into a haze. Its wings weren’t made of film but energy. Its wings spread out splendidly in the room.

Psssh.

Though, unlike its cool exoskeleton, its wings let out a vibrating sound which got on his nerves.

The wasp shook its wings once and the space around it agitated as it flew towards Choi Hyuk. Its head, which seemed to be a bundle of bones, opened to reveal rows of blades as it tried to bite Choi Hyuk’s head.

Crunch!

Then Choi Hyuk used his fist to shatter the wasp’s head. It didn’t matter whether it was its blades or exoskeleton, it was completely smashed.

“...Weak.”

Dimensional wasps could multiply at incredible speeds, alongside their nest, inside a parallel dimension. However, every time they multiplied, their individual power would drop greatly. It was the same as how beer could be fermented with very small bubbles, where the density of each bubble would be small.

The wasp in front of him wasn’t as tough as it looked. If he considered its strength, it was on the lower end amongst 1-star monsters. It wasn’t even as strong as the crook,

which was the first monster he saw. It was an insignificant opponent for Choi Hyuk.

As the wasp died, the purple room rippled and turned black. The black wall split on one side, and the door to the white metallic room, the dimensional wedge, opened.

Choi Hyuk returned to the dimensional wedge in less than 10 seconds. In the white metallic room, the colonizers, who had yet to start, awkwardly stared at Choi Hyuk. Perhaps it was to be expected since he returned in less than 10 seconds.

Looking at their figures, it looked like they were surrounding Penelope and were in the middle of learning fighting tricks.

Choi Hyuk indifferently passed them and shouted at the wall.

“Next!”

As Choi Hyuk shouted, the wall swayed and a new notice appeared.

---

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 1<sup>st</sup> Stage Boundary Region}

Attack progression rate: 0.000001% -> No idea where the queen's room is.

<Possible Actions>

1. Return (Locked)
2. Food Supply (Attack)
3. Continue to attack

---

From the start, there was only one choice he could choose.

“Continue to attack.”

The door opened again. Afterwards, it was simple repetition. The wasps were still weak, and Choi Hyuk returned to the dimensional wedge every 5 seconds. Every time

he returned, he saw the beginner warriors listening to what Penelope was saying. When he returned for the fifth time, there finally was no one in the dimensional wedge. On his seventh, he saw Penelope who had returned from a wasp room. With her ever innocent face, she greeted him friendly with round eyes. Choi Hyuk passed by and re-entered the wasp room. Returned after slicing through the weak wasp inside. He repeated these actions twenty times.

“How boring...”

This was one of the reasons why it was difficult to attack the dimensional wasps’ nest. The nest, which multiplied like bubbles, wasn’t something he could instantly smash apart simply because he was strong. Even if a strong warrior invaded, he would be unable to make any progress within the endlessly multiplying wasp rooms. Even if he killed and killed, it was difficult to clear the multiplying rooms.

Because of this, they needed an absolutely large number of warriors to attack the wasps’ nest. They needed to attack the wasps’ nest together and deteriorate its multiplication.

Just then, when he finished his twenty-seventh repetitive attack and returned, there was a change. A new announcement had appeared on the wall.

{Waiting for the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage Boundary Region Attack to complete... }

The announcement flickered. It was impossible to attack anymore. Choi Hyuk stood inside the room and waited.

Soon, other warriors, who had finished their attack, returned. As they returned one by one, a total of seven people gathered, including Choi Hyuk. The last remaining person didn’t return. During the waiting time, the six, excluding Choi Hyuk, whispered to each other.

“How was it?”

It was Penelope’s gentle voice. It was lively and filled with concern.

“Yes... Maybe it was because of the camouflage incense pouch, but they thought I was a larva and didn’t attack... When I waited and precisely stabbed its neck with the awl, it squirmed then died... However, there was an incident where I was almost cut apart by its teeth as it squirmed...”

The left arm of the man who was speaking was mutilated as blood flowed out. His face distorted in pain when he glanced at his arm. Penelope quickly covered his face, taking his eyes off his wound, and comforted him.

“Shh... Calm down. Don’t look at your wound. That sort of wound will heal by itself if you rest. Because we are awakenees.”

Choi Hyuk began to slowly find her interesting. ‘Are those actions truly out of sincerity?’ Choi Hyuk, who had spent his time amongst Berserkers, found it hard to believe that a colonizer could be so kind.

After passing time like this, the announcement changed.

{1<sup>st</sup> Stage Boundary Region Attack complete. The dimensional wasps’ lair is deteriorating.}

“Ah... Mr. Kimura...”

The moment the announcement popped up, Penelope let out a sad sigh. There were eight people gathered at the start. There were now seven. It seemed that the one known as Kimura had died. Although they were very easy opponents for Choi Hyuk, if he considered that the five were beginners who didn’t even possess 1-star stats but no-star, many more had survived than Choi Hyuk expected. Perhaps it was because of Penelope.

The announcement continued.

---

{Dimensional Wasps’ Lair 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Outer Region}

Attack progression rate: 0% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen’s room.

<Possible Actions>

1. Return to Earth
2. Food Supply

### 3. Continue to attack

\*Warning. If you choose to return, someone in another dimensional wedge will have to face your opponents in your place.

---

The attack progression rate had changed from 1<sup>st</sup> stage to 2<sup>nd</sup> stage. They had skimmed off the bubbles of the boundary region created through multiplying and had taken a step forward.

Then the possible options they could choose in the dimensional wedge were unlocked.

As expected, the most eye-catching option was 'Return to Earth'. Then the warning below it. That was the problem.

"...If I choose to return, someone else would have to fight my opponents as well?... Then, in reverse, doesn't it mean I might have to face double the opponents?"

It was the man who Penelope had sincerely taken care of just now. He said it in a completely exhausted voice. He glanced at his arm which was now barely starting to stanch.

"...I can't. I suffered from just one, I'll die for sure against two."

His voice seemed like he had come to a decision.

Penelope hurriedly grabbed him.

"You can't. Mr. Alberto. If you give up here, someone else will face even more danger!"

Alberto's eyes trembled. He looked at Penelope with a tearful face.

"But... Reversely, the other side might give up."

He was stricken with fear.

"Don't... Don't criticize me. There... There are people who haven't even come here. Why... Why do I..."

He avoided Penelope's eyes and said,

"Sorry... Return!"

Crunch!

The special effect of dimensional teleportation... Space erased his body as if swallowing him.

"Ah..."

Penelope sighed in regret and the remaining beginners murmured. Like how Alberto had given up, others would have given up as well. They may possibly face double the opponents in this fight. To them, who had only now awakened, this was too cruel.

"Sorry... Return!":

Another shouted his return.

Although the rest didn't shout to return... their eyes were wavering.

They may have possibly held good intentions. They chose to fight a battle they could have avoided without hesitation.

However, the problem now wasn't their intentions but others'. 'Just because I don't betray them doesn't mean that the other side, who I've never seen before, can't betray me. Why is it that I need to be this scared, and why is that I need to die like this?'

A cruel test.

The second dilemma, the game was about to begin.

# CHAPTER 71

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (5)

---

The first decision was somewhat easy. Whether they were going to fight to save 1/5 of the non-awakenees or not, one single decision. If they had just closed their eyes and chose, that would have been the end of it. It was a decision emotional people could have chosen romantically, thinking 'I'll do something good for a change!'

However, the second decision they had to make was one based in reality. Because they had already experienced fighting, they could clearly imagine, in frightening detail, the events that would happen later.

Didn't beginner warriors only have one technique anyways?

1. Use the camouflage incense pouch to get close to the dimensional wasp.
2. When the dimensional wasp lets down its guard after smelling the scent of a larva, use the wasp-hunting awl to deal a fatal blow.

This method would work quite well against one wasp. However, what if there were two? Would one stay still even after seeing the other die?

The answer that popped up burrowed into their minds.

'I'll die!'

There was a big difference between 'I might die' and 'I will die'. The moment they thought this, they were stricken with fear.

The crossroads of life and death made their heads spin.

1. If I continue to attack? If someone else doesn't give up, I have a 50% chance of surviving. However, if someone else does give up, I have a high chance of dying. But there is no guarantee that this mission will be successful just because I die. Also, even if the mission was successful, what's the point if I'm dead? I, who bore a sacrifice, will die, while the one who gave up cowardly will live instead.

2. If I give up on attacking? I have a 100% chance of surviving for the moment. If someone else doesn't give up and fights well, the chances of successfully completing the mission will greatly increase as well. If the other person gives up as well, although the chances of successfully completing the mission will drop, I, at least, avoid the situation where I alone bear the sacrifice. It was fair.

For those who thought of their life first, there wasn't a need to trouble themselves over the decision. Giving up on attacking was the answer. Those who fought in case they would be part of the 1/5 non-awakenees to die quickly chose to return. They were now awakenees anyways and wouldn't be part of the 1/5 to die.

Those who still remained were those who had other things that tugged on their minds besides that. Whether it was family, principle, or their natural personality.

...Or worry about Earth's future. Those who were quick witted already felt it. That the annihilation of 1/5 non-awakenees wouldn't be all. That if they all gave up and failed this mission, it might somehow result in the collapse of Earth. However, it was also a reason that held no weight right now.

'When I'm about to die right now?'

What filled their vision wasn't of what was far away, but what was right in front of their eyes.

One thought came up repeatedly in some people's heads.

'Ah... I shouldn't have come from the beginning.'

Choi Hyuk passed through the middle of that hesitation and pain as if it was nothing.

Dilemma was being indecisive between two choices. Because of this, those who had already thrown away the alternatives didn't fall into a dilemma.

"A waste of time."

Choi Hyuk thought, 'It's better to kill another monster in the time you thought about it.'

"Resume."

Choi Hyuk walked out of the dimensional wedge with surefooted steps.

“Puha... That fellow, he has a straightforward personality. He’s him, right? The person who’s famous these days. The Demon King, Choi Hyuk.”

The man who had been silent until now said as he jingled the sword which hung at his waist. He looked around at the beginner warriors who had fallen into a state of confusion.

“Don’t feel so dejected. The first awakenees were thrown into this fight without a choice. From my perspective, this is an opportunity to get stronger comfortably. Crying already... Anyways, take care.”

Then, he walked out of the dimensional wedge, swinging his arms.

Looking at him from behind, Penelope thought that it was time for her to leave as well. The more deserters there were, the greater the experts needed to try their best. In her sweet voice, she said to the beginner warriors,

“Don’t worry or blame yourself too much. It’s normal for you to be scared. Then... Please take good care of yourselves.”

Penelope prepared to risk her life as she told others that being scared was normal. Although she looked soft and innocent, she too was a tenacious person who had already thrown away all of the other alternatives.



There wasn’t much of a difference between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage. Although the monsters became a bit stronger, this made no difference to Choi Hyuk. The wasps had still not reached the 2-star level. Occasionally, another wasp would be added, becoming two, but they still only took one strike anyways...

The bigger difference was the dimensional wedge he returned to after attacking a room. In the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, he always returned to the same dimensional wedge, but this time, it was always different.

Thanks to this, Choi Hyuk was able to see all sorts of different groups.

While Choi Hyuk repeatedly attacked 10 rooms, there were dimensional wedges filled

with agonizing beginner fighters. Perhaps it was because of this, but the attack rate went up at a ridiculously slow rate.

---

{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 1<sup>st</sup> Stage Outer Region}

Attack progression rate: 0.00001% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.

<Possible Actions>

1. Return
  2. Food Supply
  3. Continue to attack
- 

When he had returned after attacking by himself during the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, the attack rate was 0.000001%. It was a percentage with five 0s after the decimal... As a fraction, it was 1 out of 100 million. That meant there were at least 100 million rooms. He was also able to infer that at least tens of millions of warriors participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage from this. So, although Choi Hyuk attacked 27 rooms by himself, his level of contribution was insignificant.

It was the same this time as well. Choi Hyuk alone attacked 10 times, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage attack rate was now only 0.00001%. Four 0s after the decimal... As a fraction, it was 1 out of 10 million. Because the majority of the recruited warriors were beginner fighters, and since they didn't act, the attack rate had barely risen.

Still, Choi Hyuk didn't mind. As he silently continued to attack and clear away the dimensional wasps, the dimensional wedge had, at some point, become completely empty. The ones who had decided to give up had given up, and those who decided to attack had gone to attack.

Only then did the attack rate start to move.

Even though many gave up, since there still were a lot of people who continued, the

attack began to rise quickly.

{Attack progression rate: 3.78577% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.}

However, it was clear that the risk for beginner warriors was higher compared to the 1<sup>st</sup> stage. Choi Hyuk met people with all sorts of hesitation and pain.

After finishing his attack and returning to the dimensional wedge, Choi Hyuk was met with a shivering woman. Her arm had been completely cut off. She sat still, unable to select 'Return to Earth' or 'Continue to attack'. Perhaps she was waiting for the wound on her arm to stanch.

Choi Hyuk simply passed by. She too didn't look at Choi Hyuk.

{Attack progression rate: 11.57325% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.}

Choi Hyuk finished his attack again and entered a dimensional wedge.

This time, there was a man. He was a beginner warrior. He mumbled to himself,

"Fight? Return? Fight? Return?"

When Choi Hyuk walked past him, he hurriedly called out to Choi Hyuk,

"Hey! Please wait!"

But Choi Hyuk passed by as if he couldn't hear him.

{Attack progression rate: 51.35781% -> Barely started to deduce the location of the queen's room.}

The beginner warriors were definitely doing their share. Nonetheless, at some point, the attack progression rate gradually started to slow down. They were fatigued from fighting, and the casualties were growing. Once these beginner warriors narrowly returned to the dimensional wedge, the continuous choice of whether to return or attack unceasingly corroded their will. They were exhausted and scared. The thought of 'I did my share,' slowly bared its head.

It was more than understandable. But, for the success of the mission, they couldn't admit it. When they considered the dimensional wasps' nest that could endlessly replicate itself, a decline in their attack rate could be fatal.

Choi Hyuk was clearly aware of this. 'The attack rate can't slow down.' Yet, this wasn't something he could do by himself. There were 10 million from the start. Even if Choi Hyuk alone attacked 100 or 1000 times, it wouldn't make a noticeable difference. So... A special action was required. He didn't have time to think intricately.

'Now's not the time to be picky.'

Choi Hyuk resolved himself. The advancement evaluation was a key point he had to pass for his revenge. For his revenge, he was literally willing to do 'anything'.

Just in time, the environment was becoming more advantageous for him. The dimensional wedges which had been scattered everywhere to destroy the expanding dimensional wasps' nest came together and grew larger. The dimensional wedges, which fitted 8 people at the start, had now become large enough for tens of people to access it. That meant... that it was now possible to control the crowds.

Choi Hyuk tested something before acting.

'Continue to attack.'

He didn't say it out loud, but only repeated the command in his mind.

Fortunately, nothing happened.

There were a few beginner warriors gathered in the dimensional wedge Choi Hyuk was in.

They were in the middle of taking a break, talking to each other while waiting for their trifling wounds to stanch.

"I have a 3-year-old daughter. So I can't give up. If my daughter somehow becomes part of the 1/5 and dies, I will probably never forgive myself."

"But what happen to your daughter if you die?"

"Since she has a great dad, she'll be fine."

From the beginning, these people had chosen to take the challenge instead of running away within the 10 seconds given to them. Although others gave up and left, they didn't flee even though they may have had to fight twice the number of enemies. The ones who were still alive until now were, in general, out of the ordinary. They had resolved their will.

But, even still, it wasn't as though everyone was of the same mind.

While people exchanged their resolutions and words of encouragement, someone slumped his head and mumbled,

"...Sorry... I'm sorry... This is it for me. Re...!"

Smack!

The word he wanted to say was 'Return'. However, he was unable to say it. Choi Hyuk appeared as if he had sprouted from the ground and blocked his mouth with his right hand.

'As expected, since he can't talk, the return won't activate.'

Things went as he planned.

"No, what is this!"

The surprised crowd stood up from Choi Hyuk's sudden use of violence. Yet, Choi Hyuk ignored them. He blocked the squirming man's mouth and pushed him towards the metallic wall.

Then he warned him.

In a quiet voice only he could hear.

"If you bring up 'Re' of 'Return' again, I'll cut your right arm. And if you say it again, I'm going to slit your throat. Now, the only thing you can say is that you will attack."

After his warning, Choi Hyuk let go of the man he had his hand on. The man shook Choi Hyuk off and furiously expressed his protest. Although, it didn't last long.

"This crazy...! Gaack!"

The man was about to swear at Choi Hyuk. Suddenly, his right arm was rolling on the cold, metallic floor. He didn't even see Choi Hyuk unsheathe his sword, but his arm was already cut off.

Choi Hyuk calmly warned him,

“There's not much time. Go attack.”

The man, filled with pain, was unknowingly about to curse again.

But, Choi Hyuk was a step faster as he cut him off and warned him again,

“This time is your neck.”

The man's voice, which was on the verge of sounding out, miraculously halted. Choi Hyuk simply stared hard at the man, who had broken out into a cold sweat due to pain, and ordered,

“Go.”

Feeling fear, the man opened his mouth.

“Con... Continue to attack.”

A path to the dimensional wasps' nest appeared. The man's face became pale white. The man, whose arm had been cut off, looked back and forth between Choi Hyuk and the pathway as he showed a desperate expression.

“Please... Please don't do this.”

Yet, there was no change in Choi Hyuk's expression.

“Go.”

The man, in a state of panic, shouted,

“Why me! What did I do wrong?! I... I... risked my life and came here to take responsibility... I fought as much as I could! However, I'm scared now... I want to live... Is that wrong?! Huh? I should have ignored the announcement and slept like others! Then, I wouldn't have met a crazy bastard like...”

Smack.

Choi Hyuk wordlessly kicked the man and pushed him through the pathway. As soon as the man entered, the pathway disappeared, and the smooth, metallic wall reappeared.

“...”

Choi Hyuk, who had been silent for a moment, only then turned his gaze towards the people gathered in the dimensional wedge. They were all beginner warriors. They were dumbstruck at Choi Hyuk’s sudden act of violence. However, because he looked undoubtedly stronger than them, they didn’t dare attempt to restrain him.

Choi Hyuk looked at them as he gripped his sword. Then he sincerely thought,

‘Should I kill them all?’

Grip.

The moment Choi Hyuk made up his mind, the inside of the dimensional wedge became chaotic.

‘Mon... Monster... A real monster!’

A monster that was incomparable to the dimensional wasps was here with them. The senses all over their body began to give off warnings. Their hair stood up. Their animalistic instincts shouted, ‘Danger! Flee!’

“Co... Continue to attack!”

“Continue to attack!”

Beginner warriors chose to attack in order leave the dimensional wedge like scattering grasshoppers. Danger also made them unconsciously reveal their inner thoughts.

“Re... Gaahk!”

“Ret... Kyak!”

Those who attempted to flee by choosing 'return' instead of 'attack' all had their arms cut off. Choi Hyuk's ears didn't miss even the smallest whispers, and his Karma Blade pierced through the air as he didn't give them even the slightest opportunity.

"Devil! Devil!!!"

"Don't do this, please! Please? Don't do this!"

Choi Hyuk pushed the ones who were trembling in fear into the pathways leading to attack.

As they cried, cursed Choi Hyuk, or even cursed themselves, who had chosen to fight... they all passed through the pathways leading to attack and disappeared.

To be honest, they weren't people who should have been treated like such. When others didn't even come to fight, they were the ones who willingly chose to fight. When others gave up on the first choice and returned, they were the ones who fought at least one more time. Although their hearts eventually broke, they were still more courageous than anyone.

Unfortunately, for the completion of this mission, they didn't have any other alternatives and were cruelly required to change their attitudes at this moment. Although their will in coming to the battlefield may have been noble, there was nothing noble in this place. It was simply hell. The abode of devils, who would do anything for victory.

Choi Hyuk was one of those devils. He desperately wanted the successful completion of the mission, but he wasn't good-natured and his method of handling people wasn't good. To them, this was a tragedy.

Choi Hyuk's actions had now changed. When he finished his attack and entered a dimensional wedge, he would emit a murderous aura and make everyone inside the dimensional wedge flee. He left those who fled into the attack pathways but forcefully pushed those who tried to flee into the attack pathways.

He himself became an entity of irrationality and forcefully erased people's freedom of choice.

"You... will one day pay the price,"

Was what someone said. Choi Hyuk admitted it as well. That all the curses and verbal abuse that they poured onto him were reasonable. However, he still continued.

It wasn't like he was 100% certain.

'Would there be an effect just because I do this myself?'

Tens of millions of people had to act. Just because Choi Hyuk was doing this, didn't mean that the progression rate would increase significantly. It could very well be possible he was making others die or get wounded in vain.

But, even still,

'This is more effective than me repeatedly attacking alone... And it won't be just me.'

He was simply doing what he could right at this moment. Choi Hyuk even used the resentment and curses directed at him to fuel his burning revenge. His rage gradually increased.

Fortunately for Choi Hyuk, it wasn't only him who acted after feeling a sense of crisis.

The majority of sovereigns also had similar realizations as Choi Hyuk.

'We can't succeed unless the beginner warriors act.'

They orchestrated or threatened the beginner warriors in their own way.

Once these actions accumulated, a clear change appeared in the progression rate, which had slowed down.

{Attack progression rate: 78.11852% -> The deduced location of the queen's room is very imprecise.}

Although they were each in a place where they couldn't see one another, because their individual methods of increasing the progression rate accumulated and accumulated, they had finally created an immense result.

{Attack progression rate: 100%}

{2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Outer Region Attack complete. Dimensional wasps' lair is deteriorating.}

Some used cruel and irrational methods, while others used touching methods to make people act. Either way, they felt as if a sudden shower had passed, leaving them feeling clammy and downcast. People despaired, prayed and bit their lips in front of the dimensional wedge, where they had to choose either to 'give up' or 'attack'. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage attack, which felt as if it would never end, was complete.

It was all due to the gruesome fight of the beginner warriors who survived until the end, whether it was by their own volition, because they were influenced by others or were threatened.

Rumble!

With the completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, the dimensional wedge shook heavily.

# CHAPTER 72

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (6)

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As the rumbling continued, the metallic walls gradually became transparent. Once the walls became transparent, they could see the silhouettes of the people beyond the walls.

As if they had entered a mirror room, the dimensional wedges were lined up endlessly. They were in the process of connecting every dimensional wedge. Due to the transparent walls, the people, who had been scattered throughout the dimensional wedges, were able to identify each other's faces.

"You were alive!"

The ones who saw people they knew shouted happily. However-

Bang!

When they tried to get closer, a faintly shining wall blocked their paths.

"Huh?"

The walls between the dimensional wedges had disappeared, but walls between people had appeared instead. Everyone was split up into independent spaces and were rearranged. The space given to one person was only 1m x 1m x 2.5m. People were placed into these semi-transparent boxes and were arranged into rows beside, below, or above each other.

Then, once the arrangement was complete, the floor became transparent. They saw empty space below the floor, and below that, they saw a purplish grid. It was a familiar shape – The dimensional wasps' nest. However, it was more enormous than what they had seen until now, and the purplish walls had turned semi-transparent, giving off a dangerous vibe. They could clearly see the wasps hovering inside their nest.

If they took an overall view, they were arranged in a circle. It felt like seeing a stage from the top of an amphitheater.

Just then, the rumblings stopped.

An announcement appeared in front of their eyes.

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{Dimensional Wasps' Lair 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage Inner Nest Region}

Attack progression rate: None. The attack is complete the moment the queen is killed.

Current situation: Obtained a route to track down the location of the queen's room.

The dimensional wasps' nest has been drastically reduced. The dimensional wasps have become much stronger.

As there isn't a significant difference in density between levels in the inner nest region, warriors are able to pass through different rooms with their own power. However, your speed will decline. On the other hand, wasps are able to pass through rooms without any restrictions.

Because you need to deduce the queen's room while following the route and exploring, you will be divided into teams and will infiltrate one by one.

<Possible Actions>

1. Return to Earth
2. Food Supply
3. Infiltrate

\*Warning. As the dimensional wasps' nest has become stronger, it is impossible for dimensional wedges to intervene. If you choose to infiltrate, you will be unable to return to the dimensional wedges until the attack has completely ended.

\*Warning. The wasps, that felt threatened, are preparing for a large-scale counterattack. The first team to infiltrate will face the most danger.

---

There was still an option to return. However, because everyone was separated into individual, transparent boxes, there was no longer a way to force their decision. If it was like this, there was a high chance that many would choose to return.

Yet, Choi Hyuk smiled. That didn't matter anymore.

When he read the announcement information, the progression rate was 'none'.

It meant that this was different from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages where they needed to attack in numbers to deteriorate the growing dimensional wasp's nest. Now was the time to directly deduce the location of the queen's room and kill her. They didn't know where the queen was or when she would appear, and if they failed to kill her, even though she was right in front of them, they would fail the mission. This was the reason why the concept of a 'progression rate' didn't work anymore.

Also, the meaning behind this fact was clear to Choi Hyuk.

'I'll finally get to warm up.'

He could simply fight without caring about others. That moment had finally arrived.

However, there was a procedure which allowed them to influence those still remaining.

{First, form teams. The 38 sovereigns currently participating will each command a team. Free warriors, who are not affiliated with any sovereign, are able to choose whichever team they want. There is a chance for sovereigns, who wish to gather team members, to speak. No one is able to return to Earth until the sovereigns are done.}

A new announcement had appeared.

The moment that announcement appeared, before people could finish reading it, a sovereign requested to speak.

A blond, handsome middle-aged man appeared in front of them.

{Nice to meet you. I am Richard. I am known as the Sovereign of Balance amongst colonizers.}

He possessed gentle eyes and a confident voice. He felt trustworthy simply through

his expression and voice.

{There is one thing I want to say. Everyone, please do not think there will be another chance. Please think that there isn't another chance. Do you remember the announcement that appeared before we came here? Exactly. It said 'First Advancement Evaluation'. If there is a 'first', it means there will also be a 'second'. The next test may dig into our selfishness and distrust even more skillfully. That is why we must win. We must win and set an example. We need to know what it means to be victorious. We need proof that we can trust each other. We had a hard time coming to this point. If we can't win here, we will undoubtedly lose next time. You think the deaths of non-awakenees will be the end of it? That won't be the case. It seems many have forgotten, but please remember. We, humans, are still Consumables. Please fight alongside me. To those who fight under my team, I will definitely repay you on behalf of my clan. I will even take care of your families.}

His speech followed a proper rhythm, the content was reasonable, and the rewards he promised were enticing, such was why the people's expressions were as friendly as ever. As expected of the 'Sovereign of Balance' who was judged to have the most outstanding leadership skills amongst the sovereigns.

In fact, his method of guiding beginner warriors to participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage was the same. He had approached them friendly, patted their backs, promised his personal support, and persuaded them with reasons why they must fight. Also, people trusted his words because of how he had lived until now. He was a completely different style of sovereign compared to Choi Hyuk.

"Wahhh!"

Richard's speech ended with a storm of applause.

After Richard's speech ended, a young Latin woman's face appeared this time. If one looked closely, she was young, however, perhaps it was due to her deep eyes and stubbornly shut lips, but she didn't look young at all.

"Ah... It's unni<sup>{1}</sup>!"

Penelope was near Choi Hyuk. When she met Choi Hyuk's gaze with her large, gentle eyes, she smiled sweetly and waved her hand.

Only then did Choi Hyuk figure out the secret behind her kindness.

‘Is she part of the Camilla clan I’ve heard about...?’

{Hello. I am Camilla. I am also known by the unmerited name, the ‘Sovereign of Paradise’, amongst colonizers. I would first like to express my gratitude and respect to all of you who have arrived here after enduring this difficult fight. I am very happy to be able to meet with you all. And I request to you. Give us your courage once again. The reward for those who are good-natured and courageous is the meeting of other courageous people itself. Do not be afraid. If you bring up your courage, you will definitely not be alone. I will become your brother and sister. The Camilla clan and I will be at the front. We will make it so that no one dies before us. Likeminded brothers and sisters, cooperate with the Camilla clan.}

Camilla and her clan members famously possessed the ‘Savior’ fate. Their karma would increase the more they saved and helped others, and the greater number of people who trusted and relied on them.

The Camilla clan was also famous for being a small clan comparable to the Berserkers. It was because people needed to have at least an 80% aptitude in the ‘Savior’ fate to join. Unless they naturally possessed a reciprocal personality, one could never get over an 80% aptitude, so the Camilla clan became a group of people who were rarely seen these days.

Because they were a group that possessed high morals and reciprocity, it was easy to obtain their help, but it was very hard to become a part of them. In an anarchy like now, there was no way they could maintain a ‘paradise’ without blood and steel. To the groups who attempted to trick them or exert an evil influence on those they were protecting, the Camilla clan would retaliate with zero tolerance. Especially the ones who specialized as ‘executors’ within the clan. They were famously known to be as cruel as the Inquisition of the Middle Ages.

They were a group which simultaneously possessed both a warm, heavenly interior and a cold, strict exterior. Due to this, the ‘Sovereign of Paradise’ not only held the positive meaning, but also a sarcastic implication of their exclusivity.

Unlike how almost everyone reacted positively towards Richard’s speech, the reactions Camilla received were mostly positive, however, they were divided. Some felt deep excitement and were touched, whilst others felt ill will towards her instructing tone.

However, since she pledged that she would fight at the very front, she couldn't help but make a favorable impression. Didn't it say in the announcement? That 'the first team to infiltrate would face the most danger'. Of course, the number of people who would apply to join Camilla's team would be small because of this, but on the other hand, they would be able to obtain indisputable new recruits.

Camilla's speech ended with applause as well.

Then, Choi Hyuk's face appeared in front of everyone.

"Huh?"

"Now, really..."

The reactions when Choi Hyuk appeared were greatly different from before. The interest, expectations, and respect, among others, they had shown just now were almost non-existent.

Choi Hyuk's vision was dyed in a dark red like the sunset. Hostility and murderous intent. Everywhere, people were staring at Choi Hyuk. The majority were beginner warriors. There was no doubt that the actions Choi Hyuk took during the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage accumulated a large amount of hostility.

Yet, Choi Hyuk's expression didn't change. He simply said what he wanted.

"Berserkers, gather. We infiltrate at once."

In fact, his words weren't directed at others, but instead, was a message to the Berserkers who were scattered here and there. He was not interested in gathering other team members.

"Infiltrate."

The moment Choi Hyuk said this, an ivory sandy pathway formed in front of the box that surrounded him. The ivory sandy path formed a circular field at the center of the donut-like arrangement of people.

Choi Hyuk steadily walked on the path.

Thousands of Berserkers from every direction walked down the sandy paths towards

the field in the center. There wasn't even the slightest hesitation.

