SOVEREIGN OF JUDGEMENT

BOOK 02

Today Again

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

Sovereign of Judgement

(심판의 군주)

by

TodayAgain

(오늘도요)

Synopsis

One day, a survival game started.

I decided to call it the end of the world.

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

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English Translation by Myoni, emptycube @ MY:TL

Translation Edit by Myoni, Yoni, Haku, Stealth, Obelisk, Lesurous @ MY:TL

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ Hasseno Blog

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Episode 6 - Mafia Game

Chapter 101: Someone (1)

"...What did it do?"

Choi Hyuk tilted his head in the fourth dimension, which was now permeating with light.

Like how Choi Hyuk had seen through the monster of night's core, it too had thoroughly seen through him. It seemed it had used its 'seeing' ability to look into Choi Hyuk's past as well. It must have seen his mother during that. Although it was unpleasant to the extreme, there was nothing he could do about it. It was a high ranked monster. Going purely by rank, it ranked higher than Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk had no way of finding its core without giving it his past. It was a tactic of 'giving up one's flesh to strike their bones'. That was how he eventually came out victorious.

However, Choi Hyuk frowned.

He clearly recalled its last words, 'I saw it. I saw it. I saaaw it!' followed by its karma moving.

"It definitely did something..."

It had been difficult to find the core though.

The reason why Choi Hyuk was able to beat it was because he had paid sharp attention to finding its core from start to finish. On the other hand, the monster of night had been careless enough to read and learn of Choi Hyuk's past, finding his weakness, his mother, and rejoice. Additionally, it had even occasionally paid attention to the fight between the doppelgangers and humans outside. This was how he had been able to win.

That was all. Choi Hyuk had only found its core by using its carelessness. He had no way of knowing what sort of trick it pulled at the last moment.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

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“How futile.”

Ryu Hyunsung lamented as he buried a corpse.

Although it had been a long time since human lives had become as worthless as flies, Ryu Hyunsung was still not used to death.

He brushed the dirt off him and looked at his hand. As a national athlete, he had wielded the saber with this hand countless times. His hand, which had been covered in calluses, was now soft and smooth due to karma.

He had personally killed people with this hand that looked like it had never met any hardship. Countless of them.

Was it nonetheless or because of it? He hadn’t become used to death, and it gradually felt heavier. These people had been chatting and laughing just this morning, yet, now they were gone. If there was such a thing as fate, then when were their deaths decided?

Tap.

Someone placed their hand on his shoulder. When he turned around, it was Guardian Bae Jinman. Although his complexion seemed healthy due to karma, his white hair was still that of an old professor’s.

“Guardian.”

Ryu Hyunsung greeted in the glum voice of guilty middle schooler but bowed in the awkward manner of someone who didn’t want to reveal their gloominess. Bae Jinman nodded his head and turned his gaze away from Ryu Hyunsung. His eyes took in the scene of the buried corpses, comrades holding their tears back, and the colonizers who plainly seemed to find all of this a bother. Although Ryu Hyunsung, who was immersed in his sadness, wasn’t aware of the colonizers who didn’t seem to care for their fallen comrades, Bae Jinman could see it all.

‘Human lives were more precious than anything.’ This common notion was an illusion that had only been created in recent times. In fact, many people were shockingly apathetic to the deaths of those unrelated to them. What if they saw someone die right in front of their eyes? It wouldn’t affect them as much as one would expect. The moment it was meaningful was either when the person who died in front of them was someone precious to them or if they felt that they would be next.

However, when looking around at those who found this bothersome, there were many colonizers who were even beyond that stage. ‘I want to live.’ ‘I can live.’ They had already lost this hope. Perhaps they were even of the mind ‘Since we’re going to die anyways, we should be enjoying every moment before we die. What a waste of time.’

Bae Jinman turned his back on Ryu Hyunsung and asked,

“Director Ryu Hyunsung. Do you know why I pledged myself to Overseer Choi Hyuk?”

Ryu Hyunsung’s eyes widened at the unexpected question.

“No… You didn’t tell me when I was curious.”

Ryu Hyunsung and Bae Jinman had both been leading their own forces before joining Choi Hyuk for the first colonization. Afterwards, they had decided to become Choi Hyuk’s followers and had been working together since then.

It was a question Ryu Hyunsung had always been curious of because Choi Hyuk, who slaughtered lives, didn’t seem to match Bae Jinman, who considered life as something precious. Even if he could accept the fact that Bae Jinman had joined the first colonization because it was a critical moment for humanity, he thought that there was no reason for him to stay by his side as a follower. There was no way Bae Jinman wanted crumbs from the colonized lands either.

“Cancer… I thought of it as cancer treatment.”

“Cancer?”

“At Kangdong District, I had already thought the world had fallen. However, when we killed the Wyvern of Destruction and came out, what was this? That wasn’t the case. Although the world was collapsing, people didn’t know it. Even until recently.”

It was probably after two-fifths of the non-awakenees had ceased to exist during the advancement evaluation when the entire world was undoubtedly aware. Before then, there were still many who lived without this sense of reality.

“There’s a saying ‘true crisis is when you aren’t aware there is a crisis’. It was exactly that. It was like seeing patients who refused examinations, let alone surgery, while their insides were rotting with cancer. That was why I joined Overseer Choi Hyuk. Although he was more extreme than the others, I believed it was precisely because he was so extreme that he could make the world aware.”

Ryu Hyunsung slowly nodded his head. Many people in the world would often say Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers were ‘crazy’, but in Ryu Hyunsung’s perspective, the world was already crazy. In a universe where entities from the alliance and monsters were fighting each other, earthlings couldn’t continue to live the way they had when they simply lived harmoniously with each other.

“However, this choice was also giving up ‘myself’.”

Ryu Hyunsung looked at Bae Jinman with slightly surprised eyes. Bae Jinman had a bitter expression. Ryu Hyunsung had never seen him look so vulnerable before. He had always taken the lead and focused on treating the wounded. However, Bae Jinman was currently shaking his head, saying it was not so.

“I had the realization that the dream I had my entire life, everything I believed that was ‘me’, and everything I loved and found precious had been crushed. Once the game began in

Kangdong District... The moment patients and doctors began to kill each other, the moment I was no longer able to see my family, my world had already died. No, I had already died. What that means is..."

Bae Jinman, who had been looking off into the distance, turned his gaze and looked directly at Ryu Hyunsung. His voice was trembling with rage, sadness, and eventually, resignation.

"There is nothing more I hope for in this life. There's nothing that makes me angry, sad, or regretful, since, for me, everything has ended. Perhaps, I have already died, and this is some sort of bonus game. That is why I can partake in Overseer Choi Hyuk's actions, whom I would have never cooperated with in the past. If it was the past, no matter how beneficial his actions were to humanity, I would first be haunted by those he killed. But that isn't the case now since this life has already ended for me. Only... Since I still have time left, I am only doing what I can do to make the next generation a generation where humanity can hope again. I don't reflect on my actions or differentiate between this and that. I don't have the power to do so anymore. When I think that this is truly my life, I find my ruined life unfair and am unable to endure the longing of wanting to see those I can no longer see. However, when I think of it as an extra life, a bonus game, it's not that bad. Everything has already ended. The world has collapsed, and if it ever comes to the point of regeneration, that is not our responsibility. And if it's Overseer Choi Hyuk, even if he can't save us, he will one day end this ruin... That is what I think."

Ryu Hyunsung could somehow understand Bae Jinman's jumbled words. He also knew why he was telling him this when he had never said it before.

That was why he said,

"Thank you."

Bae Jinman had comforted Ryu Hyunsung in his own way.

Perhaps he knew that Ryu Hyunsung had never had a day in the past 3 years where he didn't lose sleep due to nightmares, which was why he had told him his own 'coping method'.

Ryu Hyunsung had an especially good memory. He first remembered all his dead friends. He thought that, by not forgetting them, he was respecting them. That was why every day felt heavier.

Bae Jinman was telling him to let go. However, he shook his head.

"Still, I can't forget them yet."

This was his inevitable nature. He couldn't forget those who died first. He couldn't stop his affection for them. That was why he was scared.

"I am scared. Although I can still raise my sword... I'm scared I won't be able to lift my sword due to my pressing depression... Still, there's nothing I can do."

Ryu Hyunsung forced a smile as he said this. Bae Jinman patted his shoulder twice before leaving.

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The battle had ended, leaving everyone with their own wounds.

Once the monster of night had been slain, the monsters on the Cayenne star fell into a state of chaos. It was then when the mission became as Tangka of the Armored Soul Tribe had said, an 'easy' mission. They were able to conquer the Cayenne star with no particular losses.

Instead, what was more exhausting than the actual battle was the negotiation process with the alliance.

The alliance's attitude was clear.

{There was nothing wrong with the operation order.}

"What are you saying? In a region expected only to have

moderate battles, high ranked monsters, doppelgangers and a monster of night appeared!”

At Camilla’s retaliation, the artificial intelligence tasked with inspecting this mission repeated its rigid message.

{Reconnaissance cannot be completely precise. As monsters do their best to trick us, this sort of error is a common occurrence.}

“… Then how do you explain the doppelganger identification device that the alliance sent? Didn’t you withhold information even though you knew of the possibility of doppelgangers appearing ahead of time? Even though we know that it is grounds for violation of the alliance law?”

{Doppelgangers are considered as a rank 1 species for caution by the alliance. As we never know when or where they will appear, it is only normal to randomly send it as an exploration device to new unexplored regions. It is difficult to determine that they were aware of the possibility of doppelgangers ahead of time with this.}

“… Then why didn’t you tell us it was a doppelganger identification device?”

This time, it was the Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan who asked.

{As there is always a risk of doppelgangers, it is common to give low ranked troops an identification device, however, it is a fact that the actual frequency of doppelganger appearances is low. As there have been cases of setbacks due to the first-line troops becoming excessively intimidated by this rare possibility, relevant information may be hidden depending on the commander’s judgment.}

“…”

The overseers had nothing to say at the artificial intelligence’s words.

It was their first mission after being commissioned. The mission they said would be easy was a mission that could have resulted in

their annihilation with the slightest fault. Lingering bitter feelings remained in the hearts of the warriors who had to kill their own comrades with their own hands. However, it said no one was responsible for this tragedy.

It was... simply a slip-up.

What did it matter if they had mouths, they could only stay silent as they were powerless.

The one who took action was Commander Mack.

“Well. Good. Theoretically, you are right. In fact, since you’re an artificial intelligence inspector, that can’t awaken karma, of course, you will reply according to the rules. But... You just said ‘Depending on the commander’s judgment’, right? Their commander is me, Mack. Yet the doppelganger identification device wasn’t reported to me either. The higher ups ignored the chain of command and made my subordinate Tangka deliver the device. Isn’t that a problem?”

While looking back at the silent overseers of Earth, Mack criticized in an orderly fashion.

{They made the explanation that, due to the urgent situation, they did not follow the chain of command and personally made the order. However, if you are not convinced by the above explanation, then you can request an additional explanation from the Laniakea Supercluster or Commander Mack can personally take legal action.}

“Yeah. It should be like this. After a long time, it looks like there will finally be a big scene at Dark City.”

Commander Mack gave a satisfied smile at the artificial intelligence’s reply.

After the artificial intelligence inspector had left, Commander Mack turned around to look at the overseers of Earth. She looked terribly sorry.

“Sorry. There probably won’t be an apology issued by the alliance or any compensation from this issue… The higher ups never admit their mistakes.”

“Haa…”

At her words, the overseers let out a sigh. How could they not know? They were all well-known figures on Earth. They knew the characteristics of those in power better than anyone. They wouldn’t apologize… Only… They were simply dejected that this characteristic was unchanged even in space.

“But! I’ll take responsibility for the victory reward and get you a lot. That’s the best in the end. Even if it’s unfair… no, the more unfair it is, you more have no choice but to get Mission Points and become stronger and more respected. Only then, can you go up.”

Silence hung in the air again.

A cold-hearted logic. Facing this logic, the overseers might have recalled their followers who had died due to this incident. It was the cruel balance between life and vested interests.

Within this silence, Choi Hyuk shot his hand up.

“Yeah, speak.”

When he received permission to speak, Choi Hyuk said,

“I killed the monster of night by myself.”

Then, feeling embarrassed, requested,

“Please let them know.”

‘No choice but to go up.’ There was no one who agreed with this more than Choi Hyuk.

Commander Mack grinned at Choi Hyuk’s words.

“Okay.”

Just as she said that, Richard quickly said,

“I planned the operation of dragging out the monster of night!”

“Yeah, yeah. I got it.”

Mack nodded her head, saying she understood, and left.

“…”

Dumbfounded, the five other overseers stared at Choi Hyuk and Richard.

“… Dis-disgusting…”

The Queen of England Diana mumbled in a quiet voice everyone could hear.

Chapter 102: Someone (2)

The alliance's method of 'broadcasting' was directly transmitting telepathic messages to the viewers' heads. They would suddenly hear a voice, and when they focused on that voice, they would see a clear scene as if they standing in the broadcast.

{There is news that Earth's independent troops, who have recently joined the alliance, have eradicated doppelgangers and a monster of night, and subjugated the Cayenne star. We take you now to Reporter Leleo on the Cayenne star.}

After the news anchor finished speaking, a white-skinned, pointed-eared, beautiful woman appeared in the middle of a field of shining flowers. Her long, thin tail swayed elegantly behind her.

{This is Reporter Leleo. I am currently here on the Cayenne star. Can you see the plentiful shining flowers here? They are amazing flowers that convert the heat and energy from the Cayenne star into various matter and energy necessary for life. Overseer Richard, who was the first to report this, called them 'solar flowers'. Like you can see here, many different lifeforms have evolved throughout the Cayenne Star's long history, the most recent inhabitants of the Cayenne star having a glorious civilization, one where they could even build an enormous floating city.}

Following Reporter Leleo's words, the viewers were shown the past appearance of the Cayenne star deciphered using psychometry. A beautiful city floating in the sky, a beautiful field, and the now ruined city. Once they walked through this, the viewers would be standing in the middle of the great ruins.

Reporter Leleo walked next to them as if she were on a hike.

{However, due to the invasion of the monsters, the 'cayennings' have become extinct, not leaving a single descendant behind. Even the enormous amount of karma they had accumulated throughout

the star's long history had lost its path and degenerated into the monsters' energy source. However, the independent troops of Earth have avenged the now extinct Cayenne star residents. We were also able to collect a significant amount of karma that had been about to be completely absorbed by the monsters. It is the precious inheritance the Cayenne star residents left behind for the life and freedom of karmalings.}

Leleo took a few steps forward, twirled around and, while looking back, said,

{Now we will meet the heroes of Earth who eliminated the monsters from the Cayenne star.}

A black-haired man appeared next to Leleo.

He was tall and gave a cold impression. He was Choi Hyuk.

{Hello, Overseer Choi Hyuk.}

{Hello.}

{Excuse me, but I heard that your karma level was at the level of middle ranked warriors.}

{That is correct.}

{Although the monster of night isn't a combat-oriented monster, it is still a high ranked monster. While it must have been difficult to handle it with the strength of a middle ranked warrior, there are many warriors who were shocked to learn that you killed the monster of night by yourself.}

{It wasn't that difficult.}

Although Choi Hyuk's reply was short, Reporter Leleo skillfully continued to ask questions and made the interview interesting. The key point she was attempting to highlight was the fighting capabilities of the newly joined earthlings, and among them, Overseer Choi Hyuk's fighting talent.

While talking about his fighting talent, there was no way Choi

Hyuk's sword wouldn't catch her eye. Choi Hyuk didn't hide it and revealed his sword. She showed a dramatic reaction.

{Whaaat?! A middle ranked warrior with a Weapon of Vow...?? Oh, my god.}

Reporter Leleo, who couldn't close her mouth as she examined 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint', had difficulty continuing to speak.

{Fr-from what I know, isn't this unprecedented? There's no doubt that the emergence of a Weapon of Vow after such a long time is a fortune for the alliance... but I thought that if a Weapon of Vow were to emerge, it would be from the hands of a top ranked warrior. For a middle ranked warrior...!}

Reporter Leleo's tone, which had been calmly complimenting and giving reactions up until now, dramatically changed. Her voice became louder and she stuttered her words. The reaction she was showing now was real and not because this was her job. She couldn't hide her excitement.

Choi Hyuk's interview became longer than expected. Only after a long while later did Reporter Leleo end it, while still excited, and hurriedly followed the original script.

{Yes. However, the reason why earthlings, who have joined only recently, could come out victorious against the much stronger high ranked monsters, doppelgangers, was largely due to Overseer Richard's outstanding commanding ability.}

Richard was briefly called out at the end of the interview. Leleo analyzed and complimented his outstanding commanding ability. It seemed she had pulled herself together as her previous excitement was no longer apparent.

After watching the end of the interview, Commander Mack opened her closed eyes. With a smile, she asked,

"How was my present?"

"... Exhausting."

“Haha! It’s still the best present. It was an actual interview on Laniakea’s central broadcast. This means that there will be those in the alliance headquarters who watch it, let alone those in other superclusters. Then they will start handling information about you over there. Your name will spread throughout the universe. On top of that… Since you were hiding such a huge secret, your name will be spread to countless people. You must be happy. You’re only a middle ranked warrior who recently just joined, yet you’re much more famous than me.”

Commander Mack was leaning against the air as she gave a sidelong glance. Her gaze fell on ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ hanging from his waist.

“Although it wasn’t really a secret.”

She said to Choi Hyuk, who followed her gaze and looked down at his weapon. He had thought he knew better than anyone else that his weapon was amazing, but after receiving such heated reactions… It seemed it was more amazing than he thought.

Looking at Choi Hyuk’s dull reaction, Mack shook her head.

“It’s fine if you brag and put it out there a little more. You… want to go to the center, right?”

“Yes, I do.”

Choi Hyuk replied without a sliver of hesitation. Commander Mack shook her head as if saying there was no stopping him.

“Haha, what a troublesome subordinate. So troublesome.”

After mumbling ‘troublesome’ a few more times, she raised her slouched body and, with a lower voice, said,

“Although I don’t know too much, looking at the mood, there seem to be a few people up top that don’t like that earthlings joined the alliance… That in itself isn’t strange. Recently, joining the alliance has become very picky, and even if they did join, I heard that many go through a harsh hazing. However… If this incident

wasn't simply an accident but the result of someone's trickery, then this is an incident that significantly crosses the line, even considering other incidents up until now... That's why I was curious. If this really is true, then why? What did the earthlings do for them to act this way...? And I was extremely curious, okay?"

She had leaned her face in closer and closer before leisurely leaning against the air with a disinterested expression as she said,

"But you had a Weapon of Vow. How did you make it? Even I'm only using a Weapon of Sentiment."

A blue crystal, which had been hidden beneath her blue hair, poked out a little. Although Choi Hyuk wasn't aware of it, it was a strong weapon with quite the reputation in the Laniakea Supercluster. A karma-crystal 'Mack's Desire'.

Choi Hyuk looked down at 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint', which was a new Weapon of Vow currently making waves throughout space, and replied,

"A friend... gifted it to me."

"... Although you were the one who made it, the cost of the materials and the necessary facilities must have been no joke... What an amazing friend. A real amazing friend... Even your friends are troublesome."

"Do you know Flame-Rain?"

"Although I don't know a lot... I know that she's the young lady of a great family in the Flame Wing tribe. She's famous for being an eccentric young lady who goes around to different clusters and joining the war... And while there are a lot of absurd rumors, even I don't know of her true identity. But what's clear is that I don't want to know her identity either. I get a hunch that nothing good will come out of it if I knew."

Mack clasped her hands and said,

"The incident this time might have actually been because of her

and not you. Looking at how she goes around the boundaries of the alliance shows that there definitely is a story behind her… Meaning it could be a family who wants to obstruct her or one that possesses a grudge against her. But if she shows great interest towards you, then that'll be more than enough for you to become a target."

"… They'll entrap all of humanity because I'm a target?"

"I told you. She's the young lady of the Flame Wing tribe. If they are a family with direct ties to the Flame Wing tribe, then they can shake the fate of a newly joined species on the palm of their hands. Although it's a classic example of the irrationality of the alliance… it's still a fact."

"…"

Mack moved and placed her arm over Choi Hyuk, whose mouth was tightly shut. Then she said,

"I'll give you a piece of advice. If you want to be friends with such a troublesome people, then you have no choice but to quickly become successful and scram off to the top."

"I'll do my best."

"Yeah. I'll thoroughly make use of you, so do your best to accumulate contributions."

To reach the top, one needed the help of someone up top.

"If you go up, don't forget my help."

Choi Hyuk needed Mack's help, and Mack was also looking for a way to use her subordinate, who had become a hot topic throughout space, for her own benefit.

"This interview is only the start. With their own wrongdoing and because of the public opinion about you… You should be able to get a great reward. You can look forward to it."

"Thank you."

Mack slowly nodded at Choi Hyuk's reply. She took her arm off his shoulder and, with a serious voice, turned to a different matter.

"Yeah. One more thing. You reported that the monster of night 'saw' something, right?"

"Yes."

"That's why I looked into it... And I found a trace that something had escaped towards Earth during that time."

"To Earth?"

He was slightly taken aback. For the monster of night's final trick was aimed at Earth and not himself. It was a result he had never expected.

"There are cases like this. Cases where they read a warrior's past and inversely invade their home star... Looking at how weak the detected karma was, it might have sent an immature doppelganger queen to avoid detection... is my guess."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"It is dangerous. Very dangerous. Depending on the situation, it might even result in the early shutdown of Earth. It's a situation where even Dragonic might be in danger if there's a slip up."

"What do we need to do?"

"If it's an immature doppelganger queen, then it'll take around 2 months before it starts laying larvae, meaning we need to find it before then. But, since it's a queen and immature, it'll be difficult to find it using the wide area identification device. There is no other way besides using a small identification device to search for it. A doppelganger queen in an undeveloped state is in a spirit form. That is why you can't see it with your eyes and must use your karma senses to find it, and confirm it once more with identification devices. That is why it's complicated, but if someone hides it as well, then the problem becomes even more serious."

"... Hides it?"

"Yeah. There are cases like that since they burrow into the openings of people's hearts. If it's one the monster of night sent, then there is an especially high chance it'll make use of the information the monster of night collected. The person might not simply hide it but even offer to grow it."

"I understand."

Although it was a headache, Choi Hyuk calmly nodded his head. Since there was a month left and they had identification devices, they could find it even if they had to do a total inspection. Because they were going to progress forcefully, it didn't matter whether someone hid it or not.

Mack nodded her head as if pleased with Choi Hyuk's calm expression.

"Yeah. I'll keep a lookout, and if the resolution takes too long, we'll intervene. Of course, if you are able to resolve it yourselves without our intervention, then people's evaluation of you will rise."

She was pressuring him, telling him to try and resolve this by himself. Of course, Choi Hyuk had no thoughts on asking for help either.

"Understood."

**

Once he returned to Earth, Chu Youngjin suddenly began to see 'her'.

On corners, on crowded crosswalks, beyond store windows, on the other side of the street, and behind strangers, he saw the figure of a girl who couldn't possibly be there.

This was a frequent occurrence ever since the moment Lee Hyejin was murdered in the gym 3 years ago. When he ran towards

her figure, hoping it was her, he would be met with nothing or strangers. A sweet illusion, a cruel reality.

However, the frequency of occurrences was especially high these days. Then, when he turned at a corner, she was standing there. She didn't disappear.

"…"

Chu Youngjin didn't say anything and neither did she. If she (it) had said something, then he would have been suspicious. However, like the illusion he had always seen, it didn't say anything. It simply stood in the corner of his vision.

Chu Youngjin slowly passed by her (it). She slowly followed behind him. No matter where he went, she wouldn't leave his sight.

'It seems I really am crazy now.'

Even as he thought this, Chu Youngjin was simply happy at the fact he could see her.

Chapter 103: Someone (3)

A group of people carefully jumped over the roof of a building. Although they were in a group, they all kept a wide distance from each other. They were using their karma-reinforced sight to stalk their target from afar.

However, when their target entered an alley, she disappeared without a trace.

"…!"

Although they were taken aback, they didn't let out a sound. The leader gave a hand signal to his team members and ordered them to look for their target again.

"What are you doing?"

The voice of their target, Lee Jinhee, was heard behind him. Flinch! Before the leader could even turn around, he heard her voice right next to his ear.

"Well, not that I need to ask."

Crack!

It was instantaneous. The building and sky reversed in an instant. He only felt a pain from his leg afterwards. A cute, pretty face abruptly appeared before his face, which had been smashed into the floor. She was their VIP target, Lee Jinhee.

"Who sent you?"

"…"

"You're not going to tell me?"

"Why… Why are you doing this?"

"What do you mean why? You guys stalked me."

"Pardon?"

The man sneakily acted like that wasn't the case. Lee Jinhee let

out a sigh.

“Haa. Fine. Naro! Find out where they are from.”

{Yes. I’ll check all the CCTVs registered on the computer network… Here is the result. They are executives of the Lee Jungmin Clan. His name is Min Chunsu.}

“So this time it’s the Lee Jungmin Clan…? Haa… Do you guys want to die? Why are you constantly stalking me?”

Min Chunsu showed no signs of being flustered when he heard Naro’s voice. However, his expression turned resolute as he ground his teeth.

“What do you mean stalking you? It’s just a justified surveillance.”

“Ah, really? Is it justified even though you’re stalking me? Well, I mean it’s not like it’s a DUI when you drink, right?”

Slap!

Lee Jinhee slapped Min Chunsu’s cheek. Even though his body was reinforced with karma, the impact was enough to shake his teeth.

Yet, Min Chunsu glared at her fiercely. Instead of becoming downhearted, he stated his justifications for stalking her more vigorously.

“Are you acting like this because you really don’t know? Isn’t it the Berserkers who are ransacking everything, saying that a doppelganger queen has invaded us? You said there was around a month remaining. Yet, it’s already become a mess within 3 days of investigations. Subordinate clans like us are even showing their underwear to you guys! But what about the Berserkers themselves? Aren’t the Berserkers supposed to conduct an internal investigation as well? But are you doing that properly? Even when it’s risking the fate of Earth?! Aren’t you guys busy covering for your own family? Even when the situation is like this, aren’t you

just helping yourselves?”

“... What are you talking about? Although I don’t know where you heard these rumors, but of course we conducted an internal investigation before we investigated you.”

“Ah, so the answer to this problem is that we simply retreat just because you said you investigated internally? In the presence of the Berserkers, every damn one of us has to disarm their karma barrier and let you look around our every nook and cranny with your karma. However, how do we know you guys are investigating each other? Honestly, since Overseer Choi Hyuk was the one who fought the monster of night, isn’t there a likely chance that one of the Berserkers was infected by the doppelganger queen? Can you say with 100% certainty that none of the Berserkers conducting investigations right now are doppelgangers?”

“Hey. What are you saying? We told you the doppelganger queen isn’t like that. Since it’s still immature and in a spirit form, it’s difficult to see and doesn’t have the power to make doppelganger larvae. And we are the ones carrying the doppelganger identification devices, yet you think we’d be the doppelgangers? You sound like the Berserkers are already being controlled by the doppelgangers. Huh? Do you think I’m a doppelganger too?”

“Hmmp! Do all Berserkers carry around an identification device? When we don’t even know the whereabouts of Director Chu Youngjin!”

“Hey! He has his own circumstances!”

“Circumstances? Have you even considered our circumstances? This is what’s not transparent. If you find this unfair, why don’t you have an open investigation! If you guys are doppelgangers, then we’re the ones who die, yet you’re telling us to suck our thumbs and just blindly trust you?”

Lee Jinhee was at loss of words at Min Chunsu’s constant counterarguments. The most fearful thing about doppelgangers

was that they planted suspicion amongst the people. All kinds of groundless rumors were running rampant, and those who had been traumatized by suspecting and killing their comrades couldn't take those groundless rumors as simply rumors. They would turn into 'likely possibilities' as they spread among them.

Within this mess, the attempts of trying to keep the Berserkers, who wielded absolute power, in check never ceased.

Of the major groundless rumors, one was about the victory reward. An enormous amount of Mission Points was given to Choi Hyuk as a reward, and he possessed the sole authority of distributing the reward. After a lot of consideration, Choi Hyuk decided to distribute it depending on their contributions, yet there was a groundless rumor that the Berserkers received a much higher reward. Dissatisfaction surged, asking how he could do this when they all risked their lives together.

Lee Jinhee grabbed Min Chunsu by his collar.

"Is that all? If you want proof, then I'll show you proof. All executive-level Berserkers are going to partake in an open investigation soon. I suggested it and the leader approved it. We even announced it. But are you truly so nervous that you're continuously acting this way? Or is this your trick in trying to find the Berserkers' weakness and increase your influence?"

Lee Jinhee harshly interrogated him. Yet, Min Chunsu became even more vigorous. He was acting too righteously for someone who had been caught stalking.

"What do you mean influence! This isn't a problem of influence but of whether humanity survives or not! All of us have to unite under Overseer Choi Hyuk's command! All procedures must be conducted with transparency! In a situation like this, aren't the Berserkers the ones who are clinging to their vested interests? Aren't you fulfilling your selfish interests and desires by using Overseer Choi Hyuk's favor and covering his eyes and ears?!"

Lee Jinhee became startled. She didn't expect him to express his loyalty for Choi Hyuk.

It was like this. This was all nothing more than a mess. The content and aspect of these groundless rumors were too extensive and various. Using the power struggle was clever.

The power and authority Choi Hyuk possessed were already stable. Sensible people didn't go against Choi Hyuk. They thoroughly proclaimed themselves as 'Pro-Choi Hyuk'. Instead, their enemy was Choi Hyuk's followers, the Berserkers. They competed for loyalty and targeted those who had traditionally been near Choi Hyuk. After highlighting the Berserkers' weakness, they would shout, 'How can you advise Choi Hyuk like that?! Screw off! We'll do it!'

Although this attitude hadn't been explicitly expressed, practical people were progressing with this thought in secret. They would gather information about the Berserkers and distinguish who to cooperate with and who to push aside before picking an objective, finding their weakness, and building a public opinion... They were very hard-working.

They used plausible words to package their motives. Since their words made sense, there were many who simply agreed with their cause. Also, Lee Jinhee was a simple person. She was someone who believed in the goodwill of people. She was someone who would listen and think about the words of others even if only 1 person was truly innocent and the remaining 99 were bastards.

It was the trait of a hero. However, if she didn't have the compassion to match it, then she would simply be a 'pushover'.

Although Lee Jinhee felt repelled by his words, she couldn't reject them. She simply flinched and expressed her dissatisfaction.

"Do you think the leader will be happy if you guys act this way?"

"An authority without checks or balances will rot. Director Lee

Jinhee, although I deeply respect your valor and contributions, don't think that you are always right. If you truly care for Earth and Choi Hyuk, then do not think about simply pushing us small and middle-sized clans aside, and instead think about coexisting with us! Do not fear being kept in check!"

"Heu..."

Lee Jinhee simply clicked her tongue. She had thought this Min Chunsu specialized in stalking, but it turned out that he specialized in using his silver tongue. Although she didn't like it, he made her think about it again.

So Lee Jinhee's decision was her fist.

Punch!

"Keuk!"

Lee Jinhee's fist collided with Min Chunsu's stomach. Min Chunsu felt a pain that even sent shivers down his spine. He couldn't breathe. He was crushed by the aggressive karma in Lee Jinhee's fist, and the karma in his body shrank.

Lee Jinhee shook her hands and got up.

"I've never seen an honest person amongst those with a silver tongue. If you really do care for the leader, then don't do this and polish your fighting skills."

Although she felt unpleasant, she had no reason to kill him. Although Min Chunsu himself disgusted her, there were a few points she agreed with him on. If it was some other Berserker, they might have killed Min Chunsu without reason, simply because they felt irritated. However, Lee Jinhee thought differently.

'Those idiots...It's because them they are trying to keep us in check.'

Although she held affection for those Berserkers, who risked their lives and fought alongside her, to be honest, it was difficult

for her to cover up their violent acts and nonsensical killings.

‘Yeah. To make a bigger, stronger force, won’t Berserkers also need to reflect on themselves? Ah… I don’t know.’

While thinking this, Lee Jinhee said,

“Go. And don’t try to stalk me again. If you try it again, it won’t end with just a punch to your stomach.”

“Gue… Guak…”

Lee Jinhee raised another fist at Min Chunsu, who couldn’t get up.

“You’re not going to leave? You want another hit?”

“Hiek! Hiiek!”

Pale-faced, Min Chunsu immediately got up and forced himself to jump over the building and run. Due to his shrunken karma, his running figure looked unstable.

Staring at his figure, Lee Jinhee let out a sigh and continued on her way. She was on her way to meet Chu Youngjin.

**

‘Just what is that?’

Chu Youngjin was stuck repeatedly thinking about this.

The ‘thing’ that started following him one day. At first, it was hazy, but now, it had become more and more distinct. It was as if Lee Hyejin had returned alive. Although it seemed like others still couldn’t see her, to Chu Youngjin, it was identical to when Lee Hyejin was still alive. Even its expression and trivial gestures were identical.

The ‘thing’, that was quietly following him, suddenly became surprised and took off, examining its shoes. Chu Youngjin was almost about to cry. Lee Hyejin did the same thing. She couldn’t handle a single drop of blood and had an abnormal aversion to

killing things. Like its current actions, she would carefully check her shoes in case she stepped on an ant.

Although others would call Lee Hyejin's actions foolish, Chu Youngjin loved her every action. No, he was crazy about her. He even had the heart to put the ant on a piece of A4 paper and move it somewhere else if she was worried she might step on it. Although Chu Youngjin's personality was unhesitant and aggressive, in front of her, he was a fool.

Chu Youngjin and Lee Hyejin were completely different. That was why there were many people who had directly asked,

'Do you like her that much? Why? Do you have some sort of reason?'

To Chu Youngjin, there was no question more foolish than that. A reason? There was no way there was one. Lee Hyejin was in every moment of his memories. She was his childhood friend. It wasn't a normal relationship either. They would always spend time together and rely on each other. Who was the person who had saved him when he was about to die after he had fallen in water? Surprisingly, it was Lee Hyejin. The cowardly Lee Hyejin had been so courageous at that moment. Who was the person who had saved Lee Hyejin who was being fiercely chased by a dog? That was Chu Youngjin. And who was the one who called for an adult when Chu Youngjin was, in turn, chased by the dog? Lee Hyejin. The person who cried along with him when he was in pain was Lee Hyejin. The person who stopped crying and joked for the crying Lee Hyejin was Chu Youngjin, and the person who stopped crying and laughed with him was Lee Hyejin.

The moment Lee Hyejin died, Chu Youngjin had lost most of his life.

That was why Chu Youngjin couldn't take his eyes of 'that', which looked identical to Lee Hyejin.

'Am I seeing illusions after going crazy? Is this what people called

schizophrenia?'

'No, is that really an illusion? Maybe it's the doppelganger queen people have been talking about recently?'

'No. Doppelgangers kill living people and imitate them. Hyejin died without even leaving a corpse... Fuck...'

'No... But it's not simply a doppelganger, but a queen. They said that, unlike normal doppelgangers, the queen is currently in a spirit form. Since the monster of night could read people's pasts, it could know of Hyejin's appearance. It may be because it's the queen that it can imitate Hyejin's appearance with just information.'

'No. No... There's no way a measly doppelganger can perfectly imitate Hyejin.'

'I might just be crazy.'

While Chu Youngjin's gaze was fixed on 'that', he was thinking all sorts of conflicting thoughts and was fighting in his head. Then he eventually pushed those thoughts aside.

'Whatever it is, it's fine. Just a little... Just a little bit more...'

Swish.

Just then, the 'thing', that had been walking a few steps away from him, suddenly became surprised, and came close to Chu Youngjin, hiding behind him. It clung onto Chu Youngjin's arm.

His body trembled. Even its surprised and scared reactions were identical to Lee Hyejin's.

"What the? Why are you spacing out?"

Chu Youngjin became surprised at the sudden voice.

"Ah... Ah! Jinhee nuna?"

He didn't know when she came next to him, but Lee Jinhee was standing there with a frown on her face. Chu Youngjin glanced at

the ‘thing’ hiding behind him. He hid her behind him and asked,

“Why are you here?”

“What do you mean why am I here? I came because I was worried.”

Lee Jinhee stepped towards Chu Youngjin and placed her hand on his forehead. Her hand was small and soft, however, Chu Youngjin only stood there blankly.

“No fever. You’re completely absent-minded. Haa… You’re having a hard time, right? As expected… Did you think of her?”

Lee Jinhee thought Chu Youngjin was having a hard time because of the doppelganger clean-up operation. There were colonizers who had thrown their lives away to protect their then doppelganger lovers. She assumed that Chu Youngjin had recalled his past lover and was suffering after seeing them like that.

Her assumption was only half-correct.

“I’m fine.”

Chu Youngjin avoided her gaze and replied half-heartedly. Lee Jinhee simply made an expression showing she felt bad for him.

“I already told the leader. Since you’re going to continue not participating in missions like now, don’t worry and rest. Still, there will be an open investigation of the Berserkers a week from now, so even if it’s hard, come out for that.”

“… Yes.”

Ironically, the only reason why Chu Youngjin could avoid being investigated was because of Lee Jinhee’s consideration for him. All the Berserkers had participated in the doppelganger queen search at least once, and because of this, they were naturally able to know that they hadn’t been infected by the doppelganger queen. However, Lee Jinhee, who noticed peculiar symptoms from Chu Youngjin right after returning to Earth, gave him a break,

unintentionally allowing Chu Youngjin to avoid the first round of inspections.

The majority weren't aware of this hole. However, Chu Youngjin himself was well aware of this, yet, he didn't come forward and point it out. Which was how he was able to come up with this last excuse.

'The inspection... is in a week...? Yeah, if it a week, then nothing will happen. Everything will be clear then... Yeah. Until then.'

He didn't want to think about this anymore. His rationality had become paralyzed due to the fact that the person he wanted to see the most was right in front of him. 'Even if... she was a doppelganger.' Even though his heart was terrified of that thought, Chu Youngjin tried his best to suppress it. Even if he were to rage then... Chu Youngjin only wanted to see her for a while longer.

Lee Jinhee let out a sigh as she looked at the spaced-out Chu Youngjin.

"Haa... Chu Youngjin. Even still, keep yourself together. Look at your appearance. Even though you picked 'Explosive Heart' instead of 'Mind's Eye' for your second trait, how does it make sense that you didn't know I was right next to you?"

Like how Choi Hyuk chose Mind's Eye at the 3-star level, Identical Mind at the 4-star level, and Explosive Blood at the 5-star level, they could pick another trait every time they increased a level after reaching the 3-star level. At the 4-star level, Lee Jinhee chose 'Mind's Eye' to expand her control and strengthen her detection abilities, while Chu Youngjin chose 'Explosive Mind', which was an advanced version of 'Explosive Blood'.

"There were people stalking me today. If you're like this, you might not be able to detect whether you're being stalked or not. Hmm?"

Lee Jinhee, who had placed her hand on his shoulder as she spoke, suddenly frowned. It seemed something had been detected with her Mind's Eye.

"Huh? Just now, something..."

As if finding it weird, she looked around Chu Youngjin. At the same time, Chu Youngjin felt 'that' as it pressed closer to him. 'It' burrowed into Chu Youngjin's karma and hid its existence.

'Ah...'

An ominous premonition ran down his spine. Just what was this premonition? A premonition that 'it' might be a doppelganger? No, the uneasiness that he might not be able to see her any longer? He couldn't figure out which one it was. Although his heart tightened at the uneasiness, he turned his back on it once again.

'Yeah. A little longer. Either way, it's only a week.'

Chu Youngjin smiled awkwardly.

"Yes. I'll be careful."

Lee Jinhee, who ended up not finding anything through her search, looked at Chu Youngjin. His face was haggard. She felt sorry for him, but she eventually let out a sigh and withdrew.

"Yeah. Then let's see each other in a week. Pull yourself together by then."

When Lee Jinhee left, that 'thing' came out and motionlessly stood next to him. Chu Youngjin looked at 'it'.

'It' lightly stretched and sat down next to a wall. Then it exercised its knees by squatting up and down. Even though it had been scared just a moment ago, it acted bravely as if it wasn't scared.

... No matter how he looked at it, it was Lee Hyejin. Chu Youngjin's cold, tense heart relaxed.

'A week...'

Chu Youngjin mumbled again as he turned around and headed home.

Chapter 104: Someone (4)

Baek Seoin was spending his days very busily.

He currently had to cooperate with all the overseers and fully investigate 2 billion people on Earth in only a month. Although Choi Hyuk had lightly said, ‘Then we just need to do a total investigation,’ for Baek Seoin, who had to oversee this investigation, it felt like his head was splitting apart.

He didn’t even have time to finish his preparations before beginning the investigation. He had to start immediately while still completing the system.

Even alternating the Berserker who held the identification device within each team, therefore naturally investigating them, was a method Baek Seoin came up with to reduce time.

However, there was a big flaw in it. The one who assigned teams and oversaw everything was Baek Seoin, yet the one who granted Chu Youngjin special vacation time was Choi Hyuk, and the one who hushed the members of Chu Youngjin’s team was Lee Jinhee. A very small opening had been created due to the considerations of Choi Hyuk and Lee Jinhee, who were indifferent to the heavy workload and administrative tasks given to Baek Seoin, and Chu Youngjin’s high rank. And eventually, this small opening would become the crack which would collapse the dam.

For the establishment of international cooperation, Baek Seoin had multiple meetings today as well.

“Yes. So that’s why the doppelganger queen is very different from the doppelgangers we know, right?”

“That’s right. I’ve personally confirmed these details at Dark City.”

Richard’s aide, Leah, was on the screen. If Choi Hyuk had Baek Seoin, then Richard had Leah. What Baek Seoin and Leah had in

common were the dark circles which came down to their cheeks.

Leah was sharing new information she had gathered about the doppelganger queen to Baek Seoin.

“Rather than transforming or acting, it is closer to ‘imitating’. The conscious of an immature doppelganger queen may even be very virtuous.”

“Then… It will be difficult to distinguish its wickedness without a device that can detect doppelganger queens.”

“Correct. Even if you pass by it, you will only feel something strange, you won’t feel any wickedness.”

“Hmmm… Still, the draft of the plan has been made, and since we were able to receive more identification devices from the alliance thanks to you… If things continue like this, then we might be able to investigate all earthlings within the time limit. Then we will be able to find its imitation or whatever.”

“Yes. Only, since we are all human, I’m worried there may be human error. The doppelganger queen can drastically lower one’s guard with its ‘imitation’, but there is also research stating that it can emit waves that can meddle with their mind. It makes one unconsciously feel goodwill towards it and makes them ‘accommodate’ it. Things like the good faith and feelings between people… these things can create a serious problem.”

“… We should cross-investigate three or four times. If we are going to, then we need to move the execution of the plan forward… Haa, it seems I need to quit sleep for a month.”

Baek Seoin showed a depressed expression. Leah expressed her sympathy.

“We definitely have healthy bodies that can withstand a month without sleep… But we’re already so exhausted after only four days…”

Their karma reinforced bodies didn’t easily tire. However, Baek

Seoin and Leah were currently handling a huge amount of work that would even make a computer buffer. They had only spent four days without sleep, yet they were exhausted to the point their eyes were already flickering. If they didn't have Naro's help, then they would never have been able handle this amount of work. It was a horrifying thought.

"Once this incident is over, I want to go on a vacation to a secluded place. Haa. Then work hard, Ms. Leah."

"Yes. You too, Mr. Baek Seoin."

Tik.

The screen turned black. Baek Seoin pressed his temples with his fingers before rubbing his face. Now, outside of Korea, he had to check the progress in the U.S., China, the United Arab Emirates and others, all which had portals leading to Choi Hyuk's colonized lands. Then he had to assign investigation teams for small and middle-sized cities and islands that didn't have an overseer and plan transportation routes for them. As they had no idea where the doppelganger queen was, it was necessary to investigate every single person.

There was just too much work.

"Haa… Although they are a hassle to deal with, is it lucky that the clans under our command are proactively helping out?"

Baek Seoin recalled the people who came to him today, asking to participate in the investigation, and borrowed a few identification devices.

"Urk. I should dispatch them to mountain villages tomorrow. But I don't know whether they will follow regulations properly."

There weren't enough identification devices. There was still some time left before the additional identification devices Leah obtained would arrive, yet even they weren't enough. There was no choice but for those with identification devices to run around

more. The problem was whether they would be properly regulated. In the end, those in the minority, whom he could trust, had to run around more diligently.

"Haaa..."

Just as Baek Seoin let out a long sigh and pulled his chair forward to start working again, Lee Jinhee appeared.

"You look busy."

"Yeah. I'm very busy. I'm already busy, but because someone suggested we conduct an open investigation of the Berserkers, I'm even busier."

Lee Jinhee quickly made an excuse when Baek Seoin gave her a look mixed with resentment.

"No, when you go around outside these days, the mood is really bad. I was even stalked yesterday. Although it's only this bad for me, there have already been clashes and fights between Berserkers and other smaller clans..."

"Those dirty bastards. Why do they love fighting so much...? Yeah, yeah. It's good that we are doing an open investigation. No matter how busy we are, we need to stop the complaints. You came at a good time. You bring around some guys and regulate the minor clans. It's impossible to investigate 2 billion people with just the Berserkers alone. I handed out some identification devices today so make them cooperate. Check to make sure they aren't slacking off."

"Got it. Whether I threaten or coax them, I'll make them listen to me."

"Yeah. Like you said, it looks like they are bent on ripping the Berserkers apart these days, so keep them in check."

Even while he was saying this, Baek Seoin continued to rub his temples.

Lee Jinhee was also exhausted with her heavy workload. She handed a drink to the exhausted Baek Seoin and, to relieve some stress, attempted to chat a little.

“Got it. Those guys have a lot of suspicions. The guy I met yesterday kept talking about Chu Youngjin.”

Baek Seoin, who had been rubbing his temples, showed a reaction to her words. He stopped his hands and looked up at Lee Jinhee.

“Chu Youngjin? What about him?”

“No, he made a fuss, saying that the Berserkers aren’t being investigated and that we are only hard on them since Youngjin’s currently on vacation. Asking if we are covering our own. They clearly know that there will be an open investigation in a week.”

Although Lee Jinhee said this hoping for sympathy, Baek Seoin became serious when he heard her words.

“Wait. Chu Youngjin’s on vacation? But I clearly remember putting him on the list of investigators?”

“Ah, he wasn’t in his right mind once we returned from Cayenne star so I suggested he take some time off. The leader approved. Since he was on vacation before the queen incident broke out, I already told his investigation team.”

“What? Then Chu Youngjin hasn’t been investigated even once yet?”

“Probably?”

“What?! Hey. Send Chu Youngjin to the investigation team immediately.”

Lee Jinhee flinched at Baek Seoin’s fierce attitude.

“Uh? Uh? Why? There’s still a month before the doppelganger queen matures. The open investigation is in a week, no, it’s 6 days, there’s no problem if we do it then, right?”

Lee Jinhee never considered the possibility that it might be Chu Youngjin out of the 2 billion. Lee Jinhee simply wanted Chu Youngjin to rest easy. However, Baek Seoin frowned.

“Hey! What are you saying?! The doppelganger queen isn’t the problem. It’s the trust in Berserkers. You yourself even said that the clans are already filing complaints. Then we need to set it straight. Why wait 6 days?”

This was the first time Baek Seoin directly fumed at Lee Jinhee. Lee Jinhee backed down.

“Ah… Okay. Then I’ll go personally.”

Seeing as she was personally going to go, it showed how much she cared for Chu Youngjin.

Baek Seoin let out a sigh and calmly persuaded her.

“Don’t feel bad. We aren’t a small-scale clan anymore. If we want to lead tens of millions of people, we need to be thorough with ourselves. Although there’s no problem with waiting 6 days like you said, others may find it as abusing our power. Okay?”

Lee Jinhee reflected on his words.

“I got it. I’ll handle it right away.”

After resolving her mind, Lee Jinhee wanted to go immediately. However, before she could, they heard some news. They heard Naro’s urgent voice.

{An armed clash broke out between a minor clan and Director Chu Youngjin!}

Baek Seoin frowned.

“What? Why?”

{It seems they requested to investigate Director Chu Youngjin for the doppelganger queen, but it ended up becoming a clash!}

With his head aching, Baek Seoin grabbed his forehead.

An incident broke out before they could set the misaligned piece straight. This was similar to a sticky incident that could have been resolved internally, but before they even could, it was broadcasted by reporters.

**

The smaller clans, who received identification devices from Baek Seoin, immediately chose and dispatched their elites to Chu Youngjin. Like they had stalked Lee Jinhee, they had also stalked Chu Youngjin. They were suspicious of his recent abnormal behavior before anyone else. Also, they didn't notify the Berserkers because they wanted to make it so that they were the ones who resolved this situation.

The attitudes of those who appeared in front of Chu Youngjin were intimidating.

Chu Youngjin held back his laughter.

"You're going to investigate me?"

"That's right. Please cooperate. You need to get rid of your karma barrier and accept our karma."

"With what authority? Did the leader order you to?"

"Is now the time to be nitpicking these things? Everyone must unite and overcome this danger. You have yet to be investigated. So please accept this investigation."

Chu Youngjin glanced back at the 'thing' hiding behind his back. He couldn't help but think, 'Is that the doppelganger queen?' Although he couldn't believe that it was such a wicked existence... It wasn't as though he couldn't accept being investigated.

However...

"Go back. If I am going to get investigated, it'll be by myself. Or through other Berserkers."

"No. You need to be investigated now."

Chu Youngjin surged with irritation at their stubborn attitudes. Still, he endured it and said,

“There’s an open investigation in 6 days anyways. Why are you making a fuss right now?”

“Since you’re going to be investigated anyway, why not now?”

They didn’t back down a single step.

Chu Youngjin, who had already been very emotional these days, became more and more irritated at their attitudes.

‘If there’s no difference in being investigated now or later, then can’t I just be investigated later?’

However, he didn’t say it and simply stared at them.

Then someone new joined in.

“Now, now, that’s enough. Since you’re constantly like this, it seems you’re hiding something?”

It was a provocative voice. Chu Youngjin turned towards him.

“You said your name was… Kim Honghyun, right?”

It was a face Chu Youngjin knew.

“That is right. And I am Kim Saehyun.”

The one who said this was the person who had been arguing with Chu Youngjin until now. Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun were famous fraternal twins who had reached the 4-star level. Excluding the Berserkers, they were two of the most well-known warriors among the minor clans.

Now that he thought about it, the 20 colonizers surrounding him were all emitting an extraordinary vigor. There was no doubt that they were the elites chosen amongst the smaller clans. Their intentions were clear.

“Tsk.”

Chu Youngjin clicked his tongue. He felt vexed as it wasn’t the

Berserkers but minor clans who were trying to pressure him. Even if he were to be investigated today, he would be investigated by the Berserkers later, and he didn't want to be investigated by them.

"Move. Since I'm going to take care of my own investigation, don't interfere."

"What if we do?"

Kim Honghyun blocked Chu Youngjin, who was trying to pass by. He didn't simply block him but stretched out his arm and pushed Chu Youngjin's chest. It possessed quite a bit of aggressive karma.

Chu Youngjin, who had been pushed back a step, looked at Kim Honghyun with an agitated expression. He revealed his teeth as he laughed.

"Why is the great Berserker Chu Youngjin talking so much?"

"Haa..."

Rumble.

At the same time as his sigh, Chu Youngjin's karma surged. The karma in Chu Youngjin's karma heart exploded into an incredible power. His contracted power instantly expanded as he stepped forward, pivoting his waist and throwing a punch.

Baang!

His punch created a shock wave that seemed to shake the heaven and earth.

He never thought to hurt him. He only thought to send him flying.

However, Kim Honghyun wasn't blasted away. He reflected Chu Youngjin's fist with his arm and was pushed back a step.

"Hyah. It's quite heavy, isn't it?"

He leisurely mocked as he took out an enormous ax. He held it

with both his hands as if it was a tennis racket and declared,

"Let's see who's stronger."

As if he had been waiting for this, he increased his vigor.

Chu Youngjin frowned.

Chapter 105: Someone (5)

The most insane person among the Berserkers, the most Berserker-like Berserker, was, without a doubt, Chu Youngjin.

He was different from Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk was someone who looked towards the future instead of the past. To him, his past was despair and his future was rage. This was why he hadn't fallen for the monster of night's trick when it masqueraded as his mother. His rage began by wholly accepting his past.

However, Chu Youngjin was different. He was completely possessed by his past. He was someone who always wanted to reject the present and return to the past. That was why his heart was easily smitten by the doppelganger queen sent by the monster of night.

Around 20 experts from the minor clans surrounded Chu Youngjin, and the doppelganger queen hid behind him. Although he wanted to simply smash them apart, a guilty conscience remained in the corner of his heart.

'Am I in the wrong?'

While Chu Youngjin was thinking about this, the doppelganger queen made its move. It was currently immature and its conscious had yet to awaken. It wasn't even aware it was a doppelganger queen. Its heart and thoughts were the same as Chu Youngjin's lover, Lee Hyejin. As it had yet to awaken, it was truly good. However, its personality had been appropriately tuned by the monster of night.

"Huh?"

Chu Youngjin felt a soft hand grab his shoulder. He felt that thing's... no, 'her' head resting on him. She didn't say anything, however, like Naro's telepathy, he clearly felt her sadness and will.

I'm scared.

Everyone hates me.

Is there something wrong with me?

Did I do something wrong?

Did I… did I turn into something I'm not?

Will I hurt you if I change?

Then kill me.

I don't want to hurt anyone.

In its imitative state, the doppelganger queen sincerely wished this without any ulterior motives. Its thoughts, which was identical to Lee Hyejin's, squeezed at Chu Youngjin's heart.

Thump.

The memories he had never forgotten, yet had turned mirthless like black and white, were restored of their colors at once. Each cell awoke and shouted its joy.

After spending a few days together with the doppelganger queen, Chu Youngjin's mind had already become infected. The doppelganger queen's 'sincerity', which stealthily encroached in his mind, was a device that provoked 'brainwashing'.

No, instead of brainwashing, it was more like a madness-ridden tenacity.

Chu Youngjin's mind turned strange. He was certain.

'If it's a doppelganger queen, then there's no way it'll act like this.'

His remaining suspicion disappeared. Chu Youngjin began to see the clan experts blocking his path as Choi Junsung, the man who had killed Lee Hyejin. His eyes reddened.

"Berserker, Explosive Blood."

Chu Youngjin activated both his innate skill, Berserker, and his karma trait, Explosive Blood.

Ruuuumble!

Thunder roared over the ground. A humid, fierce wind, hinting at a typhoon, blew at the same time.

“Hmmp! {Toughness}!”

Kim Honghyun gripped his ax. Karma rolled with him as the center.

Rumble!

It was unknown as to when he had unsheathed it, but Chu Youngjin’s sword struck down at Kim Honghyun’s head, and Kim Honghyun swung his double-bladed ax at his sword. Rather than the sound of a sword and ax colliding, a thunderous roar sounded out.

At the same time, Kim Honghyun’s twin brother, Kim Saehyun, unsheathed a flexible sword from his waist.

“{Sharpness}!”

His flexible sword shot out like a spring and lunged at Chu Youngjin’s thigh like a snake. Chu Youngjin, who was confronting Kim Honghyun’s weapon, didn’t avoid it. Instead, he changed his direction and shot towards Kim Saehyun. The flexible sword glanced off Chu Youngjin’s thigh. Although blood spurted out, the wound quickly closed.

‘Chu Youngjin’s Protection’ aimed at Kim Saehyun.

Rumble!

Another thunderous roar sounded out.

Kim Saehyun’s sword coiled like a spring as it deflected Chu Youngjin’s sword. Although he was violently forced back, he wasn’t greatly wounded.

“Attack him!”

As soon as the three began to tangle together as they fought, the

surrounding experts simultaneous rushed towards Chu Youngjin. However—

Rumble! Bang!

As soon as a thunderous sound erupted, their necks were either cut or sliced in two. If they were lucky, they were able to retreat with a fatal wound. However, even if they were successful in wounding Chu Youngjin, the wounds would close immediately.

“Mo… monster…”

Aside from Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun, no one was able to endure a single strike from Chu Youngjin. They couldn’t wrap their heads around it.

“How?”

Although Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun acknowledged that he was strong, they didn’t expect him to be this strong. Yet, when he revealed his strength, only the two of them could face him.

{Chu Youngjin}

Power: 200 (4★) Speed: 202 (+150) (4★) Control: 0 (3★)

Endurance: 100 (3★) Stamina: 217 (+210) (4★) Recovery: 53 (+47) (4★)

{Kim Honghyun}

Power: 107 (+95) (4★) Speed: 0 (4★) Control: 372 (3★)

Endurance: 310 (+100) (4★) Stamina: 100 (+95) (4★) Recovery: 2 (2★)

{Kim Saehyun}

Power: 153 (3★) Speed: 321 (+110) (4★) Control: 137 (+85) (4★)

Endurance: 50 (3★) Stamina: 110 (+95) (4★) Recovery: 117 (3★)

It was hard to predict the outcome of the fight by merely looking at their stats. Although Chu Youngjin's stats were at an international level, they couldn't be called 'absolute'. He lagged behind sovereigns such as Overseer Jessie or Overseer Richard. There was nothing more to say about Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun. Although they were top-notch, when looking at it from a global perspective, there were many experts at their level.

But, they had something special.

'Innate skills'. A skill awakened by those born with special fates. As only the minority possessed these skills, the majority were still unaware of them. Not only that but unlike Richard or Choi Hyuk's innate skills, theirs were specialized for combat. Their actual fighting abilities went beyond their stats.

For example, even though Chu Youngjin's Recovery stat was 53 (+47) (4★), with the addition of his innate skill, Berserker (which sharply increases one's Power, Speed, and Recovery), Explosive Blood (which increases Power, Speed, Endurance, Stamina, and Recovery), and 'Chu Youngjin's Protection' (Combat Endurance Ability +100 (Stamina, Endurance, and Recovery)), his Recovery reached the late 4-star level.

Most wounds would close immediately.

Rumble!

Like a war god from myths, Chu Youngjin charged without fear of being wounded.

"Explosive Heart!"

The karma trait Explosive Heart was added to that. It was a trait that could support his chronic weakness, his Control.

Under the influence of Explosive Heart, Chu Youngjin's explosive

power was concentrated on a single point. His sword struck out like a comet. It was a strike most opponents couldn't even perceive.

"Kuaaap! Fortitude! Reflex!"

Wooong!

Yet, Kim Honghyun blocked it.

"Keeup...!"

Although he was pushed back a few steps, he received his strike. Even though both his Power and Speed were more than a level lower than Choi Hyuk's, he also possessed an innate skill. He had blocked Chu Youngjin's attack with his karma trait {Reflex}, which assisted his reflexes, and with his innate skill {Toughness} and his karma trait {Fortitude}, both of which greatly increased his Endurance and Power.

Chu Youngjin's next strike was blocked by Kim Saehyun's precise counterattack. His innate skill {Sharpness} allowed him to attack exquisitely, stopping Chu Youngjin's attack while also wounding him.

They exchanged approximately 10 attacks in an instant.

Chu Youngjin attempted to split Kim Honghyun's head, yet Kim Honghyun blocked it with his double-bladed ax. He used the rebound from the clash to turn around, swinging at Chu Youngjin. Chu Youngjin reflected his attack and attempted to take Kim Honghyun's leg. Kim Saehyun joined in and aimed for Chu Youngjin's wrist. Chu Youngjin lowered his body, received the strike with his shoulder, and wielded his sword again. Kim Honghyun blocked his attack with the head of his double-bladed ax.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Explosive sounds boomed and blood spurted at every step. Even though his body had been sliced and turned into a bloody mess,

Chu Youngjin pressed on against Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun.

The experts, who couldn't even think of joining in and ended up becoming spectators, couldn't help but open their mouths.

"It looks like it'll be a long fight..."

He was mistaken.

'Chu Youngjin's Protection' became the decisive difference. It distributed its Combat Endurance Ability +100 (Stamina, Endurance, and Recovery) depending on the situation. When Chu Youngjin was wounded, the sword would shine and pour all 100 points into Recovery, closing his wound immediately. When he was about to attack, the 100 points, which had been poured into Recovery, would pour into Stamina and Endurance. His tough Stamina and solid body supported his Power and Speed, maximizing their effects.

Even as a weapon, there was a huge difference in performance.

When Chu Youngjin wielded his karma-sword 'Protection', he could, in fact, be called the strongest on Earth aside from Choi Hyuk.

Kirik!

Along with a terrifying sound, Kim Honghyun's ax shattered.

"Dodge!"

Kim Saehyun's flexible sword coiled into a spring as he blocked Chu Youngjin's path.

Kirik!

Although he stopped Chu Youngjin's charge, Kim Saehyun's sword shattered like glass.

Like a blizzard, the shattered metallic pieces were violently swept up with the wind.

Chu Youngjin's eyes had turned completely red.

"Kill..."

He had lost all sense of reasoning. The pain from {Berserker} and {Explosive Blood} combined with the doppelganger queen's brainwashing. Everyone looked like Lee Hyejin's killer in his eyes.

"Ru... Run!":

The experts, who had been watching the situation, picked up Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun and retreated from the battlefield.

"... I'm going to kill you!"

Chu Youngjin attempted to follow and kill them. Just then, the doppelganger queen, who was a bit behind him, made its move. Still sincere, it shed tears as it held Chu Youngjin.

Don't. Kill me instead. Don't do it.

"Uh...? Lee Hyejin...?"

Chu Youngjin, who had been gathering his strength to chase them, stopped in his tracks. He blinked.

"Yeah. You're right. Saving you comes first."

Chu Youngjin held its hand. Even though there was no way he could hold its hand as it didn't have a physical body, but as Chu Youngjin was already thoroughly out of his mind, he mistakenly thought he held its hand.

"Let's run."

Chu Youngjin held its hand and escaped. He headed towards Yeouido. It was the closest place with a portal to Dragonic.

**

At the same time, Choi Hyuk and Naro were spending their time busily.

"Aaaah. It's impossible. Impossible."

Naro wrapped its arms around its head and buried its head between its knees. However, Choi Hyuk didn't let it go.

"I'm tired too. That's why we should finish it quickly."

"Can't we take it easy? I mean, how can you tell me to compile information about space routes, the history of the war, and information about various skills in this short period of time? No matter how great of an amazing artificial intelligence I am, this is impossible."

"We can't. We don't have time. We might be duped multiple times while we're still stuck on Earth like now."

"But Earth is already in a fuss about the doppelganger queen problem, why do we have to do this now?"

"I supplied Baek Seoin with enough memory to resolve that problem. That should be enough."

"Aahh, I'm tired. Tired!"

Naro stood upright and simulated choking itself to death. Still, Choi Hyuk didn't let it slide.

"You have to do it even if you're tired. We need to advance to space as soon as possible."

The cause of this incident were the resources for dimensional travel given as a reward. They were the necessary fuel and parts that would allow Naro, who had been stuck on Earth until now, to attempt dimensional travel.

"There's no future if we keep getting dragged around. We need someone within the core of the alliance who can be our eyes and ears."

They were only permitted to travel within the Laniakea Supercluster through the military gate system. However, with the rewarded resources, Naro's spaceship could attempt dimensional travel, and they could even travel beyond that. Choi Hyuk had no

thoughts on pushing this back. What he needed now was a scout who could work at the core of the alliance.

“If we consider the future, the doppelganger queen isn’t what’s important. You said it yourself. That you can sufficiently handle that.”

Choi Hyuk put the doppelganger queen, which was a hot issue at the moment, aside and told Naro to download all the information it could about the alliance. He himself was learning about the alliance and analyzing the information about their various commonly used fighting techniques.

The flood of information made even Naro, who was the ultimate artificial intelligence left behind by the narolings, feel pressured. Naro was suffering while Choi Hyuk urged it.

Just then, Naro, who had been in pain, abruptly raised its head.

“Ah! The warriors of the minor clans are fighting against Director Chu Youngjin!”

Even though Naro’s voice was filled with urgency, it also clearly contained its expectations of finally being able to rest.

“What? What are you saying?”

“Please wait. I only handled this data. The one who directly communicated with people was Director Baek Seoin so he should know more about it than me. I’ll connect you now.”

Baek Seoin’s face appeared on the screen. He had an urgent expression.

“Leader!”

“What’s wrong?”

“The minor clans claim Youngjin is the doppelganger queen’s host and are chasing him down.”

“Chu Youngjin’s the host?”

“It seems like it. He completely lost his rationality. In fact, he’s headed towards the gate to Dragonic. There are Berserkers who have locked down the gate so there shouldn’t be a problem, but if we want to reduce our losses, I think it’s best if you personally stop him.”

Baek Seoin’s voice sounded urgent. It definitely would be troublesome if Chu Youngjin crossed over to Dragonic. However, there was something else that got on Choi Hyuk’s nerves.

“But why are the minor clans, and not the Berserkers, chasing Youngjin?”

“The clans are very dissatisfied with the Berserkers these days. It seems like they were trying to capture Youngjin themselves and gain the right to speak. The situation isn’t good. They say Chu Youngjin has already been greatly wounded... Leader. Although it’ll be tough, we can’t just gloss over this. Even if it’s Chu Youngjin, we need to punish him to set an example.”

“Punish Chu Youngjin?”

“Yes. Since you are an overseer who has to take care of tens of millions of people. If you just gloss over this incident, dissatisfaction will surge explosively. We need to provide generous compensation to the victims as well.”

Baek Seoin reminded Choi Hyuk with the same words he scolded Lee Jinhee with.

But Choi Hyuk was different from Lee Jinhee. There was a definite difference between Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin’s judgment of the situation.

“So what’s the current situation? The minor clans are blocking Chu Youngjin? Is that something we requested?”

“That’s not it. This wasn’t a report given by them but rather a situation we figured out by ourselves. Although the minor clans are blocking Chu Youngjin, he is about to break free from them. I

already gave the order for the Berserkers blocking the gate to intervene right away. It will be a headache if the minor clans take any more losses! Leader, please hurry. Director Lee Jinhee left already, but it'll be difficult to stop his charge without suffering any losses."

Baek Seoin sounded urgent. Choi Hyuk momentarily became lost in thought. Then he shook his head.

"No, don't get them to intervene. The Berserkers will continue to concentrate on locking down the gate. Just stop Chu Youngjin from going through the gate if he tries to. Don't help the minor clans. We don't need to compensate them for their losses either."

"Pardon?"

Baek Seoin's expression became blank at the unexpected reply.

Choi Hyuk was firm.

"Why are the minor clans acting and making the problem bigger? If they are suspicious of Chu Youngjin, then they should report him to the Berserkers, why are they personally making a move? Like now, even if Chu Youngjin attempts to cross through the gate, why are they moving by themselves instead of reporting him to the Berserkers, who can stop him? If they are going to act without knowing their place, then they have to pay the appropriate price."

Choi Hyuk had been silent about the conflicts up until now. However, it seemed he was disgusted by the minor clans.

Baek Seoin became more urgent. By his judgment, they had to embrace them right now.

"That's how deep the misunderstandings between the Berserkers and the minor clans are. It is currently time to stitch things up. We can't always be a small group of elites. Don't we have to become an army of tens of millions of people?!"

Baek Seoin's plan was to unite the strength of the earthlings and cultivate a powerful force. He believed that, beyond the Berserkers

suppressing them with their power, they needed the political power to merge countless forces and rule over them. It reflected his unbiased, fair personality.

However, Choi Hyuk's judgment was different.

He called Baek Seoin in a low voice.

"Baek hyung."

Hearing the weight carried in his voice, Baek Seoin quickly looked at Choi Hyuk's eyes. They were chilly. Baek Seoin felt his spine shiver. Then he realized once again.

'Ah… Right. Our leader isn't right in the head.'

Choi Hyuk said,

"That's a method Richard is good at, but we are Berserkers."

Each of Choi Hyuk's words stabbed into Baek Seoin's heart. Choi Hyuk, who lacked administration and political skills, left Baek Seoin to govern most matters. However, it eventually fell onto Choi Hyuk, who was an overseer, to make the decisive judgment and decide their ultimate aim.

And Choi Hyuk's aim wasn't justice, only revenge.

"I don't need tens of millions of people who are going to make their own judgments. I only need crazy warriors who can raise their swords at death. What's the point if we are large in number? You know how strong our enemies are. When we fight them, how many of the tens of millions will be able to wield their swords?"

"…"

Baek Seoin was silent.

"I can't leave Chu Youngjin, who has been deceived by a monster, alone. Even still, I have no thoughts of embracing the minor clans either. They do not have the right to judge the Berserkers. No, they don't have the skill to. If they want the same rights as the Berserkers, then tell them to raise their strength. Or

join the Berserkers. If they moved to personally capture Chu Youngjin, then they need to try by themselves.”

Choi Hyuk stood up. After stretching, he said on his way out,

“Tell them to try to stop Chu Youngjin. Though, I think Chu Youngjin will eventually come to me.”

Choi Hyuk left like that.

His policy was clear. ‘Discrimination’. He had no thoughts on giving the minor clans rights. He had no thoughts on acknowledging them. If they found it unfair, they would have to obtain it themselves.

Although Choi Hyuk didn’t plan on leaving Chu Youngjin, who had been deceived by a monster, alone, he also had no thoughts on acknowledging the minor clans either.

Both of them would pay the price.

“It’s better this way,”

He mumbled as he jumped down from Naro’s spaceship.