“Haa... Now that I think about it, the announcement said that you couldn't return to Earth during the speeches, but it never said anything about not being able to infiltrate.”

Richard said as his eyes shined. His gaze fell on the Sovereign of Paradise, Camilla, far away. Even she, who looked like not even a needle would get past her, currently had a dumbfounded expression.

“Keu. Now that she's showing an expression like that, she finally looks like a woman in her twenties. She's so scary since she's always pompous all the time. Anyways, Sovereign Camilla said she would take the lead, but she lost the initiative.”

It was as he said. While she showed the personality of the Camilla clan and was waiting to gather team members, the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk had chosen to attack immediately. As if it was a waste spending time like this.

Soon, all the Berserkers gathered at the field.

{The first infiltrating team has been formed. The first infiltrating team can begin their infiltration any time their sovereign gives the order.}

The announcement changed.

Choi Hyuk unsheathed his sword.

Screech, clang!

The Predator's Blade jolted as it left its sheath. The sound was heard by the millions of people gathered here.

“Let's go,”

Said Choi Hyuk.

The sandy field scattered and disappeared. The Berserkers began to fall towards the dimensional wasps' nest below.

Pshhhh!

Whoosh!

As if they sensed a dimensional infiltration, the wasps, which were hovering back and forth inside the nest, simultaneously shook their wings and raised their vigor.

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{1} What a younger woman calls an older woman in Korean.

# CHAPTER 73

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (7)

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The Berserkers fell. The dimensional wasps spread their wings, which rippled like a haze, and flew towards the Berserkers. The wasps gathered into a dark cloud, making the thousands of falling Berserkers look insignificant.

Pssshh.

Whoosh!

The sound of their flapping wings was irritating. The sound was like a sudden rain shower, then a waterfall, and then a landslide. The sound grew louder, becoming unbearable.

The number of dimensional wasps overwhelmed their vision, and the sound of their flapping wings was unbearable. Although they looked similar to the wasps they had seen until now, they were different. The onlookers trembled at the wasps' explosive vigor. They were only watching from above, but the beginner warriors were already frozen with fear, unable to move their arms or legs.

Yet, the Berserkers were not the least bit afraid. There were even some who looked cheerful as if they were enjoying an extreme sport.

An unhesitant freefall.

But, Choi Hyuk felt strangely uneasy. His eyes were locked onto the incoming dimensional wasps. The vigor of the dimensional wasps looked fierce but felt somewhat light. Choi Hyuk thought that they were inflating their vigor like balloons.

He activated his karma trait, Mind's Eye. With his eyes dyed blue, he was able to clearly see the flow and structure of the dimensional wasps' karma. When he saw this, he was able to figure out the reason behind his unease.

He shouted,

“Prepare for impact!”

At the same time, the Berserkers' second-in-command, Baek Seoin, shouted. Like Choi Hyuk, his eyes were dyed blue.

“Damn! They are fireworks! Deploy the Karma Barriers!”

Crash!

Booom!!

The dimensional wasps, which were gathered together in a black cloud, simultaneously turned white. Their crazily flapping energy wings had started to explode. They were white fireworks. A cluster of stars, which shined bright as the Sun, formed inside the dimensional rift and created to prevent mutual interference between the dimensional wedges and the dimensional wasps' nest.

Even as this cluster filled their vision, the Berserkers didn't bat an eye.

Bang, bang, bang!

Karma Barriers surged out of their bodies like deployed parachutes. The Karma Barriers and Karma Blades they personally learned from Choi Hyuk were reputed to be the best amongst colonizers.

Each person's karma color was different, and different colored marbles, formed by karma, fell into the cluster of stars below, which expanded with explosions.

The beginner warriors who watched this gulped down their saliva.

“Oh my god... What is that...”

The explosion had been created by the self-destruction of the black cloud of wasps. They could almost feel the heat from the blast from where they were standing.

“They said the first team to infiltrate would face the most danger...”

They never thought it would be to this degree.

They had fought in the wasp rooms individually until now, but to suddenly change to a group battle... Just this fact scared them, but they suddenly had to face self-destructing wasps? Wasn't the level of difficulty too different?

As the explosion hadn't yet ceased, they couldn't see the Berserkers who were within.

"Are they alive...?"

'No way.'

The beginner warriors could not imagine someone surviving that blast. Until yesterday, they had lived in a peaceful world as non-awakenees. Although they knew that awakenees had superhuman power and had heard they were fighting a gruesome war against monsters, that was all. Seeing with their eyes was completely different from their imagination.

The aftermath of the explosion subsided.

Someone shouted,

"They are alive!"

"They are fighting!"

While the people above were distracted by the explosion, the Berserkers were already in a bloody battle against the guardian wasps within the dimensional wasps' nest.

The exterior appearance of the guardian wasps was identical to the wasps they had fought until now. However, they were stronger as if they were completely different existences, only their appearances were identical. Even if they compared them to the self-destructing wasps, their vigor was on another level.

"Gahk!"

A Berserker was flung away after being hit by a wasp's tail. The poison spread and his face became pale. Even though he saw this clearly, Ryu Hyunsung was unable to help him immediately.

"Damn... Late 2-star or early 3-star... This isn't good."

Ryu Hyunsung wielded his saber as he examined the wasps. A Karma Blade erupted out of his saber. His saber exquisitely sliced off the wasp's legs, tail, and mandibles before slicing its neck. Considering his stats, which were approaching 4-star, these late 2-star to early 3-star level wasps weren't a problem for him at all. The problem was

the dimensional wasps' nest itself.

Ryu Hyunsung tried to pass through the semi-transparent dimensional wall between the rooms in order to help the Berserkers who were being pushed back. The moment he tried to pass through, his body slowed down as if he was moving in slow motion.

“Keuak! This thing!”

Ryu Hyunsung let out a tantrum and exploded the karma within his body, only then did the purplish wall ripple and subside, allowing him to pass through smoothly.

“To do this every time...”

Since it was able to annoy Ryu Hyunsung, who was heralded as a top expert amongst the Berserkers, it wasn't easy for regular Berserkers to pass through these dimensional walls. The consumption of stamina was enormous.

The dimensional wasps' nest was sectioned into countless rooms, each divided by purplish semi-transparent walls. They called these walls, dimensional walls. When humans passed through these walls, their movements would become extremely slow, and to offset this slowness, they would have to use up a significant amount of karma.

Yet, the guardian wasps weren't affected. The wasps flew around as if the walls didn't exist. It was an indisputably disadvantageous battleground. The wasps were highly mobile while the Berserkers' mobility was bogged down.

On top of that, the Berserkers were scattered amongst the countless rooms.

This was due to the self-destruction of the wasps at the start that was not only dangerous but also had the effect of scattering the members of the infiltrating team. The Berserkers were spread out into different rooms, and it was impossible for the Berserkers to fight as a group, leading them to face the risk of being defeated one after the other by the guardian wasps, that could easily pass through the walls.

What made the situation even worse was that each guardian wasp was at the level of veteran colonizers, and if they compared their stats, they would either be equal or above normal Berserkers.

The Berserkers were forced to fight these enemies by themselves, unable to support each other.

Still, they weren't intimidated.

When the guardian wasps flapped their wings, rattled their black exoskeletons and opened their mouths, which split into ten sections, the Berserkers actually became even more vigorous.

“Come at me, asshole!”

In a pinch, they sacrificed their arms and struck the wasps' necks. Even in moments where they were unable to defend, when their necks were cut, or when they were dying from poison, the Berserkers still took down a wasp with them. The Berserkers, who had been tempered through countless fights, took at least three wasps with them on their road to hell. On their last breath, they would deal one final sharp strike.

“Kuahk!”

{Kieeeeeeh!}

The screams of the Berserkers and the wasps were unending. There was no time spent on finding the other's weaknesses. Within seconds after a fight broke out, a wasp or a Berserker would die. In a war of attrition, where they would either kill or be killed, the Berserkers showed no signs of damping vigor. Instead, since the wasps were pushed back by their vigor, more and more wasps had to swarm in.

While spectating, even though their teeth chattered at this hopeless war of attrition, they also felt strangely moved.

“They really fight well...”

Then, another announcement appeared due to the Berserkers' actions.

{The enemy's defensive line has fallen into a state of confusion. Still have not confirmed the route to the queen's room. Second team, infiltrate.}

The second team was the Camilla clan. The Camilla clan were hit and scattered by the self-destructing explosion on their way down too. It was the same for the third, fourth and fifth teams. However, because the number of self-destructing wasps were noticeably smaller than the number that had self-destructed when the Berserkers infiltrated, they were able to safely land even while protecting the beginner warriors. Although there was no way to stop them from being scattered throughout the

dimensional wasps' nest, they were able to quickly get into formation before the guardian wasps attacked them because the Berserkers had gathered the wasps' attention.

Just then, the usefulness of the beginner warriors was revealed.

{Due to the increase of infiltrating members, the speed of locating the queen's room has become quicker.}

{If you use the wasp-hunting awl given to you, you are able to nullify the walls in the wasps' nest.}

This was the announcement which appeared after later teams joined.

The beginner warriors, who had chosen to fight instead of returning to Earth, were able to quicken the speed at which they were locating the queen's room by their sheer numbers. Not only that, but the weapons, given only to them, were able to melt down the walls which were tormenting the Berserkers.

From then, the beginner warriors became miners. The beginner warriors would gather around the purplish walls and pierce holes in them with the awls. Every time they pierced a hole, the wall would become more transparent until it disappeared completely. When the walls were removed like this, they were able to go to and from different rooms like normal. Although it took 20 beginner warriors a minute to remove a wall, it was an essential task for the group battle.

By the time the guardian wasps, that were busy with the Berserkers, found out about this, the later teams had already gained space and gotten into formation.

It was slowly becoming a worthwhile fight.

As more teams infiltrated, the pressure from the wasps gradually lessened. However, it was still an even fight. It didn't look easy to completely push or annihilate the wasps. When the dimensional wasps were at a disadvantage, they would move the fight to regions where dimensional walls still stood. Although they tried their best to push forward and remove the dimensional walls, the fight couldn't help but be dragged out.

However, even during these moments, they were constantly deducing the location of the queen's room, and at some point, the location of the queen's room was announced.

They learned this information as if they had suddenly remembered something they had forgotten. They suddenly knew where they had to go.

The warriors, who had become tired due to the long drawn out fight, were instantly fired up.

“Good! Attack! Let’s go!”

In order to create a path to the queen’s room, each sovereign placed their veteran warriors in the lead to push the wasps back before sending in the beginner warriors to melt the dimensional walls.

Psshsh!

“Kuahk!”

“Gaahk!”

Of course, to resist them, the guardian wasps’ attacks became fiercer, increasing the number of casualties.

The Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, who had been quietly fighting until now, started to make his move. From the start, his objective was the queen, which was why he felt reluctant to use his skills when he was unsure of the queen’s location. Even though he saw the deaths of Berserkers, he only fought dimensional wasps at a suitable pace, only lending a hand at critical moments. He had not used all his strength.

However, now was the time for him to use his full strength. Choi Hyuk suddenly showed off one of the strongest skills he possessed.

It was a skill that could melt the dimensional walls without the wasp-hunting awls.

“Instant Void Annihilation!”

His sword cut through the air and ripped open a dimensional wall.

“Let’s go!”

Every time he swung his sword, he would rip open a dimensional wall which obstructed his path. The Berserkers, who were feeling greater exhaustion because

they had to pass through the walls without the help of beginner warriors, shouted, “Woaahhh!” and rushed out like fish from a ripped net. They began to run amok like a mass jailbreak of vicious criminals.

“What... What are they?”

This scene looked similar to a natural phenomenon, like a typhoon or blizzard.

The Berserkers rushed past them like a gale. The guardian wasps melted and disappeared like sugar in hot water.

There were even quite a few warriors whose lives were saved by standing in the rushing path of the Berserkers.

“W... What the...”

Not even 30 seconds had passed since the location of the queen was announced, but the Berserkers had already run off so far that the other sovereigns were no longer able to see them.

“Hurry! Hurry up and follow them!”

The other sovereigns, a step too late, followed the path Choi Hyuk had ripped apart. However, after around 5 minutes had passed, they heard cheers.

“Wahhhh!”

An announcement followed shortly after.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk eliminated the queen wasp. Sovereign Choi Hyuk and his team members will be given additional rewards.}

“What? Already?”

The fight had been long and tiring. However, once the objective had been located, the end was pitiful. It was all because the monster that had endured until now had suddenly gone berserk. The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage began and ended with the Berserkers.

“...Let’s just forget what I suffered.”

Although it wasn't the case for all the beginner warriors, to many, this served as a trigger to silently bury their grudge against Choi Hyuk.

# CHAPTER 74

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (8)

---

There was no announcement when they returned. There weren't even any events where they congratulated or consoled the soldiers who returned after saving more than a billion lives. They simply returned suddenly, without anyone knowing. Life was progressing as usual, and only they had returned from hell.

Chirp, chirp.

A bird chirped.

The day they returned to was sweeter and warmer than yesterday, the morning of a spring day.

The cool, yet soft breeze and the flowery scent which accompanied it created a stark contrast to their blood soaked clothes and the acidic stench of the dimensional wasps' bodily fluids.

"...I'm alive!"

Even though there was no fanfare, the beginner warriors, who had returned from hell, were moved. For colonizers with lots of experience, this hell was something they were used to, and they didn't feel anything new.

Chirp, chirp.

Still, the bird was pleasant to listen to.



"There will probably be almost no flowers blooming by spring next year. Since there won't be any flowers, the number of insects will drop drastically, and since there won't be any insects, birds won't sing. A silent spring will come."

Naro's white hologram spread its mitten-like hands apart and shook them before lowering them towards the floor. Then, while shaking its head, it covered its mouth as

it said, 'A spring of silence will come.'

Although it could speak Korean more fluently than Koreans, its unique mime was still the same. Accompanying its mime-like actions, the images of what it was thinking were telepathically transmitted as well.

"Hu... Rachel Carson<sup>{1}</sup>... You even read books now? It's quite the classic."

Baek Seoin was surprised at the passage Naro used. He had already been surprised when it had perfectly mastered Korean in a single day. However, it still did not know how to read in Korean back then. It had never read a book before, and it had yet to know how to access the internet. But, after only a day had passed, by the time they returned from the advancement evaluation, the fellow had changed.

"Yes. I succeeded in accessing the internet yesterday. I can now use most of the languages used online."

As if it was bragging, it twirled around in place.

Although it had a simple appearance, in reality, it was an artificial intelligence which possessed superintelligence far beyond that of a human's. Because its abilities were beyond his imagination, Baek Seoin felt somewhat overwhelmed.

Nonetheless, in a tone which sounded as if things had become easier rather than being surprised, Choi Hyuk asked,

"Really? That's good. Then tell me the global trends."

Even when it was abruptly requested for 'global trends', the super-intelligent artificial intelligence Naro selected and reported topics Choi Hyuk would be interested in.

"First... The number of identified participants of the advancement evaluation is around 20 million. If we consider those not identified as well, I estimate there to be around 30-40 million in total."

It was a number that didn't even account for 1% of the world's population. That was the number of people who had willingly decided to fight.

"The majority of the sovereigns participated in the advancement evaluation. Of the 40 total sovereigns, two sovereigns have been confirmed to not have participated."

“Really? Who are the two?”

He had been curious about this. The number of teams formed during the attack on the dimensional wasps’ nest was 38. Two sovereigns were missing.

“The Clown Sovereign, Freeman, and the Sovereign of Opportunity, Nasir. They were caught going out.”

“...Even though, as sovereigns, they should be clearly aware of what the Consumables fate is, they didn’t participate...”

Choi Hyuk tapped his cheek with his index finger and thought for a moment.

“That aside, what about the treatment of returnees?”

“Including South Korea, the 17 countries with sovereigns as their political leaders ordered to prepare rewards for the participants. Besides them, it seems each sovereign has been trying to reward them... the actual effectiveness seems to be low. There isn’t a method to prove that the participants who died actually died there or a suitable method to filter out the people who claim they participated even though they didn’t.”

In some ways, this was irrational. Although the people, who fought for peace with their lives on the line, returned, drenched in blood, it seemed they hadn’t gained anything. However, Choi Hyuk didn’t really feel pity for them.

“Okay, well... The reward is that they became stronger than yesterday. That’s their reward. The real problem should be the treatment of those who did not participate?”

“Even if I used every monitoring device towards analyzing that... There is no way to find out the real debate. I think that punishing those who did not participate is rare.”

Baek Seoin agreed with Naro’s judgment.

“Indeed... Since the majority of the population didn’t participate... It will be difficult to take unfavorable actions against such a majority.”

Of course, Choi Hyuk’s thoughts were different.

“It’s not like we can’t take any action.”

“Of course, that is true... But, if we look at it from the perspective of our group, we will take a loss. Leader... You said that you acted harshly against the beginner warriors already. We are already a small force, if we keep this up, we’ll be isolated.”

Baek Seoin sounded like he was complaining.

Choi Hyuk was silent for a moment before asking Naro,

“Advancement Evaluation... This isn’t all, is it?”

Naro replied,

“Of course, this won’t be all. If I analyze the tests and mission patterns up until now, it isn’t. Since the condition this time was the extinction of 1/5 of the non-awakenees, it seems the same test will be repeated four more times. Of course, it could end earlier...”

“Four more times... If we don’t set upright laws, then the further along we go, the fewer people will participate.”

When Choi Hyuk protested to Baek Seoin, Baek Seoin shrugged.

“Or, the veterans, who had already gone once, might be more active.”

“Hmm...”

Choi Hyuk thought for a while.

The isolation of the Berserkers wasn’t what Choi Hyuk wanted. From the fight against the eyeless observers not too long ago to the dimensional wasps’ nest attack this time, the damages to the Berserkers were too large. There were 2,000 casualties. The most and second most losses the Berserkers faced until now had actually occurred one after another. The number of Berserkers, which approached 20,000 in total, had now been reduced to 14,000.

This wasn’t the only problem.

“If we start to crack down on those who did not participate, we will have to start by cracking down on Berserkers. It’s not like 100% of the Berserkers participated. It seems around 40% hadn’t participated...”

It was as he said. There was no way that, just because they were Berserkers, they all participated in the advancement evaluation that less than 1% of the world's population participated in. Still, since around 60% of the total members participated, it was a great participation rate... but the fact that 40% didn't participate was true as well. If they blamed them, then there was the danger that the already reduced Berserkers would be reduced even further.

Baek Seoin's worry made sense. Choi Hyuk slowly nodded his head.

"...Then, I'll think about this problem a little more."

In the end, he pushed back his decision and looked at Naro before asking his last question.

"But if we pass the advancement evaluation, can we... stop the collapse of Earth?"

Naro slowly shook its head.

"That's not it. It has already passed the point of stopping. Like I said before, there won't be a spring starting next year. Even if earthlings succeed in advancing... Earth will collapse."



Over the past two months, Choi Hyuk grew at a dazzling rate. Important fights continued without rest. The fight against the El Tribe, the fight against the ground devourer, the fight against the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, Lao Ban, the capture battle for occupying Lao Ban's cities, the fight against the eyeless observers, the dogfight between colonizers right afterwards and the dimensional wasps' nest attack.

The 'Combat Addict' fate had activated without rest, and he had also obtained additional rewards. Because of this, his stats, which had stagnated, were able to increase by 51 points. Choi Hyuk invested these points into his Control and Stamina. Besides that, his Retribution had also been increased for free as a reward for killing the queen wasp and establishing trade between colonized lands, among others.

Stamina: 359 (3★) -> 410 (4★)

Control: 453 (4★) -> 463 (4★)

Retribution: 400 (4★) -> 421 (4★)

He raised his Stamina, which had been stuck at 3-star, up to 4-star and invested the remaining points into Control. Choi Hyuk was now aiming for 5-star stats. Once he reached 5-star stats, he would thoroughly straighten out his three skills, Instant Void Annihilation, Flaming Wing Dance and Heart Injection.

They were skills that were so difficult to comprehend that he had to rely on automatic activation to use them. However, if he could figure out the fundamentals of the skills after gaining stronger Control and a higher Retribution rank, he felt expectant at the thought of activating the skills with his own abilities and even possibly improving them.

How strong would his skills be then? To endure that power, he raised his Stamina to a 4-star stat in advance. With just this, Choi Hyuk felt that he had become much stronger than before. 4-star Stamina and an almost 5-star Control allowed him to use Flaming Wing Dance and Instant Void Annihilation, which consumed a lot of karma, with more ease. Perhaps if he were to face the fight that broke out in Hyehwa District again, he would now be able to dominate the battlefield much more easily.

A period of rapid growth that followed after stagnation.

Yet, Choi Hyuk was unsatisfied.

“...I have to get stronger.”

Although this was a desire which was carved into his instincts, it was also a characteristic which allowed him to be Sovereign Choi Hyuk as well. The mistreatment of beginner warriors this time, the slaughter of the other forces' colonizers last time, and even when he killed the Sovereign of Dark Secrets, the reason why he was able to remain as a sovereign was because he never lost. It was because he was stronger than the rest and had always won. If Choi Hyuk showed even the slightest opening, those who held a grudge against him would swarm to him like bees. Because of this, Choi Hyuk had to be stronger than anyone else. Of course, he himself didn't calculate all this.

Due to Baek Seoin's dissuasion, he decided to think about officially punishing nonparticipants a little longer; however, the more he swung his sword, the more his mind became set.

“Hooo...”

Steam rose from his body. He tried to control the Flaming Wing Dance skill, but he failed today as well. However, while he was training, his mind became more simplistic.

‘I can’t leave those who don’t fight alone.’

Various side effects? What if there were.

“If a problem comes up, I just need to get that much stronger.”

Although Choi Hyuk always trusted Baek Seoin’s judgment, he needed to uphold the identity of the organization he led. This wasn’t a problem others could decide, but a decision he alone had to make as the sovereign.

Choi Hyuk, who had finished training in the training area arranged inside Naro’s spaceship, had hardened his mind.

The moment he stepped out of the training area, Naro appeared in front of him.

“Leader! The second advancement evaluation has started!”

The reason why he was surprised was,

“...What? What about me?”

Choi Hyuk hadn’t received a mission announcement. This occurred the day after they returned.



It wasn’t only Choi Hyuk who hadn’t received a mission announcement. The majority of the people who participated in the previous advancement evaluation were excluded from this advancement evaluation.

{The members who participated in the past advancement evaluation are exempt. Only the 10 sovereigns named below can participate.}

The second advancement evaluation began with an unexpected announcement.

It ended in failure before the day ended.

When the sun was setting, 1/5 of the non-awakenees ceased to exist. Starting from the tips of their fingers, their bodies turned white and melted before scattering away. The scene looked like snowflakes rising up towards the sky. The snowflakes, which gathered in the sky, flashed brightly before disappearing.

That time, Lee Jinhee was holding onto her phone.

Her mother, who was in her hometown, had called her to tell her that her father had gone missing. She was worried that he might have gone to the advancement evaluation.

“Ah... Really, you Lee’s need to fix your tempers. You and that man, why do you guys always lose your tempers and go out? Even if we don’t do it, others will take of it on their own. I thought we had passed over it last time, but what’s all this now.”

She was finding fault in her husband while simultaneously worrying about him as she talked with Lee Jinhee.

“Dad went there? Euah... That’s worrying. It’s not easy...”

“Haa, it’s fine. Don’t worry, don’t you know your father’s temper? He’s not that easy to deal with.”

She had just been worrying about him, but when Lee Jinhee began to worry, she waved her hand dismissively.

The two of them continued their normal conversation. However, not long after, Lee Jinhee’s mother saw her fingertips turn white as they melted and scattered like snowflakes.

“Huh? Huh? What’s this? Why is my hand...”

“What? Mom? What’s going on? Why does your voice sound like that?!”

Lee Jinhee asked when she felt something was wrong in her mother’s voice. At the same time, a telepathic message sent by Naro entered her mind.

{It looks like they failed the second advancement evaluation. There is a phenomenon

where people are evaporating throughout the world.}

Images of people's bodies fading away like snowflakes appeared from the message Naro sent. They were videos taken by surveillance cameras in the streets, subways, and elevators.

Lee Jinhee became astonished.

"Mom! Mom! It's not you, right? Mom!"

However, Lee Jinhee soon heard a strangely resigned voice.

"...It seems my time has come. I never thought this would happen to me. Daughter! Daughter, are you alright? Jinhee, you're alright, right?"

"I'm fine! Mom. Where are you? I'll go right now!"

"It's a relief you're okay. I'm only worried about that man... Whether he's alive or not."

That was the last phone call Lee Jinhee shared with her mother. Lee Jinhee lost both her parents that day. Although she learned that her father died on the battlefield a few days later...

"...Ah..."

Lee Jinhee's body trembled in rage.

Perhaps failing the second advancement evaluation was inevitable from the start. The ones who willingly chose to fight had already gone. On top of that, only 10 sovereigns, who could organize and lead the people, could participate.

The test devised by the Exalted Wings was cruel.

The soldiers, who fought for a cause, couldn't take part multiple times, and it wasn't like the soldiers who fought in the first advancement evaluation received any special benefit.

Some families, who hadn't fought in both tests, were fine, whilst Lee Jinhee's parents had passed away even though she had played an active role in the first advancement evaluation.

Conditions which supported Choi Hyuk's strong views were being established.

At the same time, there would be inevitable friction between colonizers whose non-awakened family members had not participated in the fight and other awakenees.



One of the Exalted Wings asked,

{However, isn't it a loss to annihilate 1/5 of the population to take out only one dimensional wasps' nest? We never know if there are soldiers with outstanding talent amongst them.}

Another Exalted Wing replied,

{We may never know. However, finding them incurs a cost. It has already been well over 2 years since Earth received a deferred judgment. Yet, if they still haven't chosen to fight, then isn't it best to think they never had the talent of a warrior? As you all know, Earthlings aren't generally a species with incredible fighting talent. And if they don't even have the will to fight, then I believe they are useless. Using our budget to screen warriors amongst them will be nothing more than a luxury.}

A quick counterargument. The Exalted Wing who asked the question was still unconvinced. However, he simply nodded his head and said,

{... I understand.}

The war was too monstrous and Earth was, like a speck of dust, too insignificant of a planet to waste time on.

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{1} Author of Silent Spring. The book documented the detrimental effects of pesticides on the environment.

# CHAPTER 75

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (9)

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Alexei's Youtube channel had become incredibly famous. At first, it started off as his own hobby, but now people started to regard it as the Berserkers' official channel. This was because the Berserkers were such an unsociable group, and besides Alexei's channel, there were no other outlets which released information on them.

Even Choi Hyuk ended up regarding Alexei as the Berserkers' spokesperson.

The night they failed the second advancement evaluation, the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk, held an extensive press conference and also uploaded a video on Alexei's Youtube channel, which clearly indicating his stance, before midnight. The video created such immense waves that it reached 100 million views in a day.

The message of the video was simple.

"This is a fight with humanity's survival on the line. It is difficult to tolerate selfish actions. I will give a penalty to those who do not participate in the fight."

"The method is simple. All citizens and colonizers of the Berserkers' cities, Barhaloleun, Spartoi's Fortress, Grassland Castle, Zhiyu, Pyungryu, Wanwu, and Yeshi, will assemble at their city square by noon tomorrow starting now. Remain there until all advancement evaluations have ended. We will use a recording medium and mobilize people to identify those who did not participate in the advancement evaluations from now on. Also, those who have already participated, please immediately come to the administrative office of your city to prove your participation. This action applies to all citizens and colonizers who are over the age of 14."

"Also, from this moment, all assets within the colonized land will be frozen. Furthermore, I will not allow anyone to leave the colonized land. Those who have been determined to have not participated in the advancement evaluations until the end, regardless of their status, will be kicked out from all Berserkers' territories. Of course, your assets will be confiscated."

"Due to the current urgency of the matter, we will only be conducting this within the Berserkers. However, we will need the joint response of many more sovereigns. No

matter who it is, those who do not participate in the advancement evaluations need to pay a price. Especially the Clown Sovereign, Freeman, and the Sovereign of Opportunity, Nasir, who abandoned their duty as sovereigns. They will need to pay a harsher price. Times have changed. You cannot survive on the blood of others. If you want to survive, you must be ready to spill your own.”

While this announcement, which became known as ‘Choi Hyuk’s Statement’, received strong support from one side who reacted by saying, ‘Refreshing!’ ‘Great!’ ‘I’m going to join the Berserkers,’ it was also met with concerns such as, ‘A dangerous thought that will push those who aren’t ready to fight towards their deaths!’

A fierce dispute erupted. Whether it was on Earth or in the colonized lands, whenever people gathered, they would always get into a heated discussion about this issue. The purpose of Choi Hyuk’s decision was clear.

“Can you still talk about different methods at this time? 1/5 of the non-awakenees died! Within our team, Kim Daeri and Lee Hojin have already died. In this situation, you still want to look at different methods? What? Not ready to fight? Who fights because they’re ready? And what’s better, dying dejectedly or dying while fighting?”

However, while Choi Hyuk’s method was strong and simple, it lacked polish.

“However, this sort of forceful push will only increase unnecessary casualties. How can the elderly or handicapped, who have never fought in their life, be able to fight overnight? Even though you are able to overcome the deficiencies that come from age and most disabilities when you receive karma, won’t they need to fight while they still haven’t adapted to their new physical state? That’s like telling them to die. Instead of foolishly saying, ‘Everyone fight!’, they should receive the help of supporters who are physically healthy and give them a big reward.”

When two company employees were discussing in a bar, there were times when a colonizer sitting next to them would abruptly join in,

“Ha- I’m speechless at your words. Look. Don’t you know how it was for 1<sup>st</sup> generation awakenees? Don’t you know that a ring suddenly appeared and that they had to kill each other regardless of age or gender? Handicap, your mother. Doctors murdered patients at a hospital. Although patients also killed doctors as well. What? Not ready to fight? How can they fight when they’ve never fought in their life? Motherfucker. If you need to fight, you fight.”

Then another colonizer would join in,

“Hey. You’re right. But aren’t you mistaken about something? The subject is the Berserk Sovereign’s territory. His colonized land. Barhaloleun, Zhiyu, Pyungryu... Hey. Everyone there is already an awakenee or colonizer. Even if you considered non-combatant members, they are still people who aren’t afraid to die in these advancement evaluations. But, why do we need to risk our lives for these non-awakenee scum? And why do we need to lose our possessions? Fuck, does that make sense? You need to solve your own problems, you non-awakenee bastards. Or just die.”

Occasionally, dissatisfaction grew larger amongst awakenees than non-awakenees.

Even though it was a strong cause, Choi Hyuk’s decision was embroiled in negative public opinion. That was because Choi Hyuk’s statement was a ‘wide scale provocation’.

Choi Hyuk directly targeted the majority, who didn’t participate, and the targeted majority wanted to justify their decisions in any way they could. It was difficult for there to be a good public opinion of him after making the majority his enemy. On top of that, because Choi Hyuk’s decision forced the hand of the colonizers and awakenees who were his support, he wasn’t able to get an amicable reaction from them either. Whether they were awakenees or not, they disliked Choi Hyuk’s statement. This was even so when considering the fact the ones who benefitted from this were the non-awakenees.

Even the colonizers who thought they had the responsibility to successfully complete the advancement evaluations even if it meant taking sacrifices were unable to readily support Choi Hyuk. The majority, who had not seen a monster before, were influencing the judgments of the colonizers they were close with. It didn’t matter what the colonizers thought inwardly, they were unable to thoughtlessly tell others to fight just because they fought. The decision was so difficult that even the top executive of the Berserkers, Lee Jinhee, mumbled, “If my mom was alive, I would have opposed this decision. But... I don’t know what’s what anymore...”

That was why other sovereigns had to find a more polished, yet effective, method than Choi Hyuk’s. However, was such a method easily found?

In contrast to them, the starting time of the advancement evaluations was all over the place. There was a day grace period between the first and second advancement

evaluations, but the third one began the early morning of the day after the second evaluation. It was even before everyone in the Berserkers' territories could gather at their city squares.

The third advancement evaluation progressed the same way. An announcement appeared to those who did not participate in the first or second evaluation, and an offer was only given to 10 of the sovereigns, excluding the ones who participated in the second evaluation.

Was it because 1/5 of the non-awakenees lost their lives? It was counted that more people participated in the third evaluation than the second evaluation. However, the absolute majority was still hesitant. 'I'm just one person.' Many still thought this as they aimed for a free ride. There were even some who held baseless confidence that they would be able to survive this time as they had survived the first 1/5 probability.

In the end, that night as well, they failed the advancement evaluation.

It was better than the second advancement evaluation. That time, they weren't even able to go beyond the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage – Dimensional Wasps' Nest Boundary Region before the majority of people decided to return. Because the number of participants was unconditionally small, they failed to deteriorate the growing wasps' nest. This time was much better since they were able to attempt the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage. However, they were unable to go to the end. With the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage left, everyone returned. It was because they didn't have sufficient soldiers remaining to aim for the queen wasp.

The only reason why they were barely able to attack the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages was because the Sovereign of Paradise, Camilla, who had participated twice, and her clan members fought hard and didn't give up until the end. The number of warriors who participated in the evaluations was still too small, but the Camilla clan fought with all they had, and the beginner warriors were influenced by them and fought fiercely as well. It was to the point where each beginner warrior attacked more than 10 times. However, ironically, the desperate fight caused their already small troops to reduce even further, and the attack eventually failed even after taking immense losses.

The night sky, containing snowflakes left behind by the non-awakenees who ceased to exist on Earth, was beautiful.

Frustrated, Choi Hyuk was about to go out on a walk.

"Ah..."

From the hair of a passing person, inside a passing car, and above buildings, white snowflakes flew up like a snowstorm. People disappearing, scattering without a sound.

More people died. At least 1.2 billion people. All in an instant.

Choi Hyuk was depressed.

Life and death. There were scenes he recalled whenever he thought of these words. He didn't know why, but he thought of the last smile Jung Minji showed him, the Marronnier Park incident where he bawled while hugging his mother's gravestone, and the funeral that day which still felt unreal to this moment.

At times, he wouldn't feel anything when he killed another person, but at other times, the person's dying figure seemed so sudden and painful.

Choi Hyuk held one of the gently rising snowflakes in his hand. The snowflake passed through his hand as if it didn't exist. It was pure karma. It was the purification of karma which had been accumulated over long periods of time by natural beings. Only, it wasn't the life of one being, but his father's father's father, and his mother's mother's mother. The decisions made through the accumulation of billions of years of crying, laughing, deception, and more deception. That was karma.

In other words, when a living being died and its karma was scattered away... it didn't simply mean the death of one life. The billions of years it took for that living being to be born, the history of his ancestors which had never been broken since being a single-cell organism. It meant that the genealogy of their evolution was erased.

The reason why Earth was dying wasn't simply because the ground was drying up. Earth was burning its history to give humanity the strength to fight against the monsters. Earth would disappear. Forever within the endless loop of cause and effect that is karma, as if it never existed in the first place.

Choi Hyuk didn't know all this in his mind, but he could somehow feel it. As his Retribution increased, and he could more sensitively sense karma... he instinctively realized that the extinction of the non-awakenees was something more saddening than death.

Then, as he was walking absentmindedly, something small and warm slipped into Choi Hyuk's left hand.

“There’s no way you’re alright, right?”

When did she appear... It was Flame-Rain. Choi Hyuk didn’t grab her hand nor did he shake her off, he just halted, vacantly.

Choi Hyuk stood still before abruptly asking,

“This... is a best 3 out of 5, right?”

“...Probably?”

“...”

Choi Hyuk shut his mouth in frustration.

It was as Naro predicted. 5 evaluations, 1/5 of the non-awakenees each time. The current score was 1 win and 2 losses. This meant that they absolutely had to win the next one.

However, there was a problem.

Would Choi Hyuk be given the opportunity to participate in the next evaluation? Also, even if he was given the opportunity, would he be able to pass through the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages? The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages were games they needed an absolute advantage in numbers for. The burden was heavy as that wasn’t something he could accomplish with his own power.

He was crazy for revenge.

Unfortunately, in the end, he was unable to do everything by himself... For it to be this hard to get rid of their Consumables fate, he felt a sense of shame.

“Why is it that the Exalted Wings don’t distinguish between the families of those who participate and those who don’t when ceasing their existence? If it’s like this, there isn’t a big merit in participating in the fight. Instead, the participants face the risk of losing their lives in the fight as well as losing their family.”

Choi Hyuk expressed his frustrated thoughts to Flame-Rain.

Flame-Rain only slightly held his hand before letting go.

“That’s because the test you are taking is a qualification test on becoming a member of the alliance... So... a citizenship. It’s not a problem of who’s strong or weak, but a qualification test of whether you are existences who can develop alongside the alliance in the long run... The treatment you described just now is more fitting of consumables, not citizens. ‘You fight. Or else I will kill your family.’ Those who move because of these threats cannot be seen as equals. The alliance wants those who judge for themselves, without the need for threats. A person who says, ‘Even though there isn’t an immediate benefit, if I judge that I need to fight, I will willingly fight.’... That is what the alliance is testing right now.”

Choi Hyuk was silent. Indignation rose up from inside. ‘Why are you the one testing that? With what right? Have you ever proved your qualifications to us?’

Flame-Rain inspected his expression and continued,

“...Is what they say. I don’t know much either. I don’t like it as well.”

She turned her gaze towards the sky where the karma snowflakes shined white.

“Isn’t it pretty? Purely refined karma. The history of one species... Remember, they are much more powerful than you think. An incredible power that melted the endlessly growing dimensional wasps’ nest within a dimension in an instant... A power that would still have a lot left over after that.”

Then she turned her gaze towards Choi Hyuk. The flames which covered her face had, at some point, faded away and disappeared.

“If it’s you, you might be able to produce a true flame.”

Her lips smiled, though her eyes were sad.

Blaze.

With those words, Flame-Rain was engulfed in flames and disappeared. They were familiar flames. It looked similar to the skill Choi Hyuk had endlessly been practicing to control more finely.

“...Flaming Wing...”

However, it was a true flame, purer and clearer than Choi Hyuk’s, writhing with its

own living will.

# CHAPTER 76

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (10)

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The second extinction occurred. What was especially shocking was that the meaning behind the extinction of 1/5 was not of the 'surviving ones' but 1/5 of the 'initial population'. People who were already aware of game design style of the alliance reacted with an 'Of course,' however, those who were inwardly optimistic received a huge shock. If it was like this, probability-wise, it would become more and more difficult to survive.

The number of non-awakenees sharply dropped to 60% in two days. All this happened while they were still bewildered. From 80% to 60%, the difference they experienced was drastic.

Up until yesterday morning, many people still went to work.

Although they were able to see who lived and who died by the scattered desks of the absentees. Although there were many people who held onto their phones, calling their family and friends instead of working. Although the break rooms were filled with people, who broke out sobbing, as they watched the news of missing people and the government's response. Although arguments broke out on whether Choi Hyuk's countermeasures were right or wrong...

Up until yesterday, people still went to the places they would normally go.

Up until yesterday, there were still quite a few lucky people who hadn't had any of their friends or family die.

However, after failing another advancement evaluation last night, by morning, the world had completely changed.

Some woke up this morning to see that their wife or husband had disappeared. Parents, who went out last night, looking for their children who had gone missing from their rooms, and came home with the sliver of hope that their child would be home when they returned, despaired once more. Although there were still people who went to work, they were met with an empty office. Amongst them, directors and section chiefs attempted to call their subordinates. The majority of them didn't answer.

Occasionally, when someone answered, they were met with curses and swears when they asked whether they were coming to work or not.

The extinction felt too unreal. Although they didn't feel it yesterday, they felt it today. What if they failed another advancement evaluation? Only 40% would survive. Not even half. And if they failed again? 20% would remain. While the remaining 20% may be thankful for the first successful advancement evaluation... The remaining 80% would forever be dead. Even if they didn't die, their loved ones would most definitely die.

For the first time, people's blood began to boil. Liquid didn't change its state until it hit a boiling point. If 100 degrees was the boiling point, 10 degrees or 99, there wasn't a big difference to the naked eye. However, if the temperature increased by 1, the true nature of what had been calm at 99 degrees would be revealed. It was the critical point. The change was dramatic. If it was 99 degrees yesterday, it was 100 degrees today. No, it was at 150 degrees. If it was a liquid state yesterday, it was gaseous today.

These people didn't know what to do as their blood boiled. They wanted a method. What did they have to do in order to recover from this crisis? And one answer spread out like wildfire. Although it was unknown who spoke it first, through the web and through speech, it was transmitted to everyone.

{Let's gather at the Berserk Sovereign's colonized land!}

The Berserk Sovereign.

When they looked back, he was the only person who gave a responsible statement to this situation. When they looked back, he was the only person who had the will to resolve this problem.

In a single day, people's opinion of Choi Hyuk had changed. What was thoughtless yesterday was a hope today.



By lunch time, the portal in Yeouido was crowded with waves of non-awakenees... It had come to the point where it was useless to count them all.

A hundred thousand? No, a million, no, 10 million. The numbers grew minute by minute. It seemed like all the non-awakenees in South Korea had gathered here.

People suddenly showed up in Seoul. They gathered in Yeouido. Traffic was frozen. As Yeouido Park was too small, the waves of people were pushed as far back as the 63 Building and the National Assembly building. People pushed and entered into the buildings lining the streets. They took their spots in offices which barely had any employees in them. They sat near the windows and looked outside. They sat on roofs and looked out.

Global reporters, who loyally did their job even in this situation, rode on helicopters, flew above Yeouido and live broadcasted this bizarre sight to the world. Foreigners who saw the broadcast were of the same mind. They too, like the Koreans, went out into the streets to find their country's sovereign, or they gathered in front of a large screen and watched the broadcast relaying the situation in Korea.

It was the largest gathering since Dangun<sup>{1}</sup>. During the June Democracy Movement<sup>{2}</sup> or the 2002 World Cup, there were, at most, hundreds of thousands of people gathered at one location. There was never a time during any revolution when the number of people gathered in one location exceeded the millionth scale. Just looking at this sight was magnificent, frightening and exciting. It was something that awakened all the senses a human could feel.

There were times when someone would suddenly ask,

“But why are we gathered here?”

“To change the world!”

The shock from the fact that they gathered was already surpassing its cause.

People had gathered with the thought that they had to do something. What would they do once they were gathered?

There was only a single person who could answer this. It was the Berserk Sovereign, Choi Hyuk.

During this time, Choi Hyuk was in Naro's spaceship. He normally spent his time in Naro's spaceship these days. It was the same for the other Berserkers as well. They would either be in the spaceship or in the colonized land.

“How unpleasant...”

Choi Hyuk wet his lips as he stared down at the endless crowd below his feet. The spaceship was currently in stealth mode. From the outside, they would only see the blue sky. On the other hand, the inner walls of the spaceship were transparent like glass, and he could clearly see the outside. It was normally a metallic wall, but depending on the situation, he could switch it as he pleased.

“...Really, I never imagined that it would turn out like this. As expected, you can’t predict the future in politics.”

Baek Seoin stood in front of him with his hand placed on his thumping chest.

Tens of millions of people were gathered to see Choi Hyuk.

Just the fact that they had gathered made Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, Ryu Hyunsung... and all of the Berserkers, including Choi Hyuk, become embroiled in an incomprehensible worry.

Gatherings had that sort of strength. Green migratory locusts were normally cute. However, when they started to gather, their bodies would rapidly produce serotonin and change their shape. They would grow and their color would change into a reddish-brown. They would devastate people’s fields as they traveled in swarms. A cute insect would turn into a fearful locust swarm. Gatherings weren’t simply a quantitative change, but also brought a qualitative change in the individuals.

Humans, who were social animals, were the same. With the simple action of gathering together, they were becoming completely different from normal. They hadn’t done anything yet, but they were already immersed in this feeling of having accomplished everything. If Choi Hyuk showed up now, it would be like the second coming of Christ.

However, Naro warned,

“Please be careful. You cannot leave them alone to be intoxicated by this feeling.”

Choi Hyuk, who had been about to leave, halted and asked,

“Why?”

“From my deductions, the chance that the fourth advancement evaluation will not happen soon is high. They are going to test the humans. From when I’ve investigated, humans are outstanding at gathering, but at the same time, have the characteristic of

being unable to maintain such a large gathering for a long time. In a short while, the crowd will disperse. Also, the more intoxicated they become from this feeling, the greater the dejectedness would be once they disperse.”

“...Ah...”

Choi Hyuk let out a sigh. There was a break period of a day between the first and second advancement evaluations. There was no break between the second and third advancement evaluation as they commenced the day after each other. Then, it was obvious he would expect the fourth evaluation to take place within the next two days. The reason why over 10 million people gathered in a cramped Yeouido within half a day was because they were nervous that there would be another evaluation soon.

However, what if the evaluation didn't occur right away? No, since when was it guaranteed that it would occur right away?

Naro pushed its hands out and did a pressing down gesture as if telling him to calm down.

“The message master has to give now is to actually calm the crowd down.”

“...Calm the crowd down?”

“Yes. So that this passion can continue to persevere like a charcoal fire.”

“...”

Choi Hyuk acknowledged its words.

Choi Hyuk discussed general ideas on what to say with his top executives and Naro as ‘calming them down’ was something he wasn't confident in. However, that didn't mean he wanted to send a follower out to say memorized words without sincerity in this current mood.

Once he finished his preparations, Choi Hyuk exited the spaceship.

Naro prepared the effects.

The blue sky rippled like waves. Its stealth mode had been deactivated. The enormous fortress-type spaceship, covered in white metal, was revealed in the sky above

Yeouido. Yeouido became dark, almost as if it was about to rain.

<<<Woah... >>>

Shouts of admiration. The people, who covered the ground, made a commotion. It felt as though the ground itself was shouting.

A ray of light, piercing through the darkness, came down, and Choi Hyuk walked down the path of light.

Cheers erupted. Their shouts shook the buildings.

Choi Hyuk, who had been walking slowly, stopped in midair. They could clearly see his silhouette from afar. It was like the descent of a god.

Yeouido, which had been shaking from the cheers, instantly became silent. Worried they might miss even a word of Choi Hyuk's speech, they shut their mouths and perked their ears. The whole world perked their ears for Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth. Due to the application of Naro's telepathic skill, his voice was as clear as if he was speaking right next to them.

To the people who were awaiting his words, like the voice of god, he said,

{Are you happy?}

What did this mean? Their brains couldn't easily interpret the words they had heard. Only silence. Choi Hyuk continued,

{Now that you're gathered like this, do you feel that you've accomplished something?}

His voice was filled with criticism.

{Dream on. 40% of the population has died already. We are halfway to losing. What were you people doing while 40% of the population died, and why have you come crawling out now? I don't trust you people. Nor do I care about you. It's your job. Do what you want. If you don't want to die, fight or don't. Do you want me to compliment you? But, you all probably won't fight then either. If there was an evaluation now, maybe the majority of you will fight. Because you are intoxicated with the mood. However, 2 weeks from now, a month from now, the majority of you will not fight.

Since the mood will have cooled. I hate you all. I hate the people who haven't fought until now and will hate the people who do not fight from now even more. I will definitely find a way to make you pay the price. Now then... Since you're disrupting the traffic, break it up.}

It was as though cold water had been poured on them. Rage, as well as a sense of crisis, burrowed into their hearts.

Only then did the people realize the gazes of colonizers looking at them. The ones who died were the non-awakenees. To the colonizers, this was someone else's concern. This tendency was especially strong in the first generation awakenees, who had lost all their family and friends. They had long since become disgusted with the non-awakenees, who didn't even fight for themselves.

This was the major reason why they returned from the third advancement evaluation in failure. To attack the queen wasp in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, they needed to pierce through the strong guardian wasps which were at 2-3-star level. It was during this time that they needed more experienced colonizers than beginner warriors. However, as they progressed with advancement evaluations, the number of participating colonizers gradually decreased. Even if each sovereign and the Camilla clan fought with all they had, it was insufficient. From the start, there were many followers under sovereigns who didn't participate, and there were even more colonizers not affiliated with sovereigns.

The number of experienced colonizers, that was the key.

Even during the first advancement evaluation, the Berserkers, who were the first team to attack, didn't face too many losses. If the teams following behind them didn't separate the guardian wasps, even Choi Hyuk wouldn't have been able to target the queen wasp.

Also, there were still many colonizers who were skeptical.

"Isn't it obvious we're going to be consumables anyways? Let's enjoy the rest of our lives."

It had come to a point where words like these were openly circulated amongst colonizers.

The effort the non-awakenees showed was still disappointing. To ensure their lives for

the time being, they spent enormous sums of money to head to the colonized lands and become awakenees. The meaning behind it was clear. 'I won't participate in the advancement evaluation after becoming an awakenee.' It was because they wouldn't cease to exist even if they failed the advancement evaluations.

Looking at this, someone said,

"Look, typical of humans."

Two weeks passed like this. Nothing happened.

Two weeks was an iffy timing. Although the shock didn't recede, it didn't mean they couldn't do anything during this time. They still needed to continue production to live. Like that, one by one, their minds changed. It changed from an emergency crisis to normal life. And at that point, the fourth advancement evaluation began, burrowing into the cracks in their hearts.

{Participate? Or not?}

When the announcement appeared and the opportunity arose, people suddenly remembered Choi Hyuk's cynical remarks. There were people who chose to participate due to the sudden surge of rage.

Yet, there were still many who did not.

Their tense hearts had become soft, and 10 seconds was too short.

"Wha... What do I do?"

During the short time they were indecisive of their decision, 10 seconds had passed. Only then did they dejectedly say,

"...Fuck... It's just as that bastard, the Berserk Sovereign, said..."

Still, there were at least ten times the number of non-awakenees who participated in the fourth evaluation than the third. Some said it was because of Choi Hyuk's speech, and others said to stop spouting bullshit.

However, the number of colonizers who participated was actually less than the third evaluation. The colonizers, who received the announcement this time, didn't want to

fight for the non-awakenees. At least the followers affiliated with sovereigns followed their sovereigns and participated, but the majority of those who weren't affiliated chose not to participate. It was more so because the colonizers, who were willing to fight for the non-awakenees, had already fought during the first, second, and third evaluations, and so the ones remaining were those who had consistently chosen to not participate.

In the fourth advancement evaluation, the one known as the strongest, Choi Hyuk, participated. Even still, many predicted they would fail.

“What’s the point if there are a lot of non-awakenees? No matter how berserk the Demon King runs around, they won’t be able to attack the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage with that many colonizers.”

“If they attempted the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage with a noticeably smaller number of colonizers... Then well, the beginner warriors will just be annihilated. How can no-star awakenees fight 2-3-star monsters?”

However, that evening, people witnessed a countless number of survivors. Many beginner warriors survived and returned. Also, no one ceased to exist that day.

The keywords, ‘Berserk Sovereign, Demon King, Choi Hyuk, Flames,’ were plastered on portal sites.

2 wins, 2 losses. It was a dramatic draw.

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{1} Dangun – the legendary founding father of Gojoseon, the first ever Korean kingdom. This is basically saying that it was the largest gathering since the inception of Korea.

{2} June Democratic Movement was a nationwide democracy movement in South Korea in 1987.

# CHAPTER 77

## ADVANCEMENT EVALUATION (11)

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During the 2 weeks without an advancement evaluation, Choi Hyuk spent his time thinking about fire.

What was fire?

Fire symbolized wisdom, it symbolized virtue that could not be hidden when one attempted to. It also symbolized enlightenment, but at certain times, it also stood for humanity itself. At the same time, it meant destruction and annihilation as well.

What was fire?

The four states of matter are known as solid, liquid, gas and plasma. Some say fire is plasma while others say that it isn't.

Fire was something so close that it defined humanity, but was difficult to comprehend. If it was instead light rays or a lightning strike, he felt he would be able to describe it somewhat, but when asked what fire was, his mind would become complicated. Just what was fire? Was it matter? Or was it simply only a heap of heat and light? If fire was matter, where would it fall between solid, liquid, gas and plasma? If fire was simply a heap of heat and light, would they have to call a hot incandescent light fire as well?

Choi Hyuk was continuously consumed by this question.

The skill Choi Hyuk was training, Flaming Wing Dance, was something he couldn't control by himself and was a high-level skill that he couldn't comprehend. At first, he started to train in hopes of controlling it more efficiently. To reduce the consumption of Stamina. However, his training was met with a completely different development.

It was because of his meeting with Flame-Rain and the flames she showed. Her flames were purer and clearer, and above all, tenacious. Choi Hyuk was captivated by this new revelation.

'Why are her flames and mine different?'

What made the difference in flames? Just what were flames?

Choi Hyuk had no choice but to first start with the 'fire' he saw in nature before expanding beyond. The fire Flame-Rain and Choi Hyuk used wasn't something that existed by burning matter but rather by burning karma, the retribution of living beings. Then, it became more complicated.

'What is fire anyways? Then just what is karma-burning fire?'

It was a completely different kind of training. The training Choi Hyuk had done until now was that of 'looking', 'sensing', and 'trying'. If he saw it, he could get a sense of what was going on, and depending on the sensation, he could try it out. His entire training regime was centered around constantly practicing until he became used to the skill and improving on it. It was training comprised of his instincts and physical body.

However, the training this time demanded contemplation and enlightenment.

'What is fire? What is karma-burning fire?'

To find the answer, he had asked Naro, Baek Seoin, and Lee Jinhee. It had been his first time asking someone else about his training.

Naro restrained from explaining karma.

"I'm not sure. Karma isn't something that falls within the logic of science. It is hard for an artificial intelligence like me to explain. Since it is subjectively similar to a 'feeling'... Instead, try asking humans, who can generate and control karma, what they think fire is. Only, the entire population will probably describe the natural phenomenon they call 'fire'. What is fire? The reason why the true nature of fire is so confusing is... the phenomenon known as 'fire' is actually an accumulation of various different essences rather than of a single one."

"An accumulation?"

"Yes, it's like a guitar performance. Guitars are made up of their body and strings, correct? If either one of those is missing, then it will be impossible to play."

"Yeah."

“You also need a guitarist. As well as a song to play. The gathering of all these is a ‘guitar performance’. If you ask, ‘What is a guitar performance?’ Asking, ‘Is it the guitar strings? Its body? The performance? The song?’ doesn’t have any meaning. From the beginning, a guitar performance is not of one essence but the continuous reaction of various essences. It’s the same with fire. It is a phenomenon which occurs when fuel is heated. If we use a candle as an example, when the wick, which is solid, is lit on fire, it will burn and turn to ash. The wax will melt into a liquid, and a portion of that will evaporate into a gas, and a portion of that gas will be ionized, temporarily turning into plasma. The plasma is unstable and will be unable to maintain its state for a long time before returning to a gaseous state, emitting a light which creates the fire’s light. So fire is the accumulation of all these essences. Fuel, the heat applied to the fuel, the gas produced by the fuel, the temporary plasma generated from the gas, and the light due to this. So, fire, in the context of light, is similar to neon signs and auroras. Since they are phenomena created through plasma. However, when humans talk about ‘fire’, they aren’t only talking about the light, but its fuel, the ashes which remain afterwards, the evaporated smoke, the light and the heat. This is the reason why the name of this combined chain of phenomena feels different from everything else.”

Surprisingly, Choi Hyuk was able to understand this right away without much scientific knowledge. This was the not often revealed effect of his Retribution stat. Retribution improved the caliber of the living being itself. A Retribution of 421 (4★), which Choi Hyuk possessed, allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of the origin of the world. His senses and cognition, which had reached a superhuman level of sensitivity, allowed him to process information humans normally wouldn’t be able to sense and allowed him to more easily comprehend these phenomena. On top of that, since Naro used its telepathic abilities to light a candle in Choi Hyuk’s mind and allowed him to closely examine it, it would have been weird if he didn’t understand it.

“Aha. Thanks.”

“No, it was fun for me as well. Since fire is wonderful. Like the guitar.”

The simple appearance of Naro’s hologram imitated playing a guitar. Then it stared at Choi Hyuk. Even when he was leaving, it followed behind him. In the end, Choi Hyuk reluctantly asked,

“...You like the guitar?”

Naro leaped up and down as it replied,

“Yes! The thing known as music is so surprising. Narolings didn’t have anything like it. Since they didn’t communicate through sound... Perhaps they may not have felt anything even if they heard music. But, for some reason, I, the artificial intelligence which they created, can appreciate it. So I know that music is a marvelous culture of the earthlings. I like all instruments! However, at this moment, I like the guitar the most.”

Then, it stared at Choi Hyuk again. Feeling a strange pressure, Choi Hyuk asked,

“Don’t tell me... you want one?”

Naro leaped up and down. As expected, it wanted one. Choi Hyuk was taken aback.

“You can just make one instead.”

Naro’s spaceship was the last heritage of a highly advanced civilization. Of course, it had the ability to create any object which existed on Earth. However, as if it found Choi Hyuk’s words absurd, it exaggeratedly shook its head and arms before saying,

“Haa... How can it compare to a handcrafted instrument made with the heart and soul of a master craftsman?”

This was the reply of a certain artificial intelligence that loved analog items.

Choi Hyuk, who had promised to buy Naro a guitar, went to find Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee this time. What they thought about fire was a level simpler.

“Are you talking about fire? Isn’t it something that spreads as it burns?”

“Fire? It’s incredible. It’s bright, and when you approach it, it’s hot. When you touch it, it hurts like stinging needles and gives off a scent. But leader, the advancement evaluation is really taking a long time to start... Don’t tell me no one participated again? Haa... I really don’t like it.”

These replies didn’t directly help Choi Hyuk. But, it became a chance for Choi Hyuk to look back on it himself.

‘What do I think fire is?’

To him, fire was destruction. Something that burned everything. Killed everything.

Brought pain. Perhaps it was because of this, but the flames he burned felt somewhat heavy. Instead of burning, it felt like he was smashing things with fire. On the other hand, the fire Flame-Rain showed him was light, yet strong. It possessed the power to penetrate through any strong material and lightly burn it.

After long contemplation, Choi Hyuk was finally able to realize what fire was.

Choi Hyuk had thought that fire was simply heat until now. So he could melt his opponents with this heat. Because of this, his fire didn't comply with his will. This was because the true essence of fire wasn't heat. Naro's words were right. Fire was a series of processes. It was a continuous reaction which changed the state of materials. This meant that fire didn't stop and was continuously changing. Light and heat as well as their by-products, the result of which was fire.

Its essence was the simultaneous coexistences and changes of states itself. The more states it included and the more dramatic its change was, the more destructive the result would be.

'If I want to manipulate fire, I need to focus on the effects and changes of these essences instead of its destructive power.'

Like how he needed to grab his collar instead of his shirt to take it off, and how he needed to grab the handle of a fan and shake it open rather than opening each and every fold.

When he realized this, Choi Hyuk's flames evolved.

These flames first made their appearance during the '3<sup>rd</sup> Stage – Wasps' Nest Inner Region' of the fourth advancement evaluation.

The fourth advancement evaluation.

When they were about to start the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, the atmosphere felt hopeless. There were simply too few experienced colonizers remaining. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, the beginner warriors played a supportive role. No matter how many there were, it was useless with only them. Many sovereigns felt that it was better to retreat rather than causing needless sacrifices.

'Will a billion people die again?'

‘Are humans consumables as expected?’

Although they hated it, their strength was insufficient. They despaired.

The speeches began within this heavy silence. Choi Hyuk was the first to start speaking. Like always, he didn’t have retreating on his mind this time as well. He simply issued the order in which they would infiltrate.

“The first to infiltrate will be me. Next will be the Berserkers. After that... do what you want.”

Then he really jumped down towards the dimensional wasps’ nest by himself. As if he didn’t care whether they followed behind him or not.

Everyone thought he was crazy.

Pssssh!

Vooom!

The dimensional wasps densely gathered towards the falling Choi Hyuk. Each one was a monster at the level of a veteran colonizer. Choi Hyuk looked incredibly small in the middle of them. They couldn’t watch with open eyes.

On top of that, at first, Choi Hyuk absentmindedly stood there. People were suspicious whether he was stricken with fear or not.

However, soon, there was a reversal.

Choi Hyuk wasn’t standing there absentmindedly, but he was preparing to burn his flames. He linked his thumping Karma Heart to his mind.

At first, his Karma Heart was filled with emptiness and despair.

When he closed his eyes, his Karma Heart, which had been hollow with emptiness, achieved a calm peace.

As the tips of his lips curved upwards, he started to become excited.

When he opened his eyes and looked straight at his enemies, his eyes were dyed with

hostility.

The hostility turned into rage.

The rage then turned into madness, and the madness left behind ashes, returning back into emptiness and despair.

It was a sequential change, but at the same time, it was a simultaneous change. His Karma Heart simultaneously went through emptiness, despair, peace, joy, hatred, hostility, rage, and madness as it changed into each one in succession. Karma boiled. No, it burned.

“Flaming Wing Dance – Choi Hyuk Style.”