As he fell to the surface, he saw Chu Youngjin, who was trying to charge through the minor clans like a furious lion.

Chapter 106: A New Start

“What about the Berserkers? Are they still not here yet?”

“No. They said that they aren’t coming to back us up at all!”

“What?”

Clan Leader Lee Jungmin ended up shouting.

“What are they thinking by not sending backup? Are they just going to watch Chu Youngjin cross over to Dragonic?”

“That is... It seems they are at least planning on stopping him from going to Dragonic. That’s why the Berserkers, who were on their way here as back up, changed directions and returned to lock down the portal.”

“Ha!”

Lee Jungmin ground his teeth.

“So they don’t care if we live or die?”

It felt like his insides were surging with flames. Yet he had no choice. The situation was progressing completely differently from their expectations. The reason was simple. Chu Youngjin was just too strong.

“Guaack!”

Lee Jungmin saw a warrior flying away with a smashed arm. He was an expert who had come over from Macau. He was a famous figure known for his powerful strength. He wasn’t someone who should have flown away like that.

There wasn’t an expert who could endure a single strike from Chu Youngjin. They couldn’t block his attack even if they could see it either. Rumble! Whenever they heard a thunderous roar, there would always be a casualty or someone who had been fatally wounded. It was impossible to use a hit-and-run tactic. The moment they ‘hit’ would be the moment they died.

“Block him! He’s only one guy! There’s a limit to his stamina!”

The clan leaders tried to encourage them, but their clan members were busy hastily backing away. They were gradually becoming more and more passive.

They couldn’t help it. Chu Youngjin was simply trying to get to Dragonic. As long as they didn’t attack him first or block his path, he wouldn’t attack them.

The clan members grumbled,

“The Berserkers are locking down the gate… Then why do we have to act?”

There wasn’t much benefit relative to the risk. Their clan leaders’ aspirations were insufficient in persuading them. Chu Youngjin charged forward like a lion while the clans dispersed like lambs.

Then, at some point, the situation reversed completely. While Chu Youngjin was running down the street in front of the National Assembly building, the clan experts slowly retreated, and eventually, turned their backs and fled.

Whoosh.

Hundreds of people ran. They fled as fast as they could. Some stepped on building walls and jumped onto the roof, while more urgent people shattered windows and hid inside. The somewhat slower individuals didn’t even think to retreat into the side streets and instead continued to run straight down the street as fast as possible.

Chu Youngjin followed the empty street and headed towards Yeouido Park. He was now a short distance away from the portal. He saw the tense expressions of the Berserkers blocking the portal.

“Hu… Hu… Huhuhu.”

The clan leaders couldn’t help but laugh at this absurd scene.

This wasn't their original plan. They were going to secure Chu Youngjin's whereabouts, and after having forcefully investigated him, they planned on using him to get an apology from the Berserkers. They hoped to get their capability acknowledged through this.

However, everything went awry.

The main character was presently not the minor clans but Chu Youngjin.

He was dazzling. Currently, in this moment, the guilty Chu Youngjin was shining brightly, while the minor clans looked like unsightly villains.

Then, suddenly, the main character changed.

Baaang!

Something fell from the dark sky and slammed on the ground. Dust clouds reached the top of the surrounding buildings, and shattered asphalt collided and smashed into the walls of the surrounding buildings.

There were even minor clan experts who were in pain after unluckily being hit by a stray flying piece of asphalt on their heads or legs.

Even Chu Youngjin, who had completely lost all sense of reasoning, flinched in surprise at the force and stopped in his tracks.

Choi Hyuk walked out, making his way through the dust cloud. He laughed when he saw Chu Youngjin.

"Chu hyung, why do you look like that?"

Chu Youngjin's clothes were ripped, and his entire body was caked in blood. His eyes went beyond being red and formed blood tears.

Chu Youngjin raised 'Chu Youngjin's Protection'. He was

completely different from before when he charged forward recklessly. A tension that could cut one's flesh hung in the air.

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth wide.

It had been a long time since his heart pounded like this before a fight. The Chu Youngjin in front of him didn't look trivial. He also wasn't so weak as to quickly die in a fight.

Choi Hyuk didn't unsheathe his sword.

Fist clenched, he placed a lot of strength into his right shoulder.

"This will bring you to your senses."

Bang!

No one knew who moved first as they shot towards each other. Rumble! With a thunderous sound, Chu Youngjin's figure became blurred like an oncoming storm. However—

Bang!

The terrifying sound smacked the hearts of the masses.

"Keu… Kuuu…"

They heard Chu Youngjin wheezing as air escaped him. Chu Youngjin's sword didn't reach Choi Hyuk. Chu Youngjin's gut took the full impact of Choi Hyuk's short jab. As Choi Hyuk cut his attack short, Chu Youngjin wasn't blasted away. Only, his insides were in a mess.

Baaang!

Before the lingering aftereffect of his first strike could disappear, Choi Hyuk displayed his explosive strength. His fists relentlessly rained down on Chu Youngjin. They weren't piercing punches but ones that gradually piled on.

Crack. Bang! Riip!

Chu Youngjin's Endurance, which was at the 4-star level, was useless. His ribs broke and stabbed his lungs, his eyeball popped

and dribbled down, and he received a concussion. Even his insides burst at the sudden pressure.

Yet, Chu Youngjin didn't stop. Even though he was hit countless times, his karma heart continued to beat explosively. His sword continuously targeted Choi Hyuk.

Rumble! Boom!

Every time a thunderous roar sounded out, a nearby building would explode. The karma blade that extended from Chu Youngjin's sword sliced through the ground like tofu.

The more Chu Youngjin raged, the higher his karma surged. His karma surged to the point where his Recovery stat was close to reaching the 5-star level. The moment his eyeball exploded, a new eyeball would regenerate, and when his shinbone broke, it would immediately snap back into place and adhere together. When he spat his mushed insides out, new ones would regenerate within his body.

It looked like he was invulnerable.

Did Chu Youngjin recognize Choi Hyuk in his unconscious state?

Or, did he instinctively know that he couldn't head towards Dragonic without beating Choi Hyuk?

Chu Youngjin didn't back down at all.

Boooom!

Lightning struck. Seemingly in correspondence to their intense fight, rain began to fall from the sky. The escaping experts and even the Berserkers, who were locking down the portal, blankly watched their fight. The drizzling rain soaked their clothes. A shivering cold lingered in the air as they got goosebumps.

Bang! Baang!

Every time Choi Hyuk punched, raindrops drew lines in the air. Choi Hyuk continuously punched Chu Youngjin as if he were

trying to nail him into the sky.

“Keeuck!”

Chu Youngjin desperately shouted.

“Kuaaaah!”

And a resounding roar following after.

Baang!

Blood splattered. Blood surged against the flow of raindrops. Blood began to gradually dye the building windows red. Choi Hyuk’s left shoulder was inflicted with a deep cut, dying it red. It was the first effective attack by Chu Youngjin. On top of that, it was quite deep.

However, Choi Hyuk smiled more furiously.

He ignored his wound and smashed Chu Youngjin’s face with his right first. A cloud of blood burst from his face as his teeth flew away. Like slow motion, Chu Youngjin’s body slowly tilted backwards before flying backwards, as if he had fallen from a tall cliff, and was nailed into the building behind him.

“Kuaah… Haah…”

Legs trembling, Chu Youngjin walked out from the pile of concrete rubble. He spat a broken tooth out. A new tooth grew out from his mouth, foaming with blood. Chu Youngjin’s blood-caked face smiled. However—

Thud.

The tooth that was growing fell out as well.

Thud, thud.

It happened again. It seemed like it would stop this time, but it fell out a third time with a thud. It only stopped at the fourth time. This was because Choi Hyuk’s karma, which had invaded his body, had obstructed his recovery. It was also because Chu Youngjin’s

recovery was slowly weakening due to him having exhausted his karma to the extreme.

“It’s finally kicking in.”

Choi Hyuk said as he rotated his arm. His attitude showed he was still at ease. However, his wound hadn’t yet closed. A lot of blood was still dripping from his deeply wounded shoulder. This was because Choi Hyuk’s Recovery was a chronic weakness of his and he had consumed a lot of stamina. It was also a large wound. Choi Hyuk had almost never been inflicted with a wound of this magnitude.

If he had instead tried to kill Chu Youngjin, then it might have been easy. Choi Hyuk’s Weapon of Vow was a deadly sword, and as it was rare for even middle-ranked warriors, who have reached the 5-star level, to block its close-ranged attack, there was no way Chu Youngjin, who was only a low-ranked warrior, to block it. However, this act of beating him up so that he couldn’t fight anymore wasn’t easy for Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk’s Endurance (100 – 3 ★) and Recovery (371 – 3★) were very low, and each of Chu Youngjin’s attacks had been reinforced, matching middle-ranked warriors. To avoid each of his attacks while pummelling an explosive Chu Youngjin into dough required incredible concentration and stamina.

So…

Choi Hyuk enjoyed this fight.

“Chu hyung, I’m coming!”

With a swish, the distance between Choi Hyuk and Chu Youngjin became non-existent. The rain that had been falling within that distance was swept up and scattered in every direction.

Chu Youngjin raised his sword and blocked Choi Hyuk’s punch.

Gong!

‘Chu Youngjin’s Protection’ quivered. Below his blade, Chu

Youngjin's eyes were noticeably less red.

"Are you back to your senses?"

Choi Hyuk asked. At the same time, Choi Hyuk's left foot struck at Chu Youngjin's right thigh.

"Keuk!"

An extreme pain gripped his entire body. However, Chu Youngjin endured this pain and instead shot forward, pushing against Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk used Chu Youngjin's strength to throw him over his shoulders. It was a clean throw, and by Choi Hyuk's standards, it was clean starting from the head.

Chu Youngjin was slammed upside down onto the ground. Choi Hyuk kicked Chu Youngjin's back. His spine looked like it would snap. It was the critical blow. Chu Youngjin's body folded completely in half. Then shot out and slammed into a building. From then on, the situation proceeded one-sidedly.

Choi Hyuk pummeled Chu Youngjin as he expressed his victory, while Chu Youngjin's counterattacks became duller than before. It seemed the effects of Berserker and Explosive Blood were ending as Chu Youngjin's combat strength was dropping.

Thud. It slowly took longer for Chu Youngjin to stand back up.

"Chu hyung. It's still far from over."

It looked like Chu Youngjin had finally regained his senses. His red eyes had returned to normal, and his shattered and ripped wounds didn't stanch easily.

Even in this situation, Chu Youngjin continued to stand up, albeit unsteadily.

He didn't even utter a single excuse.

Punch! Punch! Punch!

From then on, instead of a fight, it was a one-sided beating. Choi Hyuk would hit him, and Chu Youngjin would silently take the hit.

Chu Youngjin resolutely stood back up, and Choi Hyuk resolutely beat him down.

Thud.

After falling, Chu Youngjin was no longer able to stand back up as he squirmed on the ground. His face was embedded into the ground as his hands kept slipping from the rain. He swallowed rainwater.

Choi Hyuk motionlessly looked down at him before raising his hand. Lee Jinhee, who had been watching this unfold with mixed emotions from afar, threw him an identification device. A fist-sized sphere fell onto Choi Hyuk's hand. Choi Hyuk placed the device next to Chu Youngjin's head and activated it.

Zzzing.

The light emitting from the device pushed its way through Chu Youngjin's worn-out karma and searched every nook and cranny. Even before the results were out, Choi Hyuk was staring at something next to Chu Youngjin's head.

Whoong!

The light emitting from the device shook. It turned red and created a shape next to Chu Youngjin. It was the doppelganger queen, who was crying next to Chu Youngjin, holding his body which couldn't stand anymore.

"Ah... As expected..."

"That's the doppelganger queen..."

"It looks like a real person? Makes sense to be fooled by it."

Although they had guessed it, the feeling they felt after finally confirming it was different. Chu Youngjin's sins were fully displayed to the entire world.

Chu Youngjin, who had gotten up after falling multiple times, gave up at this moment. He vacantly looked at the doppelganger

queen that looked like Lee Hyejin. As if he couldn't hear the murmurs of the people around him or see Choi Hyuk approaching, he passionately gazed at the queen.

However, Choi Hyuk said with indifference,

"You know it, right? That it's only a monster."

Blaze.

Soon, the flames that bloomed in his hand wrapped around the doppelganger queen. The doppelganger queen, who had yet to awaken, was still kind as ever. As it looked at the flames wrapping around it, it smiled brightly, seemingly thinking that this was for the best. As it gazed into Chu Youngjin's eyes, it smiled, trying to put him at ease.

It smiled-

"Aaaaah!"

Then screamed. Choi Hyuk's scarlet flames could cause terrifying pain even to spirit forms. An intense heat spread everywhere as it evaporated the falling rain. Even the mist was burnt up by the flames and disappeared.

"Aaaaack!"

The more disfigured Lee Hyejin's appearance became, the more fiercely the doppelganger queen screamed. Just then, black energy surged out from within its body. It was the queen's core. The flames even spread to that core.

{Aaaack! Aaaaaah! I hate you! I haaate yooouuu!}

After completely ridding itself of its imitation of Lee Hyejin, the queen let out a terrifying scream. Then it burnt up cleanly, not leaving a single speck of ash.

The flames died down, and the rain fell once more.

Thud.

After having watched the entire scene, Chu Youngjin's face dropped. His forehead fell into a puddle of water. His face was completely soaked with rain.

Choi Hyuk bitterly looked back at him before turning away.

He declared to the surrounding experts of the minor clans and Berserkers.

"Effectively immediately, Director Chu Youngjin is stripped of his position. He hid the doppelganger queen and committed an inerasable sin against humanity. While capital punishment is a suitable punishment for his sin, taking his contributions up until now into consideration, I will not kill him. Instead, he will be forever exiled from Earth."

Exiled from Earth. Everyone murmured at the unexpected judgment.

"All his Mission Points gathered until now will be confiscated, and he will be sent to a war zone beyond the Laniakea Supercluster with no connection to Earth. He will never again be able to step forth on Earth and will not be able to hear any news about Earth."

Things would progress according to his declaration. No one could question it.

Then Choi Hyuk looked at the minor clan experts just standing there. He passed judgment to them as well.

"The clans under the Berserkers have contributed by noticing Chu Youngjin's abnormality. However, they did wrong by not reporting his abnormality to the Berserkers and by trying to resolve it themselves. The price for which is the following."

As he said this, Choi Hyuk grinned. It was clearly a mocking smirk.

"The wounded or dead will be compensated from a moral standpoint. Do not overstep your bounds and interfere with Berserker matters. If you are confident in your skills, we will

always welcome your application.”

With that, Choi Hyuk turned his back. Rain endless fell onto the heads of the experts standing there foolishly.

**

That was how the curtains fell on the doppelganger queen incident.

It wasn’t only an incident that revealed the external conflict between the Berserkers and the minor clans, but also one that revealed the problems with the internal communications between the Berserkers.

Using this incident as an opportunity, Choi Hyuk changed the organization of the Berserkers. He gave Baek Seoin the position of vice-overseer and gave him clear-cut authority. For symbolic reasons, he left Baek Seoin to deal with Lee Jinhee, who didn’t report the exclusion of Chu Youngjin from the investigation teams. Baek Seoin concluded by giving Lee Jinhee 3 months of active military service as punishment.

Not only that, but the relationship between the Berserkers and its subordinate clans became clear. A public announcement declared, ‘The only military organization acknowledged within Overseer Choi Hyuk’s territories are the Berserkers.’ Then they sought policies to absorb their subordinate clan experts into the Berserkers.

Chu Youngjin had to leave without witnessing these changes.

Only Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin, and Lee Jinhee saw him off when he rode the 1-person spaceship Naro prepared for him and left Earth.

Unexpectedly, Chu Youngjin had a carefree expression.

“Thank you.”

Although it was a doppelganger queen, Chu Youngjin had seen

Lee Hyejin die twice. He could no longer live on Earth, which made him recall his memories of her.

“Be happier in your next life.”

Choi Hyuk joked as Chu Youngjin was leaving.

“Whatever you do is fine, just don’t die. We need to see each other again.”

At Choi Hyuk’s words, Chu Youngjin smiled bitterly and shook his head.

That was how he left Earth forever. Like ending one life, he left Earth.

For the first time, Choi Hyuk was able to send a human beyond the Laniakea Supercluster.

Whatever convention he used, he had sent one of the people he trusted the most to the heart of his enemy.

Episode 7 - Tidal Wave Of Monsters

Chapter 107: New Land, New Era (1)

There were no longer any objections.

Beginning with the collapse of the Sovereign of Dark Secrets Lao Ban, they had overcome the eyeless observers, completed the advancement evaluation, subjugated Cayenne Star, and had even experienced the Chu Youngjin incident. Everything was verified from the endless waves of fights and wars.

It was impossible to confront Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers. There wasn't a force on Earth that could take them on.

As expected, the world was changing as well. The world order reorganized itself under the 6 overseers and the 9 great sovereigns, who confined Overseer Nasir, as they possessed exclusive rights to trade with the alliance.

Those who had been reading the mood as they took a wait-and-see approach began to make their move.

"Let's go our separate ways."

President Shin Woojin became disheartened at Choi Hyuk's reply. He tried his best to persuade him.

"However, South Korea will perish then."

"Is that name so important? Then you continue its name."

Choi Hyuk's mind was resolute. Well, he was right. With the entire earth collapsing, the life or death of a 70-year-old nation on the Korean Peninsula could be considered a trivial problem.

"But..."

"No. My answer will not change. I don't have any thoughts on accepting the president into the Berserkers, nor do I have any thoughts on an alliance or treaty of administrative duties. Even if you put down your authority as a great sovereign and wanted to join the Berserkers as my follower, I wouldn't accept. The

Berserkers are literally an organization of crazy warriors. And it needs to be. The president, as well as those following you, aren't suited for it. You are people who have too much to become crazy warriors. Let's go our separate ways. If you really don't want to, then give up your privileges and live in my territory as a regular colonizer. That is all I can say."

"..."

In the end, Shin Woojin had no choice but to give up.

To be honest, Shin Woojin's position within the Korean Peninsula until now was ambiguous. He was the president. He used his own ability and didn't lose his authority within the confusion. He won over a majority of the military, who had disappeared, and used civil service to maintain order in South Korea. He was truly the leader of South Korea. Choi Hyuk's power was limited to the colonized lands in Dragonic. On Earth, within South Korea, the Berserkers were instead the minority.

However, this whole situation had instantly been flipped on its head since the advancement evaluation. During the advancement evaluation, the world's population had been drastically reduced by a half. There was nowhere on Earth that could endure that kind of chaos. The anarchic situation continued. On the other hand, after actively participating in the advancement evaluation, Choi Hyuk's influence had expanded on its own. Citizens of South Korea began to mentally depend on the Berserkers rather than the president. Many citizens moved to Choi Hyuk's colonized land. Korean citizens who were under Choi Hyuk's banner numbered more than half the population.

From then on, President Shin Woojin had to focus on his reign. It was distressful.

As Shin Woojin had joined and fought alongside the Anti-Berserker Alliance, he had been able to become one of the nine great sovereigns who shared Nasir's rights. Normally, the 9 great

sovereigns possessed the commanding authority over their respective countries. Yamato of Japan did and so did Zhang Ziyin of China. However, Shin Woojin couldn't as South Korea had Choi Hyuk.

Because of this, he had simply watched. He had known that the clans under Choi Hyuk were dissatisfied with his forceful rule, and he even had hopes for their rise. Yet, everything became clear after the Chu Youngjin incident. No one could face the Berserkers.

In this situation, Shin Woojin had proposed an alliance with Choi Hyuk to maintain his authority. It was a proposal where policies such as public order and internal affairs within their colonized lands would be shared and combined. It was a type of federal government. As he was well aware that the Berserkers lacked administration and political abilities, he planned to use this federal government system to bring over his own authority over the South Korean citizens completely intact. Choi Hyuk would handle the war, and he would handle the mundane politics. That was his plan.

However, Choi Hyuk denied his proposal. He demanded a secession.

Shin Woojin had no choice but to abide.

"Overseer Choi Hyuk declares to secede from South Korea. Following Overseer Choi Hyuk and President Shin Woojin's agreement, the citizens of South Korea are free to choose their affiliation."

Although the world was in such a mess that the press and internet communications networks couldn't function properly, the news of the secession quickly spread throughout Korea.

The time had come for them to choose sides. Those who had dipped their hands in both sides until now were busy thinking about what decision to make.

"I, Shin Woojin, will take responsibility and return you to your

daily lives.”

President Shin Woojin asserted the legitimacy of South Korea. He stimulated the longing people had to return to their safe and familiar lifestyles in order to draw people in. To gather even one more person, he prepared all sorts of favors.

On the other hand, Choi Hyuk had an attitude of ‘come if you want’.

“I don’t care whether those who join me are old, young, male, female, handicapped, or not. You will fight without rest. And you will win.”

People couldn’t tell whether he wanted them to join or not by his pledge. However, the number of people whose hearts wavered at his pledge wasn’t small.

They were living in such times.

**

One of the problems which arose during the process of handling the doppelganger queen was the conflict between the Berserkers and the minor clans.

Choi Hyuk set an extreme measure regarding this problem. This was also the reason why he had no choice but to secede from South Korea.

Choi Hyuk planned on creating and controlling a 3rd troop comprised of all the colonizers within his scope of authority. With the authority of an overseer, which could establish strategies, he planned on dispatching them to the war against the monsters and then leaving Berserkers to control them. There would be a clear difference in rank between normal colonizers, minor clans, and Berserkers.

Also, there were no exceptions to this measure. Whether they were miners, farmers, or cooks, they would be drafted and then participate in the war.

“Will it be okay? If that’s the case, then our rate of production will drop.”

Artillery Captain Handke had a defensive attitude.

Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Earthlings’ production is like a speck of dust compared to the alliance’s. If the only thing we can sell is our strength, then we need to focus on it.”

His voice was resolute.

Yet, his followers still had many worries.

Guardian Bae Jinman said,

“There will be tremendous chaos. Although it could be said that they are somewhat tolerant after the large-scale expeditions during the advancement evaluation, either way, there are still a lot of people with occupations that aren’t combat-oriented. It’ll be difficult for those in the mining, farming, service, and manufacturing industries to adjust after being blindly sent to war.”

“That’s why we’ll establish a warrior school. It’ll be the greatest training school on Earth. If they still can’t adjust, then they can just follow Shin Woojin. Berserkers are our identity. Those who want to live in my colonized lands must participate in the war. I’m thinking about sending them once every week or two. Even if they can’t become formal Berserkers, they should at least be able to act as the second or third string or even trainees.”

Silently listening to Choi Hyuk’s explanations, Baek Seoin slowly raised his hand.

“But… To ultimately make humanity more powerful, I think that it might be necessary to strengthen humanity’s overall capability. Military power isn’t everything. Even at the Cayenne star, as we don’t have the skills to personally extract karma, we ended up handing it over to the alliance at a dirt cheap price. Even if it is

possible for Naro to move between dimensions, its efficiency is still not great, and we are in a situation where we have no choice but to rely on the alliance's military gate system to move large-scale armies. In the end, if we aren't able to possess any of these key technologies, then we will never be able to move away from the alliance's grasp."

His words, which started cautiously, became filled with more certainty as he spoke. Yes. He made sense the more they thought about it. If they only focused on raising their military power without these technologies, they might end up only becoming a useful tool for the alliance. Choi Hyuk couldn't help but fall into a state of deep thought at Baek Seoin's points.

Then he shook his head.

"Baek hyung words are right as well. However, Earth's technology is hundreds of thousands of years behind the alliance's. Even if we have Naro, the situation doesn't change. Even looking at the military gate system, Naro said that it had no idea how it worked. What I'm saying is that we don't have the time to start researching these technologies right now. My thoughts are that, with military power as our footing, we increase our position within the alliance and use it to learn those technologies."

"Hmm...."

Everyone was quiet. Choi Hyuk's thoughts were extreme. However, it was difficult to say that his thoughts were wrong. At the same time, it was difficult to say he was right, but they could understand where he was coming from.

"Understood."

With Ryu Hyunsung, who had been listening quietly, raising his hand as a start, the others followed, raising their right hands as well.

Even Baek Seoin, Handke, and Bae Jinman, who gave opposing

views, raised their hands. They said, “Understood.”

It was a common sight in meetings comprised of the top ranks among the Berserkers.

As long as they had the most convention-defying person on Earth as their leader, no one thought that they could make him yield. If they held these thoughts, then they wouldn’t have stayed under Choi Hyuk’s command from the start.

Meetings were often times not a place to decide on something but rather a means to clearly understand Choi Hyuk’s motives. Only then could the executives do their work according to his motives. Well, if Choi Hyuk changed his mind in the process, then that was good as well.

So, even if they weren’t completely convinced, it was normal for them to move on with an “Understood” once they understood Choi Hyuk’s motives.

Just as the meeting was about to end like this, Lee Jinhee poked Ryu Hyunsung’s side. As she was trying to behave herself these days, she had simply attended the meetings and hadn’t opened her mouth once. However, it seemed that there was something she wanted to bring up.

Surprised by being poked by Lee Jinhee’s finger, Ryu Hyunsung stared at her before revealing an ‘Aha!’ expression. He cleared his throat and asked Choi Hyuk,

“Aren’t we going to secede? Have you thought of a country name?”

His question changed the mood.

Figuring out a name was a headache yet also an exciting process. The executives of the Berserkers looked at Choi Hyuk with expectant expressions.

Choi Hyuk received their gazes unenthusiastically as he replied,

“It’s fine. Tell them to call it whatever they want.”

That was how the ‘crazy law’ characterizing the ‘Berserkers’ land’ was decided. Everyone living in the Berserkers’ land had to partake in war missions once every two weeks. It was literally a crazy law. Someone said,

“Crazy… It’s not like Choi Hyuk is the only overseer in the world, who will go live in that crazy place?”

However, there were people who headed towards that place. There were many.

“Hyungnim, do you remember hitting the jackpot in real estate when you listened to me before?”

“I do. That’s why I bought you beef. When others lost money that time, I earned a lot. I bought it since you kept rambling on about a rapid change or something… but you did well. When I think about it now… Well, it all went to ruin once the world became like this.”

“Hyungnim, there is currently a change even greater than that time. You must choose Choi Hyuk.”

“Choi Hyuk? I was going to choose Shin Woojin… They say that we need to go out to the battlefield once every 2 weeks if we choose Choi Hyuk. How can I do that? Although I’ve awakened, I’ve never even seen a monster yet.”

“Even if it’s difficult, you have to, hyungnim. There is no future staying on Earth or Dragonic. Look at Choi Hyuk. He’s insane, right? But what about it? He’s on a roll. Why is that? Isn’t it because he’s good at fighting?! Isn’t that why he’s acknowledged by the alliance and has become an overseer? It is now the era of space. Only those who can trade with the alliance can survive. But does Earth have the technology? Or the resources? Currently, the only method for an earthling to advance in space is to fight. Although it’s scary, you must. Just think of it as an initial

investment. It is now an era where you need to know how to fight. Hyungnim, don't you trust me?"

"Hmm... Since you put it that way, your words do seem correct... But what if I die?"

"Ehh, why be frightened of that? Wasn't it the same in the past? Didn't people die when their investments failed? There's no need to be scared. Only, you need to prepare yourself. We are of a different class. We can't run around like rookies, can we?"

"Prepare?"

"Yes. You said your relative was a Berserker? I think I heard you say he was a Berserk Roach under Baek Seoin... Let's first contact him and ask for private lessons. Well... It'll be nice if we could ask him to help us during the mission, but let's not hope for that yet and rather learn skills that can ensure our survival. Hyungnim has to trust me. If we go to Shin Woojin for immediate comfort, we'll definitely die within 5 years. You saw it too. Non-awakenees turning to ash and dying. That's the kind of world we live in now. It's a world where you'll die if you're weak. There is no better investment than getting stronger."

"Okay, I got it. Yeah, I'll try calling him."

There were conversations like this everywhere.

A world you couldn't survive in unless you were strong.

Within this world, Choi Hyuk, who had no losses, might be the most suitable leader to follow.

People who decided to throw away their livelihood and start a new challenge were gathering under Choi Hyuk.

Chapter 108: New Land, New Era (2)

The population of Dragonic was increasing.

As Earth only had around 2 years left before collapse, each sovereign actively encouraged emigration to Dragonic.

The colonized lands, which were scattered like dots, were connecting together. As they had already explored the topography between the colonized lands during the great war between the 'Anti-Berserker Alliance' and the Berserkers, trade between the different colonized lands was progressing smoothly.

The 6 overseers (excluding Nasir as he has no authority), the 9 great sovereigns, who acted on Nasir's authority, as well as the 4 sovereigns who stayed neutral during the war. A total of 19 sovereigns recruited colonizers and allied with each other, growing their forces.

The majority of sovereigns drew colonizers in with promises of freedom and benefits. Freedom meant the freedom to choose how they made Mission Points, and benefits referred to tax benefits.

It had been a long time since major currencies on Earth had been replaced by Mission Points, which could buy supplies from the alliance. Methods to earn Mission Points included personally going out and completing alliance missions, providing goods to those who earned Mission Points through the first method, and selling Earth's goods to aliens in the lowest-ranked supply store for Mission Points. (No one would buy any Earth goods when brought to the low-ranked supply store used by low-ranked warriors.)

As many people completely avoided alliance missions, which risked their lives, most colonized lands were maintaining a 2:3 ratio of combat-oriented colonizers to non-combat-oriented colonizers. Combat-oriented colonizers made more income, but non-combat-oriented colonizers were comparatively safer. There were even some among the colonizers who went back and forth

between combat missions and business activities, balancing risk and income.

Most colonized lands weren't simply a union of adventurers but were also comprised of inns, markets, woodworking shops, construction firms, restaurants, and red-light districts.

However, differences between the Berserkers' land and other normal colonized lands could be seen simply from the streets.

First, the buildings were sloppy. Unlike other colonized lands, which built large, refined buildings by using cutting edge technology, their buildings were small, simple and crude. The material used to build them was different as well. Unlike other colonized lands, which made steel, concrete and other materials from the processing of raw materials collected in Dragonic, the Berserkers used raw materials like wood and stone to build their buildings. Without the need for a separate process and technology, the colonizers could simply cut the materials with their swords.

The difference between the Berserkers' land and other colonized lands wasn't comparative to the difference between the countryside and a city, but rather the difference between the Middle Ages and present age.

The only decent buildings within the Berserkers' land were the ones built by the previous sovereigns before Choi Hyuk captured them.

The reason was simple.

There were no purely non-combat-oriented colonizers within the Berserkers' land. They were all required to join a combat mission once every two weeks. Although there were some who, after completing their duties, spent the remainder of their time running business activities. However, when compared to other colonized lands, these colonizers, who went back and forth between combat and non-combat, leaned heavily towards the combat side. They didn't have the various economies to support building decent

buildings.

However, despite its crude appearance, the Berserkers' land always bustled with activity.

"Looking for a party for a mission exploring the northern regions of Dragonic!"

"Recruiting for a reconnaissance mission on the Lemir Star! Preferential treatment to long-distance attackers!"

"We're going on a mission to the Cayenne Star, subjugating monster remnants and exploring ruins. Our party prioritizes safety over results. We are a heavily armed troop. A tanker with at least 2-star Endurance is welcome."

People gathered in every square, looking for parties to go on missions with.

Also, every shabby bar and restaurant was packed with people, sharing their visions of the future.

"Wow... Did you see those guys from the Lee Jungmin Clan fight? They were flying all over the place. It looks like they value mobility. When they fought, grinding down their opponents with speed, even large monsters were easily handled. I thought that fighting was all about clashing head on, but it looks like you need to use your head a ton."

"Right. I think your fighting style is important. Overwhelm them with speed, crush them with power, or beat them with techniques. You're screwed if you increase your stats without any thought."

"Not only personal style, but there has to be a concept to your party as well. You can't join really important missions with parties simply gathered in squares, you know? Even if it's difficult, I think it's important to decide a concept before forming a crew."

"Yeah, that Changsoo fellow only recruited long-range attackers for a reconnaissance mission this time. They say he hit the jackpot. Said he earned a ton of Mission Points."

“As expected, is it currently the era of long-range attackers?”

“Well, to make money at our level, long-range attackers are the best. But to take down the really strong guys, you’ll have to use close quarters combat in the end. Look at the Berserkers. They have a small ratio of long-range attackers, but no one can face them.”

“Talking about the Berserkers, Gilsoo recently joined a capture mission overseen by Choi Hyuk personally. He boasted so much that the commander of his troop was Director Lee Jinhee.”

“Director Lee Jinhee? Her probation is over already? Ah, has it been that long already?”

“Yeah, rumors have spread that Overseer Choi Hyuk specifically took her on an especially tough mission for her return.”

“Haa... If Choi Hyuk says it’s tough, just how tough is it? Though, as long as they survive, their earnings will probably be on another level... If it were me, I wouldn’t have gone. Unless it’s Director Baek Seoin’s troop.”

“They won’t even consider someone like you.”

“What’d you say?”

Those who chose the Berserkers’ land usually possessed strong adventurous spirits. They talked endlessly with one another, learning the latest information, and using that information to carve and polish better survival methods for themselves.

**

{Kahur Kabkun discovered. Estimated to be low-ranked. We will take action to destroy it before it grows any further.}

{Good, Warrior Leader Choi Hyuk. You’re on a good pace. Just keep going like this.}

He heard Commander Mack’s bright voice.

{Military gate system. Opening the detected Kahur Kabkun.}

Along with the system voice message, the Kahur Kabkun opened. Kahur Kabkuns were black wormholes, supply routes for the monsters. They were passageways that connected the universe the monsters lived in and the current universe karmalings lived in. As this one was a low-ranked passageway, it would be packed with 3-4-star monsters.

“Let’s go.”

Choi Hyuk rushed towards the opened gate. The Berserkers and the colonizers, who were assigned from the Berserkers’ land, followed behind him.

Following Choi Hyuk’s policy, even those who weren’t Berserkers were dispatched to missions of the highest difficulty. Those assigned to the Kahur Kabkun destroying mission this time were precisely that. Although they weren’t Berserkers, they were acknowledged as fighting specialists.

They felt pride that they could fight alongside the Berserkers, who were known as the best. At the same time, they also had the aspiration to show the Berserkers up with their skills.

Yet, their pride and aspirations soon drooped like soggy sponges.

“Haaa! Haa!”

Not long after the battle began, many participating colonizers weren’t breathing properly. They were completely out of breath. Yet, the battle continued without stopping.

A living hell.

An endless number of monsters swarmed towards them inside the Kahur Kabkun, and the Berserkers continued their relentless advance.

“Stick to the front, bastard!”

A Berserker in command of the regular colonizers shouted.

Kaaaang!!

While flinging away an enormous monster's front leg with his sword, he shouted,

"Stick to the front!!!"

It seemed it wasn't easy taking the monster's attack head on as his complexion wasn't good.

"Kuaack! Kuaah!"

At his angry urge, the normal colonizers stuck to the front, their voices indistinguishable between a scream and a shout. Hit by a monster's leg, a few of them were hurled far away. A gap opened up within the battle lines again. Then the Berserker in charge shouted again,

"Quickly stick together!!"

These regular colonizers were experiencing this kind of battle for the first time. It was a battle no different from a brawl. There was no point differentiating between the vanguard and the rear. The monsters, which were at the 3-4-star level on average, undoubtedly overwhelmed the 2-3-star colonizers. If those at the front became unable to fight, then those in the rear would take their places. If even they became unable to fight, then those who recovered from their wounds with potions and such would take over once again. This repetition of fighting and healing was like hell. A clearly unreasonable advance, yet this was precisely the Berserkers' fighting style.

The difference between the Berserkers and regular colonizers... they realized that this difference wasn't simply a gap in stats, but the difference in experience and expertise. The Berserkers, who were fighting as much as they were, didn't slow down. Even though they were sweating bullets and accumulating wounds, their eyes shined with resoluteness and killing intent.

"Kuhap! Kuhaaa!"

Looking at their appearances, the participating colonizers

squeezed out every bit of strength they possessed. Although it was partially due to their pride... They didn't have a choice either. The moment they were separated from the group, they would die.

Then—

Flash!

They thought lightning had struck, but—

Blaze!

Flames surged like a forest fire.

The dark Kahur Kabkun brightened like dawn.

{Kiyaaaaah!}

The monsters screamed.

Due to the light, they could see monster cocoons packed on the outer walls of the Kahur Kabkun. Those monsters squirmed, still growing even in this moment as the Kahur Kabkun increased their sizes.

"Burn all those insects!"

Choi Hyuk's voice was interesting. Even though it didn't seem like he was shouting, everyone could still clearly hear his voice.

"Burn them all!"

The Berserkers repeated Choi Hyuk's words in the same manner they would shout, 'Party time!'

"Hiyaaahaaa!!!"

The Berserkers dashed forward in high spirits. The cocoons were ripped apart. As the large blood vessels flowing along the outer walls were stabbed all over the place, black blood began to flow down. Soon after, Choi Hyuk's flames adhered to it and, as if burning fuel, it engulfed the blood and the remains. A sea of flames gradually spread everywhere.

"Haa... Haa... Crazy bastards... Haa..."

The regular colonizers, who had become so exhausted they didn't even have the strength to speak, became pale at the sight of the Berserkers, who seemed just as vigorous as they were at the start.

With bloodshot eyes, the Berserkers ripped everything apart and, depending on the situation, were ripped apart as well. However, they didn't hesitate in the slightest.

Why wouldn't this be difficult for the Berserkers? However, they were used to this as they always fought to their limits.

Kwaooooh!

Enormous flames blew and a white flash shined in a straight line like lightning. Choi Hyuk's Flaming Wing Dance and Instant Void Annihilation could clearly be seen from anywhere in the battle formation. The only reason why an army at the 2-3-star level could capture a Kahur Kabkun frequented by 3-4-star monsters was because Choi Hyuk was at the very front, ripping the brunt of the enemy's attack to shreds.

"... Monster."

"No, no, a god. That's a fighting god."

That was how the reverence they had for Choi Hyuk became a level deeper.

Berserkers' fights ended as quickly as they were intense.

Choi Hyuk looked behind him. He saw regular colonizers, who were so exhausted they couldn't even keep their eyes open properly, and Berserkers, who were snickering despite having lost strength in their legs. He also saw monster and human corpses strewn behind them like a carpet.

Choi Hyuk currently stood in front of the Kahur Kabkun entrance. A black abyss-like space was spread in front of him.

An unpleasant karma flowed in from beyond it. It was definitely karma, yet it was different from the karma earthlings and aliens

affiliated with the alliance possessed. Although Choi Hyuk could almost identically imitate the karma the Flame Wing Tribe used, he couldn't imitate this. This so-called 'monsters' karma', which was fundamentally different from karmalings', was unpleasant, sticky and ferocious.

Just beyond where he stood was a universe fundamentally different from the one earthlings inhabited. A universe in a completely different dimension. The homeland of the monsters. The world of death.

The black hole looked blood-red in Choi Hyuk's eyes. It possessed killing intent thicker than any human's he had seen yet. He could clearly see and feel its will of wanting to annihilate all karmalings. 'Something' from beyond was fuming. It was anxious to bore a wider Kahur Kabkun. As long as it could send a sufficient number of sufficiently powerful monsters, it would be able to instantly annihilate the karmalings of this weak universe... Its arrogant thoughts, irritated by the difficulty of crossing dimensions, crossed over in a telepathic form.

Choi Hyuk's heart was filled with something fierce. 'You're that strong?' was what he thought. When he saw something strong, he wanted to break it. It could instantly annihilate us if a Kahur Kabkun was big enough...? Wasn't that being too arrogant?

However, Choi Hyuk suppressed his violent impulses. Now was not the time. He couldn't handle the monster beyond right now. Wasn't he so weak he couldn't even enact his own revenge? Those monsters in the world beyond, known as 'demises', were existences even Exalted Wings like Dark-Sound feared.

'But one day...'

Choi Hyuk suppressed his surging impulses as he threw a 'Kahur Kabkun Destroying Bomb' into the black hole and turned his back.

"We return."

He had to quickly return and quickly prepare for the next fight as an especially large number of Kahur Kabkuns were appearing in the Virgo Cluster, which was at the border. It was also an opportunity for him to grow stronger.

Chapter 109: New Land, New Era (3)

Chu Youngjin raised his head.

The entire sky was distorted. Like the gray static on TVs, black, white, and gray dots filled his vision as they flickered and squirmed.

His hair fluttered and his skin felt hot. The planet was extremely polluted, with karma shattering and smashing against each other.

This place stressed people out just by its existence. It was a war zone.

Aliens he had never seen or heard of before were fighting against monsters he had never seen or heard of before. To Chu Youngjin, both sides looked like monsters.

It felt unfamiliar.

Just before charging into battle, Chu Youngjin would unwittingly think of his extremely distant homeland.

“Are they doing well? Those two... Have they become my successors?”

However, his thoughts didn’t drag on for long.

{Newcomer! You XXX! Pull yourself together!}

A senior officer of his troop swore buckets at Chu Youngjin, who had momentarily become sentimental. He was an insect-like alien with a mouth split into three parts and long antennae.

Chu Youngjin glanced at him and smiled.

“Don’t worry,”

With that short reply, Chu Youngjin’s eyes reddened.

Rumble!

At the same time as the rumble, Chu Youngjin penetrated into a crowd of maggot-like monsters. Black blood and the sickening

flesh of monsters scattered into the air behind him.

This was a war zone where alliance members with no connections and karmalings who were deemed as Consumables were dispatched to. An alien troop that repeatedly fought in the most dangerous and dirtiest of fights.

Chu Youngjin liked this place.

He spent every day here, drunk on fighting. The more he fought, the blanker his mind became.

That was what he liked the most.

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In the Barhaloleun Mountains, known as the Berserkers' homeland, a warrior school was erected a little distance away from the city. Ryu Hyunsung was training talented warriors there.

"Now, you see how Overseer Choi Hyuk blocked that attack? Why do you think he blocked it this time when he dodged it before?"

"Unlike before, his right foot was firmly on the ground. It seemed like he judged that he could take the attack with his strength."

"A great answer. However, you're only half-correct. The reason is rhythm. There needs to be a rhythm when you use karma. Think about it. When comparing someone who fights with 10 Power to someone who alternates between 5 and 13 Power, who do you think is stronger? Of course, it's the one who alternates between 5 and 13 Power. When you don't need a lot of strength, use it lightly, but when you need to break your opponent, use it strongly. The secret to attacking effectively while still fighting for long periods of time is rhythm. To find a rhythm and timing that is optimized for you, you need to awaken all your senses."

The students nodded seriously at Ryu Hyunsung's words. Although they were considered students, their ages ranged greatly,

from those in their early teens to older people in their seventies. They had joined the advanced class as their fighting talents as regular colonizers, not Berserkers, had been acknowledged.

Ryu Hyunsung, who taught them, had a very bright and energetic expression.

“Now, if we were to proceed as normal, it would be time for actual fighting, but there is a special event today. I’m confident that there will be more to learn from it than from actual fighting. Although fighting is good, there are many cases where continuously fighting causes one to fall into a rut by repeatedly following a familiar pattern, and said pattern becoming a habitual routine. In times like these, it’s of great help to watch fights of those stronger than you and expand your realm of creativity. Now, follow me.”

The place Ryu Hyunsung led them to was a Berserkers’ training ground not far from the school. Berserkers had already gathered and were being noisy. There were so many Berserkers here that they couldn’t see what was going on beyond them.

Looking at the crowd of Berserkers, who were known to be brutal, the warrior school students were dispirited. However, their teacher, Ryu Hyunsung, didn’t hesitate as he pushed through the crowd.

“Move! Let the students watch!”

When Ryu Hyunsung shouted, the Berserkers turned around, seemingly in a bad mood. However, after confirming Ryu Hyunsung’s face, they moved aside without a word.

“Uh, director. Who are the chicks behind you?”

A few Berserkers showed interest.

“I told you they are students of the warrior school.”

Ryu Hyunsung replied lightly. Yet, his path to the front wasn’t entirely smooth.

There were Berserkers who didn't move. They were indifferent when Ryu Hyunsung directly asked them to move.

"Why should I move? I barely managed to get this spot after coming here early in the morning. On top of that, isn't this a matter regarding us, Chu Youngjin's troop? Aren't you, Director Ryu Hyunsung, a third-party here?"

Some refused in this way.

Then Ryu Hyunsung smiled brightly as he turned to look at his nervous students.

"The Berserkers are a bit like this. There are many who won't listen to others no matter what. Since a lot of you want to become Berserkers, I'll show you how to deal with them."

Then he turned his head with a swish and stared at the Berserkers blocking his path. Tension hung in the air. The Berserkers blocking their path slowly got into combat positions.

"Director Ryu Hyunsung, it won't be easy this time."

"Won't be easy, my ass."

Punch!

Thud!

Bang!

Ryu Hyunsung had moved before he finished his words. The Berserkers blocking their path groaned as they slumped onto the ground. One was hit on the head, another stabbed in the neck, and the last had his chin kicked. They all became incapable of fighting. As he slowly walked passed them, Ryu Hyunsung explained,

"They are elites who have reached the peak of the 3-star level, but how were they beaten so easily? It's precisely because of rhythm. I launched my first attack half a step earlier than they expected. I was half a step later with my second attack than what my target expected, and it was the same for my third and fourth

attacks as well. What I mean by creating your own rhythm isn't creating some standard rhythm. Figuring out your opponent's rhythm quickly is the most important thing. That is why you have to awaken all your senses."

Ryu Hyunsung continued to teach while pushing the Berserkers slumped on the ground away with his feet. It looked like being a teacher suited him well as he seemed to be enjoying it.

His students were carefully following behind him, tiptoeing in fear of stepping on a collapsed Berserker.

Finally arriving at the very front, Ryu Hyunsung and his students saw an enormous open space surrounded by Berserkers, with twelve people standing in the middle.

The 12 consisted of the 10 team leaders under Chu Youngjin's troop and a pair of fraternal twins, Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun.

"What's the current situation?"

A female student, who looked around 17 years old, cautiously asked Ryu Hyunsung.

"Ah, it's a test to pick the next director of Chu Youngjin's troop."

"Next director?"

"Yes. You know that Director Chu Youngjin has been exiled, correct? There needs to be someone who will lead his troop in his stead. But Director Chu Youngjin recommended the next director before he was exiled. They are those two over there, Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun. The funny thing is they were the ones who had chased down Director Chu Youngjin during the doppelganger incident."

"Pardon? Then they didn't know each other before?"

"That's right. After fighting with them then, Director Chu Youngjin left after recommending those two, saying that they were

better than the guys under him. I saw them too... And they are quite skilled. However, there was no way the lunatics of Chu Youngjin's troop would accept this. They insisted and decided amongst themselves that, whoever it may be, their director needed to be able to take down 5 team leaders by themselves. That's how this deciding match came about. The situation is, if Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun want to become joint directors, they need to take down 10 team leaders."

As expected, tension hung in the middle of the empty space.

While they were glaring at each other, Kim Honghyun stepped forward.

"Aren't we going to fight? How long are we going to glare at each other?"

While talking craftily, he suddenly rushed into the group of team leaders.

Ruuuumble!

At the same time, rumbles resounded in the air. As they were the subordinates of Chu Youngjin, their usage of karma was similar to his, emitting thunderous roars. The experts of Chu Youngjin's troop, who were known to possess the greatest destructive power in one-on-one situations among the Berserkers, struck out simultaneously. Their attacks had the intention to kill, not holding back at all.

Even as the air crackled around him, Kim Honghyun didn't back down.

"Toughness, Fortitude!"

His innate skill and karma trait, both which greatly increased his Endurance, activated at the same time.

"And Reflex!"

Crash, bang!

Kim Honghyun blocked a portion of the downpour of attacks and received the rest with his body. With his monstrous Endurance and ability to avoid strikes to his vital points with his cat-like reflexes, Kim Honghyun stood firmly after receiving all ten people's attacks.

Ryu Hyunsung admired,

"Wow, did you see that? He twisted his body the moment the team leaders became certain their attacks would hit. On top of that, it looks like his Endurance is unbelievable. That right there is rhythm. He completely took over their rhythm. The team leaders are probably taken aback now since things went differently from what they expected. A weakness."

Ryu Hyunsung explained quickly.

As expected, Kim Honghyun smiled, revealing his teeth.

"That's all?"

Swish.

With a swift sound of slicing air, Kim Saehyun, who had been standing behind him, attacked, targeting the team leaders' weak points. Victory was already determined with his first move.

Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun were much stronger than expected. Since Chu Youngjin had run amok after beating them, they had initially thought they weren't all that amazing, but they were wrong. After personally experiencing the combat-type innate skills they possessed, they realized they were on a frightening level.

The reason why they were beaten so badly by Chu Youngjin was because Chu Youngjin, at that time, was unbelievably strong. They weren't a good match either. Chu Youngjin's lethal one-hit attacks could pierce Kim Honghyun's Endurance and Kim Saehyun's sharp attacks couldn't overcome Chu Youngjin's monstrous Recovery.

"Uhh... If it's those two, it might be tough for me too...? Chu

Youngjin beat them with strength? And he was able to make a fuss afterwards?”

Nervous, Ryu Hyunsung suddenly muttered to himself, and his words spread through the mouths of the Berserkers. He was later frequently teased by Lee Jinhee for this. ‘Sniff, sniff? Do I smell the scent of a coward from somewhere?’

‘Damn… Let’s duel, Lee Jinhee.’

‘Heh? Why don’t you beat the Kim brothers first?’ Something along those lines.

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At the same time, Choi Hyuk was in Naro’s spaceship.

If something was different from normal, it was the spaceship’s location. Naro’s spaceship, which had always floated above Seoul, was now floating over Dragonic.

It wasn’t through the use of the military gate system, but rather through the result of its own efforts and usage of the spaceship’s dimensional travel equipment.

Although it was subtle, Earth’s horizons were expanding.

{Yes, yes, we are steadily progressing with the friendly sparring sessions as you ordered. We went to two places today. I beat the instructor of one but was beat by the one in the other. The spars between their trainees and our Berserkers were close. I think it was a good experience. I am organizing the list of my results.}

Lee Jinhee, who had been dispatched to Dark City of Laniakea, appeared on the screen. She was currently going around warrior training centers in Dark City with a portion of the Berserkers’ elites for training.

“Good. But why do you look so glum?”

{It’s because I’m embarrassed, why?! I already feel bad about losing, but I have to tell the instructors who beat me that my

leader will challenge them later. This is like me calling my big brother for help.}

"Then become stronger than me."

{Damn it... I want to too. Ah, one more thing. When I asked around, it seemed that the rate of detecting Kahur Kabkuns in other clusters within the Laniakea Supercluster has gone up these days. It looks like Naro's prediction that it is a problem of the entire Laniakea Supercluster, and not simply the Virgo Cluster's, was right.}

"Really? Okay. If you hear any other rumors besides that, let me know through Naro."

{Yes, yes. I'll do as you order. Then I'm hanging up now. See you for the report tomorrow, leader.}

"Yeah, work hard."

After hanging up, Choi Hyuk was momentarily lost in thought. Her win rate was 40%. Considering that she was an earthling, who had only just debuted, it wasn't a bad result. However, when considering that Laniakea's Dark City was at the bottom, it was difficult to call it satisfactory as well. Since the ones who truly knew how to fight were probably out in the battlefields.

"We need to get stronger faster..."

Choi Hyuk was frustrated. The only ones who had reached the middle-ranked warrior level amongst the earthlings were Choi Hyuk and Richard. This was severely lacking by Choi Hyuk's standards. Both earthlings and himself.

Of course, middle-ranked warriors could be classified as elites in the Laniakea Supercluster as, if they went down to the Virgo Cluster, which contained Earth, they could be warrior leaders. They couldn't be considered weak. 'Warriors' acknowledged by the alliance were worth something. It was similar to when Keushisuit bragged that he was a lowest-ranked warrior in the past. Unlike

earthlings, who had no choice but to become warriors, of those who were alliance members from the start, a significant portion were non-combatants. There were a considerable amount of combatants whose skills didn't reach the level of being acknowledged as warriors. Even if they were lowest-ranked warriors, just the fact that they were acknowledged as 'warriors' by the alliance was worth bragging about in this backcountry.

However, was Choi Hyuk's goal directed at a backcountry like this?

Choi Hyuk, who hoped of advancing to the center, couldn't help but constantly feel lacking as 'middle-ranked warriors' were considered normal, ordinary warriors over there.

'Isn't this the same as a captain being able to strut around as a company commander on the field but being no different from enlistees at the headquarters? Something like that, I guess.'

It was like Baek Seoin's comparison. Choi Hyuk was unsatisfied with earthlings and his current status.

"Anyways, so there's an increase of Kahur Kabkuns in the entire Laniakea region..."

The majority of the missions he took on recently were destroying Kahur Kabkuns. There were just that many. From what Commander Mack said, there was a clear increase from before. Choi Hyuk was heavily gaining her favor these days as he had been constantly finding and destroying Kahur Kabkuns day after day.

Also, the fact that Kahur Kabkuns were becoming more abundant meant that monster attacks in those concerned regions were becoming more severe.

"An opportunity to make a contribution is coming."

Earth, as well as the Berserkers, had yet to adjust to this great change. However, Choi Hyuk was still pleased by this change as new heroes would be born from the chaos.

Ring~

Behind Choi Hyuk, who was resolving himself once more, Naro played the guitar. Naro's eyes were gently closed, seemingly in thought, as it played its guitar in the background when it suddenly opened its eyes in surprise.

Ting!

The guitar strings snapped.

Naro quickly got up from its seat and spread its arms wide before shouting,

"Uh... Uhh. I finished scanning the entire Dragonic region just now. Besides the scan I did through the gates in the past, I really did scan the whole region, okay?"

Feeling something was odd, Choi Hyuk asked,

"But?"

"But I perceived Kahur Kabkuns on the opposite side of the planet. Although they look to be of a lower rank than middle-ranked Kahur Kabkuns... There are as many as 10... This... If we don't prepare properly, we might be swept away."

"..."

Was it what Choi Hyuk hoped for? Chaos was indeed approaching.

Chapter 110: Pre-Emptive Attack (1)

Zero asked,

“Should we kill him?”

Richard replied,

“Since he’s someone who frequents the red-light district… Handle it as though he got in a fight and died. As quickly as possible.”

‘As quickly as possible’, this meant to handle it within 3 days.

“Understood.”

Zero answered immediately and wrote, ‘Died in a fight, 2 Days,’ on the headshot on top of the table. Then he put the picture away in his pocket.

When his hand came out from his pocket, it was holding another headshot.

Richard momentarily became lost in thought as he looked at the new headshot on the table. The report he received from Zero beforehand crossed his mind.

Hans. He was a good man.

He was someone on the side of justice who couldn’t overlook injustice. There were many cases where the personalities of colonizers, who were experienced in fights, would severely crumble, but he wasn’t one of them. He organized a neighborhood-watch-like organization that surveilled and restrained colonizers who habitually assaulted and killed others.

Hans. He had a famous catchphrase in his territory.

“Screw off, bastards!”

When he shouted wholeheartedly and chased the colonizers causing a fuss by kicking them in the butt, the inexperienced or

non-combat-oriented colonizers would friendlily express their thanks with a “Boss Hans! Thanks for today as well!” after receiving his help. Richard looked favorably upon his actions and had met him in person a few times and helped him out.

He was a ‘person to keep alive’ then.

“But, it’s changed…”

Richard’s hand hurriedly tapped the table.

“Should we kill him?”

Zero asked once again when he saw Richard taking a while to think about it. It might look like he was urging Richard, but this sort of urging was also one of Zero’s duties.

‘There may be times when my heart grows soft and I might not be able to kill those who I need to, so urge me with the suggestion of killing them if you can.’

This was the order Richard gave him the first day he was appointed.

As he was someone who had resolved himself to this degree, he would reply soon once asked like this. Unaffected by emotion, he would coldly tell him to kill.

However, Richard’s thoughts this time dragged on.

“Take out all of today’s subjects.”

“Understood.”

Zero took headshots out from his pocket and spread them out. While examining each picture closely, Richard remained deep in thought.

“No matter how much I look at it, it’s a ridiculous list.”

Shaking his head, Richard ordered Zero once again,

“Take out all the remaining ones.”

“I’ll spread them here.”

Zero took out a bundle of pictures and spread them out on the table to the left of Richard. Looking at them, Richard pondered once again.

“This one is someone I need to keep alive, huh.”

Richard picked up a photo.

His name was Joseph.

He was currently walking around in the streets at night.

With a blank expression, as if he was someone with nowhere to go.

Then his gaze suddenly fixed on someone.

“Let’s have a drink!”

“I’m not in the mood.”

“Don’t be like that, let’s have one drink!”

As if he had just come back from a space mission, the youth, his entire body stained with blood and dust, pestered his colleague, who had the same appearance as him. Even though everyone else had faces of exhaustion and futility, the youth was especially bright. His smiling face gave off a friendly impression.

“You came back from that hell, but you don’t want to drink? Hey, hey, let’s have a drink. I’m telling you, even if it feels like hell right now, you’ll feel great if you sleep after having a drink.”

“You crazy… Why drink when you can’t get drunk due to karma? Unless you’re going to do drugs.”

“Ehh, you don’t drink to get drunk. You drink to act drunk.”

The other exhausted warriors simply grinned as they saw him smiling friendlily while he made misleading statements.

“Let’s go, let’s go, yeah? We have to live so well that those guys come back from the dead due to envy!”

Although his extreme yet hopelessly optimistic character could

make one feel uncomfortable, perhaps it was either because he had been like this for a while or because they knew his sincerity, but his colleagues, who had initially declined, gave in and followed him in the end. They all left with their arms around each other's shoulders.

Looking at them, Joseph revealed a strange smile. His face distorted, becoming impossible to distinguish whether he was angry or happy. He slowly followed after the youth and his colleagues.

Richard held his forehead.

"Just what is about to happen for things to be like this?"

The reason why Joseph caught the attention of Richard's intelligence organization, 'Der Schatten', was because he was a serial killer who had murdered hundreds of people. He was a lunatic who didn't care whether his victim was a beginner, moderately experienced, male, female, as he would sexually assault and torture them before killing them in a cruel manner. A criminal psychologist read emotions of 'malice', 'rage', and 'superiority' from the corpses of his victims.

German for The Shadow

His intelligence organization, 'Der Schatten', chased the clues and figured out he was the culprit behind the murders faster than anyone else. Then, like always, they would ask Richard for his verdict. The investigative agency had yet to identify the serial killer. 'Der Schatten' wasn't an official organization that maintained public order but Richard's secret organization. The fate of the real criminal no one knew entirely depended on Richard's words.

Richard had seen him with his own eyes and had notified Zero. An additional investigation was conducted and it was now time to make a decision.

Richard tightly closed his eyes before saying,

“… Keep him alive.”

“Understood.”

Zero’s hand paused momentarily before replying calmly and drawing a blue circle around Joseph’s head as if nothing happened.

Richard quickly added,

“Take protective measures.”

“Understood. Subject number 11. Protective measures.”

As soon as Zero spoke into a tiny intercom installed on his clothes, he received a reply.

“Copy.”

From that moment, ‘Der Schatten’ would follow Joseph and guard him at all times. Just in case he, who killed people habitually, might suffer a counterattack and run into danger.

Keeping his eyes closed, Richard gestured to the faces on top of the table to his left and said,

“Keep all of them over there alive.”

“Understood.”

Zero put the photos spread out on the table into his pocket once again. They had one similarity. They were all as wicked as Joseph and were similarly adept at fighting.

Richard opened his eyes and looked at the photos on the table in front of him. They were people he needed to kill.

There were a few he had his eye on already among them. They were those who stabbed people’s backs using the ‘order’ Richard set up as their shield. They hid among those who stood for justice, hiding their weaknesses while posing as the victim as they profited. They were a shameless bunch who didn’t follow the rules as they showed no mercy to their victims while they hoped to be

protected themselves, insisting on rules and mercy when questioned.

He had pushed killing them back, waiting for the right opportunity and method.

However, they weren't everyone. Many photos of those whom he had secretly protected and looked favorably upon were in the lineup along with them. They were truly righteous, good people.

They were all people who were classified as 'people to keep alive'. However, they were now 'people to kill'.

"Why?"

Richard racked his brains.

The 'Eyes of the Judge' Richard possessed clearly distinguished between those who he should kill and those who he should keep alive to achieve the goal he set, 'the survival and prosperity of humanity'. Although it was restrictive, it was an amazing ability linked to foreseeing the future.

Yet, there was a limit to this ability. The Eyes of the Judge did not see one's past contributions or sins. It also didn't show one's merits and flaws. It simply determined whether someone was currently beneficial or not to 'the survival and prosperity of humanity' in a clear-cut manner. That was why Richard was always in thought. With the 'present' as its reference point, the Eyes of the Judge would always judge the 'entire future', therefore, saving someone might be a loss when thinking 50 years into the future, but they could be beneficial for the next 10 years. This was why Richard didn't only rely on his 'Eyes of the Judge' to determine whether someone should die or be kept alive. He would collect intelligence and make his own decision. There were even cases where he left those classified as 'someone to kill' alive. At what time and with what method would killing them be the most beneficial? He would also carefully consider whether this would result in a political liability for him.

Currently, those who had been considered ‘people to keep alive’ just a while ago were now ‘people to kill’. The meaning behind this was clear. While keeping them alive had been beneficial to humanity until now, from this moment on, there would be a bigger loss than benefit by keeping them alive.

“Just why?”

Why did it determine that these righteous, good people weren’t helpful for humanity? Why was there such a sudden change? Why did it have to be them of all people when there were many righteous and good people besides them?

Deep in thought, Richard soon found a common trait among these people.

“… They are interested in the survival of beginner colonizers…”

They were heroes who wanted to protect the weak. They were existences who would protect the lives of the weak even if they themselves were to take a loss.

On the other hand, people who deserve death like Joseph were classified as ‘those to keep alive’. Their common trait was that, even if their personalities had broken down, their combat abilities shined.

In the end, Richard could only come to one conclusion.

“War.”

Muttering this, Richard suddenly raised his head.

“Zero. A war will break out soon. It might be a war involving not just us but humanity as a whole. It might have a similar impact as the advancement evaluation. Operate ‘Der Schatten’ at its maximum capacity. Try to make an excuse for the 7 overseers, 9 great sovereigns, and the 4 remaining sovereigns, as well as their key aides, to gather right now. It doesn’t matter if I have to make a state visit or not. Just set up a meeting somehow.”

“Understood!”

Zero, who had always acted in a calm manner, replied in a nervous voice.

The meaning behind setting up a meeting was that Richard had to ‘personally see’ them. He was talking about the most influential leaders in the world as well as their aides. Who were ‘people to kill’ and ‘people to keep alive’ among them, and what information had changed in this time? This order showed Richard’s will in wanting to be actively involved after judging that this information was the foundation of the fate humanity would face in the future.

There was no way he wouldn’t be nervous.

Richard, who had at some point stood up, glanced down at the photos of ‘those to kill’ on the table in front of him and said,

“There is no other choice. Since there’s no way we can tell how much time we have and what it will be… Deal with them all. Within a week.”

Then, without looking, he split the photos into two sections. One side was a group Richard had planned on killing beforehand, while the other was a group comprised of people Richard valued.

“Organize a clash between the two forces.”

“Understood.”

Zero replied and began to move quickly.

Richard added,

“However, don’t let the ones on this side die… If my prediction is right, then there’s no need to kill them. Only, make them unable to take part in politics for around a month. Whether you wound them, make them busy by dealing a blow to their organization, or kidnap them.”

“… Understood.”

The group Richard said not to kill was the one that worried about

the weak.

Done with his work, Richard planned on leaving the office and calling for Leah. However, an unfamiliar voice cut in.

“Amazing.”

Clang!

Zero unsheathed his sword. A man, whose presence was unknown until he spoke, stood against the wall.

Recognizing the man, Richard restrained Zero, who was prepared to attack.

“… Choi Hyuk?”

“Sorry I came by so suddenly. I came quietly to ask for advice, but I ended up becoming an eavesdropper.”

Richard shook his head at Choi Hyuk’s apology.

Richard had no way of knowing what methods Choi Hyuk used to infiltrate his office without a sound. However, he coolly accepted that he possessed the ability to do just that.

Above all, Richard wasn’t wary of Choi Hyuk. Instead, he believed that Choi Hyuk was the only sovereign he could show his true self to.

As they currently didn’t have time to waste, Richard cut to the chase and asked,

“Why are you here?”

Choi Hyuk simply replied,

“You’re right, there will be a war.”

Richard’s face stiffened.

Choi Hyuk requested Naro to display a holographic map of Dragonic. The hologram showed the area where all colonized lands earthlings inhabited were located and the Kahur Kabkuns on the other side.

“We discovered 10 Kahur Kabkuns. The monsters will enact a large-scale attack. As an incredible number of monsters will pour in simultaneously… The Berserkers won’t be able to cover for everyone no matter how hard they fight. Everyone will need to work together so I came to ask what we should do.”

Choi Hyuk explained calmly.

Richard’s mind raced.

The people to kill and the people to keep alive determined by his ‘Eyes of the Judge’, which was connected to the future, the prediction of the political landscape based on the intelligence ‘Der Schatten’ collected, as well as the news about the 10 Kahur Kabkuns. Once he put all this information together, he deduced the best strategy they should take currently.

Richard went straight to the point as he told him the strategy he had come up with.

“Pre-emptive attack. Rather than defending a strongpoint, we should first gather our elites and attack the Kahur Kabkuns.”

An offensive strategy that disregarded losses. Choi Hyuk’s lips curled slightly upwards.

“… You thought the same thing as me. But do you think it’s possible? The Berserkers aside, I don’t know if the other sovereigns and the smaller clans will accept it.”

Richard gave a short reply to Choi Hyuk’s question.

“Don’t worry. I’ll make it happen.”

Chapter 111: Pre-Emptive Attack (2)

Choi Hyuk reported the data collected by Naro to the Virgo Cluster.

Not long after the Virgo Cluster investigated themselves did Commander Mack personally contact him. She bowed so deeply that her blue hair tumbled down. She was expressing that she was sorry in the manner people on Earth, specifically in Korea, would.

{I am ashamed. I am sorry I didn't notice this sooner. The result of the investigation was that 3 more Kahur Kabkuns were detected besides the 10 you found. As the Kahur Kabkuns were well-hidden, it would have been difficult for you to detect.}

"... There are a lot."

{There are. Their levels aren't low either. Although you have destroyed quite a few middle-ranked Kahur Kabkuns before, they were all mostly underdeveloped ones. The ones detected this time are sturdy, having been completed a long time ago. There will probably be monsters that even you will have trouble dealing with.}

"Finished a long time ago? They've been there for a long time? They aren't newly created?"

{Yes, they aren't newly created. They were simply dormant and are now being reactivated. Like you know, Dragonic was a planet that had been captured by the monsters a long time ago. Although it was assigned as the earthlings' colonized land, strictly speaking, that place is still within the monsters' territory. The Kahur Kabkuns used when the monsters attacked have still remained intact.}

"But, from Naro's analysis, rather than being neglected for a long time, they looked to be active."

{It seems like they recently started becoming active again. Haa...

To be honest, Dragonic is located at the Virgo Cluster's frontier. The reason why it was allowed to be a colonized land for earthlings, who used to be deferred consumables, was because the higher-ups decided to expand the alliance's territory.}

According to Commander Mack, Dragonic was a planet whose location made it look like it had seemingly been stabbed into the monsters' territory. Earthlings, who used Dragonic as their colonized land, had unknowingly been treated as special 'airborne' troops as part of a 'landing operation'.

{Because it's so dangerous, we conducted a large-scale cleanup of the dimensional wasps' nests, which serve as information relay stations for the monsters, in the entire region. Also, we repeatedly launched waves of attacks in that region. It was an attempt to conceal the fact that earthlings had arrived on Dragonic... However, it seems that a flaw in our containment opened while we were dealing with the Kahur Kabkuns, that have been increasing drastically recently. The monsters found out that Dragonic contains the colonized lands of karmalings. As a result, earthlings have fallen into danger. I am sorry.}

Mack bowed her head deeply once more.

Yet, Choi Hyuk was calm. Although he had never thought that there would be 10 Kahur Kabkuns, he had already guessed that the reasoning behind the alliance assigning them Dragonic as their colonized land wasn't all good. Knowing that the monsters resided in a different dimension, it seemed that they thought they could secretly nibble away at the monsters' territory and regain Dragonic, but they already had an 'if it fails, it fails' attitude from the start. Since only earthlings, who were deferred consumables at the time, would suffer even if they failed, they didn't have a guilty conscience about failing. Among the facts learned by analyzing information about the alliance with Naro, there were a few bits of information that let him guess these circumstances. He wasn't surprised.

People without strength would suffer anyways. Because of this, receiving an apology wasn't what was important.

Choi Hyuk asked,

"Well, instead of an apology... Will you provide support?"

Mack's eyes looked up sharply. Her blue pupils didn't waver in the slightest.

{Of course, we will! Since the base of the earthlings, who are members of the alliance, has fallen into danger, of course, we will. Bilu and Tangka. I'll send those two warrior leaders.}

Bilu, a 1023-quasarling, was one of the aliens who brawled with the overseers when they first arrived at Dark City.

Commander Mack's blue hair swayed as she assured,

{It'll be tough, but it's not to the point of despair. I'll make you win. Earthlings will become stronger through this fight.}

"What welcome words."