His flames, which started in one corner of the dimensional wasps’ nest, spread endlessly. It was different from Flame-Rain’s clear flames. His distinctive scarlet flames, which looked like gushing blood, burned the wasps’ nest as well as the dimensional wasps. The dimensional walls, which divided the dimensional wasps’ rooms, melted down. They shriveled up. The nest itself let out a scream. This wasn’t the ‘Flaming Wing Dance’ which had been deteriorated to the 4-star level. It was a true Flaming Wing Dance which Choi Hyuk, who had become enlightened in what fire was, created. The purification of the essence of karma flames.

{You have attained a deep understanding of karma on your own. Retribution increased by 30, free karma points increased by 40.}

<<Kiyeeehh>>

The wasps let out a scream the onlookers had never heard before as they died.

Victory was decided that moment.



“As expected, the Berserk Sovereign did one for us.”

When Richard, who had been inwardly anxious, heard that they won the fourth advancement evaluation, he clenched his fists. It was the moment where, if they weren’t careful, all his preparations would have been for naught.

“Now, if it’s a best three out of five... It will start soon?”

Richard thought.

If it was a best three out of five, then there was one more evaluation left. If they were in the middle of testing humanity, then when would humans reveal their weakest point? In Richard’s mind, that was...

“Now.”

The moment they were drunk with victory. It hadn’t even been 2 hours since the fourth advancement evaluation ended when the always insincere announcement woke those who were asleep up and awakened those who were drunk with alcohol.

{Advancement Evaluation. Same as before. Participate? Or not?}

Richard smiled.

“I knew it.”

It had already been a long while since he had finished his preparations. The moment he had a hunch they would lose the second and third advancement evaluation, Richard put everything on the final evaluation.

He used both carrot and stick methods. He gathered experienced colonizers and promised them benefits within his colonized land. He persuaded the sovereigns who had yet to participate and rallied the non-awakenees within their groups before promising them suitable benefits if they cooperated. On the other hand, he quietly purged those who did nothing but speak negatively and had a lukewarm response to participating. Also, he requested to all the cooperators, excluding the sovereigns,

“You will not participate in any of the evaluations. We will risk it all on the final evaluation. You will keep choosing not to participate and will choose to participate in the final evaluation. Also, pray. That during this time, someone, no matter which sovereign it is, will win once.”

Then he issued ‘tickets’. He printed off multiple tickets and gave them to the colonizers and non-awakenees who promised to cooperate.

“You will always keep these tickets with you. You will carry them with you even during

the advancement evaluation, and when you meet members of predesignated clans, you will give them this ticket. Later, we will collect them all and check whether you participated or not.”

The reason why this system worked was because of the trust Richard had accumulated until now. ‘Trust’ was the driving force which allowed him to mediate the countless conflicts between different forces, giving him the name ‘Sovereign of Balance’. Colonizers trusted in the fairness of his methods as well as the advantages and disadvantages he promised. They also trusted the collectors of these ‘tickets’, whom he chose.

Although it was completely different from Choi Hyuk’s method, the method Richard used to gather strength may perhaps have been the most ideal and natural method for humans.

The result of this was victory.

Choi Hyuk, who had returned from the fourth advancement evaluation, heard the news of the fifth advancement evaluation victory after he woke up.

“Already? Who?”

Baek Seoin replied,

“The Sovereign of Balance.”

“Huh...”

It had been a long time since Choi Hyuk admired someone else besides himself.



The place where enormous stone slabs gathered, the ‘Brain’ of the Flame Wing Alliance.

The Exalted Wings were discussing new information.

“The humans have passed the advancement evaluation. We have to grant them citizenship.”

“However, if you look at the process, it is hard to say they were united. In reality, wasn’t it a success created by the strength, coercion, or conciliation of individual sovereigns?”

“That is correct. The result was a victory, but there is a problem with the process. Although there were individuals who showed power beyond our expectations, we cannot grant them citizenship because of this. Amongst 5-star experts, so many species are still consumables.”

“...You say strange things. If we decided to go with the advancement evaluation from the start, then it is only right we accept the result of the advancement evaluation. I worry that the standard for granting citizenship is getting more difficult as days go on. If we don’t respect other species as karmalings like us and use them as tools, how are we different from monsters?”

“I am not saying we shouldn’t grant them citizenship. I am only suggesting to limit their rights. Earthlings are a species that will not be able to function properly without an outstanding sovereign. Also, we observed that they cannot unite if there are too many sovereigns. Following this, I request we limit the number of sovereigns who can represent the earthlings. We need to only acknowledge three sovereigns to have the political rights and right of passage as members of the alliance. Sovereigns besides them... Even if, in reality, they possess an occupation as a sovereign, we cannot acknowledge them as representatives of Earth as per the alliance’s principle.”

“...Three is too few. It’s not like the number of earthlings is small, we cannot reflect their will with only three people. It makes no sense to restrict a species’ potential for our own convenience.”

“Then let’s go with seven people.”

“ ... ”

The decision of the Exalted Wings was normally very quick. Even if they didn’t speak, they knew each other’s circumstances, and thus, the conversation and compromise ended in an instant. Seven people. Even the objectors felt this was the best they could do.

Silence. This meant agreement.

“Then, we will leave the method of selecting the seven up to the earthlings. As they are now a species that possesses the right of autonomy and is affiliated with the alliance.”

That was how the fate of Earth was decided once again.

# CHAPTER 78

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (1)

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That day, the sun had momentarily lost its light. As if a light switch had been flipped, the sun suddenly turned off. Instead, an aurora was cast over the entire Earth. It was as if the clothes of god or the dance of spirits had been cast on the sky. It was as if spirits were showering.

The aurora, which was Latin for dawn, swayed and shone above the heads of people who were celebrating the fifth advancement evaluation victory.

“I never thought there would be a day where I’d see an aurora in Seoul.”

The aurora, which started off green, shortly changed its color. It gradually became redder, and from red, it changed to pink before turning yellow at its ends. The morning aurora changed into the color of a sunset, and the 63 Building and Han River shined alongside it.

This ridiculous combination in the sky made even those who shut themselves at home come out and look up at the sky.

Even people in windowless study rooms were pulled by an unknown premonition and stood below the aurora-splashed sky.

The aurora swayed as it slowly began to form letters. Letters which didn’t exist on Earth. However, for some reason, even children, who had yet to learn to read, were able to read the letters.

{We sincerely welcome you on joining the Flame Wing Alliance. Let us fight together until the day of eternal victory. We hope that peace and prosperity will cover the entire universe.}

{A notice from the Alliance’s 103<sup>rd</sup> Barred Spiral Galaxy Administration Bureau.}

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<Release of Information>

1. Currently, Earth is in the process of extinction. That is to say, this was an inevitable decision so earthlings could carry out the alliance's monster-fighting missions, and using your obtainment of alliance membership as an opportunity to look back, this will not be repeated.

The karma extracted from Earth will be prioritized for the awakening of earthlings and the dimensional teleportations used to carry out missions. The rest will be used as necessary resources to investigate other karmalings and to have them take part in this sacred war.

There are 1,197 days until the complete extinction of Earth, and due to the fact that after 900 days Earth will become a land uninhabitable by living beings, we hope that you will hasten your colonization and migration to the planet 'Dragonica'.

However, if the migration is taking longer than expected, you can file a claim to the alliance, asking for the postponement of Earth's extinction.

2. As alliance members, all earthlings have the right to be respected and protected according to alliance law. However, following the decision of the top legislative organization of the alliance, the 'Brain', the earthling's exercisable rights will be limited. All rights of earthlings will be entrusted to seven sovereigns. Those who do not have the approval of the selected sovereigns will not be able to, among others, exercise their rights of using the supply store, entering other planets, picking missions, establishment and suggestion of tactics.
3. Because earthlings need to choose the seven sovereigns whom they will entrust their rights to by themselves, this will be done through a self-application process. Any earthling, who possesses an occupation as a sovereign, will be able to apply to be one of the seven sovereigns. The list of applicants and their current locations will be revealed and constantly updated. Anyone will be able to read the current list of applicants simply by thinking of it in their minds. In the case there are more than seven sovereigns, no sovereign applications will be accepted. Also, as it is expected that there will be many applicants during this first time, we hope that you understand we will only record the seven chosen sovereigns once a 24-hour-period has passed without any additional applicants.

4. Hostile actions between alliance members are absolutely forbidden. In fact, as the laws that apply to you are now different from when you were outside the law as consumables, from now on, we hope that you will pay special attention so that there are no clashes between other alliance members. However, the alliance will not interfere in conflicts between earthlings as we consider them internal affairs.

---

That was what was written.

People absentmindedly looked up at the sky which contained the shining aurora. Soon, the aurora disappeared, and the sky returned to its normal hue. However, as if those sentences had been engraved in their minds, they didn't forget them.

The advancement evaluation which had snatched away almost half the total population... caution spread between the joy of surviving through this ordeal.



"I think I can smell the stench of blood already?"

Alexei sniffed his nose.

"Don't say such unlucky things,"

Criticized Lee Jinhee as she jumped over a gap between two tall buildings.

"But, this is no joke. I really think that tons of people are going to die this time. The moment the announcement appeared, all 40 existing sovereigns applied. Although some came to an agreement nicely amongst themselves... From the start, the announcement stated, 'We will not interfere in disputes between earthlings.' Then there will undoubtedly be sovereigns who fight with their all. Also, our leader will definitely be on the side of fighting with his all."

"...Yeah, you go ahead and kill a lot."

"Ah... That..."

Alexei, who knew Lee Jinhee's hate in killing humans, showed an uneasy expression.

He had misspoken. Although it couldn't be helped, there was no need to remind her of it.

"It's fine. Alexei. Don't follow me. I have somewhere to go."

Lee Jinhee didn't even call him by his nickname, 'Lyosha'. She was upset. Then-

Thump!

She stomped on the roof banisters as she began to jump over three to four buildings at a time. This wasn't a speed Alexei could follow.

"Euack! I'm sorry!"

He shouted as he tried to catch up, but Lee Jinhee didn't turn back as she went further away.

Alexei mumbled,

"Ah... Damn it."

However, he didn't stop running. Since he already knew where she was going and-

"I need to help her as best as I can today."

Since he knew better than anyone that she didn't have a harsh personality.

A fast pace. It felt good as the wind brushed past his ear. Then, at some point, the stench of blood permeated in the wind.

<<Euu>>

The moment he thought he heard the screams of patients, who had been sliced and ripped apart, they filled his vision.

The number of casualties after every advancement evaluation was incredible. The survival rate hung at 1/3 each time. The third advancement evaluation the Camilla clan participated in was known to be especially fierce, and the rate of beginner warriors who returned alive was only 10%. It was the same during the fourth advancement evaluation Choi Hyuk participated in. The reason why they said that the

survival rate was high for that evaluation was not because the survival rate was actually high, but because they had expected for them to all have died, yet a lot more than expected had actually returned alive. Even if they had wasp-hunting items, there were still many casualties, and the majority of survivors were wounded because civilians, who have never fought a monster in their lives before, suddenly had to fight 1-star monsters and above.

This had all taken place in only 17 days. It was a very short time.

However, over two billion people had ceased to exist due to their losses. That number easily overcame the number of deaths accumulated by the bubonic plague, measles, and other infectious diseases over a long period of time. Tens of millions of the people, who chose to participate and fight, had either died or were wounded. A number comparable to the world wars had either been killed or wounded in half a month.

Still, although people began to return to their daily lives, it had become difficult for society to maintain its various functions. This was especially the case in what was currently the biggest issue, medical treatment.

Although the number of doctors and nurses who had simply ceased to exist were critical, if they also considered the pharmaceutical companies, the companies who produced and repaired medical equipment, the companies that supplied raw material for these companies, and each and every transportation company, there was not one company that was functioning properly. Additionally, because of all this, it was impossible for hospitals to run properly. However, there were more wounded people than at any other time.

This was precisely the reason why the only healer in Korea, Bae Jinman, spent his days in the streets.

He set up a treatment center amongst empty offices to take care of those who weren't accepted into hospitals, and anyone who possessed some medical knowledge was able to come out and tend to the wounded.

There was a pungent stench of blood. As long as they had awakened, most wounds would close after time passed. However, the healing abilities of the beginner warriors were weak, and on the other hand, the wounds they suffered were fatal, such as severed limbs and spilled guts. If they were civilians, these wounds would have killed them already, but they were able to endure it with their regenerative abilities. They

moaned in pain as they waited for their turn even though it was unknown when that would be. Volunteers carried patients, who seemed close to dying, to Bae Jinman.

“Move! Move! Emergency patient!”

Lee Jinhee piggybacked a patient who had gone into shock and rushed into the lobby of the large building which was Bae Jinman’s treatment center. Ever since the advancement evaluation began, she had always volunteered to move patients.

Thud!

Lee Jinhee, who roughly opened the door and entered, opened her mouth at the sight in front of her. It was because the fourth and fifth advancement evaluations had occurred one after another. The number of patients reached a point of helplessness. The wide lobby was completely filled with patients that there wasn’t a single place to step. All of them were in a critical state, almost about to die. No, there were people who had already died. Blood, blood, there was blood everywhere.

Now that she looked, there were dying patients lined up outside the building as well.

“Grrr...”

The patient on her back let out a strange sound. Before he had been screaming in pain, but now he let out an ominous sound. It was critical. Feeling the warm blood wetting her back, it seemed he was spilling a lot of blood.

Tears welled up in her eyes. What was more hellish than war was what came afterwards. The despairs which repeated persistently and didn’t die down in a day or two.

“Mister. Pull yourself together. Okay? Mister. Don’t lose your mind. Karma is a power that reacts to your mind. Mister.”

She didn’t dare shake him. As she called out to him with her voice, she felt a heavy sense of hopelessness. Although Bae Jinman could treat people with his karma, Lee Jinhee couldn’t. Her karma trait was ‘Explosive Blood’. If she inserted her karma into healthy people, it may prove fatal.

As it was incredibly difficult to obtain a karma trait that could help others recover, there were only two healers in South Korea. As Choi Hyuk’s mother had passed away,

the only remaining one was Bae Jinman.

“Can’t we cultivate healers like the Camilla clan...”

As she said this in a sullen voice, she felt the patient on her back becoming cold. The life on her back was in the middle of flickering out.

Even if she had experienced it multiple times, it was tragic every time. Lee Jinhee absolutely hated the feeling of someone dying on her back. Yet, she couldn’t bring herself to let him down either. He would die either way. This had simply occurred suddenly.

“Wait.”

Then someone placed his hand on the patient on her back. Seeing as their language resonance activated, it seemed he was a foreigner and not Korean. Then-

{Recover}

With the activation word, he activated a healing skill.

Whoosh.

Green light surged. Lee Jinhee thought the light was similar to the aurora she had seen not long before.

“Grr... Eeuuu... Ah...”

Hwoo, haa.

As the light gradually died down, the patient, who had been screaming strangely, regained strength in his voice. He breathed comfortably.

The man that healed the patient asked,

“Whew~ That was lucky. Is this the treatment center Guardian Bae Jinman resides?”

He was a middle-aged man with green eyes. He grew a graying beard on his chin.

“Ah, yes... And you are?”

“I am a healer from the Camilla Clan, Le Guin. I have been sent here as a show of respect to the Berserk Sovereign, who took part in the fourth advancement evaluation.”

“Hee... The leader?”

“Ah, are you a Berserker? Anyways, I was surprised. When I met with the Berserk Sovereign, he suddenly told me to go find Mr. Bae Jinman. For South Korea’s only healer to be under the command of the Berserk Sovereign... If you don’t mind me saying, there was a bit of an image gap. Haha.”

Le Guin said this in a friendly manner,

“Then, it looks like there’s a lot of work... Let’s meet again.”

And went inside the building. Now that she looked around, she saw figures with the Camilla’ clan’s leaf emblem here and there. They appeared suddenly before mixing with the patients without any hesitation. They skillfully stanching bleeding wounds, and although it was unknown where they procured it, they administered antibiotics and pain killers.

“Woah... How wonderful.”

Lee Jinhee’s heart, which had become depressed due to the endless fighting and killing of people recently, slightly relaxed from the heartwarming feeling.

Alexei, who had found Lee Jinhee a little late, hit his chest with a thud.

“Hey. Stop beating so fast.”

Patients were everywhere, as were volunteers and Camilla clan members who took care of them, and Lee Jinhee, who stood in the middle, wiped the sweat from her forehead. The sunlight was incredible as well.

“...It would be great if this mood continued. Instead of fighting between one another.”

Even though he was only a 15-years-old youth, Alexei was still well aware that the way in which the world was run was somewhat insane. Even still, because he liked seeing this scene, because he like seeing Lee Jinhee’s smile, he sincerely wished... that the seven sovereigns could be elected without anyone dying.

# CHAPTER 79

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (2)

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That night, they were able to save the patients, who had been in a critical state, with the cooperation of Le Guin of the Camilla clan. There was a bit of time to rest afterwards.

The wind was refreshing that night. Le Guin, who had been absentmindedly resting, suddenly said,

“This was quite unexpected.”

“What was?”

“If you don’t mind me saying, but... before coming here, my impression of the Berserkers wasn’t very good. I acknowledged their contributions to humanity, but they brought too much blood? Stubborn? It was that sort of image.”

Lee Jinhee grinned at Le Guin’s words.

“Well, that’s not wrong.”

“However, the guardian and even Director Lee Jinhee... I didn’t think that the Berserkers would have this side to them. I was honestly impressed.”

Even Bae Jinman, who had slumped down in exhaustion, chuckled at his words.

Lee Jinhee looked up at the sky. The night sky was filled with stars. As almost half the world’s population died, there were many homes with their lights off, and there was no way stores would be open to nightlife in this mood... The sky, which had been created out of tragedy, was a beautiful pale.

“I don’t know... I think of it like this. That people will eventually die. Mr. Le Guin isn’t a first generation awakenee, right?”

“Ah, yes. I joined later. I accepted the ‘Savior’ fate from the Camilla clan, and when it was revealed that I had a talent for the ‘Heal’ trait, I received the support of the Camilla

clan and was developed as a healer.”

Besides awakening as a guardian due to a special occupation like Bae Jinman, the conditions in becoming a healer were very picky. Three conditions were currently known. One must have a 90% aptitude to the ‘Savior’ fate, must be able to pick the ‘Heal’ trait, and must possess both Control and Retribution stats that are at least 3-star.

That wasn’t easy. Even if they possessed the first two conditions, there was still a problem. As the ‘Heal’ trait wasn’t much help in fighting, it wasn’t only difficult to increase their stats to the 3-star level, but it was even harder to survive the compulsory missions that would occasionally occur.

There was also a problem after growing with such difficulty. Their physical states as well as their buffs and recovery skills, in all aspects, were much weaker than guardians like Bae Jinman. To develop a single healer, the clan had to consistently support them. The benefits they would earn was comparatively small. This was especially the case because, when awakenees reached the 2-star level, most wounds would regenerate by themselves. As long as their arms or legs didn’t get cut off, they didn’t desperately need the help of a healer.

That was why only clans like the Camilla clan, who pursued justice and benevolence, would professionally train healers. The majority of clans simply equipped themselves with one or two healers and that was it.

Also, Lee Jinhee knew another reason why healers weren’t popular.

“I knew it. The people of the first generation who endured that hell all know. That, in the end, they can either kill or be killed. What they need first in order to live is military power. If they don’t have it, they’ll die. Also, to save more people, what is necessary is military power. If they don’t have that, then they will have to watch their loved ones being violated by devilish people. Although you are both healers... Guardian Bae Jinman and Mr. Le Guin give off different vibes.”

“ ... ”

Le Guin was silent.

“That is probably why Mr. Le Guin doesn’t feel we are very ‘Berserker-ish’. Although we are currently saving people here... we are a little different from Mr. Le Guin at a

fundamental level. Because we can kill a person at any time. At the very least, we aren't just. No, we are closer to being evil."

Lee Jinhee's voice sounded somewhat bitter.

"The actions of the Berserkers aren't righteous. However... at the very least, I believe in one thing, and that is the direction our leader has set. His direction hasn't wavered. To take revenge on those who started this whole tragedy. To stop anyone from playing with human lives. I agree with his cause. And if it is for that cause, I can commit gruesome murder any time. Only..."

Lee Jinhee paused momentarily. The wind blew.

"Only, I don't want to become numb from killing people. That is why I lost my temper with Lyosha this morning."

Alexei, who had been slowly falling asleep, crouched in a corner visible to Lee Jinhee, perked his ears and raised his head when he heard Lee Jinhee say his nickname.

"Go sleep, kid."

Alexei smiled at Lee Jinhee's words and tried to sleep again. He looked like a small animal.

Le Guin, looking at the two, said in a passing tone,

"Really... How was it that we were born in this damn world..."

"Keuk, keuk. Tell me about it."

"Huhu... Yeah."

As if they felt the expression, 'damn world', was fitting, Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman laughed bitterly.



'All rights of earthlings will be entrusted to seven sovereigns.' This was troublesome beyond imagination.

As soon as they became a member of the alliance, a network took position inside their heads. If they followed the feeling which tickled the insides of their heads, as if they had suddenly remembered after forgetting for a long time, earthlings could learn of their new right.

‘Mission Selection’.

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{Missions within range}

1. Defend Depina, Reward – Base Mission Points 5,000, Limited to those with Retribution 0 (5★) or above.
2. Recapture Lejour, Reward – Base Mission Points 800, Limited to those with Retribution 200 (3★) or above.
3. Attack the 5532<sup>nd</sup> Dimensional Gate, Reward – Base Mission Points 3,000. Limited to those with Retribution 400 (4★) or above.

...

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The long list of missions excited Choi Hyuk’s heart. The selection of missions had been small up until now. It wasn’t like now where he could choose as he wished, but instead, a mission would be announced, and he had to choose whether he was going to participate or not. To someone like Choi Hyuk, who wanted to take many more missions that were much more dangerous, this system was frustrating. Also, the majority of missions given to him were too easy. It was because, as they received a deferred judgment, humans were rarely given dangerous missions which could annihilate them.

That was why just seeing this list, from which he could choose as he wished as if he was at a buffet, made him feel refreshed.

“So they use Retribution as the cut-off point...”

Retribution was the requirement for choosing a mission. Those who possessed high

Retribution would be able to choose better rewarding and more intense missions.

Unfortunately, he hadn't reached 5-star Retribution yet. Choi Hyuk chose a mission that matched his current Retribution.

“Attack the 5532<sup>nd</sup> Dimensional Gate.”

Even though he expected this, he felt good the moment he said those words. And, as he expected,

{As you have not received the approval of the seven overseers, you are unable to choose a mission.}

He received an excitement-dampening reply.



Choi Hyuk thought for a long while. What actions did he have to take? Was there even a way to choose seven people in this current situation without spilling blood?

After completing his thoughts, he called for a meeting.

“We can't let this absurd situation continue for much longer.”

Choi Hyuk had a bit of an agitated tone.

“Even though we finally got rid of our Consumables fate, there isn't much of a difference.”

The meeting room was so large that his voice echoed. The place they were in was the King Castle in the Berserkers' capital city, Barhaloleun. The 'King Castle' was a facility that buffed allies and debuffed monsters, and at the same time, it also observed all trades within the territory and automatically set the tax as well as other administrative functions. It could be said that it was a higher ranked facility than the 'Territory Pyramid', which was the most basic territory facility.

Currently, all the Berserkers' top executives were gathered in the King Castle. Even Bae Jinman and Lee Jinhee, who had been treating the patients, had been called here.

“Hmm... But it's not like we can kill all the other sovereigns either.”

Lee Jinhee said in a helpless voice. It was true. Only seven could remain out of the 40. 33 people had to give up. However, there currently wasn't anyone who had come out and said they would give up. But choosing to kill them all looked almost physically impossible, and the mental repulsion was great as well. It was different from when they were attacking Lao Ban since he had a clear cause back then.

"...Well, if we really needed to, we could kill all 33 of them."

Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman showed ugly expressions at the words Choi Hyuk mumbled. If he chose to do that, they would undoubtedly oppose it. Still, Choi Hyuk's thoughts were that he would only do it if it was necessary.

"Even if we don't kill all 33 of them, there's a need to firmly push forward."

Choi Hyuk said,

"If we continue to read each other's moods like this, it will never narrow down to seven people. We need to flip this around. Even if we get criticized, it's fine. Even if we get attacked, it's fine. If sovereigns unite to face us, even that is fine in its own way since it will be easier to elect the seven representatives if they form groups."

When Choi Hyuk said these words, Chu Youngjin recalled the Throne Game which had taken place in the school gymnasium in the past. Even then, Choi Hyuk had been the first to act. He created chaos, which brought on a free-for-all, and as a result, the Throne Game concluded much quicker.

Choi Hyuk continued,

"First, there is a definite starting point. Sovereigns we need to straighten out."

He briefly looked around at the people present before saying,

"The Clown Sovereign Freeman and the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir."

"Hmm..."

Even as they murmured to themselves, they all nodded their heads.

"Those two didn't participate in the advancement evaluation. And they had the nerve to apply as one of the seven sovereigns. I can't tolerate this."

As Choi Hyuk said, the Clown Sovereign Freeman and the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir did not participate in the advancement evaluation even until the very end. Instead, there were rumors that they gained quite a profit by providing medical service at an exorbitant price to those who returned after participating in the evaluations.

“These two don’t have the right to call themselves sovereigns. We will clearly inform people of this rule. That those who do not fight when they have to will face greater consequences.”

Choi Hyuk’s voice was resolute. In the very least, he would not compromise about attacking these two. Everyone had already realized that he had come to the decision to face them as their sovereign. Which was why they were worried.

“Hmm... So are we taking the bullet again?”

Baek Seoin said in a weary voice.

The current situation was similar to the Mafia game<sup>{1}</sup>. They had to eliminate 33 people but were currently unsure of how to start. What would happen if someone came out and accused, “Let’s kill A first! There’s no doubt he’s the Mafia!” at a time like this? If they felt their accusation was valid, there would be a trial against A. From this trial, A could be killed, or he may not be. Either way, what was certain was that the next person to go on trial would be the one who accused A. Being the first always came with a risk.

“If we took the lead, isn’t there a chance we’ll become the next target?”

The artillery captain, Handke, expressed his concern in a low voice.

Yet Choi Hyuk simply smiled.

“Then, isn’t that good? Since we’re doing this to end it as quick as possible.”

Of course, if people recklessly started accusing others, the Mafia game would end more quickly. For better or for worse.

Lee Jinhee shook her head and said,

“Haa... As expected, our leader is crazy.”

The situation came to a momentarily lull before Ryu Hyunsung raised his hand and asked,

“...How will we do it? It will be difficult to punish those who hide in their colonized land.”

They had endured all sorts of hardship trying to punish Lao Ban, whose colonized land was relatively close. It may be even harder when facing Freeman and Nasir, whose territories they hadn't yet located.

However, this was Ryu Hyunsung's mistake. Baek Seoin sorted it out,

“Let's see... Freeman is in a place that is around 5,200km away from Barhaloleun Hill, and Nasir's a bit further away. He around 11,300km beyond Zhiyu.”

“...How do you know so specifically... Ah!”

“Yeah. They said it was possible to check the locations of sovereigns who applied.”

Ryu Hyunsung quickly became embarrassed after Baek Seoin's explanation. However, even if they knew the location, it didn't mean the expedition would be easy. Baek Seoin turned around and asked Choi Hyuk,

“Still, isn't it too far? Wasn't Lao Ban's territory around 1,000km away? It still took over a week. Even if we say that our troops can run faster than most trains, we still need to go through monster territories throughout the journey... 5 thousand and 10 thousand kilometers is too troublesome.”

“There's a way.”

The instant Choi Hyuk said those words, a white hologram appeared next to Choi Hyuk with a crackle. It was Naro's hologram.

“I can answer that.”

Everyone was surprised by Naro's sudden appearance.

“What? Naro? How are you here?”

People were surprised by the fact Naro appeared in the colonized land.

The volume and mass of Naro's spaceship were too large to pass through Yeouido's portal. It said that it would be possible if it could connect to the portal and leap through space, but the energy it needed to perform this had already been depleted. It wasn't possible with normal energy, and it needed specially accumulated karma fuel, all of which had been used up during the dimensional transmission to Earth. Until it found a special substance that could be used as fuel, Naro's spaceship was unable to activate its true function, leaping through dimensions, and head for outer space.

That was what Naro had said. After hearing that, they couldn't help but be surprised by its appearance in the colonized land.

"Don't be so surprised. My main body hasn't crossed over. I am in the middle of using the portal to transmit information."

Crackle, crackle.

Like its words about how it was transmitting information, slight static hung on Naro's body. Still, Naro gestured exaggeratedly as it continued,

"I have been very busy creating a network between dimensions up until now. But, my efforts paid off. I am able to create a hologram within the colonized land and have investigated nearby topography and distribution of monsters by sending out radar through each sovereign's portal. I also developed a means of transportation that is suitable for traveling in Dragonic. Whether it's 5 thousand or 10 thousand kilometers, I will guide you through it all."

To sum it up, it was saying that they possessed the foundations to attack Freeman and Nasir with Naro's help.

"Really... I smell blood..."

Lee Jinhee said as she shook her head.

# CHAPTER 80

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (3)

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Nothing went the way you planned or the way you wanted. No, in fact, anything that occurred would always be a mess, a cesspool of filth. You only desperately wished to accomplish your original goal, perhaps fishing out the ring you had dropped, even if it meant dirtying your body with that stench and dampness.

The Berserkers' mobility was astonishing. Naro was extremely proud as it revealed the 'shoes' it called 'Karma Characteristic-Changing Mobilization Device TYPE A'. It had a friendly design which clearly reflected the traits of bipedalism, converted karma into force, was rechargeable and easy to use, all while being effective. It used energy fields located on the soles of the shoes to accelerate instantly and could maintain its speed with zero friction. Because it used charged energy, they could maintain a 300km/hr speed without consuming much energy. Not only that but because they moved with Naro's preliminary exploration as their guide, they could concentrate on advancing without worrying about getting lost and could keep encounters with monsters to a minimum. The Berserkers dubbed these shoes the 'Shoes of Hermes'.

The Berserkers' procession drew a line below Dragonic's milk-white sky.

The Berserkers' first target was the Clown Sovereign Freeman. Freeman was 5,200 km away from Barhaloleun Hill. He was an American and was known to be one of the strongest sovereigns. He was also one of the four sovereigns who defeated the final boss of the [Survive and Escape] mission, such as the 'Wyvern of Destruction' or the 'Flaming Devil'. The four were Choi Hyuk, Richard, Camilla, and Freeman.

He was a black man with white hair. He possessed outstanding insight and was skilled in crafting his own playing field by always being a step ahead of his opponents.

"I never knew we would get through the advancement evaluations. I suffered a huge loss. Since I never knew the Berserk Sovereign would do so much. However, my prediction this time is 100%. The Berserk Sovereign will invade in 3 days. I will bet on that."

He said, wearing a comfortable t-shirt and jeans,

“But, since his military power is beyond prediction, I will suffer a loss if we fight. To block a bigger loss, I need to endure a smaller one.”

With a leisurely smile, he assured,

“Watch. I am going to survive and the Berserk Sovereign will become everyone’s enemy. I will bet on that.”

His fate was the ‘Gambler’. It was a trait that increased his karma whenever he accomplished difficult goals or he succeeded in predicting the future. On the other hand, if he was wrong, he would lose karma. Freeman was certain he would be able to earn a significant amount of karma this time.

That was why...

The Berserkers were met with an absurd situation after reaching Freeman’s colonized land in a day.

“...The U.S. army.”

The ones guarding Freeman’s colonized land were not his own clan members but a troop of awakenees under the United States of America.

“Oh my god... Did he make some sort of deal with President Frank?”

Baek Seoin’s mouth was agape.

The Clown Sovereign Freeman’s actions were lightning quick. The moment he realized that the Berserk Sovereign was targeting him, he had made a deal with President Frank.

[The Clown Sovereign Freeman transferred 50% of his stake in his colonized land to Frank, who is the president of the United States as well as a sovereign. Freeman’s colonized land has been incorporated into the United States of America as a special self-governing state and receives the U.S.’s protection.]

The Berserkers were fast, but the actions of the United States were faster. Freeman’s clan members had retreated to the back and the U.S. army blocked their path at the front. There was no way to attack Freeman without passing through the U.S. army.

“This place is U.S. territory. If you approach any closer, we will treat it as a declaration of war.”

When the Berserkers had slowed down and approached the border, they received a warning from the U.S. army. Although tension flowed throughout the U.S. army as they faced the famous Berserkers, on the other hand, they showed a certain confidence. ‘They won’t attack us, right?’ It was a rational confidence.

The Berserkers murmured amongst themselves. They had rushed here to attack the Clown Sovereign Freeman, but the ones who were waiting for them was the U.S. army. Weren’t they like dogs chasing a chicken?<sup>[1]</sup>

Even the Berserkers, who had experienced all sorts of situations, were quite perplexed. Did they have to return like this without any results? They, the Berserkers? Everyone examined Choi Hyuk’s expression. However, there wasn’t much of a change.

In Choi Hyuk’s perspective, they looked like a group of baby chicks. That was it. The way others viewed the world was fundamentally different from Choi Hyuk.

The U.S. army which looked confident, while actually being nervous, and the Berserkers, who got into a fit but were hesitant when seeing the U.S. army, were both groups of people who weren’t free from the stereotypical mold they had formed throughout their lives. To them, the U.S. was the U.S, the strongest country in the world. The most important diplomatic partner. Becoming at odds with them was the same as fighting the world, and creating conflict with them would result in a situation where countries would start fighting against each other. Even Berserkers who weren’t in their right mind couldn’t help but hit the brakes.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn’t like them. He didn’t feel any intimidation from the U.S. army blocking his path. They were weak. To him, baby chicks were simply baby chicks.

Choi Hyuk shouted,

“Move. I have come to capture the Clown Sovereign Freeman. If you do not move out of the way in 5 minutes, I will regard it as though you are taking Freeman’s side.”

At Choi Hyuk’s words, the Berserkers made a loud commotion.

‘Wow, really? Are we really going to fight against the U.S. army?’

'As expected of our leader.'

'... Is this really okay?'

'What's there to think about? Just go berserk like always and the higher ups will deal with it.'

There were various reactions. While there was a sense of awkwardness and confusion, there was no fear.

"...Ah, damn... Baek hyung. Will we be alright like this?"

Lee Jinhee was anxious. To fight with the U.S. army? Then they might have to kill much more than they initially expected. She hated that.

Baek Seoin shook his head.

"I don't know... But..."

Baek Seoin's eyes shined in a cold light.

"The ones who first colluded politically was them. I don't know what they received from Freeman, but we can't allow them to protect a criminal who discarded 40% of the population."

Then he said bitterly,

"Still, if it was me, I would have looked for a more moderate method, but the leader probably won't. First, let's see how the U.S. army reacts."

The commanding officer of the U.S. army was surprised at Choi Hyuk's strong response.

He came out to talk with Choi Hyuk.

"Sovereign Choi Hyuk. I acknowledge that the Clown Sovereign Freeman must pay some sort of price. However, the U.S. will make him pay a price our own way. He has already forfeited half his colonized land, and his colonized land is now under the jurisdiction of the U.S. However, this may not be the end. If you go back and wait, you will see Freeman pay the appropriate price."

He had packaged the negotiations between Freeman and President Frank as if it was a 'penalty' the U.S. had enacted. However, even if that was a penalty, it was too inferior for Choi Hyuk's standards.

"Not all, but half? On top of that, he is not just a clan leader but someone who possesses the occupation of a sovereign, a representative of humanity. Then his punishment must be that much harsher. I want his life. Please bring Freeman's head in front of me right now or move."

To bring Freeman's head. This was an impossible request for the U.S. as they had made a contract with Freeman.

"That is an excessive request. Even if it's not that method, we will make him pay the appropriate price..."

The commanding officer continuously requested Choi Hyuk to yield, but Choi Hyuk cut him off.

"But how is it that Sovereign Freeman, who has paid a price, is still applying to be one of the seven overseers? No, from the start, is this even paying a price? Isn't this just the U.S. gaining something from Freeman? All of humanity suffered from Freeman's actions, yet the U.S. is campaigning that they made him pay a price after taking whatever Freeman coughed up for themselves?"

Choi Hyuk's words had at some point changed to informal speech, and the respect he had for them had disappeared. What made him especially angry was the fact that Freeman still had not withdrawn his application.

In the U.S.'s perspective, it was best to have more than one American sovereign be part of the seven overseers. This was especially ideal if, because of this incident, the one who came under President Frank's command was Freeman. This was why the U.S. did not request Freeman to withdraw his application.

This made Choi Hyuk retch. For a sovereign who did not participate in the advancement evaluations to be one of the seven overseers?

Choi Hyuk's tone became harsher.

The commanding officer became angry.

“Such an insult...!”

“Whatever. 5 minutes have passed. I warned you.”

Flames erupted from Choi Hyuk’s body.

This was the start of a gruesome war in which he would lose his nickname as the Berserk Sovereign and only his nickname Demon King would remain.

Death. And death again.

The U.S. exaggerated the clash between the U.S. army and the Berserkers at the border of Freeman’s colonized land before reporting it. Instead of reporting specific numbers, they recited provocative remarks such as ‘annihilation’, ‘overwhelming defeat’, ‘there may be even more casualties...’

No... Perhaps the number of casualties wasn’t important from the start. In any case, the Berserkers were a foreign group, and the ones who were sacrificed were U.S. citizens. The U.S. became enraged. No matter how messed up the world had become, the once-formed national identity would not easily disappear. The U.S. awakenees united. Vows to drive out the invading foreign power were declared one after another.

Even though Freeman had gone through the portal to Earth and fled to the U.S. the moment he heard the news of Choi Hyuk’s advance, Choi Hyuk... did not retreat.

They annihilated the U.S. defense troops and occupied the colonized land that Freeman’s clan members had fled from. In this situation, no one thought that they would chase Freeman to Earth. Yet, Choi Hyuk decided to advance to Earth, to the U.S.

“We can’t retreat now. We return after killing the Clown Sovereign Freeman.”

The one who opposed his decision the most was Lee Jinhee.

“But too many unrelated people will die! The losses the Berserkers will face will be large as well!”

Still, Choi Hyuk did not change his mind. He, instead, raised his voice so everyone could hear.

“Unrelated? They became related the moment they protected Freeman. The U.S. came

out and made a power play ahead of the selection of the seven overseers. However, they chose the wrong opponent.”

“But...!”

Choi Hyuk cut her off. In his mind, he didn’t think this problem was one to debate over.

“Jinhee nuna. What do you think is the power that maintains the Berserkers?”

In reality, the group known as Berserkers made no sense. They didn’t offer large benefits or convenience like other sovereigns gave to their clan members. They didn’t attempt to protect normal civilians either. Instead, they only participated in fights in which their clan members’ lives were always at risk. The Berserkers were lunatics who harmed normal people, let alone protect them. Their reputation was the worst. Their enemies were everywhere. Even still, the Berserkers could maintain their group. Even still, the Berserkers were influential and had an endless stream of new recruits. What was the reason?

“It is because we do not lose.”

Choi Hyuk said,

“I cannot give my followers wealth and honor. I cannot make rational deals like other sovereigns. I cannot protect the vast number of non-clan members well. The reason why people follow me despite all this is because I do not lose. I can only give them one thing. Endless victory. When I don’t lose even once, and once their assurance in my victory becomes deep-rooted in them, then, even if my opponent is the entire Flame Wing Alliance, people will trust and follow me. That is my goal.”

Choi Hyuk’s eyes flashed like a maniac’s.

“But, the U.S. tried to compromise with me. They took the possible escalation of war as a hostage and threatened the Berserkers’ foundation of ‘Zero Losses’. I can’t retreat from this. No matter what price I pay.”

Now, Choi Hyuk looked around at everyone and said,

“We will win this time. We will be so overwhelming that casualties will be low. As always.”

Lee Jinhee's eyes, which looked at Choi Hyuk, trembled. Choi Hyuk looked at her and said in a quiet voice,

"You were already aware of this."

This was why Lee Jinhee, who was comparatively in her right mind, couldn't leave Choi Hyuk. Lee Jinhee... She was more considerate than anyone else, but on the other hand, she also possessed an ambition to improve herself that approached madness. Lee Jinhee read Choi Hyuk's eyes. She read his will and assurance that he would not lose even if he fought the entire universe. In front of this immense scale, there was nothing she could do.

"...Since you're my hyung. I will follow you to hell."

She called Choi Hyuk hyung for a change. Choi Hyuk simply smiled.

The Berserkers went through the portal and advanced to the U.S.

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[1] The 'full idiom' is something like 'The dog chasing the chicken only looks at the roof.' The English equivalent is 'So much for our plans' or 'It was all for naught'.

# CHAPTER 81

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (4)

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Freeman's colonized land was connected to a portal in the middle of New York Central Park.

The U.S. blocked off and surrounded the entire Central Park area. Tens of thousands of soldiers from the infantry regiment, artillery regiment, mechanized infantry brigade, special forces brigade, as well as others, gathered here. At the same time, they were also awakenees. Although the soldiers were approximately at the 1-star level, and although they may not possess the ability to threaten people at the 3-star level, their equipment surely possessed enough firepower to threaten those with 2-stars.

Even though they were on full alert as they assumed an all-out war against the Berserkers, the leaders didn't believe that the Berserkers would make such a crazy move like passing through the portal. This was simply a state of alertness just in case.

Because of this, when someone came through the portal which had been idle until now, the U.S. army thought that he was an ally who had escaped late. However, the tall man with black hair and a resilient figure was strikingly similar to someone who had become incredibly famous recently.

'Huh?'

Their confusion was short-lived. The commanding officers recognized that the most dangerous person in the world had passed through the portal.

"Fire!"

The command to fire was given before even 3 seconds had passed since Choi Hyuk had come through. It was a response following the rules of engagement issued beforehand. However, 3 seconds was too late. No, whether it was 0.3 or 3 seconds, from the start, this didn't make much difference to Choi Hyuk.

The barrage of bullets, shells, and even the long-distance attacks by the so-called 'magicians' all-

“Flaming Wing Dance.”

-Turned to ash along with Choi Hyuk’s words.

‘Scarlet flames vividly licked their surroundings.’ Even if this description was a bit comical, it was well-suited. The first line of the encirclement turned into ash where they stood. A slaughter without the slightest mercy.

The blood-red flames fluttered like feathers of an angel. They burned in the air and devoured the soldiers’ fear-stricken pupils, open mouths and their blackened throats were revealed within. Depressing fireworks...

Kiririk, clang!

The Predator’s Blade’s body distorted as it came out of its sheath.

Choi Hyuk blinked his eyes once before running in a certain direction. He clearly recalled the location of the Clown Sovereign Freeman in his head.

“Block him!!”

The first line had fallen, but there were still the second and third. Yet...

“How can we block that...”

The scarlet flames devoured everything. The infantry regiment fell into a state of confusion. The artillery regiment was powerless. The armored brigade collapsed. The special forces brigade was annihilated. The awe-inspiring encirclement became desolate.

The Berserkers went through the portal following closely behind Choi Hyuk. There was more confusion. Each team leader ordered and the directors emphasized it once more.

“Push! Push! Secure some room!”

“Completely fuck them up! Make a solid retreat route!”

“Don’t go easy and kill them!”

The U.S. army, which had focused on Choi Hyuk, was easily wiped out by the Berserkers' charge.

The U.S. army's tactics were to use quick 1-star awakenees to target their enemies with powerful firearms from afar. That was why the moment they let the Berserkers rush in close without suffering any damage, they couldn't help but collapse hopelessly.

Before one could even shudder from flesh-boiling heat, wet blood spilled and seeped into the ground. The Berserkers weren't merciful in the slightest. Their mercy was, on the contrary, inflicting them with the greatest possible fear. 'Watch and shiver. Flee in fear. If you don't flee, you'll most definitely die.' They clearly engraved this certainty into their hearts. They made it so that they would flee to the ends of the Earth, unable to raise their swords again. That was their mercy.

They were torn apart. When they thought a soldier was being taken out, a squad had been torn apart. Platoons, no, companies were massacred. Regiments defeated. The U.S. was routed.

The Berserkers were like a wedge splitting a rock. They drove into the cracks of the U.S. army and split them into small pieces.

Choi Hyuk left Central Park. Following his steps, the park, which used to be the resting area for New Yorkers, was erased. The grass turned into ash and the lakes evaporated.

Choi Hyuk was simply taking the shortest distance to reach his target, the Clown Sovereign Freeman. He didn't care about what was happening behind him. It was because he had the Berserkers. He didn't conserve any karma. Freeman was currently in the underground bunker of the White House and was attending a national security conference. Choi Hyuk didn't plan on giving him the opportunity to escape. By the time he received a report about how Choi Hyuk was terrorizing the White House and that he should escape, Choi Hyuk would already be there.

Zzziing!

The 'Karma Characteristic-Changing Mobilization Device TYPE A', also known as the Shoes of Hermes, which Naro had shown off, were burning red due to the excessive amount of karma being injected into them.

There was around 360 km between New York and the White House, yet Choi Hyuk was planning on covering that distance in 30 minutes.

Choi Hyuk passed through while the Berserkers cleaned up after him.

“Secure a retreat route from New York to Washington! Guardian, artillery captain, and Hyunsung, stay here, Chu Youngjin and Lee Jinhee, follow me!”

Ordered Baek Seoin. Approximately 8,000 out of the over 10,000 Berserkers remained in New York to completely crush the U.S. army. The remaining 2,000 elites charged towards Washington, following behind Choi Hyuk.

No matter how strong Choi Hyuk was, because there was a limit to his stamina, the existence of the Berserkers, who cleared a safe retreat route, was indispensable.



The Clown Sovereign Freeman was someone who made very quick decisions. However, even he would make mistakes. Like how he didn't immediately flee the moment he heard the news that Choi Hyuk had pierced through the encirclement in Central Park and was on his way to Washington.

Of course, he was quite busy at the time.

“Sorry. Mr. President.”

“Keu... Keuah...”

The president of the United States, Frank, was dying in the security meeting room, which was meant for his safety, in the underground bunker of the White House.

“Freeman...!!”

The Chief Officer of the Presidential Security was filled with rage. Although he was a well-known expert in the U.S., he was currently unable to move even a finger. With his eyes glaring, he could only tremble as his whole body stood rigidly.

“You traitor worse than a dog! You...”

“Ah, stop there.”

When Freeman waved his hand, the chief officer couldn't let out a voice.

“Krr... Hic...”

He tried so hard to speak that the veins on his face were bulging, yet like a person who was being choked, he couldn't let out a proper sound.

“Ah... Still, as the Chief Officer of the President, do you have one stat at the 4-star level? Quite bothersome.”

Freeman leisurely leaned against the sofa and waved his hand a few times.

Then the security guards and government cabinet members, who had been won over by Freeman, stabbed their swords into the chief officer's body.

Kiririk! Kirik!

As he had a high Endurance stat, the chief officer's body let out metallic sounds, however, he was unable to block the attacks covered with karma blades. His arms fell, then his legs; his body fell in pieces and dirtied the floor of the security meeting room. Like that, corpses and puddles of blood littered the floor like garbage. This was treason.

As if the meeting room, which was filled with the stench of blood, had become his own, he sat comfortably with a dull smile.

“When I thought about it, it was too much of a waste to give you 50%.”

Only after that commotion had passed did Freeman recall the report that Choi Hyuk was charging towards Washington. He laughed like a child.

“That, that Berserk Sovereign. So bad, how could he kill the president of the United States?”

Freeman believed that he would live and that the Berserk Sovereign would become humanity's enemy. He believed in the troops guarding Washington, his clan members who were second to none, and the volunteer troops who had come from various places enraged that their mainland, the U.S., had been invaded.

Freeman thought that, even if half the rumors about the Berserk Sovereign were true, he would be able to push towards the White House. However, that was it. He would have simply fled to the back by then. If anything, he needed him to push towards the

White House so that he could accuse the Berserk Sovereign of assassinating the president.

“Work hard. So you don’t disappoint me.”

That was when an urgent message was sent to Freeman, who had been sitting comfortably.

“The Berserk Sovereign pierced through Washington’s border!”

Even until then, Freeman was relaxed.

“Already? He’s faster than I thought.”

However, urgent messages followed one after another, almost simultaneously.

“The Berserk Sovereign entered Washington!”

“He will soon enter the White House! He’s too fast. Sovereign, you need to escape!”

Freeman was taken aback as he said,

“Wh... What?”

Then,

Blaze!

Just when Freeman was about to leave, sunlight entered the underground bunker.

Whoosh. Ashes fell. Even the metal didn’t melt but instead burned, turning into ash and smoke. This was something that wouldn’t happen in the bunker even if a nuclear bomb had been dropped. Yet, in front of the ability of karma, which approached a superhuman level, material protection was of no use.

Thud.

A man fell, accompanying the pouring sunlight.

“Found you.”

Said the man.



The events of that day were an unparalleled humiliation in U.S. history.

A one-sided defeat. The number of dead soldiers approached the thousands, Central Park, which was one of the symbols of the U.S., had turned to ash, the White House had collapsed, and President Frank and the Clown Sovereign Freeman had been killed in the middle of the White House. The Berserk Sovereign, who had stomped on the U.S., leisurely went back through the portal while receiving the protection of the Berserkers.

The citizens of the U.S. were furious.

And the only U.S. sovereign who could answer their rage was Jessie. The sovereign who had uploaded lectures on fighting techniques on Youtube and had gained great popularity. The sovereign who some had thought was the strongest before Choi Hyuk revealed his true worth. That was Jessie. The sovereign who opened the fate 'Superstar', which increased his karma the more compliments he received from people and the more influential he became. Unlike the others who had nicknames, he was simply a celebrity known as 'Sovereign Jessie'.

Jessie who was visiting the place of the incident, the White House, smiled awkwardly.

"...So. You're saying you think it was one-sided?"

"Yes."

Asserted his follower, who had gained a perception-type trait. Even though Jessie had never doubted his insight... it was difficult to accept this time.

"Does that make sense? You know it as well. How strong that old snake, Freeman, was."

Even when everyone praised him, saying he was the strongest, he never once thought he was. Since there was Freeman. Although he had never directly fought against Freeman, Jessie always anticipated that Freeman's karma stats was either at the same level as or above his. He expected that Freeman would likely have had around three of his important stats at the 3-star level. Of course, fights weren't fully determined by this, but either way, looking at the indicators objectively, he always believed he wasn't

the strongest. Because of Freeman... the one who had just been one-sidedly killed.

“Does that even make sense? I admit that the Berserk Sovereign is strong. I admit that. But Freeman was killed one-sidedly? And that’s even when President Frank was with him as well?”

“From what traces are left, that seems to be the case.”

To be honest, it wasn’t the traces but the situation. The only trace left here was the enormous pile of ashes. Not even corpses remained. Only, the fact that Freeman and Frank were killed was definite, and the problem was that the time Choi Hyuk took to rush into the White House and leave wasn’t even 10 minutes. It was hard to accept that time unless they were one-sidedly killed.

Although he couldn’t believe it, he had no choice but to.

Jessie became momentarily silent.

Currently, the entire U.S. was requesting him for revenge in blood. Against the Berserkers who invaded their mainland and against the Berserk Sovereign who made soldiers and innocent civilians lose their lives. As their last remaining U.S. sovereign, they called for him to take revenge.

Because the compliments of others and their influence were important to the Jessie clan, who had the fate ‘Superstar’, this request was hard to refuse. However... The enemy they would have to face may be much stronger than they thought. An opponent who may have been strong enough to kill that Freeman with ease...

When Jessie’s thoughts reached that point, he suddenly became delighted.

“Wow... This will be quite the picture. What do you think of the concept of a hero challenging the demon king?”

They spread this material everywhere. Ridiculously strong. Ruthless without hesitation. If they used this, they could definitely make a picture. This fact delighted Jessie as the driving force which made him stronger was fame after all.

There was another meaning behind this fact... It was that the Jessie clan possessed excellent ‘directing’ skills.

## CHAPTER 82

# MUSICAL CHAIRS (5)

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‘Outbreak of war.’

This was the keyword that struck the world. Death was broadcasted on all the screens and speakers of the world.

War. The death of others. When it didn’t concern you, it would never be anything beyond tiring, unpleasant news. Instead of feeling pain for another’s death, you would click your tongue, “Tsk, humans,” then change the channel. However... the moment you thought that their death was related to you, it would become a completely different problem. This was why a terror attack in Paris was slightly more sorrowful and shocking than the slaughter of thousands in the Middle East.

The reason why the Berserkers’ ‘slaughter’ resounded so loudly was because this carnage was an incident that could occur anywhere in the world. There weren’t any countries free from the competition and conflict between sovereigns which occurred to select the seven overseers. An uneasiness similar to standing in the middle of a pile of explosives with tangled conductive wire. The world received a shock and was uneasy. Public opinions scrambled to criticize Choi Hyuk.

Of course, the Jessie clan’s superb directing skills had contributed to the situation progressing as it did.

In a video, Jessie was walking down the streets of Washington. He followed the steps the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk had taken, and the places he passed by went up in flames before turning to ash. The wide-angle shot captured the ruined scene which looked like the aftermath of God’s punishment. Since the soldiers, who resisted until the end, had been burned cleanly, it was hard to find any corpses.

{... Is this the act of a human?}

Jessie’s depressed voice was heard. It was as if he was surprised by the Berserkers’ overwhelming strength and was saddened by the unbelievable horror.

The main battlefields were Central Park and Washington. There was a clash between

Choi Hyuk, who had been charging towards the White House, and the mechanized infantry division, who tried to stop him. Choi Hyuk, who had activated the Shoes of Hermes to its maximum, passed through this place like a jet and his flaming feathers burned everywhere. This was where the most civilian casualties took place.

Jessie, who had been walking slowly, discovered the corpse of the young girl amongst the pile of ashes. Although her face had been stained with dirt and ashes, she was beautiful. When only looking at her face, it felt as though she would open her eyes at any moment, yet everything below her chest had all turned to ash and scattered. Just looking at this sight made people want to cry.

“Ah...”

Jessie held the girl’s corpse in his arms. The camera perfectly captured Jessie’s trembling fingers. He slowly stood up, holding the girl in his arms.

He didn’t say anything. He simply raised his head and looked directly at the camera. His fingers and eyes no longer trembled. They stayed frozen. A freezing aura hung in the air. Jessie gazed at the camera with tightly shut lips.

The screen gradually turned dark and a single word appeared.

{REVENGE(복수)}<sup>{1}</sup>

The U.S. stood up. The world became enraged along with it. To have invaded the U.S., slaughtered civilians and killed the president without a declaration of war... The Berserkers were branded as the world’s worst terrorist group and as warmongers. In the end, Freeman’s prediction, ‘I will survive and the Berserk Sovereign will be the enemy of the world,’ had become partly true.

{We need to make the Berserk Sovereign, who abuses his strength, pay a price.}

Sovereign Jessie formed the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Heroism struck the U.S. and half the clans spread throughout the world joined the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Soon after, sovereigns of other countries participated in creating allied forces. The mood progressed this way. There were both moral obligations and benefits. The Berserk Sovereign was an intimidating existence that they feared, and there were many sovereigns who wanted to use this opportunity to eliminate him. ‘If so many forces participate, won’t the Berserk Sovereign definitely be constricted?’ was what they thought.



However, Choi Hyuk simply moved per his schedule.

Now that he had disposed of the Clown Sovereign Freeman, it was time to deal with the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir. He wasn't the least bit concerned about the Anti-Berserker Alliance. Only Baek Seoin grew fretful.

"There are a lot of enemies. There's no chance of winning in an all-out war."

Warned Baek Seoin on their way to deal with Nasir.

The intelligence Naro had sent them was proof. An intelligence that, with Sovereign Jessie as their head, around three or four sovereigns were gathering their troops on their path to Nasir. Because the locations of all the sovereigns who applied for the seven overseers were revealed, it had become easier to navigate through Dragonic and was also why Sovereign Jessie's Anti-Berserker Alliance was able to gather together so quickly.

"Not only that, but even the Camilla clan evacuated the healers they dispatched to South Korea and insisted that we resolve this through words and not military strength. We currently do not have the moral high ground. Also, we are the minority. Although it is true that leader is strong, don't you have a limit to your stamina? You cannot win against all of them."

Even when Baek Seoin earnestly said this, Choi Hyuk didn't change his mind.

"We can't back down."

Then he added,

"Don't worry. We won't fight them."

"What? They are currently blocking our path so how are we going to not fight?!"

At Baek Seoin's sullen protest, Choi Hyuk gave a short reply,

"We aren't fighting. We are going to jump over them."

"...Pardon?"

The monsters that attacked tirelessly throughout their advance gradually died down and suddenly hid their whereabouts. The reason was clear. The Anti-Berserker Alliance filled the plain they saw on the horizon. It was because they, who had arrived early, had cleaned out the nearby monsters.

Baek Seoin sighed.

“...So many... Our side doesn't even have ten thousand left...”

{I estimate there are around 50,000 people.}

Reported Naro. Tension flowed throughout the Berserkers. The Anti-Berserker Alliance didn't simply have more numbers. They caught sight of experts who possessed strong karma in various places. They even felt their strong determination. They expected that there would be many casualties if they collided head-on.

Sovereign Jessie came out first. He shouted with the attitude of a high schooler picking a fight,

“Berserk Sovereign! Do you have anything to say about the civilians you slaughtered in New York and Washington?”

Choi Hyuk answered,

“Nothing to say. I'm on my way to attack Nasir so move.”

A commotion erupted.

The Anti-Berserker Alliance became noisy at Choi Hyuk's half-hearted response. The rage amongst U.S. citizens was especially strong. After the short outbursts settled down, Jessie raised his tightly clenched fist. At his signal, the noisy crowd became quiet.

“...Looks like words won't work.”

He said as he raised his suspended spear. He shouted, his clear voice resounding,

“All forces... Spread out!”

Whoosh.

It was like a surging whirlpool. Tens of thousands of colonizers spread out at the same time, leaving a certain distance between each other. If one had stood in arranged rows during school assemblies, they would know that, due to the characteristics of a line, the people further out would have to move a lot more. It was close to impossible for an army of tens of thousands to spread out at the same time.

However, each person was an awakenee who transcended human capabilities. They showed explosive power as they spread out, leaping tens of meters each stride, and the ranks of the Anti-Berserker Alliance, which already filled the plain, instantly expanded to the point of being unable to see the edges.

“It’s not like we don’t have any countermeasures.”

Jessie clenched his spear. It was because the ‘Flaming Wing Dance’ Choi Hyuk had shown multiple times possessed an extreme range, making fighting against him in a concentrated formation impossible. That was why he planned on maintaining his spread-out formation to tire out Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers in an endlessly rotating fight.

He stood here to truly win against the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk.

“Surround them!”

As Jessie’s command sounded out, the plain stirred up. It was a magnificent sight as it felt like the entire world was moving. Some even began using alien means of transportation that they had obtained from the supply store to quickly surround the ground the Berserkers were standing on. It was swift as well as unbelievably systematic.

However, Choi Hyuk’s eyes showed a pleased look, let alone nervousness.

“...For them to spread themselves out on their own.”

It had become easier since...

“Berserkers. Don’t fall behind.”

Choi Hyuk wasn’t planning on fighting the Anti-Berserker Alliance, but instead, jumping over and ignoring them.

Kiiiaaang!

The Berserkers' Shoes of Hermes let out a deafening noise simultaneously. A deafening noise they didn't hear when they ran on land.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk ran forward.

The Berserkers followed after him.

"It's no use!"

Shouted Jessie, yet-

"...Huh?"

The Shoes of Hermes, which were emitting a deafening noise, created repulsive forces in midair, and with a bang, the Berserkers stepped on air and flew above the Anti-Berserker Alliance.

"What... What the! Block them!"

Since they could only obtain alien objects through direct transactions at the supply store, the numbers, and their capabilities, were limited. Unlike the Berserkers, who could freely step on air and fly due to Naro's abilities, there weren't many amongst the Anti-Berserker Alliance who could partake in an aerial battle. There were only experts who jumped extremely high by relying on their own abilities and the minority of colonizers who possessed flying-type tools.

Although they quickly flew up-

"Screw off!"

Crash! Bang!

They were beaten up by the team leaders and directors of the Berserkers and sent plummeting to the ground.

There was nothing they could do. If, instead, they were in a tight formation, they could

have all jumped up at once and attacked, or shot from afar to somehow damage the Berserkers. Since they were in a spread-out formation, they didn't have any suitable way to block the Berserkers.

“Euaahhh! Berserk Sovereign!”

Enraged, Jessie stepped on air and jumped up. He didn't borrow the power of any tool, instead, this was a movement technique which required precise control over karma. He blocked Choi Hyuk's path, who had been running faster than anyone else. He used this moment to stab his spear.

Kiririk!

The Predator's Blade deflected Jessie's spear to the side as it passed by.

It let out a metallic screech.

Choi Hyuk smiled.

“Not bad.”

Bang!

Then he just passed Jessie.

“Berserk Sovereign!!!”

Jessie, who had been left behind, shouted, but Choi Hyuk didn't face him, and Lee Jinhee, who had been following behind him, smacked down at Jessie's back.

“Shut up!”

“Who are you?!”

Kakang!

Jessie easily blocked Lee Jinhee's attack by flipping his body, but that was it.