Choi Hyuk grinned like an upright warrior of the alliance.

Commander Mack acted quickly.

She sent an order to the 7 overseers...

{13 Kahur Kabkuns have been detected. From this point onwards, all earthlings' space missions will halt. You will quickly eliminate the enemies that have appeared in Dragonic first. Bilu and Tangka, warrior leaders of the Virgo Cluster, have been dispatched. Earth's overseers will be in command of the dispatched warrior leaders and have the authority to plan the strategy. You will decide on a commander-in-chief and notify the dispatched warrior leaders.}

The overseers, excluding Choi Hyuk and Richard, simply became disoriented at the sudden announcement.

'What? There are 13 Kahur Kabkuns?'

An emergency meeting was set up.

**

The day before the emergency meeting.

Richard, wearing his ‘work clothes’, observed the ‘hunt’.

The hunting method was simple. The secretly deployed ‘Der Schatten’ gathered as many strong monsters as they could and passed them over to the ‘prey’.

Once they were surrounded by monsters beyond their level, 9 out of 10 ‘prey’ would die. It would be futile no matter how much they struggled.

Penelope’s troop, which was conducting a monster cleanup mission, didn’t notice anything different at first. They had initially thought monsters, that were stronger than the ones usually seen here, had appeared, but at some point, they were completely surrounded. They not only lacked the numerical advantage but also faced difficulty in terms of individual capabilities as well. The newly appeared monsters possessed enormous heads that made up half their body. They swung their enormous heads with their thin, elastic bodies, similar to that of bamboo, to attack, and even if their attacks glanced off members of Penelope’s troop, the attacks possessed such an incredible force that they made their ribs ache.

Penelope was the one Choi Hyuk met in the first advancement evaluation with the dimensional wasps.

Kwaoo! Kwaoo!

Whenever the sounds of their heads smashing down resounded in the wind—

Break! Crack!

Terrifying sounds of bones breaking and denting could be heard everywhere. Human bodies became broken and smashed, leaving their remains littered on the ground like popped water balloons.

Penelope’s troop quickly realized the situation they were in.

Above all, they became disheartened. ‘Ahh, so this is where I die.’

They burned the last of their loyalty to save Penelope.

“Troop leader! You need to escape!”

However, Penelope pushed past her subordinates, who gathered to protect her, and came forward instead.

“No! Everyone can live. We can break through! Holy Light Scatter!”

Possessing wavy hair and large eyes, Penelope showed no sign of being taken aback even though she was surrounded by strong monsters in an unexpected place.

When Penelope, Camilla’s sworn sister, shouted while rushing forward, a bright light appeared around her. Bathed in this light, her subordinates’ wounds slowly stanched, and their fear-stricken hearts calmly regained their cool.

Bang! Slice!

That wasn’t all. Whenever she swung her sword, which was immersed in light, the monsters, that had overwhelmed the warriors with their powerful strength, were shattered and sliced. The monsters’ incredibly solid-looking, enormous heads were split like watermelons.

Although she always looked gentle, she was incredibly resolute whenever she wielded her sword.

Penelope showed off her powerful strength while healing others. Following behind her, her troop members recovered their hope and courage.

“Wow! We can break through!”

However, there was someone else who had a headache because of this.

“They really are about to break through.”

Richard, who ordered ‘Der Schatten’ to push Penelope into a corner, clicked his tongue.

“Well, I personally came here in case this happened.”

It had been a long time since he had personally taken action on the field. He had come in case something happened as it was difficult to restrain a bigshot like Penelope with decent skill, and as expected, he personally had to act.

Whoosh!

Richard, who had been observing Penelope from afar, disappeared from his spot with a whoosh. Richard’s Speed had already increased from when he had just reached the 5-star level, reaching 100 Speed at the 5-star level. If he was determined to act, there weren’t many existences that could perceive his movements.

This was the same for monsters. He passed between monsters like the wind while he stealthily oscillated his karma.

‘Shockwave.’

Baaang!

His karma, which was oscillating so subtly it was difficult to notice, flew towards Penelope.

Just then, as if she felt something, Penelope narrowed her eyes as she glanced at the place Richard was a moment ago.

“Who is it?!”

Of course, this was after Richard had left that spot.

Penelope frowned.

“Who was it?”

If Richard had slipped up, he might have been caught by Penelope.

‘Huh… Did she sense something?’

Richard calmed his astonished heart. What he was most cautious

of, even more than failing the mission, was getting caught.

Something had appeared and disappeared abruptly. Unable to confirm its identity, Penelope tilted her head.

“What was that just now?”

However, she couldn’t think about it for long.

This was because an enormous head attempted to headbutt her.

“Hmmp!”

Like she had until now, she wielded her sword to split its head. However, at that moment, something stealthily penetrated her defenses.

“… Kyak?!”

Booom!

That was the small pulse Richard shot. As soon as the pulse, that had been oscillating as subtly as the tremors of a flower, reach her shoulder, it suddenly burst, emitting a shockwave. The shockwave swept Penelope up as it exploded splendidly.

“Kuak…”

It was an unexpected attack. On top of that, it was an attack by Richard, who was one and a half levels stronger than Penelope. Penelope’s body faltered at the impact of the shockwave and momentarily fell into a state of exhaustion.

Using that opportunity, the monster’s enormous head smashed into Penelope. Since its timing was superb, to others, Richard’s sudden attack looked like the monster’s special skill.

Boom!

Penelope flew, smashing to the ground like a broken kite.

“Troop leader!”

Penelope’s subordinates hurriedly carried the fainted Penelope.

“We need to save the troop leader!”

Disregarding their lives, they rushed in like demons and ripped through the monsters’ encirclement. Fortunately, since Penelope had almost completely collapsed the encirclement, they could successfully escape with Penelope on their shoulders.

“It’s a success.”

Richard nodded as he saw the warriors fleeing as they carried the fainted Penelope.

**

The Ethiopian Sovereign Johan proposed,

“13 Kahur Kabkuns will be difficult to deal with. However, aren’t Bilu and Tangka on their way here, leading support troops from the Virgo Cluster? With them, I believe we have sufficient room for comfort. Let’s proceed with standard tactics. Let’s set up sturdy defenses and operate a detached force to take down the Kahur Kabkuns one at a time.”

The Queen of England Diana expressed her agreement.

“I agree.”

The 9 great sovereigns, who wielded Overseer Nasir’s authority, expressed their agreement as well.

“We agree.”

Sovereign Jessie actually went a step further and began to talk about what roles people would take.

“I think it’s best we pick two people as commanders. The defensive commander will be Overseer Camilla, and the commander of the detached force will be Overseer Choi Hyuk.”

It seemed he didn’t think anyone would object.

Well, this was his perspective. There weren’t simply a couple or a few Kahur Kabkuns but 13 of them. They didn’t have the firepower

to take them all down at once. However, there was no way the other Kahur Kabkuns would stand by once they began to attack a couple of them. There was no doubt monsters would come pouring out once they attacked. That meant someone would have to defend against the outpour of monsters. They had to protect the countless number of non-combat-oriented colonizers and beginner colonizers as well as their assets, such as the buildings, in Dragonic.

That was why having a small elite troop destroy the Kahur Kabkuns while the rest firmly maintained their defense could be considered the best strategy.

However, just because it could be considered the best didn't mean it didn't have any flaws.

"However, won't that take too much time?"

Choi Hyuk immediately pointed out a flaw.

To destroy the Kahur Kabkuns one by one as the rest defended. Although it was a safe and sure-fire method, it was also the method that would take the longest time.

"Even if it looks slow right now, making sure each one is destroyed will be the quickest method in the end."

The Queen of England Diana refuted. She raised her long lashes as she tried to get Richard's attention. It was a signal asking him to stop the hot-blooded Choi Hyuk.

Unfortunately, he betrayed her expectations. He instead took Choi Hyuk's side.

"A sure-fire way, huh?... That might be the case if we were the only ones in the war. However, this war is a massive war between the alliance and the monsters. We don't know what will happen. While the warrior leaders, Tangka and Bilu, may fight along our side right now, during a war, we have no guarantee they will continue to do so. My thoughts are that it is best to destroy the

Kahur Kabkuns as quickly as possible even if sacrifices are made.”

Breaking everyone’s expectations, Richard took Choi Hyuk’s side.

Richard resolutely thought,

‘No matter what sacrifices we make, it’s best to destroy the Kahur Kabkuns even a second faster. We need to disregard defending and attack. Defending won’t work. If a strategy centered on defense rather than attack was going to work, then there was no way those heroes who were considerate of the weak would have been classified as ‘people to kill’.’

Richard’s decisions always contained careful calculations like this. Although they couldn’t confirm the reasoning behind his decisions at the moment, once time passed, they would realize that his decisions were correct. That was why Richard’s words always carried weight.

‘Even if I consider Choi Hyuk is acting like that because he’s a battle lunatic… Richard wants to go on the attack as well? If Richard thinks so, then there’s definitely a reason behind it…’

Sovereign Jessie, who proposed a defensive strategy, and the 9 great sovereigns all took a step back as they thought over the situation once more.

‘Richards wants to go on the attack? Euu… There’s definitely a reason behind it if Richard says it. However, that still means a significant number of people defending will reduce. If we attacked two or three Kahur Kabkuns at a time, with what people will we defend against the outpour of monsters from the other 10 Kahur Kabkuns? Is he saying he doesn’t care if the beginner colonizers live or die?… I have to stop this.’

Although the Queen of England Diana was influenced by Richard’s words, she was still stubborn on her decision. She was well into the process of creating schools that specialized in systematically teaching colonizers in Dragonic. In her mind, those

schools were the future of humanity. She couldn't let the future be destroyed.

She dragged Camilla into the conversation.

"To go more on the offense... There will be too many unnecessary sacrifices considering how uncertain its effects will be. Isn't that right, Ms. Camilla?"

As she called upon Camilla, Diana believed she would bring supporting arguments. However, for some reason, Camilla was silent.

"Ms. Camilla?"

Diana asked again.

Yet, Camilla was silent, still lost in thought. Instead, Richard injected,

"Ms. Camilla. You should know better than anyone else. The monsters' movements these days are unusual. Compared to when we first started colonizing, their numbers have multiplied and, above all, they are getting stronger. The more time we take, the stronger the monsters will get."

At Richard's words, Camilla tightly closed her eyes.

Normally, no matter how plausible Richard's words seemed, there was a likely chance she would support the defensive strategy in the end as Camilla was a person who believed protecting the weak and the innocent was right. However, the circumstances had now changed. Penelope, who was like a sister to her, had fallen into a coma after suffering the monsters' surprise attack. The healers said that she would brush it off and get up soon, but the shock was still there. The sadness she felt because Penelope was injured as well as the surprise and bafflement that came from the fact Penelope, one of the top experts within the Camilla Clan, had fallen into a coma due to the monsters near her colonized land kept alternating within her mind.

‘Something changed. It’s dangerous. It’s dangerous to leave the monsters alone.’

This realization crept into her heart by itself.

Because of it, Camilla had no choice but to nod, agreeing with Richard, in the end.

“I believe you have a point. The monsters’ growth rate is certainly too dangerous to leave things as they are. I too believe that attacking rather than defending is the best method.”

However, Camilla added a condition.

“Only, there will be a lot of people who will suffer losses with this decision. There needs to be a countermeasure set in place.”

At her words, Sovereign Yohan, who had been watching the situation unfold, added,

“You’re right. If we reduce the number of people defending and plan a large-scale attack, casualties are bound to increase and there will be many people dissatisfied with this. There will be people who possess forces or popularity that we can’t simply ignore amongst them. If we do not placate them properly, our strength may wane due to internal conflicts.”

Richard nodded heavily at their concerns as he said,

“Understood. I’ll try to persuade them.”

That was how the general direction was determined in the meeting that day. As they planned a strategy focused on attack, they would have to solidify a system of cooperation between the minor clans. Everyone thought this would be the most difficult process. There was no doubt the beginner colonizers would oppose it, fearing for their lives, and the forces of justice that protected them would rush forward in a frenzy to defend them. Also, if they didn’t placate those forces of justice well, they would have to owe them a favor, or else they, as well as those of good relations with them, would protest.

But what was this?

When it was actually brought up, there wasn't a big opposition. They thought this would be a sensitive issue, but people were strangely quiet after they announced it. The number of those unhappy about it wasn't small, but they couldn't form a united force and would sporadically express their dissatisfaction before dying down.

Within this indecisive, strange silence, the 'pre-emptive attack on the Kahur Kabkuns', focusing on offense rather than defense, was decided and announced.

Chapter 112: Pre-Emptive Attack (3)

When he opened the door, it was Flame-Rain. She looked tired. As soon as their eyes met, she suddenly entered the room and leaned her head against him. Her hair smelled like incense and campfire ash.

“It’s been a while.”

She said with her head against his chest.

Choi Hyuk motionlessly looked down at her. He hesitated before slowly placing his hand on her shoulder and patting her twice. Flame-Rain giggled as if she found this funny.

“Hiya. I feel a little better now. How have you been? I heard you went through a lot during this time. It looks like a broadcast of you might even air at the center.”

Flame-Rain took a step back and raised her head up.

Choi Hyuk carefully examined her face.

The ends of her red hair had turned white, and her lips seemed to have lost a bit of their luster. Her cheeks were smeared with black blood that she had failed to wipe off.

Choi Hyuk asked,

“Did you come here after fighting?”

“Yeah~ I came after I fought.”

She replied dryly as she stretched her arms before flopping onto the sofa.

“I want a drink from Earth. Anything cold is fine.”

Even before she began talking, Choi Hyuk had already poured her a cup of soda. Then before she finished talking, he placed the cup in her hand. He was unexpectedly gentle.

“Oh? You provide good service.”

Her eyes widened. It seemed even Choi Hyuk was surprised as he blankly stared down at his hand.

He had missed this somehow.

He had always done this whenever he saw his mother come home from work exhausted. He had always poured her a cup of soda and placed it in her hand when she flopped down. Then his mother would place the cold cup of soda against her cheek before taking two sips. Finally, she would empty the cup and stand back up, livelier than before.

He missed this. He had completely forgotten it in his mind, but it seemed his body remembered.

'But why did this habit show up for Flame-Rain?'

Choi Hyuk fruitlessly closed and opened his fist as he erased the awkwardness.

"Kiyah!"

Looking at him acting like that, Flame-Rain happily emptied the cup of soda as she shot back up while letting out a refreshing sound.

"This is good. It tastes better than what I drank on Earth last time."

"That's probably true."

Although this was obvious, the famous soda brands of the past had long since disappeared. The soda Flame-Rain had just drunk was 'Dragonic Cola', a soda made by non-combat-oriented colonizers in Jessie's colonized land using ingredients from Dragonic.

Its taste was amazing. If the sodas of the past were akin to a drizzle, then Dragonic Cola was similar to a squall raining down like a waterfall. It was a soda that invigorated colonizers whose nerves had worn out due to frequent battles. The carbonation

produced by the special ingredients on Dragonic was so invigorating that not only did one feel it in their noses but also in their ears and throat. People who drank Dragonic Cola for the first time said it was like their whole body was drenched in rain. Some even went further and said it felt like rain was falling inside their bodies as well.

Blaze, blaze.

It seemed she really had become a little invigorated as flames began to sprout from Flare-Rain's hair like normal. The white tips of her hair were covered by the flames and were no longer visible. Even the black blood smeared on her cheeks burnt up and disappeared.

"Thanks. Although it was short, it was nice meeting you. Let's see each other again. Safe and sound."

"Are you going to fight again?"

"Yeah. Although it's probably the same for you guys, the monsters started to suddenly launch an extensive attack recently, so the entire alliance is in a mess. There are a lot of losses too... Because of it, I have no time to rest... They say it was like this before 'demise'-ranked monsters crossed over, so everyone's nervous."

As she said this, Flame-Rain bit her lips. Then, as if nothing happened, she smiled cheerfully and said,

"Nuna made you a good sword so you can't go around getting bullied, okay? You have to do well."

"..."

Her attitude, which was similar to how someone would treat a kid, made Choi Hyuk show a dumbfounded expression, at a loss for words.

"Kekeuk."

While joyfully appreciating his expression, she jumped up, turning into flames and disappearing.

"..."

Choi Hyuk wordlessly stared at the air where she had disappeared. He had only realized today that even she could become exhausted. If Flame-Rain, whose power he couldn't even guess, was at the point where she couldn't hide her exhaustion... Just how serious was the war?

Thump.

His heart thumped.

'The warriors and monsters there... Will I be able to beat them?'

He wanted to fight them as soon as possible. He wanted to get stronger.

Gulp. Gulp.

After emptying a bottle of Dragonic Cola, Choi Hyuk went outside.

**

The attack troops were split into three divisions.

Without using up all the troops, the highest number of Kahur Kabkuns they could take was three.

Bilu and Tangke, both experienced middle-ranked warriors, each led one, and Choi Hyuk led the third division. Richard stayed behind and acted as the guardian of those who remained.

"Euu... Even though Richard is staying behind, there are too many cities left without defenses. Two or three cities will probably turn to ash? Do we really have to do this?"

Although the Queen of England Diana was dissatisfied until the end, she didn't end her cooperation.

"Since we are able to take down the Kahur Kabkuns that much

faster, if things go well, didn't they say that this method could instead reduce casualties?"

The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla mumbled as she comforted Diana, who had come out to the battlefield.

"You never know…"

Although she wasn't able to hide her unease in the end, she still showed her determination.

It was a march to war so massive that it was unprecedented in humanity's history. It wasn't this big even when they faced the doppelgangers after the advancement evaluation. All colonizers who were decent enough fighters were assigned to the attack troops, and all colonizers besides them were appointed to the defensive troops. In reality, almost all earthlings were mobilized for this war.

Due to geographical conditions, they all couldn't gather in a single location, but they used the communication network to advance at the same time.

{We enter as soon as we teleport!}

As he possessed the most experience in dealing with Kahur Kabkuns, Tangka of the Armored Soul Tribe gave orders outlining what they would do.

{When we begin teleporting, the monsters around us will crowd towards us. However, refrain from fighting the best you can and prioritize on entering! Mark my words. The mission this time isn't annihilating monsters but destroying Kahur Kabkuns. Destroying them comes first. During this time, while our enemies have yet to fully prepare, we need to destroy as many Kahur Kabkuns as we can. Each division's aim is to destroy two Kahur Kabkuns by tomorrow. If we complete this initiative, then even if the monsters start pouring out, we will be able to take them down more easily!}

If each division were to destroy two Kahur Kabkuns by the next

day, that meant a total of 6 Kahur Kabkuns would be destroyed. This could be considered their break-even point. If they were successful in this endeavor, they estimated that they would suffer fewer losses than if they were to have gone with a defensive tactic.

Because of this, Earth's full might was focused into these three divisions.

Although Bilu and Tangka had a lot of excellent warriors from the alliance in their divisions, as their numbers were insufficient, experts of each clan were assigned to fill the numbers, and the rest were all a part of the attack troops under Choi Hyuk's command. The remaining people were placed under Richard's command as basic defensive troops.

As each person gathered at their post, their bodies trembled nervously, waiting for Tangka's declaration of war. What amazing fight would unfold?

{Then, off to war!}

Tangka declared. At the same time, the military gate system began to operate.

Whish!

The scene in front of them changed.

Wheeeee!

They heard the wind brush past their ears.

The Kahur Kabkun spread out below them was like an enormous lake. Black waves rippled on its surface. Flying monsters became surprised at the suddenly appearing humans, and shrieked.

Although there were monsters that ruffled their wings as they attacked the humans, the overwhelming majority of them turned into tatters and fell once faced with the humans' counterattack.

As he fell freely towards the Kahur Kabkun, which rippled like a black lake, Warrior Leader Tangka warned the executives of Earth

who accompanied him once more,

“Stay alert. They are completed Kahur Kabkuns. They are incomparable in both quantity and quality to the Kahur Kabkuns earthlings have faced until now.”

While thumping his metallic chest, Tangka openly stated the dangers of the Kahur Kabkuns.

“Understood.”

Kim Honghyun, who was falling next to him, replied without a trace of tension. Then his twin brother, Kim Saehyun, poked his side and said in a serious manner in his place,

“We will keep that in mind.”

Clang! Clang!

After glancing at the two, Tangka didn’t reply and smashed his fists together. As if that sound was a signal, the alien troops Tangka led unsheathed their weapons simultaneously. A taught tension hung in the air.

Chu Youngjin’s troop, which Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun led, followed them and unsheathed their weapons as well. It was the same for the troops next to them, which were dispatched by other overseers. They were right in front of the rippling surface of the Kahur Kabkun.

“Sniper unit, prepare to fire!”

Snap!

Amongst the members of Tangka’s free-falling division, there were also warriors of the El Tribe. They followed Great Warrior Lantz’s order and charged their karma rifles. The karma rifles they were armed with were traditional weapons of the El Tribe. They were made with the inverted tree, yet they shined like metal.

As if they looked cool loading their rifles, the Berserkers, who were also armed with the El Tribe’s weapons, took out and charged

their rifles.

The people falling ahead of the others began to enter the Kahur Kabkun.

Great Warrior Lantz glared fiercely as he shouted,

“Let’s go! The future of our race rests on your shoulders!”

“Woaaah!”

The spirits of the El Tribe’s warriors surged. It was to the point where even the Berserkers were surprised by their vigor.

“Let’s clearly show those aliens just what sort of existences we are!”

“Waaaah!”

Accompanied by cheers, the El Tribe members were sucked into the Kahur Kabkun.

Rumble!

The Berserkers, who entered the Kahur Kabkun a step earlier than the El Tribe, slashed their swords down like lightning as soon as they entered. As expected of Chu Youngjin’s troop, thunderous rumbles boomed. This was the fighting method of Chu Youngjin’s troop, which possess definite power in return for quickly expending their stamina.

At the very front were Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun.

“Let’s go!”

The Kahur Kabkun itself was no different from an enormous monster. Hill-sized blood vessels pulsed on the ground, and when the vessels were cut, monsters poured out.

Bang, bang, bang!

As soon as the blood vessels burst along with their noisy entrance, monsters jumped out from them.

Kim Honghyun trusted his tough body and rushed into the crowd

of monsters.

“Keuhaha! Is that all?”

Kim Honghyun trampled on the monsters. Kim Saehyun targeted monsters that showed openings due to his brother’s charge and killed them with a single strike. Chu Youngjin’s troop followed behind them and ripped the collapsed ranks of monsters apart with their powerful strength.

“Vice-directors, you’re quite good?”

Chu Youngjin’s troop members shouted cheekily at Kim Honghyun and Kim Saeyoung.

“Just don’t fall behind!”

Kim Honghyun replied with great force.

The battle that decided Chu Youngjin’s successor ended with Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun’s victory. However, as people said they couldn’t completely replace Chu Youngjin, Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun came up with the title ‘vice-director’ for themselves.

That was how Chu Youngjin’s troop was currently under the command of two vice-directors, Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun. To them, this war could be considered their debut, verifying their qualifications as top executives of the Berserkers.

“Wahaha! As expected of Chu Youngjin’s troop, you guys fight refreshingly!”

Bang!

Tangka seemed to in a good mood as he swung his metallic arm and turned the monster in front of him into meat paste with one strike. As expected of an alien possessing a large, powerful metallic body, he enjoyed heated battles.

Psssssht!

Steam rose from his body like a cloud.

Bang!

Every time steam rose from his body, Tangka progressed forward more quickly and smashed monsters to death. The more spirited he became, the more steam escaped his body.

The steam became thicker.

Pit, pit, pit!

A few bullets pierced through Tangka's white steam as they shot through the air.

Slam!

The bullets were with such incredible force that, as the monsters collapsed onto the floor, the heads of the monsters they hit were crushed as though they were punched by a massive fist.

"Sniper unit, fire at will! Task unit, charge forward with me!"

The Great Warrior of the El Tribe Lantz took out his sword and rushed forward like the wind. The El Tribe warriors behind him gave a long whistle and followed behind him.

Tangka, who had been about to smash the monster in front of him to death, discovered the El Tribe sniper who had snatched his prey. Tangka smacked his chest once.

"Ohh... That guy's pretty good."

Warrior Leader Tangka liked the warlike El Tribe that possessed outstanding combat abilities. This was the moment the El Tribe, who had been living in isolation, debuted in front of the alliance members and aliens for the first time.

A large-scale war was a crisis but also an opportunity. Everyone had their own circumstances, but the warriors who were out fighting fought with all they had.

The beginning of the battle was progressing very smoothly.

Chapter 113: Pre-Emptive Attack (4)

Choi Hyuk sparred with Tangka the day before they went to war.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk's fist dented Tangka's metallic side.

Pushhiiii!

Steam escaped from Tangka's entire body as though he was angry. His battered side creaked as it returned to its normal state.

Whoosh!

In a flash, Tangka's fist touched Choi Hyuk's head, however, Choi Hyuk's waist swayed, dodging Tangka's fist like a ghost.

Woong, woong, woong!

Tangka's shoulder and Choi Hyuk's upper body were like hazes. They were moving so fast that their movements blurred. Tangka attacked and Choi Hyuk narrowly dodged. In the end, none of Tangka's attacks landed on Choi Hyuk.

Instead, it was Choi Hyuk who stepped forward, aiming for a moment's opportunity. He wrapped his hands around Tangka's left wrist, extending his arm, before pushing Tangka's elbow upwards with his shoulder.

Crunch!

"Grrk!"

Tangka's left arm bent backwards. Tangka let out a groan. However, his vigor didn't lessen in the slightest. Tangka's entire body rippled with a metallic karma light. Tangka's body rotated strangely as it approached Choi Hyuk like a magnet.

Baang!

"Keuk!"

A groan escaped from Choi Hyuk's lips as he barely managed to

raise his arms to block the blow. Tangka's attack this time was one that pierced directly at Choi Hyuk's weakness. It was an unexpected move that completely ignored the rhythm of the battle. It was a swift, unconditional assault, similar to how the north pole of a magnet would shoot towards the south pole of another. It possessed a persistence that felt as though you were caught in an invisible magnetic field as it would traverse the shortest distance towards you even if you attempted to dodge.

Rather than an attack, it was inhuman, like some sort of 'phenomenon', which was why Choi Hyuk couldn't dodge it.

Although he had narrowly raised his arms to block the attack, his arms, which were reinforced with karma, had broken.

"Heh! I've finally caught you!"

Tangka's vigor rose. Tangka possessed considerably superior stats compared to Choi Hyuk, yet he was the one who had been beaten up instead of Choi Hyuk. He had become annoyed by Choi Hyuk, who avoided his attacks like a slippery eel.

Tangka decided to end this properly as he had victory in his grasps.

"Now take this!"

He reached out and grabbed Choi Hyuk's collar with both hands.

Although all the wounds Choi Hyuk had inflicted on him had already healed, Choi Hyuk's arms were still broken. As his collar had been grabbed on top of that... It seemed like the spar would end with this.

Goong!

"... Huh?"

However, instead of his victory, Tangka saw a white light.

Choi Hyuk's right foot, reinforced with his blue karma, had shot up and driven itself into Tangka's lower jaw.

Thud!

Tangka powerlessly fell to his knees before slumping onto the ground.

“Hoooo…”

Stepping back on the ground, Choi Hyuk momentarily faltered. He had launched a front kick at the last moment by greatly exceeding his Stamina. He was obviously drained of karma, and his right foot had sustained heavy damages.

“Uhh… Damn it, what was that?”

Having fainted for a moment, Tangka flailed on the ground, attempting to get up from the ground. Choi Hyuk, who had been staggering, sat on the back of his head.

“What do you mean what? You lost.”

“What? I lost?”

Tangka, who had been attempting to stand back up, flopped down after hearing those words. Even though Choi Hyuk was sitting on the back of his head, he didn’t look like he cared.

“Impossible. For me to lose when you didn’t even use your Weapon of Vow…”

Tangka looked dejected as though he had lost his nation.

“See. I told you that you would end up the same as me.”

A black, transparent face and a body wrapped in a black fabric. Warrior Leader Bilu of the Dark Tribe snickered, enjoying Tangka’s current state. He had sparred with Choi Hyuk before and had lost. With an irked expression, he said to Choi Hyuk,

“You weren’t even a match for us back during the welcoming party… You’re getting stronger at a terrifying speed.”

They both knew how strong Choi Hyuk was when armed with his Weapon of Vow. However, they had lost when sparring with him

in hand-to-hand combat without the use of weapons. This was ridiculous. Bilu and Tangka were already well into the late stages of the 5-star level, and Choi Hyuk was a warrior who had just reached the early stages of their level. The stat difference between them was enough that Tangka and Bilu could normally take on two or three warriors of Choi Hyuk's level.

However, since they had actually fainted in a one-on-one against Choi Hyuk, the shock they felt couldn't help but be huge.

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn't seem to be very satisfied.

"No. If this was a real fight where we actually risked our lives, I would have lost. Even though I can briefly knock you out, I don't have any techniques that can take you out in a single strike. On the other hand, each and every one of your attacks is dangerous to me."

But at Choi Hyuk's words, Tangka and Bilu looked like they had eaten a bug.

"What are you talking about? If we were fighting with our lives on the line, you would have unsheathed your Weapon of Vow."

"... Are you saying you would have fought against us barehanded even if we put our lives on the line? Ey, act in moderation..."

Choi Hyuk simply shrugged at their icy reactions as, no matter what they said, he personally felt he was very lacking. Only that was important.

As he grabbed Tangka's hand and pulled him up, Choi Hyuk asked,

"What do you have to do to become a high-ranked warrior? Do you know anything?"

"You're already aiming to be a high-ranked warrior?"

Bilu cut in with an irked expression. Choi Hyuk glanced at him while saying,

“I don’t know… I heard that you can’t become a high-ranked warrior simply by raising your stats. Isn’t it good to prepare ahead?”

“That’s true…”

Bilu and Tangka exchanged glances. Then they clenched their teeth.

Bilu‘s voice oozed with depression.

“We have no clue even after 50 years… If we knew how to become high-ranked warriors, do you think we would still be middle-ranked?”

“Ah… I guess that makes sense? After this war ends, I should ask Commander Mack for advice.”

Choi Hyuk quickly lost his excitement. His appearance scratched at Bilu and Tangka’s pride.

“Euack! Damn it! I will definitely become a high-ranked warrior before you!”

“Damn it…”

The alliance’s warrior training system could only support one until the 5-star level, becoming middle-ranked warriors.

The 6-star level. One could no longer receive assistance from the system to reach the 6-star stage, and one couldn’t make up the difference with stats. It was impossible for someone to distribute their free karma points to reach the 6-star level.

Only warriors who obtained a special enlightenment and developed their own personal karma (fate) could advance and become top-ranked warriors.

Because of this, there was a countless number of those like Bilu and Tangka, whose important stats had reached 599 (5★) and who ceaselessly aimed for and repeatedly attempted to become high-ranked warriors.

<Choi Hyuk>

Power: 365 (+213) (4★) Speed: 371 (+201) (4★) Control: 317 (5★)

Endurance: 100 (3★) Stamina: 51 (4★) Recovery: 371 (3★)

Retribution: 251 (5★)

Choi Hyuk's current distribution of stats wasn't well-balanced.

Considering his close-combat fighting style, his Endurance and Recovery were critically low. There were a lot of problems with his Stamina as well. One would think he was a ranged fighter when looking at his stats.

Even still, Choi Hyuk prioritized increasing his Control. When compared to the stats he possessed when he had fought against Richard back in Nasari, his Stamina had increased by 51 points, Retribution by 251, and finally, his Control by 309. His other stats were the same.

If you took into account the fact that his Retribution had increased by 200 points when he created his Weapon of Vow, he had, in fact, invested three-fourths of his points into his Control.

Although he was hanging on due to his outstanding Control stat and fighting senses, he couldn't continue to let his glass cannon body and low Stamina be detrimental factors.

Still, rather than balancing his stats, Choi Hyuk emphasized advancing to the 6-star level. He planned on increasing his Control and Retribution to 599 (5★) through this war and face the wall of the 6-star level.

**

Because Choi Hyuk had resolved himself like this, those assigned to Choi Hyuk's troops were experiencing a battle more difficult than ever.

“Wait! Wait! If we go at this speed, the rear lines won’t be able to catch up! Overseer Choi Hyuk!!!”

The Queen of England Diana shouted. However, Choi Hyuk, who was pushing his way through, didn’t slow down at all.

“Damn it… It’s no use. We have no choice but to match that guy’s pace!”

Sovereign Jessie clenched his teeth and shot forward. He dropkicked a jaksam that had been trying to force its way through.

“Kuaaah!”

The jaksam collapsed to the side with a scream. This was a monster among monsters, possessing such a strong vitality that it could even endure the attacks of a middle-ranked warrior as long as it didn’t exhaust its energy with three attacks. Because of this, Sovereign Jessie didn’t kill it and simply made it fall before passing by. He left it to those behind him.

“Exhaust it!”

By the time Sovereign Jessie shouted, Lee Jinhee was already rushing towards the collapsed jaksam. The jaksam, that had raised its knee and was about to get back up, launched an attack towards Lee Jinhee, who was running around in front of it like a fly. Its veranda-sized palm shined with light. She had no way to dodge it in mid-air where there was nowhere to step.

Tap.

However, Lee Jinhee stepped on the air and flipped her body, leisurely dodging its attack. After dodging one attack, she followed after Choi Hyuk who was way ahead of her. That was how the jaksam used up one of its attacks.

Its second attack was launched towards the Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan. He deflected the jaksam’s attack that was swinging down towards him with his enormous staff.

Baang!

The jaksam's palm ineffectively thudded on the floor.

With this, the jaksam had used up a considerable amount of its power. Normally, they would have to endure three of its attacks to completely take down its defenses, but this was enough.

"Divine Punishment."

Boooom!!

Camilla dropped from the sky like a meteor. Her iron mace split the jaksam's head. It took around 10 seconds since it appeared to kill the jaksam, which was a considerably powerful monster.

Those running alongside Choi Hyuk could be considered humanity's dream team.

Yet, they were desperate.

"We aren't even a quarter of the way there! Yet we have already met one of the strongest monsters we know?! Haha!"

Sovereign Jessie shouted, seemingly excited.

"We have no idea what lies in front of us! We must stick closely behind Overseer Choi Hyuk! Without him, there may be plenty of monsters we can't take on! Stick next to him so that he can regulate his stamina!"

The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla ordered urgently.

Even the Ethiopian Sovereign Yohan constantly encouraged the warriors lagging behind him.

"Damn it...! Hang in there! Or else you'll all die!"

Choi Hyuk's troops, which were only comprised of humans, ascended the long Kahur Kabkun and penetrated the monsters' ranks.

On the other hand, Bilu and Tangka were comparatively more relaxed.