“Now screw off.”

He couldn't endure Chu Youngjin's attack as he followed up behind her as well.

Rumble!

His downwards strike was accompanied by the sound of thunder. Although Jessie had blocked it, he was pushed back from its strength and fell to the ground.

The resistance of the Anti-Berserker Alliance ended with that.

The Berserkers passed over the Anti-Berserker Alliance without much loss. The alliance felt hopeless, like a dog chasing a chicken.



“Ueahaha! Did you see their faces?”

Lee Jinhee's voice was filled with excitement. She repeatedly imitated Sovereign Jessie's dazed expression while bursting into laughter. To her, it was a fun battle for a change. Not a lot of blood was spilled either.

“Puhahaha! Did they think we would face each and every one of them? Keuhihi! Us Berserkers don't stop for nothing!”

Lee Jinhee shouted like a drunken middle aged man.

It wasn't only her, but overall, the Berserkers were in a good mood. As they toyed with enemies multiple times their number, there was no way they didn't feel good.

It was while they were advancing in a good mood.

“Huh?”

Choi Hyuk, who had been running, suddenly let out a sound of surprise.

“Huh?”

Baek Seoin, who was following behind him, was surprised as well.

“What? What is it? Huh?”

Curious, even Lee Jinhee was surprised.

It was because the information on Nasir's location, which had been clearly indicated just now, had suddenly disappeared.

Choi Hyuk turned towards Baek Seoin with confused eyes. Baek Seoin said with a dazed expression,

"Uh... Leader... Uh... It looks like Nasir withdrew from the application for the seven overseers?"

"Why?"

Choi Hyuk asked as he didn't understand. Baek Seoin told him his assumption. Although it was a bit disappointing.

"...That's because leader is chasing him?"

"Because I'm chasing him?"

"Yes... To hide."

"..."

Nasir had not participated in the advancement evaluations even once. Even still, he applied to be one of the seven overseers. The Nasir who had met Choi Hyuk's criticisms with a "What did I do wrong!" had hidden his tracks. Because he became scared when Choi Hyuk truly came out to kill him.

"...What kind of bastard..."

Choi Hyuk was taken aback by his despicable behavior. He shook his head as he said,

"Let's go see first."

Since he couldn't retreat without any profit, he continued to advance.

"Haa..."

Someone sighed.

They couldn't do anything about the disappointing mood.

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{1} The raws actually had both English and Korean.

# CHAPTER 83

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (6)

---

A fierce wind blew as it kicked up desolate sand.

In this desolate desert, 'rain-trees', known to spread their roots up to 100 meters below the ground, were spread out here and there as a drizzle poured down between their leaves. They drew water from deep underground up through their roots and drizzled light rain from their gypsophila-like leaves. It was a desolate area, but, at least near the rain-trees, it was green like an oasis. The rain-trees filled their roots with water, and moss, grass, and small flowers grew around it. The wind swept through as it shook the rain-trees. The drizzle the rain-trees shook off fluttered like a fog. The rolling sky of Dragonic, which was thick and white like milk, formed abnormally fast whirlpools and blew fierce winds.

The capital city of the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir was called 'Nasari'. Although it looked desolate from outside, because there was an enormous reservoir of underground water deep down, Nasari was actually a beautiful city which built springs and fountains from this water. It was even known as the 'Jewel of the Desert'.

This beautiful city was currently noisier than usual.

"Hurray for the Berserkers!"

"Hurray!"

"Hurray! Welcome!"

With Choi Hyuk as the lead, the Berserkers entered Nasari without a fight.

Everywhere they went, they were met with a loud welcoming ceremony, let alone a fight.

The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir took his followers and fled, but the non-combatant colonizers as well as small and medium-sized clans, who were active in this city, were unable to leave the city, which was the foundation of their lives. Their actions of welcoming the occupying forces were, in their own way, their survival method.

The gathered people flicked colored water. The colored water that was created by squeezing oil from the rain-trees was fragrant and light but also easily washed off with normal water. The colored water, which was being flicked from every direction, dyed the Berserkers in natural colors.

Whoosh!

A gust of wind swept up the colored water and surged towards the sky. Even the whirlwinds looked like they were blooming with flowers.

“Kah! This is good!”

The artillery captain Handke shouted in a good mood. When had they ever received such cheers? It felt like they were being rewarded after the hollowness they felt for losing the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.

“It’s worrying since it’s so good... Is this really alright?”

Ryu Hyunsung looked back at Baek Seoin with an uneasy expression. Baek Seoin nodded his head as he replied,

“My Intuition is fine. I only feel good.”

While receiving endless cheers, the Berserkers advanced towards the center of Nasari, where the portal was located. Until then, the people didn’t scatter and followed the Berserkers, cheering them on.

Just then, they arrived at the center of the city. Choi Hyuk stood in front of the pulsating portal and raised his hand. The portal was the source of a sovereign’s authority. It didn’t only make passage between Earth and the colonized lands possible but also allowed them to tax those who entered and deport those who entered through their portals as they wished. Choi Hyuk had just placed his hand on the authority Sovereign Nasir left behind when he fled.

The surroundings became silent. Everyone held their breaths as they watched. ‘What will happen?’ All previous cases of taking colonized lands up until now had been by killing the sovereign and succeeding their authority. That was how Choi Hyuk obtained Lao Ban and Freeman’s colonized lands. However, it was a bit different this time. Choi Hyuk occupied this territory while Sovereign Nasir was still alive. The people’s opinions were divided. There were some who thought that since Nasir was

still alive, the authority would belong to him, and there were others who thought that since, in reality, Choi Hyuk captured this territory, the authority would be passed to him.

It was an important issue. While the people gathered here had cheered for the Berserkers' entry for their own immediate safety, they couldn't be seen as being 100% on Choi Hyuk's side. In fact, they would make their final decision on which side to take depending on whether the authority was passed to Choi Hyuk or not.

Just then, Choi Hyuk's hand touched the portal, and at the same time, the troubling, yet annoying calculations of the Nasari citizens ended as well.

{Sovereign Choi Hyuk has captured Sovereign Nasir's portal. If Sovereign Nasir does not retake the portal within 24 hours, the authority of the portal will be passed over to Sovereign Choi Hyuk.}

Announced a pleasant voice. After they had become official alliance members of the Flame Wing Alliance, excluding the mission announcements, the announcements began to use polite, formal speech. Although it wasn't much, their moods became pleasant whenever they heard the announcements.

Choi Hyuk grinned.

"We didn't take a loss."

If 24 hours passed, this colonized land would become Choi Hyuk's as well. Naro's scan confirmed that there weren't any movements of a large-scale army within a day's distance from here.

Finally, Choi Hyuk checked the surrounding combatants. The city reflected in his Eyes of Distinction was completely white (goodwill) or a light gray containing a little black (hostility). Although there was hostility due to fear and uneasiness, he couldn't find any traces of killing intent. A color which signified complete surrender to the Berserkers.

This place was now Choi Hyuk's new colonized land.

Choi Hyuk smiled slightly before turning around towards the Berserkers and shouting,

"Today, we feast and enjoy ourselves to the fullest!"

“Waaahhhh!!!”

A thunder-like shout erupted from the Berserkers, and soon after,

“Please come this way. We will take care of you!”

Prominent figures in Nasari stepped forward. To leave an impression on Choi Hyuk and his executives, they began to provide the Berserkers with the best food and residence.

An excited atmosphere boomed.

Although they killed Freeman, they couldn't kill Sovereign Nasir. Still... they obtained 3 colonized lands from this expedition. A victory was a victory.



There wasn't a specific banquet. All stores opened their doors wide and provided room. Each street had a banner. An inexhaustible amount of food and drinks were provided to the Berserkers free of charge. Due to Nasari citizens' endless attention, the Berserkers didn't have a chance to be bored. The Berserkers would become the ruling party of this place. As there could never be too many friends of the ruling party, the Nasari citizens' excessive goodwill wasn't unreasonable.

Amongst them, the attention on the Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk couldn't help but be different. Berserkers who were at least of a captain rank were gathered at a splendid banquet. Prominent figures of Nasari were gathered here as well. They all wanted to leave an impression on Choi Hyuk. However, as Choi Hyuk didn't even give them a glance, they couldn't gather up the courage to start a conversation with him. In the end, they only attempted to create friendly relationships with Baek Seoin, Ryu Hyunsung, and other top executives.

It was a banquet filled only with good things for the Berserkers. They all paid attention to their moods and tried to keep them happy. Occasionally, when the Berserkers frowned in annoyance, they would back away.

To the prominent figures of Nasari, this banquet was like a nerve-wracking battlefield. Due to their efforts in wanting to create strong ties with the Berserkers, the Berserkers were able to spend their time more happily.

A man and woman pair entered this noisy banquet. A handsome, grey-haired middle-aged man and his beautiful aide.

Choi Hyuk, who sat comfortably as he ate quietly, naturally turned his gaze towards the newly arrived pair. Slowly, Choi Hyuk's waist stood up. Choi Hyuk's gaze was fixed on the grey-haired man. On one hand, it was because his face seemed familiar, but the effect from reading the other's karma was greater.

'... He's strong?'

The grey-haired man. The karma emitted from him was unbelievably strong. He was constraining his karma with his outstanding control abilities, but Choi Hyuk was able to see through it. That was why he was surprised.

'... At least one of his stats is at the 5-star level.'

Choi Hyuk himself had only recently been able to raise his Control to the 5-star level. He had been able to reach the 5-star level with the free karma points he obtained through the attack on the dimensional wasps' nest, where he unleashed true flames instead of the heated flames of the Flaming Wing Dance. Only after experiencing fierce battles one after another was he able to barely reach this stage. He didn't know there was someone else who had reached this stage as well.

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{Comparison of Stats}

<Choi Hyuk>

Power: 365 (+213) (4★) Speed: 371 (+201) (4★) Control: 8 (5★)

Endurance: 100 (3★) Stamina: 0 (4★) Recovery: 371 (3★)

Retribution: 0 (5★)

<Richard>

Power: 278 (2★) Speed: 0 (5★) Control: 411 (+400) (4★)

Endurance: 137 (2★) Stamina: 340 (3★) Recovery: 237 (+57) (4★)

Retribution: 321 (4★)

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Of course, strictly speaking, Richard wasn't a 5-star level expert. Even though his Speed was 5-star, his Retribution hadn't reached the 5-star level. Retribution indicated the difference between existences, like a CPU for a computer. No matter how great your graphics card was, if your CPU couldn't keep up, it was useless. In the case where Retribution was lower than their stats, it would be difficult to display 10% of their power. Their cognitive abilities would stutter, unable to keep up with their 5-star stats, and they would be unable to use 5-star skills. Even if they invested their free karma, the amount their stats would increase by would be drastically reduced. People needed to gather 500 points to reach 5-star, and to Richard, who had only now reached 321 (4★), it was a critically negative factor. Not only that, but because he had focused on raising his Speed and Control, his Endurance and Power were only at the 2-star level.

Even still, Choi Hyuk had never seen anyone with karma as powerful as this besides himself. To be honest, he was a bit amazed. Only then did he remember his face. When he wondered where he had seen him before, he realized he had seen him during the attack on the dimensional wasps' nest.

The most famous sovereign in the world.

"Sovereign Richard."

At Choi Hyuk's mumble, everyone's gaze focused on Richard and his aide, Leah. Silence fell on the noisy banquet.

Only looking at their expressions, the Berserkers' faces seemed to indicate 'Why is Sovereign Richard here?' while the prominent figures of Nasari showed compliant expressions, 'So he came.' From this, they could tell that Richard had already arrived at Nasari before the Berserkers.

Richard walked towards Choi Hyuk with surefooted steps. He maintained an appropriate distance before stopping and said,

"Can we talk for a bit?"

Instead of replying, Choi Hyuk got up from his seat and walked outside. Richard didn't seem taken aback and followed behind him leisurely. His aide, Leah, gulped her saliva with an extremely tense expression and simply followed behind.



Choi Hyuk walked out of the city.

Whoosh.

The whirlpools in the sky were still moving faster than normal, and the wind kept sweeping in various directions. Dirt and dust kicked up. Occasionally, the drizzle from a rain-tree touched his cheek.

After leaving a suitable distance from the city, Richard immediately went straight to the point as he began to talk, facing Choi Hyuk's back.

"Seven need to remain. But who among them will remain... That's your worry, right?"

Choi Hyuk halted abruptly. However, he didn't reply. Richard didn't seem bothered as he continued with a friendly tone as if speaking to a long-time friend,

"You didn't kill Jessie on your way here. Yeah, if it's him, he possesses the qualifications to make humanity stronger as one of the seven overseers. Jessie, you, me. Even if we count this way, there are still four spots left. Who will survive? Who will be of use in this fight? It won't be easy deciding."

Choi Hyuk slowly turned his shoulders and looked directly at Richard. Richard came closer little by little as he continued to speak,

"However, I bet you already know this. That the longer we spend locked in a battle of wits, the greater our loss. We need to exercise our full rights as soon as possible, and we also need to improve this damn situation surrounding us a little."

Every word resonated with Choi Hyuk. However, as he was unaware of Richard's intentions, his eyes gradually deepened, turning black.

Richard stopped at an appropriate distance. Then, he lifted one finger and said,

"One month."

The wind blew between them.

“I will end this fight in one month.”

“...What?”

Choi Hyuk was taken aback. A month was extremely short. Dragonic was estimated to be much larger than Earth. How was it that he was going to make the sovereigns, who were spread throughout the lands, submit in a month? Visiting each of them once would take over a month, let alone capturing them.

Nonetheless, Richard was carefree as if ‘it would obviously progress that way’. He made a proposal.

“But, let’s negotiate on who will be the seven overseers ahead of time.”

Choi Hyuk frowned. To be honest, Choi Hyuk didn’t know many sovereigns. Richard, Jessie, Camilla was all. Although he did know Nasir, he was trash he would take out anyways...

So, his suggestion of deciding the seven overseers ahead of time seemed frank.

“Negotiate ahead of time?... Who are you thinking of?”

“First, Camilla?”

At his reply, Choi Hyuk nodded. Richard followed by nodding his head as well. Although he didn’t know her well, Choi Hyuk felt that if it was Camilla, she had the qualifications to be one of the seven overseers.

Richard smiled.

“Yeah. The majority are understandable. But, there is someone we absolutely need to discuss.”

Richard hesitated momentarily. It was different from before when he had continued to talk without hesitation. By the time doubt started to condense in Choi Hyuk’s eyes, Richard suddenly spat out a name.

“The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.”

Choi Hyuk's face stiffened.

"...Who?"

"The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir. Let's add him as one of the seven overseers. Then I will make this fight end in a month."

Said Richard calmly while looking at Choi Hyuk's chilling expression.

Choi Hyuk's lips twisted.

"Don't tell me... Nasir's choice to flee was something that came out of your head?"

Richard faced Choi Hyuk directly and said,

"That's right."

Their gazes clashed fiercely. A wind continued to blow from somewhere.

# CHAPTER 84

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (7)

---

The victory banquet continued in the city. Sometimes, there would be a gust of wind which would blow past the banquet feast prepared out in the streets. Although annoying situations like tablecloths being flipped over or salad flying away would occur, even those were fun. While they were unable to become drunk due to karma, the Berserkers went on a spree of eating and drinking. As they were already in a good mood, even if they didn't get drunk, their moods heated up like drunken men. The wind blew again.

Suddenly, a loud explosive sound erupted from a field outside the city.

Booom!

Familiar flames surged upwards immediately after. Blood-red flames burned in the sky before dispersing.

The Berserkers, who had been enjoying themselves to their heart's content, stood up like a spring. Surprised, the citizens of Nasari stood up after them.

Someone said,

"...Isn't that leader's Flaming Wing Dance?"

The Berserkers' eyes cooled to a chill. The heated mood became chilly like the edge of a blade. The festival streets instantly felt menacing as if they were in the middle of a battlefield. The gusts of wind, which previously felt like an enjoyable game, now felt bleak as if hinting at death. This wasn't a mood colonizers who weren't used to fighting could endure.

'We... We're going to die... '

The citizens of Nasari felt death approach the tip of their noses. A warm stench of urine arose as someone had wet themselves. No one laughed.

Tap, tap.

With quiet footsteps, the shadows of a few people shot through the air like arrows. Lee Jinhee, Chu Youngjin, Ryu Hyunsung, as well as other top executives of the Berserkers, had quickly gone to figure out what happened. However, they stopped before they could even leave the city. It was because Choi Hyuk had returned within that short period of time.

His serious expression showed that he was deep in thought. Three people, Richard, his aide, Leah, and Choi Hyuk, had left the city together, but only Choi Hyuk returned.

“Leader, what about the Sovereign of Balance?”

When Lee Jinhee asked, Choi Hyuk replied half-heartedly,

“He left.”

“Umm... You didn’t kill him, right?”

Choi Hyuk tilted his head in an obscure manner and replied,

“He wouldn’t die.”

Then he said as he passed Lee Jinhee,

“Gather once you’ve eaten your fill. Let’s have a meeting in the evening.”

Choi Hyuk continued to go further away with a serious look. Looking at his figure, Lee Jinhee shook her head.

Rumors spread wildly. There were many people who had participated in the banquet that day. They had seen Richard and Choi Hyuk leave together and witnessed Choi Hyuk return by himself after a large commotion. Soon after, a rumor that Richard was seriously wounded to the point of immediately requesting healers spread. Although no one confirmed it publicly, one story went around as fact.

‘Richard proposed something to Choi Hyuk, and Choi Hyuk, enraged, attacked Richard!’

Sovereigns, who were already concerned with the Berserkers’ forceful actions, looked at the situation this time with gravity.

“To even attack Richard... Does he not distinguish his opponents? He isn't someone who we can get through to with words.”

There were rumors that the Anti-Berserker Alliance was preparing for their second expedition. They said that there were many more sovereigns participating this time than in Jessie's first expedition where he failed hopelessly.

{The Berserk Sovereign Choi Hyuk. Savior? Or Demon King?}

{The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla, “He is a warrior who can save the world. This isn't something we should decide hastily...”}

{Prosecute the Berserkers for their brutality.}

All sorts of articles were published.

While the public opinion of the Berserkers was gradually becoming worse, Choi Hyuk, instead, continued forward with surefooted steps.



Whoosh.

A storm formed in Dragonic as winds were getting fiercer. The white, heavy sky rippled frighteningly. Grddk, grddk. Every time the sky swayed and shook, revealing its massiveness, a sound which was difficult to describe shook the land. It was incomparable to the sounds of thunder on Earth. ‘Did an enormous beast swallow us?’ ‘Are we being digested in its stomach?’ ‘Is the sky crushing the ground?’ Even though they knew it wasn't true, the sound made all sorts of thoughts cross their minds. That sound and the appearance of the sky rippling, as if it would pour down, brought on a fear exceeding their imaginations. And this fear brought forth an abnormal state of consciousness as if one had been possessed by a spirit. They said that your mind would waver when simply looking at rippling water for a long time. The scene of the sky, which filled their vision, couldn't help but be on another level as it tossed and turned while screaming... The consciousness of the colonizers was not free from the storm's influence.

Grrddl. Grrddk.

Below the wailing sky, Choi Hyuk gathered the Berserkers and the citizens of Nasari

and declared,

“We leave on an expedition. Until the seven overseers are decided.”

Choi Hyuk’s voice pierced through the screams of the sky and clearly rang in people’s ears.

“Those who wish to continue to live in Nasari must participate in the expedition. I don’t need anyone who does not fight with me in my cities.”

At first, the citizens of Nasari whispered to each other with perplexed expressions. Soon after, once they realized Choi Hyuk’s meaning, ‘If you don’t participate, you will be deported from the city,’ their faces turned deathly pale. They looked towards the Berserkers, whom they had formed friendly relationships over the past few days, and asked what was going on, inquiring whether he would really do that, through their gazes, but the Berserkers showed a ‘So what?’ expression. Endless battles. This was their daily life. In the Berserkers’ perspective, they were actually taken aback when the ones who hated fighting were taken aback.

“Some may say this is crazy and swear at us, but don’t worry. Isn’t this the case? This is a world where two to three billion people die within half a month. There’s no way rational thoughts will work in this world that is already as crazy as it gets. Let’s become crazy. Instead, let’s become even crazier.”

The rising wind drove into Choi Hyuk’s voice and created a bigger, bleaker echo. Choi Hyuk continued on with a voice similar to that of a god’s.

“I will make you victorious.”

Grrddk. Grrrdddk.

Some felt fear from Choi Hyuk’s words, while others became excited.

That was how a storm began to sweep through Dragonic.



The storm blew. The Berserkers rushed forward along with the storm. Their cheeks were endlessly wet with red rain.

Slice.

“Geu...”

The corpse, which had his head sliced by Ryu Hyunsung’s sword, was swept up by the storm and disappeared. The crowded, heated ground flung corpses that had lost their karma up towards the sky. Ryu Hyunsung and the teams following him were ‘technicians’, who represented the Berserkers. They used the trait ‘Mind’s Eye’ as a foundation and released precise sword strikes at their opponent’s weak points. Even if it felt like there was an even battle, once a few swords suddenly flashed, their enemies would break like scarecrows and be blown away. Even their blood drew beautiful arcs.

Rumble! Rumble!

Chu Youngjin and the teams following him were incarnations of destruction. With a single strike created by exploding their karma like an internal combustion engine, they turned their enemies into blood geysers and mist. As their fighting method wasted a lot of their strength and because they would lose out if they missed even a single time, Chu Youngjin’s team members undoubtedly pushed forward and killed their enemies with a single strike even if it meant getting wounded themselves. A bloody charge. Because of their chaotic appearance, this troop was the symbol of the Berserkers.

“Rotate to the right!”

A group of Berserkers followed Lee Jinhee’s shout and ran to the right while stepping on the enemies’ shoulders or weapons.

Bang, bang, bang!!

Pushed back by the impact, their enemies’ tight formation collapsed.

“Suppress the magicians!”

The dashing groups jumped over or slid past the guards and attacked the long-range attackers behind them. Their enemies simply stumbled at the mobile striking force they had never experienced before, unable to react.

Lee Jinhee and her team were famously known as the world’s fastest speed demons.

As someone whose fame increased daily through Alexei's videos, Lee Jinhee's team members had an especially large portion of foreigners, and the majority of them had enjoyed extreme sports before awakening their karma. They stood at the very front, jumping over their enemies and attacking their long-range troops, assassinating their commanders, and at times, even led a riot to collapse their enemies' formation.

"Director, are you okay?"

Alexei, who slashed at his enemies, read Lee Jinhee's expression. It was because he knew that she didn't want people to fight against each other. Lee Jinhee glanced at Alexei and roughly ruffled his hair.

"Lyosha. Are you worried about me? Don't worry. I already talked with the leader..."

As she said this, she nailed her gladius in her enemy's forehead. The moment she pulled out her sword, the spurting blood formed a small whirlwind due to the wind. With his eyes still open, the corpse was flung into the wind and disappeared.

Looking at that, Lee Jinhee bitterly said,

"To be honest... I didn't think they'd be so weak."

'For there to be so much of a difference.'

In fact, it wasn't only Lee Jinhee who thought this. Not only the Berserkers, but even the non-combatant colonizers of their captured cities, and the medium and small clans that felt the same.

The enemies they felt were powerful when they had fought them, now collapsed like scarecrows when fighting the Berserkers.

Even though there was already a large difference in fighting experience, due to the intense successive battles the Berserkers had experienced recently, their senses had reached their peak. In their enemies' perspective, they suffered before their bodies could even warm up. They simply couldn't stop them. When the Berserkers' swords pierced their enemies' neck and hearts, their enemies' swords were unable to touch them. It felt as though the Berserkers were swinging their swords one step in front of them while they were swinging their swords ten steps away.

"Only two and a half years... We all awakened at the same time, but if there's such a

big difference...”

Lee Jinhee, who sighed bitterly, raised her sword yet again.

“...I wonder if there really is anyone who can stop us.”

Lee Jinhee smiled bitterly as she sliced another enemy’s neck.

“Euah... Euaack!”

Another enemy who witnessed this fell into a state of panic and began to flee. That was the start.

“Euaahhh!!”

In various places, their enemies began to retreat like a tide. It definitely wasn’t a wrong choice. The enemies, who were being overwhelmingly crushed since the start of the battle, fled soon after. Then, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers would leave their fleeing enemies alone and chase the enemy sovereign... capturing and killing him. There were no exceptions.

The Sovereign of Counterattack, the Sovereign of Expectation, the Sovereign of Blood, all were unable to live up to their names and were killed off. In the end, the sovereigns located in the place the Berserkers were advancing to withdrew their application for the seven overseers and began to flee like Nasir.

Dragonic’s storm didn’t cease, and the Berserkers’ madness didn’t cease either.

Within three weeks since going to battle starting from Nasari, Choi Hyuk had captured five colonized lands.

As revenge, the enraged colonizers turned the base of the Berserkers, Barhaloleun, to ash and collapsed the Berserkers’ residence in Yeouido. Yet, Choi Hyuk didn’t care in the slightest. He simply advanced with the attitude of killing them all. Necessary supplies were handled by the colonized lands he captured. As all citizens who surrendered were thrown into the army whenever he captured a city, the number of his army gradually grew. The concern that all sovereigns would submit to Choi Hyuk was slowly becoming a reality.

Around this time, Choi Hyuk was more often called the Demon King than the Berserk

Sovereign. Humans faced repeated, futile defeat against the Demon King. Whether he was a demon king or whatever, since Choi Hyuk continued to be victorious, the wide recognition which vilified the Berserkers as 'crazy bastards' changed every day. People wanted to stand on the side of the victor.

There would be a dispute every day.

"To be honest, the Demon King is right."

"Right, my ass... Are you a psychopath? Killing all those people is right?"

"Now, really... Do you really think the world is the same as it was three years ago? Are we in a peaceful time where, if the Demon King doesn't kill people, no one will die? If anything, if it wasn't for the Demon King, I bet blood wouldn't have had time to dry as the sovereigns fought amongst themselves to choose the seven overseers or whatever. The casualties from that would be higher."

"So, are you saying Choi Hyuk is right? You crazy... Is pulling those who were running their business well into the battlefield a good thing to do? If that's so good, why don't you go out to the battlefield yourself? Why are you here?"

"Why are you like this? You already know that I fought as much as I should. Also, to be honest, that isn't normal either. In the end, we're in a situation where people will have to risk their lives and fight... But does it make sense for only a portion to do that? They both awakened at the same time, yet does it make sense if some can stay at the back and run their business with ease, while others have to deal with missions, the war between clans and fight with their lives on the line every day? When we're in a situation where we might be annihilated because of monsters?... We all need to fight. Don't you know that billions of people died during the past advancement evaluations because of those who didn't participate?"

"Of course, there was a problem then... Still, this isn't right. We need to do this rationally, pushing forcefully isn't everything. Haven't you heard of division of labor? Everyone has something they're good at, and if they don't consider that and just make everyone fight... well, that's not good."

"Fuck that. Then do those who aren't good at anything need to fight with their lives on the line while others who are talented in a lot of things can just stay at the back in safety? Even though they are protecting their lives?"

“Why are you getting so emotional? I’m saying this because this is more effective.”

“Effectiveness, your mother... If they are so effective, why are they being broken to bits by the Demon King?”

“That’s...!!”

“If that’s more effective, then they need to beat the Demon King! Don’t you see that those who divide labor are being knocked out? Come to your senses. This isn’t just a war between countries but the fight that determines whether humanity becomes extinct or not.”

“No, how can you put this so simply...!!”

The voices of those who supported Choi Hyuk became louder every day. It was as if Choi Hyuk’s victories themselves were proof that Choi Hyuk’s method was right.

Would the Demon King continue to unite humanity like this? Was the Demon King Choi Hyuk someone who had the capacity to lead humanity? Was Choi Hyuk’s method truly right?

Even though it seemed wrong, there were no alternatives. The majority who opposed Choi Hyuk simply didn’t know what to do about their growing uneasiness and conflict. It was as if the storm had snatched the people’s cool-headedness.

That was why Richard’s joint agreement created a sensation.

{Sovereigns who will calm the storm in Dragonic sign this agreement. We will drive out the Demon King’s army, who slaughter indiscriminately. We promise that sovereigns who sign will be under a mutual non-aggression agreement. We promise to dispatch troops within our power to the allied forces. -Participating Sovereigns: Richard, Camilla, Baijan, Nasir, Ichiro... }

This was a change to the people who constantly heard news about the Berserkers’ victory and their opponent sovereign’s defeat and death. A different wind from before. A new wind that may be able to calm the storm.

‘Something is happening.’

‘It’s different this time.’

‘Will the Demon King be able to win this time?’

‘Which side will we have to take?’

Whether they supported Richard or not, everyone, young, old, male, or female, couldn’t help but be interested in the formation of this large-scale allied force.



Because the reveal of the joint agreement occurred after all under-the-table negotiations had ended, the advance of the allied forces began at the same time as the reveal. The allied forces symbolically trampled through Barhaloleun, which used to be the Berserkers’ base, and advanced past Zhiyu, which had previously been Lao Ban’s colonized land.

Hearing news of the allied forces’ advance, the Berserkers’ army assembled.

The location they met at happened to be in a desert near where the Berserkers’ indiscriminate capturing of colonized lands began, Nasari.

The storm, which had entered its final stages, swept dirt and rain-trees to the right and left, and between them, the Berserkers and the colonizers of the allied forces stared at each other, standing firmly as if they had been nailed to the ground.

# CHAPTER 85

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (8)

---

Richard looked at the Berserkers and the allied forces standing in the storm. His handsome face was different from before. The left side of his face was disfigured due to horrifying burns. Wounds left behind by Choi Hyuk's Flaming Wing Dance could not be healed, even with healers. Hopelessness, despair, peace, happiness, hatred, rage, and madness, Choi Hyuk's flames, which seethed with these seven emotions, had invaded Richard's soul and left a mark. Even if they dug his wounds out and regenerated his flesh, the burn engraved on his cheek would not disappear. A disfigured face.

However, Richard's eyes were no different from before. He was confident and at ease. It was as if mere wounds were unable to shake his composure.

He recalled the conversation he had with Choi Hyuk.



"You want me to acknowledge Nasir as one of the seven overseers..."

Choi Hyuk raised the pitch-black Predator's Blade and said,

"There is no need for further words."

Choi Hyuk stood within the storm. The vigor Choi Hyuk emitted was indistinguishable from the sweeping storm. Richard felt a cold sweat run down his back.

Yet, he didn't back down. Instead, he tossed away the easygoing attitude he had until now. He spread both his arms and said in a serious voice,

"Of course, I am in no mind of accepting him as one of the seven overseers wholeheartedly. He will be detained. He will be unable to decide anything by himself."

Even as Richard was speaking, Choi Hyuk slowly raised his sword. However, if Choi Hyuk was determined, he would have already swung his sword down on Richard's head. The fact that Choi Hyuk was taking his time was proof that he was listening to

Richard's words.

Inwardly relieved, Richard continued,

"He'll be sort of like a puppet. I am not saying that we will let him enjoy his power as one of the seven overseers but more like make him serve humanity."

Grip.

The tip of the Predator's Blade stopped after taking precise aim at Richard's heart. 'Clink.' It felt like there was a metallic sound, and even the violent storm felt as though it was raising its blades.

Choi Hyuk coldly asked,

"Why do we need to do this?"

Richard replied,

"Nasir is an opportunist. A human who can cleanly give up his pride and cause for his own safety. However, he himself is not especially evil or foolish. In fact, the majority of humans are like him. However, they, or their opportunistic traits to be exact, are also one of humanity's strengths. To be able to survive in any situation. Not because they are strong, but strong because they survived. This is what it means to be a human. To preserve humanity's strength, we need to be able to embrace them. Also, Nasir is a sovereign who can represent this majority."

Richard provided a lengthy reply, but Choi Hyuk's sword didn't waver in the slightest. Choi Hyuk simply asked again,

"Why do we need to do this?"

Richard's shoulders fell slightly.

"...Yeah. I know this won't work. In fact, I predicted it would go this way. I felt that that was probably the reason why we needed to let Nasir live."

There was a strangeness in Richard's words. As if the decision to save Nasir wasn't his own. When Choi Hyuk frowned, Richard elaborated,

“I’ll be honest. I have a special innate skill... If I were to compare, it is similar to Baek Seoin’s ‘Intuition’... But my hunch says it’s more similar to ‘your skill’”

Richard said, ‘Your skill’. Although Choi Hyuk didn’t show any reaction, Richard, instead, felt more assured from his lack of reaction and asked,

“You... see something, right?”

Richard’s question was precisely directed at the ‘Eyes of Distinction’ Choi Hyuk possessed. A skill that even those closest to Choi Hyuk didn’t know about.

Although he didn’t show it, Choi Hyuk was inwardly shocked. Richard continued,

“I’m the same. I see things as well. I possess an innate skill known as the ‘Eyes of the Judge’. If I set a goal, I can distinguish who I need to kill and who to keep alive to reach my goal. But... I was truly surprised when I saw you for the first time. It kept changing for you. Sometimes as someone I needed to kill, others as someone I needed to keep alive. Even though it may change depending on the situation, it was the first time it kept changing back and forth like that. So, I thought that there was something special about you. Perhaps, you have a similar skill as me and that it may have been our skills conflicting with each other.”

Choi Hyuk motionlessly stared at Richard. He activated his ‘Eyes of Distinction’. At first glance, the light Richard emitted was white (goodwill)... but when he looked closer, all sorts of colors were added in like static. Colors he had never seen before like blue or green were like a rainbow in a mist as they incoherently distracted Choi Hyuk’s vision.

Richard seemed as though he saw something as he examined Choi Hyuk before shaking his head and saying,

“It’s a very difficult problem. Who to kill and who to keep alive. If you don’t have that standard, you won’t be able to accomplish anything no matter how strong you are. But, you sometimes acted like you would kill everyone while, at other times, would coolly gloss things over. This is proof that you are making judgments every moment unlike the image the world has made for you. And your judgment was incredibly quick. You especially filtered out those who would become your enemy with extreme precision.”

This was obvious as Choi Hyuk could grasp his opponent’s motives. Perhaps Richard had paid attention to Choi Hyuk when he easily figured out Lee Kijin’s betrayal and the sudden attack of Lao Ban’s remnants.

Richard said in a voice now filled with confidence,

“I have a similar skill as you. That skill tells me that we need to keep Nasir alive. So, I think that if we are going to keep him alive anyways, we should use him properly. So that we can use Nasir and unify humanity’s power.”

“..”

Choi Hyuk was momentarily at loss for words. He felt quite a bit of trust to the skill he possessed, the ‘Eyes of Distinction’. At least, he thought that it had never failed him until now. Then, did that mean he had to trust the ‘Eyes of the Judge’ that Richard claimed he possessed?

He shook his head. There was still a reply he had yet to hear to do that. A skill that could distinguish who to kill and who to keep alive once he set a goal. If he took that as a fact, then what goal did Richard strive for?

Grip.

Choi Hyuk tightly clenched his sword handle. Then asked,

“..Why do we need to do this?”

Richard immediately replied,

“So that we can take revenge.”

Grip.

Revenge. At that single word, the handle Choi Hyuk held creaked as though it would shatter.

“...Against who?”

“Those who started this game.”

Richard’s voice was serious and clear to no end. The Predator’s Blade, which had been tautly aimed at his heart, fell slightly.

Choi Hyuk felt Richard’s reply was quite unexpected. Richard, he was famous for being

a sovereign who could see the big picture. That was why he was known as the Sovereign of Balance. However, Choi Hyuk had never imagined that the picture he was drawing was beyond the power struggle between sovereigns and that it even reached the Flame Wing Alliance.

‘Is he telling the truth?’

Still suspicious, Choi Hyuk slowly opened his mouth,

“Why are you trying to get revenge?”

Even Choi Hyuk felt this question was unreasonable. Why did he want to get revenge? If someone asked him this question, he would be at loss for words.

Yet, he still asked. When he did, Richard revealed a dumbfounded expression. It was an expression Choi Hyuk would have shown if he was in that situation.

Richard slowly answered,

“Why? Why...? Good, then first, let’s think about it in reverse? What reasons are there not to take revenge? They aren’t an opponent we can face with our strength. It is more important for humanity to survive this war against the monsters. You can’t change what happened even if you take revenge. Something like that? But...”

Richard paused for a moment. His spirit was completely different from before. He changed as if he had taken off his mask. His calm demeanor, which seemed to approach everything from a step back, disappeared, and in its place, was a growling face, which seemed ready to lunge forward at any moment. His karma moved by itself as they were influenced by his emotions, and his eyes shined with a piercing golden light.

“However, I only have two words for those reasons – Fuck. Off.”

“...”

Strictly speaking, Richard’s reply wasn’t an answer to Choi Hyuk’s question. As he didn’t give any reason for enacting revenge. However, precisely because it was like this, he was able to touch Choi Hyuk’s heart. ‘What do you mean ‘why do you want to take revenge?’’ If there were three to four reasons why they shouldn’t take revenge, there were countless reasons why they should. Earth was becoming extinct. Billions of people had already ceased to exist. The majority of the combatant colonizers had

experienced murder. Also, the Flame Wing Alliance, didn't they themselves say it? 'Get angry.' To ask why they needed to take revenge in a situation like this... Asking that question was more foolish.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head. He had somewhat decided. The Predator's Blade that Choi Hyuk had held up slowly relaxed as it was lowered. Then, he flexibly and resiliently relaxed his karma which filled his whole body.

"You said you will end this fight within a month? How?"

Richard asked back,

"Before that, let me ask. When I first said to include Nasir as one of the seven overseers, what did you want to do? Your expression was crazy."

"...Just thinking... about whether I should kill you on the spot and make all the other sovereigns submit."

Richard asked, 'What did you want to do?' in past tense, yet Choi Hyuk answered in present tense. However, maybe he didn't catch it, but Richard didn't look surprised as he cleanly nodded his head. As if he was satisfied.

"Good. Then do just that. Then I will make it so that this fight will end within a month."

Richard didn't seem concerned with the fact that he said he was going to kill him and revealed an unfounded confidence. At this Richard, Choi Hyuk shot,

"Do you have the capability to?"

"Of course."

Richard didn't provide a lengthy answer. Choi Hyuk didn't hate his confidence. Nodding his head, Choi Hyuk raised the Predator's Blade above his head. Richard had said to 'do just that' so there was no need for hesitation.

"Good. Then should we start right away?"

"Yeah. Uh... but, hey? Right now?"

Surprised at Choi Hyuk's sudden change, Richard pulled his aide Leah into his arms.

Looking at this, Choi Hyuk coldly declared,

“If you survive this, that proposal, I’ll think about it.”

Blaze. Scarlet flames gathered on his sword.

“Flaming Wing Dance. Instant Void Annihilation.”



That time, Choi Hyuk had really planned on killing Richard. Although he agreed with many of his words, because of this, he felt that he was even more of a threat. He didn’t have enough evidence to trust Richard while his ‘Eyes of Distinction’ didn’t work properly. That was why he decided. ‘Let’s kill him first. But if he survives, if he has the skill to do that, then let’s trust him this time.’

That was why he used his strongest attacks one after the other. His Flaming Wing Dance, which burned everything, and his Instant Void Annihilation, which could even split air. He was certain that even Richard, who had reached 5-star stats, would have a hard time surviving this. Yet, he survived. He then fled and created a great army known as the allied forces.

Following Choi Hyuk’s words, now was the time to ‘think about it’. However, he had made no contact with Richard during this time.

‘Is the conversation back then still valid?’

Choi Hyuk thought. He was at least influenced by that conversation. Like Richard had said, ‘Good. Then do just that,’ Choi Hyuk ran amuck as he wished. Since there wasn’t really any other alternative, it was good for him. While he had been running amuck, Richard rallied many sovereigns and led the allied forces here.

There were around five days until his promised one month.

Was Richard’s proposal still valid? Well... either way.

‘It’ll end today.’

In the end, this would be the place where the seven overseers would be decided. Although it was yet to be seen whether it would be through elimination or if a stronger

system would be born.

# CHAPTER 86

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (9)

---

The storm swept through the desert and whooshed with an oddly lengthy rhythm. Richard thought that, for some reason, the wind sounded like music. Like slow Lindy<sup>{1}</sup>, which he occasionally danced back when things were peaceful. The dance where he held his partner's hand and danced slowly, sweetly... and playfully.

“...Now, shall we dance?”

Richard recited in a quiet voice and advanced.

In the end, there was no exchange between Choi Hyuk and Richard. There wasn't even the process commonly seen in movies where the leaders of both sides came out, scolding each other and justifying their causes.

The Berserkers and the allied forces only shortened the distance between each other within the storm, and then at some point, they rushed forward without even a shout. Blood splattered like always. Corpses flew up in the air. As it had now become such a common occurrence, it didn't seem out of place.

Choi Hyuk momentarily became immersed in his thoughts.

‘Is this the right way?’

He couldn't tell at this point. Perhaps what laid at the end was the annihilation of everyone. However, he couldn't stop in the middle either. Richard's thoughts? What did he care. Choi Hyuk only thought of one thing.

‘Finish this fight as fast as possible.’

He needed to take down his opponent before the casualties became too large. Like always.

“Flaming Wing Dance.”

Accompanied by Choi Hyuk's mumble, scarlet flames erupted, even burning the storm.

“Guaaah!”

Would hell be like this? The allied forces’ formation burned like dry firewood. The Berserkers poured in after Choi Hyuk, who left everything burning behind him, and the allied forces, who had become flustered at the flames burning their bodies, eventually had their necks sliced off.

The Berserkers collapsed the allied forces’ formation. However, there was another formation behind that. They collapsed that as well. There was still another formation behind that. Even though the Berserkers increased their army by recruiting at each captured city, they were still absolutely outnumbered against the allied forces made up by 30 sovereigns.

However.

Blaze.

Every time Choi Hyuk’s flames burned the sky, the Berserkers and the drafted soldiers following them didn’t doubt their victory. It was always the same pattern. No matter how numerous their opponents were, they were unable to endure their overwhelming military strength and would begin to flee. It would be no different this time as well.

Yet, the condition of the fight this time was different from before.

“Flaming Wing Dance!”

Blaaze!

The flames Choi Hyuk erupted-

“Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!”

Zaap!

-were struck by a golden lightning, which had come down from somewhere, and dispersed.

Choi Hyuk’s advance paused. His gazed turned towards Richard, whose face was half-disfigured by the burns.

“It’s that skill again.”

This was the skill which allowed Richard to survive Choi Hyuk’s attack before.

It was a skill that was well suited with Richard’s trait ‘Penetration’. His karma, which struck like lightning, would create vibrations, shattering its target. Even if he didn’t know it well, it was a top-level skill that didn’t fall behind the three skills he was proud of (Heart Injection, Instant Void Annihilation, and Flaming Wing Dance). It also matched Richard well. As Richard possessed a 5-star level Speed, there was no one who could match him in creating intense vibrations with karma.

However, he couldn’t fully block Choi Hyuk’s flames with just that. Choi Hyuk caught a glimpse of ten people who seemed special even amongst Richard’s hundred guards.

“Was it a skill that can be activated as a group?”

Although he didn’t know what methods he had used, Richard was currently strengthening his Lighting Quake with his ten special followers. The result was the complete destruction of his Flaming Wing Dance.

“...It’s fun.”

A smile unknowingly hung on his lips. If he thought about it rationally, this was a frustrating situation. He had resolved himself to end the fight as quickly as possible, yet there was an obstacle that could threaten his resolution. Still, Choi Hyuk couldn’t stop his lips from curling upwards.

This was the first time his Flaming Wing Dance had been completely blocked since he had unleashed his true flames at the dimensional wasps’ nest. His heart thumped with a thrill that he hadn’t felt when he captured those five colonized lands.

“Try to block this.”

All of his emotions seethed more intensely. Choi Hyuk’s flames gradually tinged blood-red before beginning to drip like blood. He was excited.

But, Richard, who had been observing this scene silently, said,

“Okay. Retreat to the left.”

“Retreat!”

Then Richard’s guards retreated like a receding tide.

“Wha... What the?!”

Flustered, Choi Hyuk quickly activated his Flaming Wing Dance, but, since Richard’s guards specialized in speed, they had already retreated out of his range.

“Huh? Euaaack!”

Only random forces who had been advancing forward were burned by his Flaming Wing Dance and turned into ash.

“What is this... What are you planning?”

They retreated when it was starting to become fun. Not only that, but their retreat was well-timed. Because Richard’s troops had retreated abruptly, the troops behind them began to collapse in vain.

“...What is he doing?”

It wasn’t only Choi Hyuk who was experiencing this perplexing situation.

“Euack! Where are you running?”

Lee Jinhee attempted but failed to chase Jessie’s troops, who had suddenly retreated after fighting properly. She couldn’t remember how many times this had occurred. She was becoming crazy with irritation. But this didn’t mean the progression of battle was disadvantageous. In fact, it was better for them.

“I mean, why is he doing that? When their side dies if they retreat in this situation?”

The Jessie clan was as skilled as they were famous. They were skilled enough to completely block Lee Jinhee’s troop, which had been able to go in and out of their enemy territory like it was their own home. Obviously, Lee Jinhee’s fighting spirit couldn’t help but surge, and they began to fight a battle staking everything. However, every time they did, the Jessie clan would cop out after fighting well for some time.

If the Jessie clan, who had been resisting the invasion of Lee Jinhee’s troop, suddenly

retreated, the troops behind them would be met with a sudden attack. Because of this, Lee Jinhee's troop was able to run even wilder. That was good... but Lee Jinhee grew irritated since Jessie didn't face her.

This weird phenomenon occurred everywhere. The elites of the allied forces would defend properly before, without any warning, repeatedly acting in a fashion that hurt their formation. Because of this, even though the Berserkers' advance kept getting blocked, a strange scene, where they still continued to inflict heavy losses on the allied forces, occurred.

After around 30 minutes had passed since the start of the battle, the other sovereigns of the allied forces, who had been focused on fighting, felt that something was strange.

"Sovereign of Balance! What is this? Don't you know my clan members will all die if you retreat from there?"

Protested the Herculean Strength Sovereign Zakan when Richard suddenly retreated after blocking Choi Hyuk once again.

Richard simply clicked his tongue at Zakan's cold protest.

"Darn, we were discovered already."

"What...?"

Richard's eyes tinged gold. Richard's fighting style was using long distance attacks, leveraging his outstanding karma control and speed. His golden karma, which shot forward like a lightning bolt, infiltrated the Herculean Strength Sovereign's body and turned his insides into a paste.

Clench!

"Grrk... You... You... Wha... What..."

Perhaps it was because of his high Recovery stat, but the Herculean Strength Sovereign didn't die, and instead, endured as he recovered from the internal wounds. His eyes were bloodshot with anger.

Slice.

However, with a silver streak, the Herculean Strength Sovereign had his neck sliced through while his eyes were still open. The one who appeared like a ghost and cut his neck was Richard's aide, Leah.

“What do you mean ‘what’? It means it’s time to clean up.”

The Herculean Strength Sovereign's guards, who saw this scene with blank expressions, became surprised and prepared for combat.

“Betrayal...! Ergh!”

No, to be precise, they attempted to prepare for combat. They died before they could. The Herculean Strength Sovereign's guards had their heads drop to the floor before they could properly express their rage. It was the price they paid for having come deep within Richard's guards without being alert. The corpses, who had died hopelessly due to the sudden attack, flew up with the wind and disappeared without a trace.

After watching this with cold eyes, Richard spoke into a dimensional slate,

“Team 7, solidify your defenses and slowly retreat to your 6 o'clock direction.”

Team 7 was the President of South Korea, Shin Woojin. He followed Richard's secret command and slowly retreated his troops towards his 6 o'clock direction.

Blaze!

Even from this distance, Shin Woojin could feel the heat from Choi Hyuk's flames on his cheeks. President Shin Woojin recalled what Richard had said.

“I'm sorry, Mr. President. However, let's think about this logically. No country can have two overseers. The others won't sit idly. Sovereign Jessie is the only one from the U.S., and I'm the only one from Germany. At most, there will be one or two from a single continent. If, in this situation, Korea comes out and says they want two overseers, there's no way the people will accept that. Then, who is the overseer Korea should dispatch? Mr. President, you need to think about this logically. Are you confident in winning against the Demon King Choi Hyuk?”

Shin Woojin shook his head. Even other sovereigns didn't look easy to beat, let alone Choi Hyuk. Richard nodded his head and said,

“Please pass the seat of the overseer to Choi Hyuk. Instead, I will let you exercise your voting rights through the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.”

Shin Woojin had no choice but to accept Richard’s proposal. At the same time, Shin Woojin felt fear towards Richard. Even though he had been inflicted with a burn which disfigured half his face, he wasn’t hostile towards Choi Hyuk. No, it felt as though he was aggressively using his burn. Who could have predicted this? That someone who had been inflicted with such a wound wasn’t hostile to the one who inflicted that wound. Everyone believed in the Anti-Berserker banner Richard put out, and because they did, they would die.

Currently, there were fourteen sovereigns here who knew of Richard’s secret intentions, including himself. Amongst them, there were five who were promised a position as one of the seven overseers, and the remaining nine were promised the next available seats in return for giving up their positions now.

These fourteen sovereigns moved strangely within the formation as they killed those who were to be killed and kept those who were to survive alive. They followed the hit list Richard had created beforehand.

The war against the Berserkers was in fact... a purge disguised as a war.



The battle was fierce.

Even as they endured tremendous losses, the allied forces didn’t retreat. The Berserkers began to tire as it became difficult to move their bodies properly from continuously slashing at the allied forces. The desert became muddy as it was mixed with corpses and blood.

However, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers’ directors (Baek Seoin, Chu Youngjin, Lee Jinhee, Bae Jinman and others) still stood at the front, alive and well.

The allied forces were the same. While they were being squashed like a well-ripened, soft peach, at some point, as if its hard seed was revealed from within, troops, which were on a different level from before, made their appearance in good condition.

These troops were those who, instead of aggressively taking the lead, had repeatedly attacked and retreated throughout the battle. The fourteen sovereigns. Only they

remained and appeared on the frontlines.

Only then were Choi Hyuk and Richard able to face each other from a close distance. There was a short lull.

“I don’t know what you’re up to...”

Choi Hyuk looked at Richard and said,

“We need to end this now.”

Richard laughed at Choi Hyuk’s words. Four sovereigns walked up beside him.

Sovereign Jessie, Sovereign of Paradise Camilla, The Queen of England Diana, and the Ethiopian Sovereign Johan.

Richard looked at them and came forward with steady steps.

Then, he suddenly gave a proposal. In a voice only Choi Hyuk could hear.

“Now, how about we call a truce now? If we count Nasir, there are exactly seven people.”

“Ah...”

Choi Hyuk simply opened his mouth. He was sincerely in admiration in this moment.

‘Did he really plan all this?’

If this was true, then it was truly an outstanding tactic. The fact that he had gathered thirty sovereigns in one place was amazing. It was also amazing that he was able to persuade thirteen of them and control the formation during the battle to skillfully purge the remaining sixteen.

Richard did everything he could.

He survived from Choi Hyuk’s hands and laid the groundwork for choosing the seven overseers within a month.

“Amazing...”

“I know, right? Now it’s your turn. Did you think about it?”

Like Richard said, it was now time for Choi Hyuk to decide. Would he accept? Or would he flip the situation on its head?

However, at this point, he no longer had the heart to flip it all over. He felt this way in all aspects. He had admiration and goodwill towards Richard’s abilities, and he also had a practical reason. If both sides were to clash, there was a higher chance it would result in the destruction of either side rather than a safe conclusion. Since the elites of the allied forces were strong enough to hold back Choi Hyuk’s army.

‘Did he do this on purpose as well? To show that they aren’t weak?’

If he did this on purpose, then it was quite successful. Choi Hyuk’s mind leaned towards a truce. It was a choice that was akin to killing two birds with one stone, as they would be able to decide on the overseers earlier than he expected and preserve their forces.

Only, there was something tugging at his mind.

“What about Nasir?”

“Nasir is already detained. Nasir will be the puppet of the nine sovereigns behind me. He will be unable to act on his own intentions and will move according to the decisions these nine people come to.”

This was the future system Richard had prepared. There were 6 overseers and the remaining seat would be shared between the nine sovereigns through Nasir. Anyone who might have become an obstacle to his plan had already been killed in battle.

Choi Hyuk’s tense heart slowly relaxed.

“...Is it a truce?”

“It’s a truce. Since we need some tension.”

As if he felt something from Choi Hyuk’s question, Richard already stretched out his hand for a handshake. Choi Hyuk grinned and grabbed his hand.

Then he politely said with a little respect,

“I look forward to working with you.”

An extremely large number of colonizers died. However, the colonizers who had survived were stronger and more robust than before. After the ‘Great Nasari War’ and the truce between the Berserkers and the allied forces, the entire world was reorganized under a new order.

At the same time, the storm in Dragonic died down.

In the desert where the storm ceased, rain-trees, which drew large amounts of blood, occasionally sprayed a blood-red drizzle.

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{1} I assume that this is some sort of swing dance.

# CHAPTER 87

## DEBUT (1)

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{The seven overseers, who will exercise the right of earthlings in their stead, have been confirmed.}

{The seven overseers can exercise the following rights as alliance members.}

1. Enter and trade with other species on their planets.
2. Freely use the supply store.
3. Select missions.
4. Plan and propose tactics.
5. Run for public office.
6. View information.
7. Overseers can permit other earthlings the above rights.

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The seven overseers had been decided.

The Demon King Choi Hyuk.

The Sovereign of Balance Richard.

The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla.

The Sovereign Jessie.

The Queen of England Diana.

The Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan.

And, the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.

13 sovereigns remained besides them. Among them, the nine sovereigns who cooperated with Richard managed Nasir's recruits and could exercise Nasir's rights themselves.

The four sovereigns besides them were all in a miserable condition. They didn't cooperate with Richard nor were they on Richard's hit list either. After the Great Nasari War, they, themselves, had withdrawn their applications to preserve their lives and had laid low.

The world population did not know what exactly went on in the great war. They only heard that the Berserkers and the allied forces came to a truce after a fierce battle. All they heard was the announcement that ten sovereigns had died in combat on the allied side and that the sovereigns, who had been chosen to be overseers from the allied side, were to protect their colonized lands which were now in a state of anarchy.

Conspiracies were rampant. There were even rumors that this was all self-fabricated. The people were suspicious, and they were enraged that they had lost their country's sovereign, but what could they do? Things had already taken place. It was now a time where it was difficult to survive if you didn't curry favor with the surviving sovereigns. Whether they were happy or not, they had no choice but to gather under the mantle of the sovereigns, who were in command of the colonized lands, as Earth was gradually getting drier every passing day and there was no harvest even when fall came.

More and more people began to migrate to Dragonic. The colonization of Dragonic became more active, and Earth was becoming empty.

Still, Choi Hyuk spent most of his time on Earth. Although his previous residence had turned into ash, it didn't matter since he had Naro's spaceship.

Choi Hyuk would conduct all sorts of training, but when night fell, he would make the spaceship walls transparent and blankly watch the sunset. As the rotation of the collapsing Earth slowed, days were slowly becoming longer as did the sunset.

“Hmm~ ♪ Hmm ♪♪ Hmm... ♪ Nana~ ♪♪ ♪”

Naro waved his mitten-like hands as it played its guitar. Even though its hands were like that, it skillfully strummed and plucked the guitar with precision in a cheerful manner. It always improvised its songs, yet they were all pleasant to listen to.

Training and handling duties regarding his colonized lands during the day and watching the sunset while listening to Naro's performance at night was Choi Hyuk's daily life.

While he blankly looked out at the sky, reminiscing his memories, the shrinking sunset slowly became hazy like a candle that would go out at any moment, and twilight set in the sky.

As people left the city, only one house would be lit across another. Even the red-light district, which had been bustling with nightlife, was now deserted. There was now less light pollution, leaving the sky above the city filled with stars.

"Yaah- As expected, the sky of the cold universe is pretty."

Flame-Rain appeared this time as well. He didn't sense her arrival, yet at some point, she was standing next to him, starting a conversation. Still, Choi Hyuk wasn't taken aback. He was now familiar with this, and he had also predicted it as well. Since the advancement evaluations had ended and they had chosen the seven overseers, it was about time for her to make her appearance.

Instead, it was Naro who became taken aback. The fellow jumped up, raised both its arms and shouted,

"Invader? While we are maintaining a karma barrier? Master! Be careful. She's strong beyond my perception!"

"I know. Don't worry. She's my friend."

Choi Hyuk calmed Naro down and looked at Flame-Rain. Her bright, hazy flames, which covered her surroundings, first caught his attention. She uncovered her face and had wrapped the flames around her like silk clothes.

Choi Hyuk carefully examined her before letting out a sigh.

"...I still have no idea."

He had reached the 5-star level. He was enlightened and could unleash his own flames. Yet, he was still unable to estimate Flame-Rain's level. It seemed as though the difference between them hadn't shortened in the slightest.

Although he was confident that there was no one on Earth who could match him, there were rows of unimaginably strong experts one step outside Earth. If Flame-Rain was already like this, then what monsters were those known as the 'Exalted Wings'?

Whether she knew Choi Hyuk's frustration or not, Flame-Rain looked away and showed interest in the scared Naro.

"Huh? The Armoured Soul Tribe? That's not it... Hmm, it looks like it's still being born. Hyuk, you found a good friend."

Flame-Rain said ambiguously after approaching the wary Naro and examining it from different angles.

Choi Hyuk concealed his frustration and asked, hoping to listen further,

"Armoured Soul Tribe?"

"Yeah, one of the most influential tribes of the Flame Wing Alliance."

Although she said they were one of the most influential tribes... Choi Hyuk, an earthling, didn't know this information even though he had become an alliance member.

"Just what is the identity of the alliance? I still have no idea."

At Choi Hyuk's grumble, Flame-Rain patted his shoulder.

"That's why I'm here. I came here today on more official business."

She took two steps away before waving her right hand and placing it on her chest.

Blaze.

Flames surged.

After getting in a decently official looking position, she said in a polite tone he had

never heard before,

“I truly congratulate you on being chosen as one of the seven overseers. I am Flame-Rain and I have been dispatched as your guide for the welcoming event commemorating earthlings joining the alliance, as well as for the overseers’ membership training.”

“Welcoming event? Membership training?”

“Yes. There will be a banquet in commemoration of earthlings joining the alliance, and then, lessons on the composition of the alliance, the progression of battle against the monsters, and battle objectives, amongst others, will be held afterwards. All seven overseers and major figures in charge of the Laniakea Supercluster, especially Dark-Sound of the Dark Tribe, a key figure of the Exalted Wings, will attend.”

For some reason, Flame-Rain’s expression looked bitter when she mentioned the Exalted Wings. However, Choi Hyuk didn’t notice. Only the words ‘Exalted Wings’ rang in his ears. Nothing else mattered. ‘Exalted Wings’, weren’t they Choi Hyuk’s enemy? The existences who sat at the top of the alliance. The ones who started this damn game.

‘Does that mean I get to meet them?’

His heart beat with a dangerous urge.

However, now was not the time. Choi Hyuk tried his best to hide his thoughts. With an indifferent face, he slowly said,

“I must go. How do I get there?”

When he did, Flame-Rain, who was standing in an official position, relaxed her posture and said friendly,

“What do you mean ‘how do you get there’? I will take you there. Haven’t I personally come to bring Overseer Choi Hyuk there~”

She stretched her hand out and said humorously,

“Hold on. Nuna will take you to a nice place.”

Choi Hyuk was in a serious mood as he was going to confirm his enemy's face, yet Flame-Rain's unhesitant attitude was that of a friend cajoling him to come to a party. He smiled.

'This isn't bad.'

This mood was actually good.

It was currently time to hide his inner thoughts. If he was agitated and revealed his hostility, he would only arouse the Exalted Wings' attention. He currently didn't have the strength to take revenge. In a situation where he had to force himself to smile and conceal his inner thoughts, he was thankful to Flame-Rain who naturally created a good mood.

'... Don't tell me, she did this on purpose?'

Although he suddenly had this suspicion,

"Hurry, hurry! Let's go! Earth is wonderful but Dark City in Laniakea is marvelous too! To repay you for the coffee last time, I will buy you something delicious!"

Choi Hyuk's doubtful mind disappeared when he saw her jump up excitedly like a young girl. He shook his head as he stretched out his hand.

"Okay. Let's go."

Their hands touched.

Flame-Rain's hand was cool and soft. The moment the tips of their hands touched, she retracted her hand slightly, seemingly surprised, before aggressively latching onto his hand and pulling him in. At her strong pull, Choi Hyuk's body leaned towards her, almost touching.

"Huh?"

Choi Hyuk became surprised, but Flame-Rain shouted,

"Let's go!"

Blaze!

Before Choi Hyuk's body could touch hers, surging flames swallowed the two of them.

Whoosh!

The extreme heat melted the space around them. The two of them, wrapped in flames, traversed through dimensions like a comet.

"...Wow. To be able to pass through the extremely distant dimensional passage with her own body..."

In the place Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain left, Naro analyzed the remnants as it fell into a trance.