While both Bilu and Tangka were similar in strength or slightly stronger than Choi Hyuk, the alliance troops they led possessed power that greatly exceeded what the average human possessed. To be Bilu or Tangka's adjutant, one would have to possess stats in the early stages of the 5-star level. Since their elites were on the same level as the Queen of England Diana, they could easily take care of the monsters. Also, they didn't lack numbers either due to the elites sent over from each overseer.

They were breaking through the Kahur Kabkun at a much quicker pace than Choi Hyuk's troops. The Kahur Kabkun entrance on the opposite side wasn't far away. Just as they were smoothly progressing along with their mission, a situation arose.

"Wha... What did you say?!"

Tangka couldn't contain his anger at the sudden order. He smashed his own metallic head with his fist as he raised his voice,

"You want us to retreat right here and now? Then what about the earthlings? If we don't destroy the target number of Kahur Kabkuns, it'll become difficult to handle the outpour of monsters!"

Tangka showed a fierce reaction. However, Commander Mack seemed as cold as ice. Lightning crackled around her golden horns. This showed she was extremely angry.

{... You can't refuse. You will go support Dark City immediately. That's an order.}

Only then did Tangka read her expression.

'Damn... It's an order from the higher-ups.'

This order wasn't made through Commander Mack's own judgment. It was an order from her superiors. That was why the person who was angrier and in more pain than anyone else at this moment might perhaps be her.

But what could they do? As long as they were soldiers, they couldn't disobey.

“Damn it!”

Bang!

After hitting his head once more, Tangka shouted as he activated the military gate system.

“There’s an emergency situation! As of this time, all troops led by Tangka of the Virgo Cluster will teleport to Dark City! Earthling warriors, immediately contact each of your overseers and decide what to do!”

Flash!

Leaving those words, Tangka and his troops retreated.

Only the elites dispatched by each overseer remained in the Kahur Kabkun.

“… Wh… What?”

They had been on the brink of victory, yet everything suddenly changed.

Kuuuooooo!

The monsters that had been hopelessly pushed back reignited their spirits. Filling the empty space left behind when Tangka’s troops disappeared, they pushed forward. Their positions had changed. The attackers had become the defenders and the defenders had become the attackers.

The heated excitement of the battle turned into fear and despair.

“… Brother. Quickly let the leader know and tell him to open the gate.”

Vice-director of Chu Youngjin’s troop Kim Saehyun urged Kim Honghyun. Although it would be a headache in the future if they didn’t destroy the Kahur Kabkuns now, if they wanted to save their lives first, they had to retreat.

Yet-

“Yeah, I reported it. I told him that we’d hold on for a while longer so to quickly come clean things up.”

Kim Honghyun actually unsheathed his sword and stepped forward.

“What? Are you crazy?! We aren’t the only ones who will die! Everyone will!”

Kim Saehyun was surprised. However-

“Hihi. Of course, this is how you should act if you want to act as our leader.”

The Berserkers actually readily followed behind Kim Honghyun.

Chapter 114: Pre-Emptive Attack (5)

Choi Hyuk stopped, standing in the horde of monsters.

He had received a call from Commander Mack.

{Sorry. It's an evacuation order. I have no choice.}

Commander Mack had a grave expression.

"... Is this the same as the doppelganger incident?"

Even while he plucked the heads off the monsters rushing towards him, his expression remained calm. He nonchalantly asked whether this was a plot targeting earthlings set up by someone above.

Mack shook her head.

{No, it's not like that this time. Although it sounds silly if I put it this way... It's a justified order. Currently, the monsters are beginning to launch attacks throughout the universe. In fact, even the capital of the Laniakea Supercluster, Dark City, is under attack. Although I am sorry, regulation-wise, defending Dark City takes priority.}

Well, in the alliance's perspective, the value of Dark City was incomparable to Dragonic. To them, this was an obvious measure.

Unsheathing his sword and cutting down a line of monsters, Choi Hyuk candidly nodded his head.

He even nonchalantly asked,

"But commander, you look a bit angry?"

{... I'm sorry. While Dark City is an important base for the alliance... To you earthlings, there currently isn't anything more precious than Dragonic right now. Although the alliance outwardly talks about the equality of its members, in moments like this... Damn it. I too... Haa. I'm sorry.}

Rather than Choi Hyuk, it was Commander Mack who had a more difficult time controlling her emotions. She tightly closed and then reopened her eyes.

{Either way, my duty is to protect Dark City. I am sorry we left so irresponsibly. I pray for your success in this war.}

The call ended.

Choi Hyuk still had a calm expression. His lips had curled up into a gentle smile.

He exhaled a short breath and shot forward, slashing a monster's face with his sword. A molar the size of a forearm broke and a fist-sized eyeball popped out.

As he looked at the scene—

Twitch.

His gentle smile convulsed. His calm eyes flared. The veins on his arms bulged.

"Those bastards..."

Choi Hyuk's feet moved while he broke out in swears. The calmness he disguised himself in until now split open, and indescribable emotions surged forward. Despair became rage, and rage became hatred...

"Flaming Wing Dance."

Wings of scarlet flames erupted from his back.

"Haha. Bastards."

Even these flames were the alliance's. The flames burned on his relentless hatred and fluttered like feathers.

"Kiiieeeee!!"

The monsters screamed as their bodies were burned by the flames and crumbled. A cruel smile hung on Choi Hyuk's lips. Joy sprouted from his hatred.

“Yeah. I’ll kill you all!”

Kwaaaaaaah!

Choi Hyuk’s flames began to devour the Kahur Kabkun.

**

“Bilu and Tangka’s troops evacuated?”

The overseers who also figured out the situation fell into a state of chaos.

“Do you know how many troops were dispatched over there?! We have to order them to retreat before they all die!”

The Queen of England Diana was the first to bring up retreating.

“We can’t!”

Just then, Baek Seoin, who had been close by, cut in.

“Berserkers have been dispatched there as well. Chu Youngjin’s troop was sent to Tangka’s troops, and Ryu Hyunsung, Handke, and Bae Jinman’s troops were dispatched to Bilu’s.”

“So?”

“Berserkers don’t retreat.”

Baek Seoin banged his sword on his shield. As if threatening them, he said viciously,

“If you pull your troops out now, I will take it as leaving the Berserkers to die.”

“You’re crazy! Then you want them all to die together?”

“No. They’ll die when they die, but they need to destroy the Kahur Kabkun before they do.”

Unlike Diana, who looked as though she would burst with anger, Baek Seoin was cool-headed.

“Although our original goal was to destroy 6 Kahur Kabkuns, we need to at least destroy the three we are attacking now. If we don’t,

we have no way to defend against the outpour of monsters. We won't have Tangka or Bilu's troops to assist us from now on. We need to, at the very least, take this opportunity to destroy the 3 Kahur Kabkuns, which were selected as the strongest. It'll be harder next time."

Baek Seoin's attitude was unyielding, yet his words also contained reason.

To be honest, one would have to fight to know the outcome. They couldn't be certain whether destroying the three Kahur Kabkuns or retreating and preserving their troops would be beneficial. Although a best action did exist, unless they had come from the future, they couldn't say what the answer was with certainty.

However, Baek Seoin's attitude was too resolute. Diana flinched and was pushed back by his spirit before making a desperate expression.

Looking at Diana's expression, Baek Seoin added in a serious manner,

"My Intuition says so."

The power of the innate skill 'Intuition', which Baek Seoin possessed, had already spread far and wide. When he even said that, she was hard-pressed for words.

As her attitude softened, she asked,

"... Really?"

"Yes. If we pull out all our troops, everyone will die."

To be honest, Baek Seoin's Intuition only noticed things that would affect his own safety. He didn't know whether pulling all the troops out right now would put himself in danger or if they would really all die. However, Baek Seoin decided to simply put it this way. His empty bluff worked.

“I’m Overseer Diana. I’m sorry. I do not permit you to use the military gate system. We will go assist you once we have finished up here. Endure for a bit longer.”

“Yeah, it’s me. We’ll go there soon so endure for a bit longer.”

“This is an order. Even if you are on your own, destroy the Kahur Kabkun. If that’s too difficult, then defend your current position. We’ll be there soon.”

“Defend with your lives on the line!”

Following Diana, Jessie, Camilla, and Yohan all ordered their troops.

{Then… You have to come soon! The situation here isn’t good!}

Although there wasn’t anyone who disobeyed or became angry, there were some who ardently begged for help.

Blaze!

Looking at the scarlet flames that had surged just now, Sovereign Jessie replied,

“Don’t worry. I don’t think we will take long.”

**

“I thought the other guys would retreat, but they aren’t?”

After Warrior Leader Tangka left, Kim Honghyun, Kim Saehyun, and Chu Youngjin’s troop filled his void. Besides them, the other troops looked to have become chaotic at first, but it seemed they received orders from their respective overseers as they soon assembled behind Chu Youngjin’s troop. They could feel their desperation.

Because of this, the Berserkers had a reliable backup.

“Kahur Kabkun. If we don’t break it down, the monsters will continuously pour out. Let’s go smash it apart quickly!”

At Kim Honghyun’s shout, the Berserkers simultaneously took

off.

{Keeluaaaah!}

A changed dragon spewed its fatal breath from the air.

Flash!

On the surface, a jaksam, which had rushed in, breaking their ranks, was running amok.

Psssscht!

Shadow teeths stealthily approached the warriors while holding vassal starving ghosts and ambushed them.

Large numbers of monsters they had fought in the past made their appearances. Although they were all difficult to fight, they could still deal with them.

“Cleeear!”

Kim Honghyun jumped high into the air using the Shoes of Hermes and swung his gigantic axe.

Crrraaassh!

Accompanied by an incredible sound, the destructive beam shot by the changed dragon hit his axe and curved.

Rumble!

The reflected destructive beam swept through the monsters instead of the humans.

{Kahllleuk!}

The changed dragon stretched its neck and roared in anger.

Slice.

Kim Saehyun sliced the changed dragon’s head off. As expected of twins, the two new vice-directors had great teamwork.

While Kim Honghyun gathered the monster’s attention, Kim Saehyun used his innate skill {Sharpness} to deal a powerful strike

and behead their enemy.

The changed dragon's head fell accompanied by the terrifying sound of flesh and bone being cut. Its black blood dripped to the ground.

The Berserkers fought as though they were possessed. They didn't care for ranged or close combat attacks and fought like slaughter machines.

Clank!

Whenever they saw a shadow teeth stealthily approaching, they didn't hesitate to raise their long rifles. They were karma guns made by combining both the El Tribe and Naro's technologies. They were quite decent weapons for the lowest-ranked warriors below the 3-star level.

Bang!

The moment the karma was charged, they shot their rifles. The shadow teeth's upper body shot backwards. As they could kill them without approaching them, they didn't have to move out of the way as much. As soon as someone shot their gun, a Berserker would unsheathe his sword and stab the head of the approaching monster. At the same time, the shooter would rotate his gun and shoot a monster approximately ten steps away from him before running the opposite direction.

They clearly held the momentum. However, there was a monster the Berserkers were seeing for the first time as well. At first glance, it looked human, yet its skin was patchy and as black as mud. Its arms were especially long, and its head was lowered, revealing dozens of eyes on the top of its head.

A Berserker who sighted this monster shouted arrogantly as he charged.

"Did you come out? Then go back in!"

Rumble!

The specialty of Chu Youngjin's troop, one hit one kill. His karma surged explosively, and using that strength, he struck out with power that exceeded his stats. He endured the pain that followed after with a shout and resoluteness.

Swish!

His strike shot out like lightning, yet his attack didn't touch the monster. The monster swung its arm, from which extended a long, sharp blade, at the Berserker. The charging Berserker was sliced by its blade and fell into two pieces.

Whhheeeze....

His sliced body powerlessly emitted the sound of wind escaping his lungs.

The monster emotionlessly stared down at the Berserker's corpse.

Slop.

It seemed like the monster's skin was viscous as it would make a slopping sound every time it took a step.

"... Wheeak. Sho wheeak..."

It said in an inarticulate voice. Although it sounded inarticulate, it was definitely speaking Korean.

As if reacting to its voice, new monsters appeared, ripping open the blood vessels of the Kahur Kabkun, and rushing at the humans.

"Keuk!"

"Gaack!"

They were all monsters they hadn't seen before. They all had their own unique appearances. It was difficult to call them one name like {jaksam} or {shadow teeth}.

They were also strong. The Berserkers, who had been progressing smoothly, were being slaughtered.

Originally, these would have been elite monsters Tangka's troops would deal with. Without a middle-ranked warrior, the Berserkers would have a difficult time facing these powerful monsters.

Unfortunately, as Tangka's troops were no longer around, the Berserkers had no choice but to face them.

The Berserkers began to be clearly pushed back. Their relentless advance had quickly reversed.

The El Tribe's Great Warrior Lantz tried his best to somehow change the tides.

"Kill them! Support the Berserkers! Show them the pride of the El Tribe!"

Following the Great Warrior Lantz's shout, the El Tribe charged towards the elite monsters as they shot at them. Their long rifles exploded karma endlessly. Pointed, condensed karma shot out.

Bang, bang, bang!

The karma bullets fired by the El Tribe marksmen always found their marks. An elite monster whose entire body was covered in a tough carapace was hit by dozens of bullets in an instant. Its carapace was shattered, and the black mucus inside gushed out.

"Push them back!"

Even Lantz unsheathed his sword and rushed forward. If the El Tribe marksmen wanted to safely shoot their firearms, someone had to stand in front and be their shield. That role fell to Lantz and his bodyguards.

"Hey! Mr. Great Warrior! Let's go hunt that guy over there!"

Kim Honghyun friendlily waved his hand at Lantz, who came out to the front. The monster he was pointing at was the disgusting monster with black skin and dozens of eyes on the top of its head. The monster that had spoken inarticulate Korean.

The eyes on the top of the monster's head rolled around leisurely

as it observed its surroundings. Just by looking at its posture, Kim Honghyun was certain.

“That guy’s the leader!”

Confident in his Endurance, Kim Honghyun charged towards it without hesitation.

That moment, the dozens of eyes on the top of the monster’s head observed Kim Honghyun at the same time.

Slice!

When the monster swung its long arm, there was a flash. Blood gushed from Kim Honghyun’s chest. Kim Honghyun’s axe had been sliced in two and fell to the ground.

“Huh?”

He hadn’t expected it to possess this much power. Kim Honghyun’s Endurance had been powerlessly sliced through like his axe. Even though Chu Youngjin hadn’t been able to slash him with one strike?

“Brother, dodge!”

Kim Saehyun shouted in surprise, and the Great Warrior Lantz rushed to save Kim Honghyun.

“Blessing of the inverted tree!”

Rumble!

Large tree branches extended from Lantz’s necklace. The branches, which grew like a tidal wave, wrapped around Kim Honghyun and pulled him back.

The monster swung its sharp arms as it charged forward to prevent Kim Honghyun from escaping. Branches were cut as soon as they grew, but its attack narrowly missed Kim Honghyun.

“Wow… Damn, just what is that guy?”

“Sharpness!”

When he heard Kim Honghyun and had become relieved, Kim Saehyun, who arrived late, launched a sharp attack towards the monster that was slicing the branches apart. Although it was too late as an attempt to save Kim Honghyun, as a sudden attack, its timing was amazing.

However, the monster reacted to even this sudden attack.

Slice!

“Huh?”

Two arms simultaneously flew into the air. One was a monster arm, the other was Kim Saehyun’s.

The monster and Kim Saehyun’s eyes fixated on the two arms soaring in the air at the same time. There was a slight confusion, but the monster was the first to move.

Thud!

“Keeuk!”

The monster swung its remaining right arm and grabbed Kim Saehyun’s throat. Having lost both his sword and his right arm, Kim Saehyun couldn’t resist as he was grabbed by the monster’s hand, and his body dangled as it was raised up.

The dozens of eyes on the top of its head thoroughly examined Kim Saehyun’s body.

“Pretty shtrong?”

The monster said in inarticulate Korean. Kim Saehyun became surprised. He was so surprised that, despite his throat being strangled, he asked,

“Gack! You can talk?”

“Ki, ki.”

Yet the monster didn’t reply as its lips spread wide into a smile. The monster slammed Kim Saehyun’s face onto the ground.

Bang!

“Kuack!”

Bang! Bang!

Once, twice, every time it slammed his face on the ground, Kim Saehyun’s nose was crushed and his teeth flew into the air.

Looking at this, Kim Honghyun became enraged.

“You bastard!”

He once again charged recklessly.

The monster glanced at Kim Honghyun before throwing Kim Saehyun, who had turned into a mess. Kim Honghyun hurriedly caught Kim Saehyun and—

Psscht.

The monster’s right arm pierced through Kim Saehyun’s chest.

“Kehack!”

It was an attack that even pierced Kim Honghyun’s chest as he held Kim Saehyun in his arms.

“Wheak?”

The monster tilted its head and grinned.

“Save the vice-directors!”

Rumble!

The team-leader-level Berserkers rushed forward. The monster didn’t take them on and retreated to the back. It looked like it didn’t want to take any chances. Considering how its left arm was cut off, compared to its overwhelming power, it seemed its defenses were quite weak.

The Berserkers looked after Kim Honghyun and Kim Saehyun while the Great Warrior Lantz stood at the very front, guarding against the monster.

“Their conditions?”

Lantz asked with his eyes fixed on the monster.

“Vice-Director Kim Honghyun will be able to recover soon!”

A Berserker replied.

“Saehyun!!!”

Followed by Kim Honghyun’s screams.

Chapter 115: Pre-Emptive Attack (5)

There was a gaping hole in Kim Saehyun's chest. His blood was gushing out, and unknown chunks were mixed in with his blood as they dripped to the ground.

While dying, Kim Saehyun worried about his twin brother, Kim Honghyun.

Like pouring water into a broken jug, every time his heart struggled, more blood would pour out. It was at this moment that Kim Saehyun instinctively knew what he had to do.

Although the karma within his body was dissipating, the karma that was embedded deep within his soul still remained strong. Kim Saehyun carefully took that karma out.

"Older brother."

Although Kim Saehyun called him 'older brother', due to the air escaping his lungs, what came out of his mouth was 'older brosher'. He wheezed as air escaped his lungs.

Still, Kim Honghyun understood him. Even though he was only born a few minutes before him, Kim Saehyun always called him older brother.

"Yeah, buddy. Keep your head together. You're okay, right?"

Kim Honghyun furrowed his eyes.

"Drink..."

With slurred speech, Kim Saehyun placed his powerlessly dangling arm on his chest and scrubbed the blood gushing from his chest with his palm.

"What?"

Kim Honghyun looked to be in shock. He didn't understand what Kim Saehyun was saying.

“Drink it…”

Kim Saehyun urged Kim Honghyun to drink his blood once more.

“What are you saying?”

Slap.

Kim Saehyun slapped the dazed Kim Honghyun’s cheek. Rather than saying he slapped him, it was more like he placed his hand on his cheek.

(Wheeze) (Wheeze)

“Drink…”

(Wheeze)

It seemed it was becoming hard for him to speak as the sounds of air escaping became more and more mixed in with his speech.

Their eyes met.

‘I’m sane so drink it. Shut up and drink it.’

Even while blood spilled from his mouth and while he couldn’t speak properly, Kim Saehyun’s gaze was clear. Kim Honghyun felt that he could read his thoughts through his gaze.

Although he couldn’t understand the reason, Kim Saehyun was serious.

“Haa… Haha…”

As he laughed with a stunned expression, Kim Honghyun’s two hands stuck to Kim Saehyun’s chest. Then he scooped some blood and drank it. The blood dripped and wet his lips, hands, and forearm. Once in contact with his skin, the slippery blood gradually became stickier.

“Are you happy? Are you?”

Although his tone was provocative, Kim Honghyun’s eyes were trembling slightly in worry for Kim Saehyun. Kim Saehyun’s hand

rose up and ruffled Kim Honghyun's head.

"You did well... I definitely... (Wheeze) passed it over to you..."

Then his hand listlessly fell to the ground with a thud. His karma, which had still faintly been present just now, had scattered, disappearing for eternity.

"Saehyun! Saehyun!!"

Kim Honghyun shouted at the top of his lungs, but there was no way a person who had already died would come back.

"Shaehyuna! Ssaehyuna!"

A distressing voice imitated Kim Honghyun's wails. It had black, viscous skin that was hard and lumpy like mud, and numerous eyes on the top of its head.

It was the monster that had killed Kim Saehyun. It imitated Kim Honghyun's cries.

As if it had a tic, it did so repeatedly while tilting its head.

"Ssaehyunahh! Ssaehyunahkakak!"

Then it laughed. Kim Honghyun shot up.

"Endure it!"

The Great Warrior Lantz attempted to hold him back—

Whoosh!

But Kim Honghyun had already arrived in front of the monster.

Without holding the axe's handle, he swung the head of the ax in his hand at the monster's head. The monster twisted its body slightly and dodged his attack.

"Wheak?"

At the same time, it swung its right arm.

Pssscht!

The monster's right arm pierced through Kim Honghyun's side

and was about to slice Kim Honghyun in two.

“Haah.”

Kim Honghyun took a deep breath. Even while receiving its attack, he didn’t back down. Instead, he flexed his body.

The monster’s arm pierced deep into Kim Honghyun’s body, but it couldn’t slice him in half. Kim Honghyun’s muscles squirmed. His contracted muscled tightly clenched onto the monster’s arm.

“Die, asshole.”

Kim Honghyun pushed the blade of his axe into the monster’s face.

“Kiyaaah!”

The monster screamed while looking at Kim Honghyun. It closed all the eyes on the top of its head at once and the monster’s black forehead butted Kim Honghyun’s nose.

Bang!

Kim Honghyun’s body was pushed back a distance. He had a nosebleed. However, Kim Honghyun quickly regained his balance and wielded his axe.

“Eeck!”

But the monster’s movements were much more refined than Kim Honghyun’s. It dodged Kim Honghyun’s attack and pulled out its arm that was embedded in his side.

Clang!

Kim Honghyun narrowly blocked its attack and rolled on the ground.

Kim Honghyun’s Endurance couldn’t completely block the monster’s attack, and he wasn’t a match for the finesse of its attacks and techniques.

The Great Warrior Lantz attempted to help Kim Honghyun, who

was in danger, but he couldn't as he had to deal with the other elite monsters that were rushing towards him at that moment.

Fortunately, the monster didn't kill Kim Honghyun right away. It brandished its right arm as it approached him leisurely. As strong as it was, its actions were also different from the other monsters'. Because of this, Kim Honghyun was able to slowly get back up.

A mess of blood and dirt, he stood up and spun the axe in his hand. His hand movements were somehow much lighter. The atmosphere seemed different somewhat.

Kim Honghyun wiped his lips with his hand. He felt Kim Saehyun's wet blood still on his lips.

Looking at his brother's blood, Kim Honghyun slightly trembled. He shuddered, filled with sadness.

"Son of a bitch... Is this why you did that?"

Kim Honghyun only now realized the unfamiliar power that had entered his body. As if he had opened his closed eyes, the world suddenly felt new.

"This... Is this the world you saw?"

Kim Honghyun mumbled to himself, and the monster watched him in interest.

Kim Honghyun adjusted his grip on the ax. Then he whispered quietly,

"Sharpness."

{Innate Skill Sharpness has been passed down to you.}

Sharpness. This was definitely Kim Saehyun's innate skill.

Kiing!

Kim Honghyun's previously sluggish axe accelerated. It shot towards the monster, drawing a line smoother than ever before. His movements had become more refined. Yet, the monster still reacted to his sudden movements. It attempted to dodge his attack as it took a step back. That moment, Kim Honghyun's axe became a level faster. His axe landed on it just before it could dodge.

Baam!

Black blood splattered.

**

They had destroyed Kahur Kabkuns 1, 2 and 3. Choi Hyuk fully demonstrated that he was humanity's greatest weapon this time as well.

Even in a situation where Bilu and Tangka had left, the reason why they could still destroy the three Kahur Kabkuns as planned was because of Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers. There was no one who suspected this fact.

Also, a new hero had appeared.

Kim Honghyun.

The first human to possess two innate skills.

Although he had received help from the Great Warrior Lantz and other troop members in the end, he accomplished the splendid achievement of killing a monster at the 5-star level. Excluding Choi Hyuk, it was a result accomplished by no one else.

With this, they had destroyed 3 out of the 13 Kahur Kabkuns.

Even though they had only accomplished half of their original goal of destroying 6 Kahur Kabkuns, the value of their accomplishment was by no means small. The Kahur Kabkuns they had destroyed this time had been estimated to be the trickiest to deal with. The fact that they were able to destroy them before the monsters properly began to pour out was quite encouraging.

Although humanity couldn't stop the anger that arose due to the alliance's irresponsibility, they felt pride at the fact they had somehow been able to stitch up this disastrous situation.

The monsters' counterattack from the 10 remaining Kahur Kabkuns began.

While the warriors of the attack troops, who had become exhausted after destroying the 3 Kahur Kabkuns, rested, Richard led the defense troops to block the outpour of monsters.

To reduce damages to the cities and to gain a strategic position to target additional Kahur Kabkuns, Richard chose to launch an intercepting attack rather than to be besieged.

The fight between the defense troops and the monsters became a topic of conversation day after day. The video Naro filmed was widely spread, and there were so many monsters that it seemed like Dragonic itself had become a monster rushing towards them. Compared to the attack troops, there were more lower leveled warriors in the defense troops. That was why there were more casualties. Although there were many people going crazy, stricken with fear, Richard did whatever he could to unite them and send them to the battlefield.

Looking at them, the warriors of the attack troops reignited their fighting spirit. This was a fight that wouldn't end by defending. Someone would have to wade through that tidal wave of monsters and destroy the Kahur Kabkuns. Only then could humanity defend their new homeland, Dragonic. This mission, which was the most dangerous and honorable, lay in the attack troops' hands. The faster they destroyed them, the more people they could protect.

The warriors ended their short break and prepared for their second expedition. This time, their goal was to destroy three Kahur Kabkuns that were considered weak compared to other low-ranked ones. The leader of the defense troops, Richard, and the leader of the attack troops, Choi Hyuk, exchanged their thoughts

and set their schedule and route. Even though it was hard, everyone believed that, like the other crises they had experienced in the past, they would be able to quickly recover from this.

However, there was a variable that even Choi Hyuk and Richard didn't expect.

This variable was precisely the difference in perspective between the alliance and earthlings.

Humans thought something like this.

'What has the alliance done for us up until now? I mean, they suddenly appeared and made Rings of Rebirth and stuff, making people participate in a horrifying game and kill each other... Yeah, that's all fine. We became war machines like you wanted and survived. Then you talked about Consumables and stuff. You also used our homeland, Earth, as a resource and brought it to extinction... Okay, that's fine too. We still survived and took the advancement evaluation. We finally became alliance members that could be treated as people. But then you royally screwed us over with that doppelganger mission, didn't you? And now you suddenly made the support troops, who had come to help protect our second base, Dragonic, retreat? Just what have you done for us? You said, as alliance members, we were equals, yet all you do is use us and backstab us. But what? What do you want us to do now?! It's already hard enough protecting our base, yet you want us to send support troops to defend Dark City? Fuck, are we really alliance members? Aren't we vassals?'

That was right. Earthlings thought that they had been strongly backstabbed by the alliance. Yet the alliance didn't think that in the slightest. Instead, they told them to fulfill their duty as alliance members.

'The situation in Dark City is very bad. With Overseer Choi Hyuk or Richard as the leader, dispatch reinforcements of at least 5,000 low-ranked warriors and 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors within

two days.'

They gave this absurd order.

Since Commander Mack resisted, saying that she couldn't give such an order, a bureaucrat of the Laniakea Supercluster personally gave the order.

It was an absurd order. Calling them 5,000 low-ranked warriors and 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors was putting it mildly. Low-ranked warriors were experts at the 4-star level, and lowest-ranked warriors were veteran warriors at the 3-star level. To be honest, it was the same as telling them to send all the elites on Earth.

Of course, there was an opposition.

"I mean, don't you know our situation? How are we to provide support when our base is about to be taken from us? No matter how important Dark City is to the alliance... We need to save ourselves first!"

Overseer Diana's face flushed with anger. Still, it seemed she tried her best to withhold her agitation and to not become hated by the bureaucrat from the supercluster.

However, the way the alliance bureaucrat saw things was very different from the earthlings.

{Although I understand the situation earthlings are dealing with, Dark City is registered as a vital strongpoint for the alliance. It has priority over Dragonic. Mark my words. If a species loses their base, they can find a new one, but if the alliance collapses, all karmalings will become extinct. In a critical situation like now, don't let your own species' selfishness take precedence.}

Earthlings suddenly became a selfish species that let their own selfishness take precedence.

Eventually, Diana burst in anger.

"Ha! That's funny. It just so happens that over 70% of the

population in Dark City, a city registered as a vital strongpoint for the alliance, are Dark Tribe members, isn't it? They are a species strong enough to be considered in the top 4 of the alliance. What a funny coincidence. The city the Dark Tribe inhabits has been registered as a vital strongpoint and obviously needs to be protected with the united strength of the alliance, while the alliance doesn't care whether Dragonic, where we earthlings live in, falls into ruin or not?"

"Stop it..."

Overseer Yohan tried to hold the agitated Diana back. Diana flinched and looked like she regretted it, but she simply kept her mouth tightly shut with a venomous expression that indicated her anger hadn't been fully relieved.

The alliance bureaucrat replied with a stern expression.

{I understand you are angry. I also understand your hostility towards the so-called top 4 species. However, the alliance exists because of them, and you were able to receive benefits from this. Don't the earthlings owe the alliance a huge debt? Just think that it is now time you paid that debt.}

Yes. 'Debt'. That was the decisive point that divided their perspectives. While the earthlings inwardly asked, 'What debt?'... The perspective the bureaucrat from the alliance had was firm.

{If the alliance hadn't carried out the warrior training system and awakened earthlings' karma and made you into warriors... Earthlings would have already become extinct a long time ago due to the monsters. The alliance didn't simply give you the power to survive extinction, it also prepared you a base to continue to live on. As members of the alliance, it is now time for you to fulfill your duty.}

It was at this moment the overseers realized that their words would have no effect.

Strictly speaking, his words weren't wrong.

They had been able to awaken karma because of the alliance.

They had been able to survive until now as well as continue to survive and prepare plans to preserve humanity because of the alliance.

However… There was no one who wanted to say thank you.

That gap.

Their misery.

There was no way they could make them understand through words.

While a deathly silence hung in the air, Choi Hyuk took action.

"Understood. I will lead an army and provide support within two days. However, after we overcome this mess, I want to be promised support for Earth as well."

{You will clearly be paid the price for your contributions and errors.}

"… Understood."

{It's good that I can get through to you. Then, let's see each other next time.}

The call ended.

Choi Hyuk smiled faintly. In a light manner, he said to the overseers who had grave expressions,

"Why the sad looks? Is this our first time experiencing this?"

With the spirit he was going to war right away, Choi Hyuk unsheathed his sword and said,

"We don't have time. We need to destroy at least 4 Kahur Kabkuns within two days."

Grit.

Choi Hyuk walked out without any lingering feelings. When he turned his back on them, they could hear him grind his teeth, which didn't suit his cheerful tone from moments ago.

However, when he turned his head around once more, he still had a cheerful expression. He even grinned as he said,

"We need to survive. Let's think about it after we survive."

Chapter 116: The Alien Troops From Earth (1)

While looking at the tidal wave of monsters that covered Dragonic, Choi Hyuk recalled Kangdong District. It had disappeared now, but he still recalled the game ‘Survive and Escape’ which he encountered after leaving school.

Those days, where he went around with Baek Seoin to destroy portals in order to fight the monsters that poured in day after day, was similar to his current situation. If there was a difference, it would be that there was nowhere to escape to this time.

It was either destroy all the Kahur Kabkuns or the extinction of humanity.

Choi Hyuk did what he could. Like he promised, they destroyed 4 Kahur Kabkuns in 2 days. There were now 6 Kahur Kabkuns left. Judging by the number, there were less than half remaining... But the progress of battle was much more difficult. There were already too many monsters that had crossed over through the Kahur Kabkuns. Even if the earthlings fought with all they had, large losses were inevitable. Even if Choi Hyuk remained, it would have been the same.

Choi Hyuk had to put this situation behind him and leave Dragonic.

There was nothing more he could do. The best he could do was alleviate the situation in Dark City and return as quickly as possible.

Choi Hyuk and Richard exchanged glances.

“Richard, then.”

Take care. He didn’t need to say those words.

Richard absentmindedly nodded his head.

“Just come back soon.”

In charge of defending Dragonic, he didn’t take his eyes off the defensive lines that were engaged in intense battles.

As long as Choi Hyuk and the elites left, there was nothing they could do about their front lines being pushed back. He had to think of a way to retreat the front lines, as well as create new ones.

His mind was complicated. The best-case scenario was for Choi Hyuk and his expedition to return quickly. His first goal was to set the situation up so that they could launch an extensive counterattack when they returned. However, Richard also thought of the worst case. The situation where Choi Hyuk’s expedition that took off to Dark City was annihilated and didn’t return. Humanity had to survive even in that situation. He had to somehow make the front lines enter a stalemate, creating time for earthlings’ potential to grow before driving out the monsters. If that was impossible… He had to consider migrating to another planet. It was something he couldn’t aimlessly leave to the alliance. Richard was already thinking about that.

“Ah, you already told your friend Naro, right? That I might need its help in a pinch.”

“Of course. I told it to follow your words as if they were mine.”

{Yes. I can confirm it. I set my settings so that Overseer Richard will be my number 1 command authority until Overseer Choi Hyuk returns.}

Both Choi Hyuk and Naro confirmed it at the same time.

“Okay.”

Richard nodded. He didn’t even turn around and waved his hand.

“Have a safe journey, everyone.”

Richard, Diana, Nasir, and Yohan remained on Dragonic.

Choi Hyuk, Camilla, and Jessie left for Dark City.

“Who knew things would come to this? We’re lucky that we destroyed a few Kahur Kabkuns with our pre-emptive attack. If we had prioritized defending, we really would be in big trouble right now…”

Diana, who had firmly pushed for a defensive tactic, mumbled with an exhausted voice. It was as she said. If they had stuck to a defensive tactic, then there might have been more than 10 Kahur Kabkuns still remaining. In that situation, if their elites had to leave like they were now, the progress of the war would have been truly grim. Humanity might not even be able to overcome this crisis.

Chills ran down her spine when she thought that.

‘As expected… Richard’s judgment is terrifyingly accurate. Just how is does he do it?’

Diana looked at Richard in a new light. His judgment would always be correct even when some unexpected change occurred as if he knew the future.

The other person who dumbfounded her was Choi Hyuk. It always looked like he was acting recklessly, but his judgments weren’t greatly wrong either. At least in fighting methods, it was clear he possessed an animalistic sixth sense.

Choi Hyuk was about to go off to battle.

“5 middle-ranked warriors, 5,000 low-ranked warriors, and 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors.”

He was calling the list of expeditionary members.