As karma developed, it would slowly transcend existing matter and approach pure karma. Because of this, Choi Hyuk could stare directly at the sun without blinding his eyes when he was at the 2-star level.

However, Flame-Rain's flames were currently so bright that he couldn't open his eyes. He could still see the bright light even through his closed eyes. He kept his eyes closed until darkness pushed its way back into his eyelids.

When he opened his eyes, he was in a place which seemed to be from a dream. It definitely wasn't Earth.

"...Could dimensional travel be so comfortable?"

Choi Hyuk said in slight admiration. To earthlings, dimensional travel was uncomfortable, always accompanied by the urge to vomit, as their bodies felt like it was being flipped inside out. A discomfort that they could never get used to. However, it was comfortable this time, as if he had just woken up from a nap.

"Of course~ Because I'm the driver,"

Boasted Flame-Rain. Choi Hyuk somehow didn't want to acknowledge it so he changed the topic.

"Where are we?"

“Hmm... Earthlings call this place the Great Attractor? In your terms, you can consider it the center of the Laniakea Supercluster.”

Although Flame-Rain used names from Earth in her explanation so he could understand, Choi Hyuk was still unable to.

“...What’s that?”

When he asked, Flame-Rain said in an overly boastful manner. She... was the type to mess with people the closer they got.

“Huh? You don’t know that? Can’t you even memorize your own address? This nuna will teach you just once, so listen carefully. They say that Laniakea means ‘immense heaven’ in Hawaiian. Earth is a part of the Milky Way Galaxy (what we call the 103<sup>rd</sup> barred spiral galaxy). And the Milky Way Galaxy is part of the Local Group along with the Andromeda Galaxy, Triangulum Galaxy and others, and the Local Group is also a part of the Virgo Supercluster along with countless other groups. And this Virgo Supercluster, along with the Hydra-Centaurus Supercluster and others, is part of the Laniakea Supercluster. Of course, the Laniakea Supercluster is also part of a bigger supercluster... but let’s stop here. Anyways, this place, in the scope of the entire alliance, is equivalent to a capital city of a small country. How about it? How do you feel coming to a city for the first time?”

Earth -> Milky Way Galaxy -> Local Group -> Virgo Supercluster -> Laniakea Supercluster.

According to her, Dragonic, which was Earth’s colonized land, was also within the Local Group, and the majority of the missions entrusted to earthlings took place in the Local Group. She said that very rarely did earthlings take part in a mission somewhere within the Virgo Supercluster...

As she explained, Naro sent him telepathic messages to help him understand. Because of this, Choi Hyuk could understand the vast scale of the universe. The universe was too enormous. To the point where Earth was too small to even call it a speck of dust...

“...Amazing.”

Forgetting to scold Flame-Rain, who had been extremely boastful, Choi Hyuk blankly looked around at his surroundings.

Dark City of Laniakea. It was a city composed of dark matter, which humanity had yet to observe.

Edit: Darkness-Sound, Darkness City, Darkness tribe -> Dark-Sound, Dark City, Dark Tribe

# CHAPTER 88

## DEBUT (2)

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Scientists discovered that the galaxy was much heavier than they initially thought. The galaxy rotated at a much faster velocity than what was calculated through Newton's law of gravity, and stars would be pulled into what they observed to be empty space. This meant one thing, 'There is matter that we cannot observe with our eyes and equipment out there.' That was how humanity anticipated the existence of 'dark matter'. Not long after, they found that the universe was filled with this dark matter. There was 6 times the amount of dark matter than matter humans could see and touch. Humans could only see an extremely small part of the universe.

Flame-Rain said,

"Not only is this place a capital with an administrative bureau which observes all the civilizations within the Laniakea Supercluster, but it also has a weapon factory that produces the weapons the alliance uses. As you can tell, since it is composed of dark matter, you won't be able to see it clearly with your eyes."

"Dark matter you say..."

Choi Hyuk's voice erupted with admiration.

"Yeah. It's matter that can be felt but not seen by living beings, who are made up of matter which reflects light, until they reach the 4-star level. Still, you are an intermediate ranked warrior... I mean, since you reached the 5-star level, you can sort of see it, right?"

It was as she said. Choi Hyuk could see the ground and buildings, which made up Dark City, hazily as if he were seeing the shadows of tree leaves under the moonlight.

Maybe it was because they took alien species that were unable to see dark matter into consideration, but they had lit lights along the edges of buildings. Their appearance was similar to Christmas lights as they gave off a bright, festive look. A Christmas in a city of shadows.

"Anyways, what floor is this? What is up, and what is down?"

Choi Hyuk wandered around like a child. They seemed to be on an overpass. The dark buildings lined up on either side were so frighteningly tall that he couldn't see the top or bottom of the buildings. As if the buildings and streets were on top of a Mobius strip, they tilted horizontally or hung upside down at some point, and a zero-gravity area (a gravity balancing area to be exact) also existed in between, allowing people and buildings to float. It seemed as though there wasn't a predetermined gravitational force.

“That’s because Dark City isn’t built on a planet, but made by processing the randomly distributed dark matter. It might be pointless trying to figure out what floor you’re on since those tall buildings may warp and contact a dark matter ground somewhere else.”

Flame-Rain smiled as she saw Choi Hyuk looking around with interest. In Choi Hyuk’s perspective, although he had gone to outer space on missions many times, this was his first time visiting a properly functioning alien city. On top of that, because this was a city at the center of the Laniakea Supercluster, a place so massive that it could be considered as a ‘city’ by the alliance, he couldn’t help but look around like someone who had lived in the countryside for 80 years coming to a city for the first time.

Flame-Rain pulled on Choi Hyuk’s arm and said,

“Now, hurry up. There’s a place we need to go before we attend the welcoming event.”

Pulled unexpectedly, Choi Hyuk began to run, and the two ran through the city of shadows decorated with brilliant lights.



They jumped down from the overpass three times and passed through around 5 buildings before jumping up into the sky and landing on a street, which was upside down, passing by members of the Dark Tribe, who were also composed of dark matter.

The streets were beautiful. The lighting technology of Dark City was so advanced that they could create crystals of light. Even lights that seemed to be traffic lights, upon closer examination, looked like beautifully split ice crystals. Some lights spread out like fountains while others floated around like fireflies.

The residents of Dark City were spending their happy everyday lives here. Flame-Rain guided him around friendly.

“Do you see that candy over there? That is an incredibly small nuclear bomb. They have around 1/10,000 the power of the nuclear bombs from World War 2? Still, nuclear bombs are nuclear bombs.”

Dark Tribe couples walked around, hand in hand, sharing these small nuclear bomb candies. Flashes of light were occasionally emitted from their bellies, momentarily dying them white, but they were fine. In fact, they shook their bodies as if they were enjoying it. They had absorbed and digested the energy from the nuclear reaction.

There were fun sights to see, and there were other species besides the Dark Tribe.

1023-Quasarlings whose bodies emitted silver lights, Armoured Soul Tribe members whose bodies were covered in metal like Mechas, whom he had seen in the past, and even members of the Speckled Light Tribe, who went around in groups.

It was fun watching them go on with their peaceful lives as they walked down the beautiful streets. And as fun as it was... the more disharmonious it felt.

Flame-Rain, who had been walking briskly, slowed her walking pace when she saw that Choi Hyuk's expression had stiffened. Choi Hyuk's face was rigid, and his eyes were dyed with faint fury.

Flame-Rain cautiously asked while reading his mood,

“As expected... Is it awkward?”

As he turned to look at Flame-Rain, he nodded,

“...Yeah, it feels awkward. Isn't this place in the middle of war?”

The reason for the sense of disharmony was that this peaceful scene was too different from Earth. It hadn't been long since billions of people ceased to exist. It had only been three years since the {Ring of Rebirth} appeared during math class, where students had killed one another. Even at this very moment, Earth was heading towards extinction. What was the reason for this?

They said it was because of the monsters' invasion. That they had no choice as they needed to block the monsters, whose goal was to wipe out all karmalings. That existences in the universe had no choice but to partake in this war.

..Yet this place was too peaceful. As if things like war didn't exist.

'Maybe earthlings are being used as cannon fodder for their peace and enjoyment?'

The moment he thought this, Choi Hyuk found it hard to hide his rage. It currently wasn't time to reveal his rage, and he lacked information to act rashly... however, this was difficult to endure.

Flame-Rain gazed at his face before stretching out her hand.

"Let's go. I think it's time I give you my present."

She took the lead.

The further he followed her, the rarer traces of people became and the more intimidating the buildings he saw were. The walls made of dark matter weren't simply walls but had been condensed with aggressive karma, revealing a menacing aura. No matter how he looked at it, this place wasn't an area open to civilians. He even saw guard posts and defense facilities. However, for some reason, he didn't see any security guards.

"This is...?"

Flame-Rain simply smiled mysteriously at his questions and didn't reply.

Doors, which looked as solid as those on a safe, stood, layered in front of each other, yet none of them were locked. They would open automatically when Flame-Rain placed her hand on them.

As there was no one in the enormous, menacing buildings, it even felt as if they had come to steal something. However, Flame-Rain passed through the passage and gateways with familiarity and without hesitation. Then, when they got on an elevator and went up, an 'ocean' appeared.

Stumble.

Choi Hyuk stumbled without knowing. It was hard to stay standing as the gravitational force in his surroundings was swaying in every direction. His surroundings were vast, boundless like the universe. It was filled with special dark matter that rippled. Every time the dark matter, which possessed strong gravitational force, rippled, it would

change the direction of the gravitational force, shaking Choi Hyuk's body. Although it was fine if he put his strength into it, Choi Hyuk, who had reached the 5-star level, still felt the ripples in gravity very strongly.

"This is the forge – A place that will let your worn sword be reborn."

Flame-Rain said as she spread her arms. Then she pointed her finger at the Predator's Blade on Choi Hyuk's waist.

"You used that sword for a while, right?"

"It has been with me since around the time I awakened."

"That's perfect."

Nodding, Flame-Rain took out a radiant jewel from her bosom. It was a jewel which possessed karma hot enough to heat his cheeks.

"We are going to re-smelt that sword now. By borrowing the strength of this Essence of Fire and the dark ocean, that is. Once the smelting is done, that sword will break through its limits and be reborn. This the present I've prepared for you."

Flame-Rain's gaze, as she looked at Choi Hyuk, was clear and upright. The white light (goodwill) she emitted put Choi Hyuk at ease like it always did.

Feeling somewhat awkward, Choi Hyuk turned his gaze away and asked,

"...Why a present all of a sudden?"

"Just, there are things I'm sorry about..."

Flame-Rain, who dragged out her words in an obscure manner, shook her head and said in a cheerful voice,

"Either way, just accept it since I'm giving it to you. First, hold your sword properly with both your hands."

Choi Hyuk couldn't deny her words for some reason. Although he wanted to ask her a lot of things, his mouth wouldn't open. He simply did as he was told and held his sword properly with his hands.

“Huuu...”

After letting out a deep breath, Flame-Rain brought the Essence of Fire close to the Predator’s Blade. Then, she stared at Choi Hyuk’s eyes and said,

“Bring your emotions to their peak. Like when you unleash your flames.”

Choi Hyuk’s emotions always started with ‘rage’. He also felt rage not too long ago. The clear difference between the lives of earthlings and the residents of Dark City. Rage towards this injustice. This rage was vivid whenever he recalled it, no matter how much time had passed.

Blaze.

Flames surged naturally from his body. However, Flame-Rain shook her head.

“Don’t create fire. Bring your emotions to their peak, but don’t unleash your flames. Keep that balance.”

That wasn’t easy. His body was swaying due to the endlessly changing gravitational force of the dark ocean, while his mind was swaying due to his emotions which surged in his mind on their own. However, Flame-Rain didn’t move, only watching with her hand holding the Essence of Fire as she waited for Choi Hyuk to achieve balance on his own.

Clench.

Choi Hyuk bit his lip. He was angry. Although he didn’t know exactly what it was, there was no doubt that the present Flame-Rain wanted to give him was extraordinary. However, he himself was too unskilled to receive her present. Choi Hyuk, who had resolved to make the Flame Wing Alliance and the Exalted Wings kneel someday, was unable to even overcome himself.

‘How am I going to take revenge like this...?’

Clench.

Massive rage rose up like a hail and covered Choi Hyuk’s emotions.

Clench.

Choi Hyuk's body, which shook imperceptibly, locked in place as if it was nailed in.

Choi Hyuk's mind, which was engulfed by extreme rage, instead calmed to a chill. Like a sword forged tens of thousands of times, his mind became cold, sharp, yet serene. A chilling rage.

Flame-Rain smiled.

"Then, here I go."

The Essence of Fire entered the Predator's Blade. At the same time-

Kuooooohh!

Wailing, the dark ocean began to rush towards the Predator's Blade.

It was so fierce that it shook Choi Hyuk's mind, which had become serene and sharp like a sword. Even his body swayed again.

"Endure it! If your emotions scatter here, then the power contained in your sword will be that much weaker!"

Flame-Rain ordered in a strict voice he had never heard before.

Choi Hyuk grit his teeth. His face distorted brutally, and the veins in his eyes popped, dripping blood. Yet, soon, Choi Hyuk's distorting face calmed, becoming expressionless. Even his lips, which he had bit to the point of dripping blood, returned to a bland horizontal line.

Choi Hyuk was only shouting one thing in his mind.

'Rage.'

'Rage.'

Choi Hyuk slowly raised his sword, which he had held straight, above his head. He wasn't concerned about the torrent of the dark ocean. Even if his skin burst and his joints broke under the immense pressure, he didn't care. He only thought of one thing.

'Kill. Only then can you kill.'

That was what they had said.

Words invoking unmatched hatred, words he had always remembered and followed.

Perhaps, at this moment, Choi Hyuk felt as though these senseless words that invoked killing might even have been directed at himself.

Just then, the Predator's Blade, which had been raised completely above his head, split the dark ocean as it fell.

Slowly, following his sword, the ocean in front of Choi Hyuk began to split.

Between the split ocean, the Predator's Blade revealed a transparent blade.

## CHAPTER 89

### DEBUT (3)

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The moment the sword swung down completely, and the dark ocean completely split in half in front of him, the world began to look completely different.

Choi Hyuk's body trembled. It felt as though his perception was expanding endlessly. He could perceive all 360 degrees around him simultaneously. He could clearly see his own face and the hair jutting from the back of his head. He could clearly see things he wasn't able to see before.

He could see the transparent sword in his hand and even the radiant colors of the rolling dark ocean around him. It was a light he was seeing for the first time in his life. It was a color humans couldn't see.

Normally, humans possessed three types of cone cells in their eyes that could distinguish red, green and blue. However, there were rare cases where people were born with four types of cone cells. Where normal people could distinguish a million colors, they could distinguish a billion. The way they saw the world completely changed with the addition of another type of cone cell.

However, Choi Hyuk completely surpassed that.

He was surprised, like a man who hadn't been able to see red seeing the natural sunset for the first time. No, his surprise surpassed that. Since Choi Hyuk could 'see' dark matter, which didn't react to light. From the start, what Choi Hyuk was seeing now wasn't a color which could be explained through light.

He was currently seeing karma.

'How was it that I didn't know of this light until now?'

As if enchanting him, he gazed at the mystical light running down his sword. However, that light soon only left an afterimage as it darkened. The dark ocean and the sword in his hand turned dark and transparent. No color remained. His vision, which could clearly see 360 degrees around him and his own face, gradually narrowed. Although he still felt his surroundings, it felt frustrating as if he was in a fog.

“Oh my god...”

Flame-Rain exclaimed.

{You have completed a Weapon of Vow. You have glimpsed at an enlightenment beyond your current level by relying on your preposterous will. Your Retribution increased by 200 points with this glimmer of enlightenment. As praise to honorable overseer’s will, you have been granted 30 free karma points.}

After reading the message, Choi Hyuk brought the sword up to his eyes.

Swish-

He had only raised his sword, but he could hear sounds of it slicing something.

His sword had lost all the light from before and was now dark and transparent. If it was a shade of pitch-black which drew light into it previously, it was now a semi-transparent shadow. When he raised his sword, information about it appeared. Its name had completely changed.

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{Choi Hyuk’s Imprint} \*Weapon of Vow

Rank: S-Rank (Growth-type, Awaken-type)

Durability: Limitless

Slashing Attacks +300~ (Power, Speed, Control, Stamina, and Endurance)

A sword imprinted with the ‘Deadly Will’ through Earth’s overseer Choi Hyuk’s own soul and retribution. Imprinted with his will, it will not break or dull. Weapon of Vow is rare even in the universe. Theoretically, there is no limit to its power. It grows alongside its soul partner, Choi Hyuk.

Originally, ‘Predator’s Blade’ was a growth-type weapon made of the metal ore ‘aerium’ from the 384-eclipse cluster of the Hydra Cluster. Mixed with the Essence of Fire, the Dark Ocean, and Overseer Choi Hyuk’s soul and retribution, it has been reborn as ‘Karma-Sword, Weapon of Vow, Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. It will normally be an alloy of aerium and dark matter, but depending on its owner’s capabilities, the material may be replaced by karma and display a stronger power.

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It was a weapon that made him shiver just by holding it.

Only, the name of his sword was a bit awkward even though the name change was proof of the fact that the blade itself had completely changed.

“The name is a bit awkward. Predator’s Blade wasn’t bad...”

When Choi Hyuk mumbled, Flame-Rain leaped up and down.

“What are you saying? It’s actually ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint!’”

“It doesn’t really sound like the name of a sword.”

As if frustrated, Flame-Rain pounded on her chest.

“Urgh. All karma weapons have names like that. First, the owner’s own name is in front. Then the type of weapon. Do you even know how amazing the name ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ is? Just hearing the name will make others attend to you. Since, inside the alliance, it’s as though you are only recognized as a true warrior worth his salt when you have a karma weapon.”

Even at Flame-Rain’s passionate speech, Choi Hyuk showed a matter-of-fact expression. His expression clearly asked, ‘Isn’t it only natural and not amazing they are doing their worth?’

Flame-Rain flicked the tip of her finger on Choi Hyuk’s forehead. He rubbed his forehead. It didn’t feel all too bad.

“Listen to the end. From the start, there was no doubt it would be a karma-sword. It should have been a given since I gave you the Essence of Fire and this place is the Dark Ocean... However, what’s really surprising is the ‘Imprint’ part rather than ‘Choi Hyuk’ of ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. That means you completed a Weapon of Vow! I only expected a Weapon of Calling! If you did better, I expected at most a Weapon of Sentiment...! But an ‘Imprint’?! A Weapon of Vow?!”

As she seemingly renewed her excitement as she talked, Flame-Rain examined ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ once again.

“Imprint... Even that doesn’t seem like a sword’s name.”

At Choi Hyuk’s begrudging voice, Flame-Rain once again pounded her chest.

“Listen to me! There are four types of karma weapons.”

Following Flame-Rain’s explanation, the types of karma weapons are as follows.

1. ‘Weapon of Calling’. The most common karma weapon. The unification of the weapon and its owner is the lowest. A form where its owner normally grants the weapon a calling. They possess names related to actions, such as ‘Revenge’, ‘Arbitration’, and ‘Protection’, among others.
2. ‘Weapon of Sentiment’. A karma weapon that can be called a work of art. Its owner’s emotions permeate the weapon, and the weapon and its owner understand each other like twins. They possess names related to emotions, such as ‘Rage’, ‘Anguish’, and ‘Desire’, among others.
3. ‘Weapon of Vow’. A powerful karma weapon rare even in the macrocosm. Its owner’s most powerful will solidifies into the shape of a sword. It is difficult to distinguish between the weapon and its owner. They possess names related to pledges and hopes, such as ‘Pledge’, ‘Imprint’, and ‘Prayer’, among others.
4. ‘Weapon of Conclusion’. An exalted weapon that can be counted on fingers in the macrocosm. The weapon itself is granted with the same fate as its owner. They possess names related to the conclusion of one’s fate, such as ‘Glory’, ‘Hell’, and ‘Salvation’, among others.

“So ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ is a rare Weapon of Vow even in the universe. What does that mean? You just completed a weapon that should be impossible at your level! You, who is only a middle ranked warrior (5-star), just created a weapon that can only be attempted once you are at least a high ranked warrior!”

Flame-Rain’s voice was close to shouting. Choi Hyuk simply thought, ‘So I guess it really is amazing.’

After hearing her words, he could guess one thing.

‘Ah, so is that why I could momentarily see my face and the color of dark matter?’

His perception grew explosively in that instant. Although he didn’t know the reason, he had taken a glimpse beyond his limits. It was probably a world he could see once he reached the 6-star level. It seemed that he gained a once-in-a-lifetime enlightenment moment. It seemed he was able to create a Weapon of Vow because of

this as well.

Anyways, he felt pleased since she said it was a good result. He looked down at his sword, 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'. A deeply satisfying feeling surged from deep within him. It didn't feel foreign at all. The sword was his own will.

"...It really is amazing."

Choi Hyuk could tell now. That this was an incredible present. Although it seemed as though it came out better than Flame-Rain expected... the reason he could create such a treasure was because she had invested equally amazing resources.

Choi Hyuk gazed at Flame-Rain with a complicated look. While he was grateful for her kindness... it wasn't a light kindness he could just gloss over this time.

Choi Hyuk asked,

"Flame-Rain. What's the real reason you are acting this way towards me?"

Flame-Rain's eyes wavered. However, she replied cheerfully as if they had never wavered in the first place,

"Just because!"

"..."

When Choi Hyuk stared at her, Flame-Rain sighed exaggeratingly. Then started to speak.

"I am from the Flame Wing Tribe."

"...The Flame Wing Tribe."

Choi Hyuk rolled those words in his mouth. It was a name he was already well familiar with. Choi Hyuk's own karma foundation was precisely the Flame Wing Tribe's Karma Heart. Even his strongest skill was the Flame Wing Tribe's fighting technique, Flaming Wing Dance.

In fact, he had already guessed that Flame-Rain was from the Flame Wing Tribe. He was able to complete his Flaming Wing Dance due to her help... and her name

contained 'Flame'.

However, it seemed that he didn't want to acknowledge this fact. Because there was another organization with 'Flame' in its name.

Choi Hyuk felt somewhat choked up. Although he wanted to ask, his mouth wouldn't open. Still, he asked, pretending to be calm.

"...I was curious for a while, but what is the relationship between the Flame Wing Tribe and the Flame Wing Alliance?"

At his question, Flame-Rain showed a gloomy face. Then, as if she had memorized a script, she replied quickly,

"The Flame Wing Tribe is the tribe who established the Flame Wing Alliance. You can call them the leader of the alliance. Since they already hold all the key positions within the alliance, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that responsibility for all actions the alliance takes falls on the Flame Wing Tribe."

"...Okay."

Even though he thought this was probably the case, when she confirmed it, he felt something surge within him, though he wasn't sure whether it was a sense of loss or betrayal. Flame Wing Alliance... Flame Wing Tribe. The Exalted Wings.

'Are they all my sworn enemies? Or only a portion?'

He still lacked information. However... their vague existence was gradually taking form.

Choi Hyuk kept his heart from stirring.

Flame-Rain gazed at him. The two met each other's gaze.

Choi Hyuk had a hard time asking,

"Okay... So, you're from the Flame Wing Tribe. But why?"

Flame-Rain replied in an indifferent tone. However, her tone of speech slowly became higher and faster.

“Yeah. Since I’m from the Flame Wing Tribe. As a member of the tribe responsible for the alliance, when I think about the events earthlings had to endure, I felt sorry, I wanted to atone for it, yet I still wanted to be friends with you... Ah, damn! I’m not being nice to you because of these emotions!”

“What?”

“I’m definitely not being nice to you because of these emotions!”

With her eyes wide open, Flame-Rain continued her empty bravado. Even though he could see how sorry she was through her eyes, she continued to argue until the end.

That she was definitely not acting this way because she was sorry. She argued while shouting.

It was comical, yet it was precisely because of this that he felt her sincerity truly came through.

Flame-Rain said,

“Please, don’t think of such complicated thoughts and just accept it. A present is only a present!”

Thud.

Flame-Rain hit Choi Hyuk’s chest with her small fist. Choi Hyuk simply laughed.

That she was doing this because she was sorry. His pride might have been hurt if she said that... but because she acted like this, his tense shoulders relaxed, and he laughed.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

‘Later... Yeah, I think I can think about this later.’

Choi Hyuk bumped his fist against Flame-Rain’s, which had been on his chest, by moving back a little and said,

“Okay. Thanks.”



Flame-Rain guided Choi Hyuk to the welcoming hall.

Although he had learned of this later, compared to the others, Flame-Rain's guide had quite a bit of extra service. Other overseers of Earth didn't have time to look around Dark City and were immediately brought to the welcoming hall. They debuted before the universe without any preparations.

Not only that, but they weren't able to properly adjust to Dark City. When he met the other overseers in front of the event hall, he couldn't help but laugh.

"Why are they like that?"

When Choi Hyuk asked, Flame-Rain shrugged her shoulders.

"There's nothing we can do. If their Retribution isn't at least 5-star, then they can't properly perceive dark matter."

Besides Choi Hyuk, the other six overseers were flailing as if they had fallen in a swamp. Richard was better off as he was only sunken up to his ankles, while Camilla and Jessie were sunken up to their knees. The other sovereigns were sunken up to their waists and didn't know what to do.

It was because, although dark matter possessed a strong gravitational force, it barely interacted with the matter which made up earthlings' bodies. Without the help of karma, the bodies of earthlings would sink through dark matter like ghosts.

Flame-Rain leisurely explained,

"Although you can feel dark matter with 4-star Retribution, it's hard to stand up and balance yourself properly without being able to see it. It's like standing on one leg with your eyes closed. You don't have this problem since you can see the outlines as a 5-star."

Choi Hyuk rubbed his chin.

"...How pitiful."

He was distressed as the overseers representing Earth were acting this way.

However, soon, something which made him more distressed occurred.

“Yaah, those kids over there are the earthlings who newly joined the alliance?”

Four aliens appeared noisily. Unlike Flame-Rain, who could speak Korean fluently, they appeared while speaking in an alien language. Although there wasn't a communication problem because of {Language Resonance}, their attitude and tone mixed together and seemed even more ill-mannered.

{Hey! Your seniors are passing by and you don't salute?}

{Kids these days are so rude.}

{Why are you like this? They haven't even been commissioned yet so we don't know whether they will be under our command or not. They say their population is quite big and if they are overseers, don't you think they'll be assigned as independent troops?}

{They can't even stand on their own feet, what do you mean independent troops?}

They approached the overseers representing Earth, who were flailing on the floor, while mocking them to their heart's content.

Then a 3-meter-tall 'robot' alien kicked the Queen of England Diana with its enormous foot. She was the only child of Elizabeth and had lived her entire life as a princess. The young, beautiful overseer Diana, who had been flailing with her body sunken up to her waist, was kicked down and was now sunk up to her shoulders.

{When your seniors come, you need to salute. How dare you lie down!}

{Ah, that was her lying down? Kekekeke. What an idiot.}

“...Ha...”

Choi Hyuk's eyes ignited with fury. His hand naturally headed towards 'Imprint'.

He even felt that this was a good chance. He was curious about his new weapon's power. An S rank weapon that could slice into a high ranked warrior, a 6-star enemy. He also wanted to test the different indication of stats now that it had received the name 'Imprint'.

Only, there was something that held him back.

“Listening to how they talk, it seems that they are our seniors... Will it be a problem?”

He asked with his hand on his sword.

“Looking at how they are acting, it seems they are commanding officers of the Virgo Cluster you are a part of. They are experts in their own right, and if you guys are officially commissioned, then they really might be your superiors. Since the alliance is one big military organization, command and discipline are quite rigorous.”

Choi Hyuk frowned at her words.

“So... There will be a problem?”

As it wasn't time to oppose the alliance, Choi Hyuk was approaching this carefully. Flame-Rain shrugged her shoulders.

“Although you are protected by the alliance law when you join the alliance... Rights are like this. Rather than a set amount, your rights grow in accordance to your demands and accomplishments. Although earthlings have been formally granted citizenship... It is still unknown how respected your rights will be. That's why they are trying to get the drop on you.”

As she said this, Flame-Rain lightly took Choi Hyuk's hand off his sword.

“Only, you can't use your weapon.”

“...”

As if he felt unsatisfied, he clenched the air once. He heard that the abilities of 'Weapons of Vow' would differ depending on the type. Weapons with the name 'Imprint' like Choi Hyuk's would be imprinted with one will and was optimized for one function. In Choi Hyuk's case, it was optimized for slashing attacks, perhaps because of his Deadly Will.

The 'Slashing Attacks +300~ (Power, Speed, Control, Stamina, and Endurance)' written in the description meant that over 300 points of karma would be distributed amongst those five stats, which were utilized when he slashed, in the most ideal manner. Since the weapon was an S rank on top of that, he could theoretically unleash

a power close to that of someone at the 6-star level the moment he slashed his target.

However, it was useless if he couldn't unsheathe his weapon. He heard that 'Prayer' and 'Pledge' types of 'Weapons of Vow' could increase one's karma normally, yet 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' would only display its might when wielded it with his own hands. It seemed that he would have to test his weapon later.

"Nothing I can do."

Instead, Choi Hyuk clenched his fists. There were four enemies. Looking at their vigor, they all seemed to be 5-star level warriors. Even if it was Choi Hyuk, he couldn't look down on them. Choi Hyuk coldly and heavily shrouded his spirit and waited for an opportunity.

Just then-

"Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!"

He heard Richard's clear shout.

Bang!

The metallic alien, who kicked Diana, was blasted away.

"Acting all cocky..."

The platinum-haired, middle-aged Richard looked down on the aliens and stood up with his hair tangled. With his entire body covered in golden karma, he seemed to have become used to Dark City as he could stand firmly on the ground.

He used his specialty, speed, and rushed towards the detestable aliens. There was a storm of karma.

"Good."

Looking at this scene, Choi Hyuk smiled. Richard created a great opportunity for him.

"Flaming Wing Dance."

Blaze!

Flames erupted, and Choi Hyuk's fist-

Bang!

Smashed into the chest of a 1023-quasarling, whose body was shining with a silver light.

"You bastards!"

The alien from the Dark Tribe, who was preparing to counterattack, was restrained by Camilla and Jessie who suddenly got up. A brawl broke out as they tangled together. Although Earth's overseers were usually the ones who flew out and vomited blood, they didn't lose out in malice.

The combination with Choi Hyuk as the lead and Richard as support even fought quite well.

"Wow... Good fight."

Flame-Rain sat down and watched.

The welcoming event in commemoration of earthlings joining the alliance opened with a group fight between the overseers of Earth and the existing members of the alliance.

It was a splendid debut.



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