Within a year since the advancement evaluation, the military strength of earthlings had greatly increased. When he thought of the harsh wars they had experienced, such as the advancement evaluation and doppelganger incident, which then triggered the mission renaissance that followed, it was an obvious result.

The number of 3-star colonizers (lowest-ranked warriors), who

could be considered as elites, had increased to 700,000 people, and the number of top elites, 4-star colonizers, had reached around 7,000 people. Of course, there were more people who had only just entered those levels than those considered proficient. For example, for a lowest-ranked warrior to advance to a low-ranked warrior, their important stats had to reach 400 points, but there were many more 'entry-levels', who had less than 50 points, than those with more than 200 points, who were considered to be 'proficient'. Still, it was an amazing progress.

They also couldn't ignore the development of the top experts either.

Choi Hyuk, who had just become a middle-ranked warrior at the time, and Richard, who had taken half a step into the 5-star level, had already advanced to the point of being considered proficient (halfway), and those who had been at the edge of the 4-star level, Overseer Jessie, Camilla, Yohan, as well as Ryu Hyunsung, and Lee Jinhee, had become middle-ranked warriors during their attack on the Kahur Kabkuns this time. Considering that it became harder to increase their karma every level they went up, the achievements they made within this short period of time was amazing.

Yet, Choi Hyuk wanted more.

"Our goal isn't simply to survive and return."

With his back towards his troops, he observed the monsters pushing in from afar. However, to the troops, his voice was as clear as if he was speaking next to them.

"We will become stronger with this expedition. And then! When we return, only their screams will remain."

A small whisper, yet, his resolve was firmly embedded in it.

His anger and resolve moved the hearts of the warriors.

"Excluding me, there are 4 middle-ranked warriors, 5,000 low-ranked warriors, and 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors... Prepare for

war!”

Along with Choi Hyuk’s declaration, the military gate system activated.

The top experts of Earth went off to war. The 5,000 low-ranked warriors among them made up the earthlings’ core military force. Because of this, Overseer Jessie and Camilla joined the expedition to protect and lead them. The 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors were the same, they were top experts. As they especially couldn’t let the military force of 5,000 low-ranked warriors be used as sacrificial cards, additional warriors, who were known to be one of Earth’s strongest, joined in even though defending Dragonic was a pressing issue.

It was a gamble.

When thinking of priorities, it might have been better if they had just grit their teeth and washed their hands of this matter. It might have been better if they had simply met the requirements the alliance requested and have experts like Camilla, Jessie, Lee Jinhee, Ryu Hyunsung and the rest stay behind and defend. However, Richard believed in Choi Hyuk. Although he was also considering the worst-case scenario… He still trusted Choi Hyuk and gambled on their return. He included some of the strongest people in the expedition so that more people could return.

Whether this would be a brilliant move or suicidal would be determined later.

At the last moment, Richard turned around and looked at the expedition that was disappearing within the hazy gate. His eyes filled with complicated emotions.

“Alles Gute (The best of luck).”

Richard’s gaze looked to the front again. His eyes were clear and unwavering.

**

Whoosh.

As soon as they crossed the gate and arrived in Dark City, the warriors were met with an intense heat wave. Traces of Dark City's dark, transparent appearance were nowhere to be found, and blue flames burned everywhere.

They saw a gigantic dog. Blue flames burned at the tips of its black fur. Its eyes and mouth billowed with blue flames. The mountain-sized dog was biting and devouring Dark City in the distance. Every time the dog ate a part of Dark City, the blue flames surged greatly.

"A hellhound..."

Choi Hyuk recalled the data he studied with Naro in the past. It was a monster that had never been seen in the Virgo Cluster. It was a high-ranked monster. Only those of at least the 6-star level could be its match.

Out of curiosity, he had carefully studied powerful monsters like it since he could encounter them in the future... But he never thought he'd see one here and now.

The monster Choi Hyuk remembered was a monster proficient in mass destruction. Well, the properties of fire were such. However, the flames it possessed were unmatched in its peculiarity.

"Euaaack!"

A blue flame floated around before catching on a warrior from Earth.

"Euaah!"

At first, the warrior writhed due to the heat, but soon, his hot burns began to feel cold like dry ice.

"Brrr."

The warrior, who had writhed due to heat, now chattered his teeth as his body shivered.

“Hey, are you alright?”

A healer from the Camilla Clan hurriedly extinguished the fire and healed his burns, but the warrior still complained about the cold. His body began to shiver more intensely.

A cold flame.

“Cold… I’m cold!”

Their behavior was illogical. Those who were burned by the blue flames felt hot at first, but soon, their bodies shivered from the cold. Their strange figures made the warriors tense.

However, soon, something even more terrifying occurred.

“Ah… Warm.”

“Hey, are you crazy?! Euack! What are you doing!?”

With their bodies shivering, the people who had been inflicted with burns once again approached the blue flames to get rid of the cold. The blue flames wrapped their entire bodies, making them feel warm until they experienced a more intense chill.

“Cold… I’m cold!!”

Then they would look for more blue flames. They repeated their actions until they were turned into ashes. Every time the warriors gave their bodies to the blue flames, blue flames would spew out like dandelion seeds.

“Just what is this…?”

The hellhound was different from the monsters they had seen until now. The spirit surging from its body was enough to make them feel intimidated, and the blue flames spewing from its body were ominous and strange. Also, it made so many blue flames that the sky looked like it had a blue river flowing in it. Due to the warriors throwing their bodies into the flames, the already plentiful blue flames increased.

“Da-dangerous.”

The warriors stepped back. Their ranks became disordered. However, there was no place that was completely safe from the blue flames. Fear and chaos seeped into their hearts.

“Keep your heads straight! Don’t touch the blue flames if they approach, and push them back with your karma! Low-ranked warriors, push them back with your power, and lowest-ranked warriors, get into groups of 10 and push them back together. If you don’t push with enough power, they will burn through your karma and come closer, so follow my orders faithfully!”

The one who straightened out the situation was Baek Seoin.

Since any information Choi Hyuk thought was useful was forwarded to Baek Seoin through Naro, Baek Seoin also remembered the hellhound, in more detail than Choi Hyuk, and also knew how to handle it.

“Push! Push them back!”

Due to Baek Seoin’s instructions, the expedition barely managed to regain their composure as they pushed the blue flames back.

Their actions left quite an impression on Dark City’s 3rd District Garrison’s Team 17 Leader, Lankin.

“What’s this? I was worried since they sent newly-joined rookies, but they’re better than I expected.”

His body was painted red. Unlike Tangka, he was an agile robot. Lankin was of the Armored Soul Tribe. He was a middle-ranked warrior who had reached the peak of the 5-star level. He appeared while spinning his Gun of Sentiment ‘Lankin’s Thrill’.

The same time he appeared, a black flag fluttered above Choi Hyuk’s head. Unrelated to Choi Hyuk’s will, his sovereign symbol had been revealed. Lankin recognized the flag.

“So you’re the leader, huh?”

With a joking voice, an announcement appeared.

{Effective immediately, Choi Hyuk, the leader of Earth's expedition, will be assigned to 3rd District Garrison's Team 17. You will follow the command of the team leader, Lankin.}

Thud!

Lankin jumped up really high into the air and dropped right in front of Choi Hyuk. The blue flames floating in the sky clashed with Lankin's red torso, but they simply bounced off powerlessly. Lankin, who was slightly taller than 2 meters, looked down at Choi Hyuk as he said,

"Although you might act like a leader in the countryside, this is Dark City. Stay alert and follow my orders. The situation is severe. You can do well, right?"

Pat, pat.

Lankin patted Choi Hyuk's shoulder as if he were a child.

Swish!

Choi Hyuk unsheathed his sword. His Sword of Vow 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' almost brushed past Lankin's arm. Surprised by its startling chill, Lankin retreated his arm.

"Just what is the mea-"

He looked at Choi Hyuk with eyes mixed with anger and surprise.

However, Choi Hyuk had a carefree attitude as if all he did was simply unsheathe his sword. He nodded his head once as he asked,

"So, what's our target?"

Chapter 117: Alien Troops From Earth (2)

Lankin glanced at Choi Hyuk's sword.

'What's that? It's not at the level of a Weapon of Calling. Is it a Weapon of Sentiment? But that's also... Don't tell me it's a Weapon of Vow?!'

Now that he thought about it, he recalled that a middle-ranked warrior from the countryside, who had only just joined the alliance, had created a Weapon of Vow. Weren't people talking about it for a while?

Dirririring!

Faint lights flickered on Lankin's red torso as if they were putting on a performance. It was the way Lankin expressed joy.

"What the? Now that I look at you, you're a celebrity, aren't you? What was your name? Cho... Che... Uh..."

"Choi Hyuk."

"Oh, yeah. Choi Hyuk! Nice to meet you!"

Lankin placed his hand on Choi Hyuk's shoulder again. His friendly attitude took Choi Hyuk aback.

"A middle-ranked warrior who has a Weapon of Vow! I'm excited. Now, the guys we have to fight are over there."

Lankin turned Choi Hyuk's shoulders around, towards a certain direction. It was the opposite direction from the blue flames spewing hellhound. Lankin gestured towards the hellhound with his chin and said,

"Don't even look in that direction. They aren't guys we can take. The higher-ups of the special task force will take care of them. We only need to block that place. You see it, right?"

He saw it.

Although he couldn’t see a single monster… He could clearly feel that it was unusual.

He hadn’t seen it since he had been focused on the hellhound and its blue flames until now. Like a pathway, there was a rift in time and space in a specific direction. It wasn’t simply time and space, but even karma was distorted like some jumbled jigsaw puzzle. The further away one looked from Choi Hyuk’s position, the more pronounced the rift became. Dark City, which was dark and transparent, was influenced by this rift and was shining strangely. The blue flames flickered above it.

“… Was this not the consideration of the alliance?”

Tap, tap.

Choi Hyuk tapped the ground he was standing on.

The dark matter that made up Dark City didn’t normally interact with normal matter. If it was like normal, those of lower levels wouldn’t be able to stand on the ground. In the past, even Richard had been submerged up to his ankles and had flailed about. However, even the lowest-ranked warriors at the 3-star level could stand on the ground without any discomfort now. Choi Hyuk had thought the alliance had arranged this.

“Yeah. Normally, the alliance would have done it… But there is no need to this time. Since those monsters need a ground to stand on, though I don’t know how they did it… They modified the dark matter. In this area, even if you’re not of the Dark Tribe, you can stand on the ground with no problem.”

Thud!

Lankin stomped on the ground. The playful attitude he had until now had turned serious. The bright red color of his torso had subsided into a cold, darker tone.

“It’s not easy. These guys knew exactly what kind of place Dark City was when they came here. It’s proof that, through the long

war, they've accumulated information about our universe and the alliance. In this situation, they launched a large-scale attack... It's alarming, isn't it?"

Clank!

With a metallic sound, his Gun of Sentiment 'Lankin's Thrill' combined with his hand.

"Our mission is to destroy those pathways as fast as we can. Every time they appear, continuously. Whatever they are planning, you just need to make it so that they don't have time to play tricks. Then... Stay alert! It's about to start!"

Even though he looked like a good-for-nothing, it seemed he had constantly been observing the situation. At the same time as Lankin's warning, time, space, and karma re-assembled. It wasn't to their former state, but into something completely different.

At first, the pathway looked black like a turned-off monitor. However, upon closer examination, it was a mixture of incomprehensible colors. It was an ominous mixture entirely comprised of colors he was seeing for the first time. It was like a foreign language you could hear but not understand. It was a color that he could see but was difficult to perceive. At a glance, it looked black. The color was so unfamiliar that his brain couldn't process it. Perhaps, this was the color of death.

It became humid like an underground basement, and he could smell a disgusting stench of rotting corpses. Distorted karma crawled its way out of the pathway. Chills went down his spine because of how unfamiliar it was.

"It would be nice if we could destroy the pathway before it's complete, but our research staff has yet to fully analyze it... So we can only destroy it once it's complete. We can get 'poja' samples while we're at it though."

"Poja?"

“You’ll know when you see it.”

Lankin gestured in front of him when Choi Hyuk asked. In the pathway Lankin gestured to, a gray object crackled like electricity as it wriggled out. It was an object interconnected by what seemed to be thin spider webs. It was as sticky and fluid as honey, and it came out endlessly.

“That’s poja. This is the first time it has ever appeared. It might be the best research object to figure out the creation process of monsters.”

Lankin raised his gun.

“We’re going. There are other people who are good at collecting poja samples so you guys focus on destroying the pathways. The trick to destroying these pathways is the same as Kahur Kabkuns. Push until the very end of the pathway and throw a Kahur Kabkun destroying bomb. Then… Let’s go!”

Lankin and his troops prepared to charge.

However, just before they could, Choi Hyuk wielded his ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’.

“Flaming Wing Dance, Instant Void Annihilation.”

The flames, which burned targets in the most painful of ways, and the slash, that could even cut time and space, combined. His Sword of Vow ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ added its deadly will onto his strike. Choi Hyuk’s concentration was at its peak. ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ added 600 points of karma to his strike.

Blaze!

Dark City, which had been lit by blue flames, now brightened with a scarlet hue. The poja, which continued to grow, was cut in half and instantly lit on fire. It shriveled like melting plastic.

“… Absurd!”

Lankin shuddered at his power. This wasn’t a power a middle-

ranked warrior could create.

“I’m in a bit of a hurry.”

Leaving a flustered Lankin, who had forgotten about charging, behind, Choi Hyuk rushed in. The earthling expedition followed behind him.

Perhaps it was because of Choi Hyuk’s attack, but the poja, which overflowed from the pathway, began to show a violent reaction. The poja swelled up and whirled around into monster shapes.

{Kuaaah!}

They heard the roar of a changed dragon. The monster that had just been created by the poja spread its wings. There wasn’t only a changed dragon. All sorts of monsters, from ones they had seen until now as well as ones they had never seen before, were created, wriggling in the poja.

“Ah… Disgusting.”

Alexei frowned. The hordes of monsters being created within the squirming poja in front of him truly made him feel disgusted. When the squelching sounds of the poja and cries of the monsters were added on top of that, it was a literal hell.

Even as he frowned, Alexei lightly made his way through the poja. Starting with the Ring of Rebirth when he was a second-year middle schooler, Alexei had experienced various wars against the monsters. He didn’t spare his body.

It was disgusting? Then he would kill it because it was.

“Since you’re disgusting… Die.”

As expected of someone who followed Lee Jinhee, Alexei wielded two short gladii. With quick movements, he stabbed the necks of newly born monsters and killed the monsters that were being created within the boiling poja by cutting them into pieces.

There was no need to talk about tactics and strategy. Everyone

knew their own roles as fighting monsters had already become a part of their daily lives. Choi Hyuk was at the very front, and Lee Jinhee's troop was behind him. Ryu Hyunsung's troop, Chu Youngjin's troop led by Kim Honghyun, the Camilla Clan's top military troop, the Executioners, and the top elite troop of the Jessie Clan, the 'Extremers', followed behind.

The lead, which possessed a powerful destructive power, would mess up their enemies' ranks, and the rear would follow behind and completely restrain them. It was the tactic they used for Kahkur Kabkuns.

It was a tactic that made them penetrate through an unfamiliar, dark pathway into hordes of monsters. Although many humans had yet to experience this, the majority of the 5,000 low-ranked warriors and the 100,000 lowest-ranked warriors assigned to this expedition had experienced this multiple times.

That was why it was familiar, and that was also why they were sick and tired of it. They felt déjà vu when they fought against surges of monsters.

'When did we start fighting?' It even made them fall under the delusion that they had been on the battlefield since a year ago, no, 2 years ago, no, since they were born.

"Is there really an end to this war...."

Penelope from the Camilla Clan, who had recovered from her injury and returned to the battlefield, suddenly made a sad expression. She didn't spare her body as she always fought for the happiness and survival of the people. She had constantly tried her best to get stronger so that she could defeat powerful enemies. However, the scale of the war stretched beyond her imagination. Weren't they fighting a war on Dark City, a city 220 million light years away from Earth? When they had arrived, she thought to end this war quickly and save Dragonic... But after arriving here, she was overwhelmed by its scale.

‘Will humans die after fighting, scattered throughout this vast universe?’

A monster rushed forward. She blocked it and then killed it with a slash. However, when she killed it, another monster would charge at her. What if they cleared this place up? Even Dark City was considered a rural city in the entire scope of the alliance.

‘Where will we be called to next?’

There were as many monsters as there were stars in the sky… No, there were so many that they could cover the entire universe.

Reflected in her eyes—

Blaze

Was Choi Hyuk’s surging flames. Scarlet, ominous flames. However, in that moment, she, for some reason, felt that this ominousness was welcomed and even longed for it. This Dark City, which was filled with unfamiliar things, was dyed in the familiar light of Choi Hyuk’s flames.

Swish!

Ryu Hyunsung wielded his sword without rest. Befitting of a director who had become a middle-ranked warrior, every time he swung his sword, monsters would die by the handful. He even took care of the monsters the low-ranked warriors had difficulty dealing with. Especially the monsters that were reported previously, those were spotted occasionally. Although they generally possessed power similar to that of a middle-ranked warrior, their traits were different. There was one whose strength was strong, but its movements were slow or its endurance was weak, and it could be killed by low-ranked warriors, but that wasn’t the case for all of them. The difference between those individual monsters was large. Even their appearances were different. What they all had in common, however, was that they looked strange, as if they had been kneaded into their shapes.

“They are rough around the edges as if they were created as tests.”

However, there were some that were especially strong amongst them.

“Sho stoopudd. Keuhik!”

It mocked as it ripped apart a Berserker who had been charging at him fearlessly. Seeing as how it easily ripped apart a 4-star level low-ranked warrior, it seemed to be a legitimate middle-ranked monster. He had to wipe it out before the number of casualties grew.

Ryu Hyunsung’s sword fell vertically, aiming at the monster’s head.

“Keuhik!”

The monster easily avoided his attack and stretched its arm out. A strange power was consolidated in its hand.

“Hmmp! Too simple!”

However, Ryu Hyunsung retreated back slightly as he raised his lowered sword. He didn’t approach close to attack. He lightly wielded his sword, aiming at the monster’s wrist. The monster’s wrist was sliced off. Even the power that had consolidated in its hand was cut and scattered. Among the talking monsters he had fought until now, it was the most balanced, but its attacks were simple like a child’s. It was far from being a match for Ryu Hyunsung, who was renowned as being the best technician in the Berserkers.

“Kak?”

It seemed it didn’t see his sword swing up as the monster made a weird noise in surprise.

“Likke diss?”

Then, as if it understood, it nodded its head.

It began to swing its remaining left arm back and forth. Its movements were similar to Ryu Hyunsung's sword skills, his footwork unique to fencing and his quick slashes.

"... What did you...!?"

While Ryu Hyunsung was taken aback by the monster's unexpected actions, it stretched its hand once more.

Ryu Hyunsung reacted to it reflexively. He took a step back and targeted its wrist once again. However, the monster retracted its arm before he could. It had anticipated his move. The monster smiled.

"You bastard...!"

Ryu Hyunsung wielded his sword. However, the more they fought, the more refined the monster's movements became. It seemed like the monster was studying Ryu Hyunsung. It imitated his movements and even imitated his emotions.

It became harder to fight him.

"Keeuk!"

Ryu Hyunsung felt helpless. His confidence, which rose after becoming a middle-ranked warrior, wavered. Even though he possessed techniques more robust than anyone else, he lacked the decisive power that Choi Hyuk and Chu Youngjin possessed. This weakness was revealing itself right now. It was 'studying' Ryu Hyunsung. Ryu Hyunsung lacked the power to kill it with one strike.

His body felt heavier as if he had sunken into a swamp.

Kwing!

A bullet pierced the monster's temple like lightning.

Baaang!

The monster's head exploded like fireworks.

Wheee!

The bullet, which had pierced the monster's head, let out a whistle as it freely flew up and returned to its owner, Lankin. Various colored bullets were swirling around Lankin.

"Get a hold of yourself! Either kill it quickly or bounce. What are you doing, giving information to the monster while fighting it?"

Lankin, whose red torso was unusually bright, warned Ryu Hyunsung once more as he passed him.

"Stay alert. They are a new type of monster. They imitate us. They can even talk. Although it seems like the majority are strange at the moment... What do you think will happen once they finish imitating us? Don't give them too much information."

An odd nervousness and fear were mixed in Lankin's voice. Although he had exaggerated his happiness, he too was feeling fear from the fact that Dark City was being attacked as well as from the fact that a new type of pathway and monster, that they hadn't discovered until now, had appeared.

Even he, who was a warrior of the Armored Soul Tribe, which was one of the top 4 strongest tribes, wasn't optimistic of this war. When he became aware of this, Ryu Hyunsung felt gloomy for some reason. Even though he had thought he had become considerably stronger, there was no end in sight, like a nightmare he couldn't wake up from. Though he had gone beyond Kangdong District, Seoul, Earth, and even Dragonic, there was no end to the war and the situation was always bad.

'Is this a fight we can win? After repeatedly fighting like this, will I too die and disappear like my friends?'

Although he always acted otherwise, Ryu Hyunsung was weak-hearted and always fought against these thoughts.

Also, from what he knew, there was only one method to beat his weakened heart. Ryu Hyunsung glanced at the red sky. Choi

Hyuk's flames. When he saw them, his heart became calm for some reason.

He cleared his mind. He left his body to the fight. He didn't think of the future nor did he look back to the past. He simply lost himself in fighting. Then there wasn't an opportunity for his weak heart to burrow in, and it would disappear.

"..."

Lankin shrugged his shoulders as he saw Ryu Hyunsung charging forward without a reply, wielding his sword.

"... His fighting attitude is good."

Then his gaze slid towards Choi Hyuk.

"I think I know who he learned it from."

It wasn't only Lankin. Every human had looked at Choi Hyuk once. Alexei did, so did Camilla, even Ryu Hyunsung looked at him.

Choi Hyuk. He was indeed the incarnation of the karma fate 'Battle Addict'.

He fought without rest or hesitation.

His figure, which jumped into the middle of the poja, that fluctuated as if it were sky diving, and into the horde of monsters, was elegant.

Blaze!

The scarlet flames, which surged towards the sky, was like an orchestra. Choi Hyuk conducted his flames as he sliced newly born elite monsters in two. He didn't have the slightest bit of hesitation. The smile on his lips was like the enlightened Buddha's. He accepted the fight with his entire body and was enjoying it.

All fear and dejection disappeared in front of him.

Like the disappearing fear and dejection, the monsters

obstructing his path melted away.

“No matter how I look at it, he’s not at the level of a middle-ranked warrior… Whether it’s because that Weapon of Vow is a monster or he is. Maybe it’s both…”

Following behind him, Lankin felt devout for some reason.

Chapter 118: The Alien Troops From Earth (3)

To be honest, it wasn't as if Richard was confident.

No matter how bold he was, wasn't this a problem that would determine humanity's survival? No, when considering that humanity inherited Earth's karma, it might even be a battle that would determine the life or death of Earth's 5-billion-year history.

Of course, he felt pressured.

He felt it after coolly sending off Choi Hyuk's expedition.

Countless eyes were looking at Richard. Each bead of sweat on the back of his neck seemed like someone's chilling gaze. Everyone's fate rested on Richard, and everyone was watching Richard's every move. Their gazes weren't all amiable.

Although he already handled the lives of hundreds of millions of people as an overseer... The feeling he felt this time was completely different. This was war. On top of that, it wasn't a war fought with clan members who had declared loyalty to him, it was one that involved other clans and even non-combat-oriented colonizers who didn't belong to any clan. They were existences that could mock and ridicule every one of his decisions and proceed to hold grudges against him.

They had to win. If they didn't, then they would rip him apart.

However, their enemies were too strong for him to be confident of their victory. Even if they won, there was no doubt that the losses would be huge.

To be in charge of Dragonic's defenses meant that, no matter what he did, he would be subject to criticism and resentment.

Yet, Richard willingly accepted this heavy responsibility.

It was something someone would have to do, and there wasn't

anyone who was suitable besides him.

‘Am I really the best for the position? Won’t there be someone better than me?’ He didn’t even put those modest and timid thoughts in his eyes. Someone who could lead humanity better than himself? Since there were more than 2 billion humans, there was a chance that someone who possessed such talent existed among them. However, even if they found that person, there was no way that that person would have the same level of influence as Richard. Currently, the only one who could lead humanity at this time, and the only one who possessed not the talent but the right to do so, was himself. There was no other choice.

‘There is no one on Earth who can do this besides me.’

A heavy responsibility, but also pride.

When pressured by a responsibility beyond one’s abilities, some might be crushed by that responsibility, but others would exceed their limits.

Richard didn’t avoid this challenge. ‘Curse me all you want. Resent me all you want.’ If they needed a leader, then he readily planned on leading them. He would make decisions others would have difficulty making and take full responsibility for them.

Although he might only take losses… He would do it.

He was a king.

“Damn it, if I knew it would be like this, I would have gone on the expedition like Choi Hyuk… There are too many non-combat-oriented members.”

The problem that was currently giving Richard a headache was ‘military strength’.

They had given people the freedom to choose as a way to advance various technologies and increase their independence. As a result, non-combat-oriented colonizers, who didn’t fight for a living, made up 60% of the population. Even if they excluded those with

combat experience, 50% of the total population were no-star colonizers, having not fought even once. It was because they couldn't force them to participate in intense wars. As a result, they only had a bit more than 1 billion deployable soldiers. Although this might look like a lot at a glance, the endless number of monsters pouring out from the Kahur Kabkuns already exceeded that number.

The bigger issue wasn't the quantity but the quality. Left to defend, there were 800 million colonizers at the 1-star level who could be considered as beginners, 200 million at the 2-star level, 600,000 at the 3-star level, and 1,000 colonizers at the 4-star level. There were also only 3 middle-ranked warriors at the 5-star level, Richard, Yohan, and Diana.

It was only after the advancement evaluation when people began to actively participate in the colonization. As it had only been a year since then, there was still an overwhelming number of beginners.

On the other hand, the monsters were mostly at the 2-3-star level. At least the number of monsters at the 4-star and 5-star levels were similar to humans... But they were pitifully lacking troops in the 2-3-star range.

Traditionally, numbers were the foundations of strategies. However, where could they increase their numbers when the entire human population was already mobilized for this war?

"Erdbeben-Blitzschlag (Lightning Quake)!"

Quiiing!

Golden lightning, which contained Richard's irritation, split into hundreds. Like how Choi Hyuk's flames weren't simply flames, Richard's lightning wasn't simply lightning. It would penetrate and then exit out of each monster. All monsters caught by this light of death were pulverized and burst as if put in a blender.

“Damn… Is there no way?”

As they were in a situation where every warrior was precious, Richard had to think of a strategy while fighting. This was the same for the other overseers as well.

{The formation has been pushed back to the northern highlands. (Haa, haa) You’re telling us to defend around the Barhaloleun Mountains from here on out? For how long?}

He received a message from Diana. It seemed she was in the middle of fighting as her breaths were uneven.

“Indefinitely. Endure for as long as you can. You need to endure it for at least a week. Only then will no troops be surrounded when you retreat further.”

{A week? Everyone’s exhausted from fighting. Please send support.}

“It’s the same everywhere.”

Just as he said this, Yohan transmitted a message.

{The situation at the Western front is very bad. The number of monsters suddenly increased. Please send support.}

“We don’t have any available troops…”

{Then the Western front can’t last!}

“… What are the levels of the new influx of monsters?”

{Fortunately, they are around the 1-star level. However, there are just too many of them.}

“Then, I will send the no-star colonizers in the rear.”

{Then the casualties will…!}

“Even if there are casualties, there is no other choice. Although I hope you save as many as possible… In a pinch, use the no-star colonizers as a shield and preserve your strength.”

At Richard’s cold-hearted words, Yohan replied heavily.

{Understood.}

After ending the communication, Richard let out a sigh.

“Haa… Damn it.”

Crackle!

Lightning shot out of the yellow jewel in his hand and grilled the monsters. Although it wasn’t as effective as Lightning Quake, it was sufficient in holding the monsters back. With Richard’s intervention, the collapsing formation could momentarily maintain their composure.

They lacked troops everywhere.

“Huh?”

Just then, he suddenly recalled some information.

“Naro! Choi Hyuk made an alliance with the natives of Dragonic, right?”

{Yes, that is correct. He made an alliance with the native group within his territory, the El Tribe. Their current estimated population is 80,000. Usable soldiers are 40,000. They are 2-3-star level warriors.}

“What are they doing now?”

{When Tangka’s troops withdrew, they suffered heavy losses and have confined themselves to their territory, the ‘inverted tree’. Their leader, the Great Warrior Lantz, also suffered injuries and is known to be recuperating.}

To be honest, the ones who suffered the most losses when Tangka’s troops withdrew was the El Tribe. They, who dispatched mostly long-range troops, had almost been annihilated when the situation turned into a brawl. Their aspiration of advancing into space had been astonishingly dashed, and they took a break when the Great Warrior Lantz, who pushed for the alliance with the Berserkers, was injured.

The elders, who were leading the El Tribe in Lantz's stead due to his injuries, didn't have a direct relationship with the Berserkers. On top of that, they had to calm internal strife aroused by the losses they suffered this time. Like this, the Berserkers and the El Tribe naturally grew more distant.

In this sort of situation, Choi Hyuk had to actively trade with them and maintain their relationship, but he lacked such senses. To make matters worse, when Choi Hyuk had to hastily go on an expedition to Dark City, the alliance between the two forces had fizzled out. Even the El Tribe members who resided in the Berserkers' territory returned to the inverted tree.

"40,000 usable soldiers... Is that all?"

Although his question was of false hope, Naro precisely knew what Richard was wondering about.

{No. They are only a tribe of the El race. I heard there are inverted trees throughout the Dragonic. Although I don't know the exact number, the population of the El race should be significant. Also, the majority of them are experienced warriors.}

"Is that so?"

A smile hung on Richard's lips.

A non-human force that he could have join the fight had appeared. On top of that, they were experienced warriors at the 2-3-star level. However, Naro made a pessimistic remark.

{However, they are a species that hid in the inverted trees when Dragonic collapsed in the past. They might be fine with surviving like that this time as well. Will they fight?}

"We'll have to see."

Either way, there was now another possibility. Richard somehow felt excited.

**

{Second Garrison Team 1. We are going to destroy the 9th malformed Kahur Kabkun now.}

{First Garrison Team 27. A hellhound is approaching! Unable to retreat! Requesting support!}

Although there wasn't anyone who replied, this was a room to where all communications within Dark City was transmitted. Sitting here, one could understand the progress of the war throughout Dark City.

Here, Commander Mack stood at attention. Her always slightly floating feet were currently firmly planted on the ground. Her posture had no flaws. However, her lips were pursed in dissatisfaction.

"Do you even call for commanders now?"

In front of her was a warrior of the highest-rank whose name was famous as the owner of the Iron Mace of Vow, 'Starlight-Flow'. 'They' were also the commander in charge of defending Laniakea's Dark City. The Speckled Light Tribe members, which were the size of specks, would form a single group fate through their mind sharing ability. This formed fate community, a 'team' or 'nation', would be granted a single name. 'Starlight-Flow' was a name formed by a group of tens of thousands of outstanding Speckled Light Tribe members. Because of this, when referring to 'them', one didn't use pronouns like 'he' or 'she'.

{Don't be like that. The situation is just that bad.}

The tiny speckled lights vibrated to create a voice. It was a clear ringing voice similar to that of a wind chime.

However, Mack's voice was still blunt.

"However, what do we do about the Virgo Cluster?"

She said, seemingly upset. Yet, Starlight-Flow's voice was still beautiful and calm.

{I know that you are very dissatisfied with the alliance.}

Even as ‘they’ provoked Mack’s anger, their voice was unconcerned. As the Speckled Light Tribe created a group mentality comprised of countless entities, their emotions weren’t easily agitated. Because of this, they could easily speak difficult words.

{You believe that the alliance holds responsibility for the decline of the Dragon race, right?}

“…”

Mack didn’t reply. Instead, her golden horns that hung behind her blue hair burned with white flames. It didn’t burn up, instead swaying like a symbol. It was the expression of her anger.

She was a descendant of the Dragon race, a force that was once as powerful as the top 4 of the alliance. However, the monsters’ early attacks focused on the galaxy the Dragon race gathered and lived together in. The Dragon race, which had lost a lot of its power, kept suffering small losses due to the alliance’s strategies. Just like the earthlings this time, they were sent all over the place, frequently unable to protect their own territory. They had lost their territory an innumerable amount of times, and a tribe would sometimes be massacred. Even still, the Dragon race couldn’t choose to secede from the alliance. Secession meant the annihilation of their entire species.

Even as they saw Mack in anger, Starlight-Flow was calm.

{That’s why I am the commander. So this is not an act of self-centeredness of a species. You know that our Speckled Light Tribe has no connections with Dark City.}

“…”

Starlight-Flow began to comfort Mack.

{Over a hundred hellhounds have appeared in Dark City already. That’s not all. Three highest-ranked monsters have also been

spotted. On the other hand, there are only two highest-ranked warriors on our side, including me. 3 vs. 2. We are missing one. We have no choice but to combine the strengths of high-ranked warriors to fend them off until support from the center arrives. Since the situation is like this, we called all the high-ranked warriors in the Laniakea Supercluster, yet we're still tight. Even if you are dissatisfied, help out. We can't call one and not another. All the high-ranked warriors called here this time are absolutely needed in their own galaxies. It's not just you. And you know that I carefully distinguish reward and punishment. I'll give you as much as the amount of effort you put in.}

This was true. Mack had, in the past, gained power through Starlight-Flow's accurate rewarding and grew rapidly. Because of it, she had been able to take a step back emotionally at Starlight-Flow's words back then. It was the same this time.

Commander Mack's expression relaxed slightly. It seemed a few members of the Speckled Light Tribe, which made up Starlight-Flow, flew up happily. However, as a whole, Starlight-Flow's voice didn't change.

{It's the same for the earthlings you value. To be honest, you may ask how much help would they, whose strongest expert is only a middle-ranked warrior, be in this situation? But, if we start to overlook others based on their circumstances, there won't be any remaining troops to call. So don't antagonize us too much.}

At Starlight-Flow's words, Commander Mack's shoulders slightly dropped as she replied,

"Understood. I won't be dissatisfied anymore. However..."

She raised her head slightly and said in a voice mixed with playfulness,

"They will be of much more help than you think."

{Who? The earthlings?}

The moment Starlight-Flow asked, a field report regarding the earthlings was heard.

All communications were shared with Starlight-Flow, who was the commander.

{This is the Third Garrison Team 17 Leader Lankin. We have destroyed our second malformed Kahur Kabkun. We will start on our third.}

{What? Again? Already?}

{Overseer Choi Hyuk and his expedition that were dispatched as support are rendering brilliant achievements. Wow. Third garrison commander, these guys are no joke. Choi Hyuk, that guy is the owner of a Weapon of Vow. The famous one!}

The surprised voice of the third garrison commander and Lankin's excited voice mingled together.

A few specks of light flew upwards as if finding this was interesting.

{Ha?}

Commander Mack shrugged her shoulders toward Starlight-Flow.

"Right?"

Chapter 119: Alien Troops From Earth (4)

Richard went to the residence of the El tribe, the ‘inverted tree’. It was to ask that they participate in the war against the monsters.

Three elders met with Richard.

“Why have you come here? As we have already made an alliance with Overseer Choi Hyuk, we have no relations with you. Also, the Great Warrior of the First Branch, Lantz, who was assigned to interact with the humans, is currently on break.”

The great elder, who was the oldest among the El Tribe at over 200 years old, drew a clear line between them on their first meeting.

His well-built figure, which was over 2 meters tall, possessed thick muscles, making the fact that he was the oldest meaningless.

This place was the heart of the El Tribe. Elders with imposing appearances stood at the front to meet with Richard, while other great warriors of the El Tribe watched from behind them. The elites of the El Tribe surrounded them.

The El Tribe didn’t welcome them. In the midst of them stood Richard’s aide, Leah, and himself. Although a situation like this would make most disheartened, Richard stood dignified. Even though he possessed the small figure of a human, he looked as big as anyone present.

“That’s why we came here. How about we create a new alliance? This time with all earthlings.”

Richard didn’t talk in circles and went straight to the point. He already knew that the El Tribe was aggressive and forthright. From the Berserkers remaining on Dragonic, he had heard of the simple method Choi Hyuk had used to ally with the El Tribe.

As expected, this sort of speech was effective.

The great elder wasn't taken aback by the straightforward proposal as if he had expected it. Only, his reply was negative.

"... Our tribe's numbers aren't as large as yours. An alliance with Overseer Choi Hyuk is enough. Though... we don't know how things will turn out."

"Aren't as large... Are you referring to the El Tribe members here or the entirety of the El race?"

"The entirety of the El race? No, of course, I am talking about the El Tribe members living in this tree."

"Then what is the total population of the El race?"

At Richard's series of questions, the great elder frowned.

"Stop with the unrelated questions. Also, sorry but we have no thoughts on taking action in your fight against the monsters. It doesn't look like the situation will reverse even if our tribe, whose numbers only reach tens of thousands, participates. To be honest... In this current situation without Overseer Choi Hyuk, we judge that there is no chance humanity will come out victorious. If you have no other business, come have a meal before you go back."

At the great elder's words, Richard laughed, not suiting the situation. After nonchalantly telling him that earthlings would fail and that they wouldn't participate, he told him to 'have a meal before he went back'. They were a cool-headed yet strangely warm-hearted species.

Richard did his best to swallow his laughter before saying,

"That's why I am asking. It's not an unrelated question."

The checkered muscles covering the grand elder's body squirmed as he looked blankly at Richard, seemingly wondering what he would say next.

Richard said,

"I, no, us earthlings want to make an alliance with the entire El

race.”

“The entire El race?”

“Yes. Not only the El Tribe living in this tree but all the El Tribes living on Dragonic. We want to make an alliance with all the El Tribes.”

At first, the great elder didn’t seem to understand Richard’s words. However, after slowly realizing his meaning, he made a shocked expression.

Richard continued,

“It’ll be difficult with just humans. However, if all the El Tribes join, we have a chance at victory. Let’s combine our strength and chase out those monsters from Dragonic forever.”

Murmurs.

As soon as Richard said those words, the expressions of the other elders standing behind the great elder and the great warriors, who had been spectating, changed greatly. The surrounding El Tribe elites began to murmur to each other.

Even the great elder didn’t continue to speak as he simply opened and closed his mouth a few times. Only after some time had passed did he speak,

“With… the other El Tribes?”

“Yes.”

Richard was inwardly taken aback by the unexpectedly intense reaction, but he replied calmly, not showing it on the outside.

‘What’s this? Were my words so surprising?’

The question on Richard’s mind was answered with the great elder’s following words.

“We’ve never… never thought about that. Although we do communicate with each other through the inverted tree… We have

never even met a tribe living in another tree. We never even thought it was possible. This... really is a difference in perspective!”

Dragonic was a planet that had collapsed long ago. The El Tribe, who had hid themselves in the inverted tree and avoided ruin, led monotonous lives. Even if they went out for necessary supplies and occasionally fought monsters, these actions would only take place near the tree. They had never met with other El Tribes living in trees far away from them.

Although they could communicate with one another through the tree, this sort of communication didn’t allow them to meet in person. In reality, they had lived thinking of each other as imaginary existences.

Even the most elderly great elder, who was over 200 years old, had never met another tribe. This was the same for his mother’s mother. The idea Richard, an earthling, had easily thought of was something beyond their realm of imagination.

“Meet other tribes?!”

Asking himself, the great elder’s voice had a hint of unconcealable excitement.

Richard shrugged his shoulders and whispered to his aide Leah,

“See. If we just give it a shot, there are cases where the unexpected occurs.”

Having shared the same pessimistic thoughts as Naro, Leah simply stuck her tongue out at Richard, who was putting on airs.

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The expedition from Earth was becoming more and more renowned each day.

“Move aside! Move aside!”

When Chu Youngjin’s troop, led by Kim Honghyun, charged

forward, allied horned aliens, who had been fighting arduously, became surprised and scattered in different directions.

Rumble!

Only shredded monster corpses were left behind in the places Chu Youngjin's troop, who prided themselves on their strong power, passed by.

Looking at them, a strange feeling welled up in General Lee Kangjin.

"Haa… Astonishing. Was that bastard's name Keushisuit?"

Back when Lee Kangjin was a captain, he had carried out a Consumables mission with Choi Hyuk. That time, Keushisuit, who had slaughtered Lee Kangjin's troop members, was of the same species as the horned aliens who had scattered just now. Yet they were now overwhelmed by Chu Youngjin's troop's force and were busy moving out of the way. They were still catching their breaths with the short break Chu Youngjin's troop had provided them. They could no longer look down on earthlings like they did in the past. Instead, there were more instances where they became timid in front of earthlings.

The earthlings, who had only been disregarded previously, were now pulling their weight.

"Yeah… I always fought with my life on the line for this."

Lee Kangjin followed President Shin Woojin as a South Korean soldier. However, his heart greatly resembled that of a Berserker'. He had never forgotten how Choi Hyuk saved him back when he was dying in the hands of Keushisuit, not for even a moment.

"Yeah… This, this is the start!"

Biting down on his lip, he ripped apart the 'poja' that was creating monsters. Although its outer appearance looked like a rippling liquid, the poja possessed a hardness that was incomparable to diamonds. Yet it was ripped apart like tissues and

melted under Lee Kangjin's sword. Lee Kangjin had reached the 4-star level, a low-ranked warrior. He pushed himself even harder to become stronger.

How many species had crawled their way up from being judged as Consumables to proper alliance members? At least among the aliens gathered in this battlefield, there were none.

The dispatched expedition this time were the top elites of Earth. The majority of them had started in the Ring of Rebirth and were heroes who had faced death countless times and had survived. Their mindset towards fighting differed from others. Because of this, even if their stats were similar, the earthlings fought much more skillfully than low and lowest-ranked alien warriors.

Choi Hyuk's flames burned endlessly at the front, and from behind him, earthlings charged forward like a blaze.

Every time they saw looks of admiration or timidity from other aliens, the earthlings felt great pride.

However, this pleasant feeling didn't last long.

Humanity was certainly no longer at the bottom. However, they were only now at the starting line. Humanity had to get much stronger.

Just as they destroyed another malformed Kahur Kabkun, an urgent order came down.

{3rd Garrison Team 17, immediately leave the battlefield! Immediately leave the battlefield! Two hellhounds and one highest-ranked monster are moving towards you! Immediately fan out and leave!}

As soon as they received the order, a roar, which seemed to not only almost burst their eardrums but also crush their bodies, erupted. Something so gigantic they couldn't see how large it was warped above the heads of Choi Hyuk's troops and Lankin's troops, which made up team 17.

“Kuak… What’s that? What’s just arrived?”

Lankin’s face distorted. ‘We only now heard the warning, yet it already arrived? That makes no sense!’ He had an ominous premonition.

However, what had appeared was not an enemy but luckily an ally. A gigantic battleship that dyed the sky in a metallic light. Lankin shouted happily,

“Steel Battleship!”

Steel Battleship. Choi Hyuk turned his gaze when he heard his words. ‘That’s the Steel Battleship?’ He had heard of it before. After killing the Wyvern of Destruction and awakening as a sovereign, Choi Hyuk had been called to the Steel Battleship. He had met the Giant Orc Karik there. He had first heard the words ‘Exalted Wings’ back then.

“Giant Orc Karik…”

When he said that name, Choi Hyuk’s voice boiled with expectations of battle. When he had first met Karik, all Choi Hyuk could do was not put down the sword he had raised. The spirit Karik exuded made all the sovereigns lower their gazes and lower their bodies. Back then, Choi Hyuk estimated that Karik was at the 5-star level.

If he really was at the 5-star level, then he was a middle-ranked warrior, meaning he was at the same level Choi Hyuk was at currently. Was he really?

Beside him, Lankin cut in,

“Huh? You know the Great Warrior of the Steel Battleship Karik?”

“Just… I saw his face once. Is he strong?”

Looking at Choi Hyuk who couldn’t conceal his fighting spirit, like a middle schooler asking if a guy was strong, Lankin laughed

while rearranging his external armor, making clanking sounds.

“Not a chance. Karik is a high-ranked warrior. You know, right? How hard it is to go from the middle rank to the high rank? Even among those high-ranked warriors, he’s an elite who rides on the Steel Battleship.”

“Steel Battleship… Is that amazing?”

“Of course, it’s amazing. That troop is under the center’s command, not the Laniakea Supercluster’s. They receive direct orders from the Exalted Wings. They go around carrying out missions throughout the Laniakea Supercluster!”

Speaking like this, Lankin’s voice was filled with envy.

Paaaah!

A bright light burst out from the Steel Battleship. A mystical symbol filled the sky, which was lit with a metallic light.

Blaze!

When the blue flames of the hellhounds, which flowed like rivers, made contact with the symbol, they would fruitlessly die out.

Then a voice that made one’s hair stand followed.

<<It doesn’t look tasty. Lifeforms here carry around weird things.>>

It was a human-sized monster. It possessed a thick tail and horns that curved down to its waist.

When Lankin saw it, he let out a ring in alarm.

“Is that a highest-ranked monster? Looking at how it can talk, it might be a new type of monster? No, that’s not it. Run!!!”

Lankin, who had been about to flee by jetting his karma, saw Choi Hyuk standing vacantly and halted his body, almost falling in the process. He hurriedly shouted.

“What are you doing? Run!”

“Over there… It’s the commander. Karik’s there too.”

Over twenty warriors were flying to the place Choi Hyuk was pointing at. Among them, there was Commander Mack, whose Crystal of Sentiment ‘Mack’s Desire’, which had previously been hidden in her hair, was floating next to her shoulder. There was also the Giant Orc Karik who held an enormous sword.

“Of course, they are! We are currently missing a highest-ranked warrior on our side! The high-ranked warriors are trying to hold that monster back using the power of the Steel Battleship! Hey! Aren’t you going to run?!”

“Wait.”

Choi Hyuk ignored Lankin, who was urging him. High-ranked warrior, high-ranked warrior. Although he had heard a lot about them, he had never seen their actual abilities. On top of that, wasn’t the monster they were facing a highest-ranked one? He wanted to confirm their power with his own eyes. He couldn’t miss this opportunity.

The clash between the monster and the high-ranked warriors only took a moment. When the Steel Battleship emitted a light that seemed to burn up, unknown symbols layered above the monster’s body. It looked like it was a karma technique that limited the monster’s actions, but the monster coolly said, <<What an amusing technique. I must examine it and take it,>> before rushing in. At the same time, the twenty high-ranked warriors simultaneously launched their counterattacks.

As soon as they clashed, with a whoosh, sounds were the first thing to disappear. Soon after, the sky was dyed in all sorts of colors. Then invisible, formless energy gushed out everywhere.

“Kaff.”

Choi Hyuk vomited blood.

The clash occurred in the sky a distance away and he had simply been looking up at it from the ground, yet he was beaten up by the after effects and vomited blood.

Crrreeeak!

Lankin's armor emitted a crushing sound under the pressure.

"Hey! Let's quickly run! Are you doing this in hopes that you'll grasp something? Give up! We won't be able to tell even if we see it! There's a difference of heaven and earth between them and us! Anyone below middle rank will die simply by being near the fight!"

Lankin prepared to flee by himself.

All of Dark City was trembling due to the collisions in the sky in the distance. Various lights erupted in a seizure, and shouting from the side, Lankin's voice gradually disappeared. Even though the ground and buildings were being destroyed, he couldn't hear anything. It felt like the world was being erased by their fight. Choi Hyuk kept vomiting blood.

It was like this. Humans had become much stronger. They could now face the Steel Battleship and the Great Warrior Karik inside it, both of which they had considered to be similar to gods or natural disasters, with proper understanding and status.

Even still, the difference between them and humanity was like the difference between heaven and earth. They fought in the sky, while Choi Hyuk, who was regarded as the strongest human, was pressed against the ground like an insect.

Still, Choi Hyuk smiled.

He wiped his blood-soaked lips, tapped Lankin's shoulder and left the battlefield with him.

As they left and as he gazed at the mythical battle which dyed the sky in colors, he said in a pleasant mood,

"Still... Now that I see it, I can sort of understand a little."

Even when Lankin looked at him, thinking, ‘What? This bluffing bastard,’ the smile on Choi Hyuk’s lips didn’t dwindle.

Chapter 120: Alien Troops From Earth (5)

I was suffocating.

My insides were drying up, turning black. No matter how much I flailed, I couldn't breathe. When I was barely able to take another breath, it quickly dried up. Sweat soaked my entire body.

I couldn't die like this...

But death was extremely near.

"That's why you should have fled when I told you to. What the... Why are you so unsightly?"

Lankin asked.

Choi Hyuk and Lankin were able to escape from the aftereffects of the fight after fleeing for a long while. It was already a great pressure to run as they had started late, but in the end, the two were exhausted before they met up with other troops. Choi Hyuk's condition was especially bad. He was crawling on the ground, unable to get up.

"Anyways, for someone who has only now become proficient at the middle-ranked warrior level to try to see the fight..."

Lankin scolded Choi Hyuk. Although his voice sounded normal at a glance, he too wasn't in a good condition. His lustrous, smooth, red torso was now the color of ash, and the surface of his exterior armor had become rough. The creaking sounds of the gears and mechanical joints, as if in pain, didn't cease.

However, Choi Hyuk's pain was beyond that. Not only that, it had become more severe.

(G-gaah)

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth to breathe, however, there was no air. Like a fish out of water, Choi Hyuk kept opening and closing his mouth as his body writhed. A silent cry. No matter how much

he squirmed, he couldn't breathe. Now that he thought about it, this place was Dark City. It was a city in outer space where oxygen was nonexistent. It was normal not to be able to breathe.

However, he had no troubles up until now.

'Why can't I breathe now?'

"... Why? (Gasp) Why can't I breathe? (G-gah)"

Choi Hyuk spat with difficulty. To be honest, this was also unbelievable, how could he talk when there was no atmosphere?

Lankin picked up Choi Hyuk, whose head was on the ground and was unable to stand up, and held him under his arm.

"You've been suppressed by karma. It had already been pressing down on you, but when you used all your strength to run, it pressed down even harder. It'll be strenuous enough to want to die."

Lankin ran with Choi Hyuk under his arm as he recalled that it had only been 3 years since the earthlings had awakened karma. It also had only been a bit over a year since they joined the alliance. He judged that it was obvious they were ignorant of matters related to karma. He explained in more detail,

"For both you and me, over 70% of the components that make up our bodies have been substituted by karma. We're in the process of removing the limitations of matter and are instead becoming the fate of the great universe itself. To us, karma is our flesh, food, and air, but because you were exposed to overly powerful karma just now, your own karma has been crushed. If I were to use the human body as an example... Your lungs have been crushed due to a powerful external pressure. The reason why you feel like you're 'suffocating' is because your body, which is experiencing this for the first time, has mistaken 'being suppressed by karma' for 'suffocation'. That's why, instead of gasping for air, try to control your karma. It'll be painful as hell until you get treated anyways."

‘Ah… So I won’t die?’

At the feeling of dying, Choi Hyuk had futilely tried his best to breathe. He became relieved when he heard Lankin’s explanation. Although it felt so painful that he would die, he knew that he wouldn’t die right away.

Slump.

His flailing arms and legs relaxed. Choi Hyuk’s body fell limp under Lankin’s arm.

“What the? Did you die?”

Lankin became surprised. However, he soon realized that Choi Hyuk had given up on trying to breathe and had instead started observing his internal karma.

“Huh… What a tough guy.”

Lankin was dumbfounded. Although he had asked him to do it, he hadn’t thought that Choi Hyuk would have become so calm so quickly.

Could a beginner swimmer immediately stop flailing as soon as they were told not to? What Choi Hyuk was doing was similar to that. He had calmly overcome the fear and nervousness that he might die any moment and was motionlessly observing his state as he waited for treatment.

Lankin had also experienced it in the past, but being suppressed by karma came with extreme pain and fear. Since he had calmly fended this off, Lankin couldn’t help but be surprised.

**

‘I’m suffocating.’

‘Why did I think that I was suffocating of all things?’

Within this pain, Choi Hyuk observed his condition.

He was focusing on his senses. ‘Why did my body mistakenly

think that being suppressed by karma was suffocating? Just why?'

As soon as he overcame the fear and pain and started looking inside, he felt the karma that had substituted the cells in his body. This was the retribution Choi Hyuk had accumulated until now. At the same time, it wasn't all only Choi Hyuk. It was the retribution accumulated by the lifeforms of Earth as they evolved. Choi Hyuk had inherited this retribution. At the same time, a small amount of the fates of alien civilizations that had developed in the massive universe was also mixed in. He had also accumulated a different kind of retribution from punishing the monsters that were trying to destroy this tremendous history. Choi Hyuk could feel each and every one of them.

'He said I was suppressed by karma, right?'

However, Choi Hyuk couldn't feel anything odd.

'Just how and where is it being suppressed? How was it before it was suppressed?'

How did his current karma differ from normal? These thoughts came up one after another. Then he came across the most primitive question.

'What was karma?'

First, it wasn't matter since karma completely transcended the laws of physics.

Someone had said that karma was the energy made from the emotions of lifeforms.

But then there was a contradiction.

Weren't life forms beings of matter? How could energy created by matter transcend matter?

'Then, the universe wasn't composed of only matter from the start.'

In the end, the theory that life forms could create karma meant

that an immaterial law existed in this universe since the beginning.

Also, Lankin had said that ‘we were in the process of becoming the fate of the great universe’.

‘Then, accepting karma into your body was accepting the fate of the universe into your body…’

So when new retribution (karma) was accumulated through one’s actions, it was also potentially determining the direction of the fate of the universe.

When he got this far, the conclusion became simple.

‘There’s no need to think about things so complicatedly. Karma is power in the end. Power that could sway the fate of the universe.’

Power. Everything was power.

At the same time, Choi Hyuk realized the reason why he felt the pain of suffocating.

‘In the end, even if karma is inside me, it is also connected to the universe. It is endlessly being influenced by the universe and is, in turn, influencing the universe. It has to because fate is <bringing change to the universe>. However, because my karma has been suppressed by an enormous power, it is temporarily unable to connect to the universe. It’s similar to suffocating.’

Choi Hyuk realized that his karma currently couldn’t communicate with the universe. Normally, his karma would be connected to the great universe and be constantly communicating with it. Even though he had seen it before, he wasn’t aware of it.

However, he knew it now.

Choi Hyuk could also feel that Lankin, who was running with him under his arm, was spreading his own ‘color’ out into the universe, while also feeling his karma absorbing the endlessly streaming flow of fate from the universe. This was the

‘respiration’ of the great fate.

‘What the? He acted tough but his condition isn’t all that great either.’

At the same time, he could tell that Lankin’s ‘breathing’ wasn’t normal. Lankin’s ‘breaths’ were short and even stopped momentarily.

Choi Hyuk himself was pretty much not breathing at all.

‘Can I… reconnect it? … It doesn’t work.’

Although he understood the symptom, he couldn’t treat himself. Like being unable to move your foot when it had been cut from circulation for a long while, Choi Hyuk couldn’t make his karma breathe again through his own power.

However, he also knew the solution.

He was currently enduring a pain that felt as though he would die of suffocation at any moment.

However, within this pain, Choi Hyuk’s understanding became clearer.

‘What I saw before is the answer.’

The fight between the high-ranked warriors and the highest-ranked monster. The karma they emitted.

The karma was completely different from the karma Choi Hyuk had seen until now. Could he say that they each had their own symbol? It was similar to the difference between a plain piece of cloth and clothes made with the heart and soul of a top designer.

‘They created their own fate. A fate to put out in the universe. Their own karma. Although it’s weak, it’s a power that can make the universe conform to their will. I have to be at that level to move this suppressed karma.’

While his body was limp and swayed like a corpse, Chio Hyuk felt his own karma.

He felt it. It was a lousy piece of cloth.

‘Aah, so it’s like this.’

From the beginning, karma wasn’t something that could be differentiated as ‘Power, Speed, Endurance, Stamina, and Control’. It wasn’t some lousy tattered complication of energy. Mixing everything together and creating one’s own symbol was karma’s true nature. This was most likely the standard they used to distinguish top ranks and those below.

‘That’s why they can’t express high-ranks with stats.’

Tap.

Choi Hyuk made a dot.

He made a dot in his rag-like karma for the first time.

He didn’t tailor it or dye it, all he did was put a dot and yet his entire body was soaked in sweat.

**

“What the? Why is he sweating so much?”

Lankin, who had sat Choi Hyuk in the healing spring water and sat next to him, became worried.

“Is he okay? He stopped responding when I called him since a while ago.”

{Yes, he’s fine. It seems he’s in deep meditation.}

‘Fragment-Light’, a healer of the Speckled Light Tribe, spread out widely and flew dizzily around Choi Hyuk’s forehead before replying.

“Is that so… Either way, it seems we, team 17, will have to take time to recover for a while. I’m sorry for this when the situation at the front lines isn’t good.”

{No need to worry. We just need to share the situation at the frontlines in the meantime.}

“Is there something new?”

{Yes. There has been a huge discovery about the ecology of the monsters.}

“What is it?”

{Simply put, the existence of code name ‘Lilith’ has been discovered.}

“Lilith?”

{It’s what we hypothesized after researching the poja all this time… But this hypothesis is that all monsters are derived from a single ‘existence’. We decided to arbitrarily call this existence Lilith.}

“…? Then!”

{That’s right. We finally have a goal in this unforeseeable war.}

An unforeseeable war, it really was that. The war had been ongoing for an extremely long period of time, and no one knew when it would end. Sometimes, the alliance would push against the monsters, and there were even times when the number of Kahur Kabkuns would drop drastically. There was even a time when they had been happy, thinking that the war had ended. However, at some point, the Kahur Kabkuns would, once again, reappear, being created at a crazy rate, and the monsters would pour out endlessly. The front lines that had done their best to push forward retreated once more. This repeated again and again. The alliance gradually became tired of the war, but that didn’t mean they could stop it.

“Lilith! If we take down Lilith, the war will end!”

{That’s right. However, at the same time, there is some bad news.}

“What’s that?”

{The monsters are much stronger than we thought. It was a fact

discovered recently, but it seems the monsters have already brought multiple dimensions of universes to extinction. It seems that the majority of monsters we fought were created while they were bringing other universes to extinction. However, monsters that spoke our language appeared recently.}

"... Then that means?"

{Yes, we see that as a sign... that they are seriously creating monsters specialized for our universe. Some predict that the large-scale attack this time might perhaps be to exhaust the useless troops that had been sent to other universes while taking this opportunity to beta test new types of monsters. Perhaps, the monsters had been fighting wars against multiple universes up until now and they had only now found a reason to specialize monsters in ours. Either way, it means that they will become more serious in invading our universe.}

"Oh, my god..."

Lankin's torso made a ringing noise. 'It's already difficult, yet they weren't even serious?' He was fearful.

{Now, about our problem.}

Fragment-Light gathered its members that had been spread like a haze. They gathered to create a single human figure. It had somewhat of a sad expression.

{It looks like the war in Dark City will go on for longer than we expected. The alliance is planning on sending reconnaissance troops to pierce the monsters' headquarters. They believe that, since the monsters are invading at full force, their headquarters will instead be disordered.}

"Attack..."

It wasn't like the alliance had never thought to attack the monsters' headquarters all this time. However, the opinion that it was reckless to attack the monsters' headquarters when they

hadn't chased all the monsters out from their universe was predominant.

However, the situation had changed now.

They now knew that they didn't need to fight against the entirety of the monsters.

"Are you saying that they are going to dispatch a suicide squad and only take out the Lilith?"

{They will do the prerequisite for that, a reconnaissance.}

"... It'll take longer for the support troops to arrive at Dark City."

{Yes, since the elites of the alliance will be sent there.}

"Haa... No matter how strong the Steel Battleship is, it won't be able to restrain a highest-ranked monster forever..."

{Yes... It seems that the front lines might retreat even further.}

"..."

{...}

An awkward silence flowed between Lankin and Fragment-Light. Although it was good news that the alliance had come up with a plan, because of this, those at the very front had to endure heavier losses.

Just then-

"Whooo."

Choi Hyuk let out a breath. He suddenly opened his eyes and got up from his seat. The karma spring water, which had been healing him, emitted a rainbow of colors as it dripped down.

"Ah, now I can breathe a little. Anyways, it'll take longer? But that's troublesome."

Choi Hyuk said abruptly as soon as he got up. His figure that was previously pale and had been sweating profusely was nowhere to be seen, and instead, he looked fine. Rather his face emitted a faint

luster.

“Huh? You?”

Lankin opened his mouth in surprise.

{How did you already?}

Fragment-Light was the same.

Lankin, who was less severely injured, had yet to recover completely, yet Choi Hyuk, who was more severely injured, stood up first. On top of that, he looked more lively than before he was injured.

“Tell me what you were saying just now in more detail. I pretty much started listening at the end.”

However, with his feet still soaking in the spring water, Choi Hyuk sat down and asked as if nothing was wrong.

Chapter 121: Alien Troops From Earth (6)

The great elder of the El Tribe decided to ask the other El Tribes whether they would join the war or not. As they were short on time, he rigorously decided on a message to write on the communication ‘leaf’.

———————

Earthlings hope to ally with all trees of the El race. They propose that we fight against the monsters together and make Dragonic a territory firmly and jointly ruled by both parties. As we, the Rikiniri Tree, the first senders of this message, share their opinion, we hope that you, our brothers and sisters, will answers the questions below.

Also, as we are sending as many leaves as we can, please write your answers below each other. Please help so that this matter and everyone’s replies can be shared to all our brothers and sisters.

> Please write your coordinates in Dragonic.

– The Rikiniri Tree is the fourth tree in the direction of the third branch of the sanctum.

–

–

> Please write your estimates on the likelihood of victory if we were to ally with the earthlings.

– The Rikiniri Tree thinks that the likelihood would be that of one branch out of ten not blooming flowers.

–

–

> If you believe that sufficient information regarding the likelihood of victory has been gathered, please decide whether you will participate. For trees that are participating, please sign below.

– Rikiniri Tree.

–

–

————————

Enormous leaves were shaking beneath the ground. Although their outer appearances were clearly that of leaves, when touched, they were like soft metal. They could see underground caverns created by the shaking of the leaves. They could also clearly see ground water flowing and hitting against the leaves, splashing everywhere and creating waterfalls that disappeared into the ground.

It was the enormous underground world the inverted tree had created. As if alive, the branches occasionally writhed, emitting groaning sounds, and every time they did, their leaves would make a clinking noise. When looking at it for a long time, the leaves looked more like the scales of a gigantic living being.

Richard stood in the ‘nest’ of the inverted tree and saw the leaves scattering and flying to other regions. Each and every one of those leaves was a ‘letter’.

Tap, tap.

The leaves, which had been hanging abundantly from the branches, kept falling and fluttering down deep underground. Endlessly… A green stream lit the underground.

“The El Tribe’ magicians sent the leaves throughout the world.

Since it's our first time attempting such a large-scale communication... It'll probably take a few days to receive replies."

The great elder's checkered muscles, a trait of the El Tribe, squirmed. As he himself wasn't certain, he couldn't give him an exact date.

"A few days..."

Richard nodded his head. Although he was inwardly a nervous wreck, there was nothing he could do.

"Then I'll be on the battlefield. I'll come back in a few days."

"Do as you wish."

One hour. This was how long he had been away from the battlefield to negotiate with the El Tribe. When considering the urgency of the battlefield, it was a long time. His karma, which had been exhausted due to the war, had recovered somewhat as well. It was fine if he recovered the rest on his way back. It was now time for him to return.

Just as he was about to turn around and leave, a leaf suddenly caught his attention.

It was an especially large leaf. A normal leaf was about the size of a townhouse, yet this particular leaf was the size of multiple soccer fields. A bunch of young El Tribe members were crowded on top of this leaf. They stood in a circle, and the mood, which was already beyond tense, started to feel more ferocious.

Richard forgot about returning and asked,

"What are they doing?"

Then the great elder replied with a bitter expression,

"It's a harmony ritual."

"A harmony ritual?"

Why was a harmony ritual so ferocious? Richard's question was

soon answered.

<Ooaaaahh!>

A loud roar rang throughout the whole tree. Then the young El Tribe members ran towards the center of the leaf. The circle they had been standing on shrunk as the distance between them shortened. Suddenly, they each took out their own weapons and wielded them at each other. Red, transparent blood gushed everywhere.

“Euaack!”

The first casualty appeared. “Keuk!” “Euack!” Then, like tomatoes being squashed in a mortar, casualties appeared everywhere. The green leaf was gradually dyed red. The leaf drank the El Tribe members’ blood and devoured their flesh.

This brutal scene wasn’t much different from the nightmarish experience of the first generation awakenees, ‘The Ring of Rebirth’.

“How is this…?”

Richard was at a loss for words. They weren’t fighting but killing each other?

“They will fight until there are ten remaining. This is our harmony ritual.”

The great elder was, on one hand, clearly bitter, but on the other hand, he was also indifferent. This was a ritual he had seen countless times.

Richard looked at the dying El Tribe members. They were young. If considered as humans, they were below their mid-thirties. Among them, there were even some that looked to be boys and girls.

“This is a harmony ritual?”

The divide between the name and what he was seeing in reality

made him even more confused.

Soon, he saw a strange scene. A few El Tribe members either drank the blood of those they killed, or cut parts of their bodies, such as their arms, ears, or noses and combined them with their own. Although it sounded unbelievable, when two arms were stuck together, they would mix together like clay to form an arm of a slightly different color and shape. It was the same for ears and noses.

Richard thought,

'Ah... Don't tell me that's harmony?'

The great elder said,

"We obtain two things from the harmony ritual. The first is strong, skilled warriors, and the second is the continued life of the inverted tree. Although it's tragic, you do not need to be sad. Either way, we become stronger because of it."

While observing the blood overflowing and dripping from the leaf, the great elder explained slowly,

"The inverted trees that protected the El race from extinction had appeared suddenly. At least from the information that was passed down, these trees did not exist previously."

When he whirled his finger, a replica of Dragonic appeared in midair. It was a replica made purely of karma. It was a refined karma technique that humans had yet to obtain.

When looking at the replica, with the place they called 'the sanctum' as the center, the tree replicas were spread out as if following longitudinal lines.

"The trees you see here are the inverted trees that had appeared throughout this world... Although we don't know when this map was sent... Either way, this is a map possessed by all El Tribes. Among these trees, it has been transmitted that a few of them have already collapsed and no longer exist. Although these trees, which

had suddenly appeared, were strong enough to allow us to overcome extinction… They collapsed as they too needed a similar amount of devotion.”

“They need the sacrifice of the El Tribe.”

The great elder smiled at Richard’s words.

“We call this harmony.”

Richard looked back at the scene of slaughter. According to the great elder’s words, the majority of the karma of those who died was absorbed by the tree. Those who killed them only received a portion of their karma. However, they said that if they killed someone who possessed a special ability, which only a small minority of the El race possessed, they could also inherit their ability.

‘Was it an innate skill…? Well, Kim Honghyun said that he inherited Kim Saehyun’s innate skill by drinking his blood.’

So harmony had two meanings.

The dead El Tribe members and the tree would become one.

The dead El Tribe members’ abilities would be passed down to other El Tribe members through a part of their body.

Richard looked at those countless deaths with bitter eyes.

The inverted tree was essential to survival on this planet occupied by the monsters. To maintain this tree, the El Tribe members had to kill each other periodically. A cold-hearted reasoning stating that, if they had to die anyways, the weak should die and the strong remain.

To survive in this cruel world, the El Tribe was, as expected, desperate.

Richard saw the El Tribe members desperately clamoring to be one of the living.

‘Did I consider things too lightly…?’

He suddenly lost confidence.

The El Tribes also wanted to live. Just like how the earthlings did.

Since the El Tribe living in this tree had responded so well to his proposal, he had let his heart rest too early.

How would the El Tribes living in other trees react? They weren't very familiar with earthlings. There was no guarantee they would easily accept. Also, if it was a problem of preserving their tribes, it was obvious that hiding in their trees was better than going out to war.

'Nonetheless, there is nothing I can do.'

Although it felt like a boulder had been placed on his chest, there currently was no other way. He had no choice but to wait for the other El Tribes' responses. If he, an outsider, hastily acted, then it was clear he would only garner hostility.

"Is that so... I will now return to the battlefield. I hope for a good result."

As he left the inverted tree and teleported to the battlefield with Naro's help, Richard felt powerless. It was a feeling he hadn't felt for a long time.

**

"We can't drag this on for long."

Choi Hyuk said firmly.

He recalled Dragonic. The Dark City expedition was comprised of the earthling's key military force. The longer they were tied down in Dark City, the greater the pressure on those who remained on Dragonic.

"But we have no choice. In our formation, we only have two highest-ranked warriors. On the other hand, there are three highest-ranked monsters. We are missing one. We are only able to

block them because we have the Steel Battleship and the high-ranked warriors dispatched from each region. If support is late... Then we have no choice but to wait until they arrive."

He seemed to be aware of the earthlings' situation as Lankin twirled his karma-gun and avoided his gaze when he said this.

The attitude he displayed was 'it hurts my heart, but we have no choice'.

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn't care.

"So, what you're saying is, we just need to get rid of that highest-ranked monster?"

"That's right. Since we have the Steel Battleship, we can overwhelm their forces below that level."

"Is that so..."

Choi Hyuk fiddled with his sword that hung at his waist. Looking at him, Lankin jumped in shock.

"Huh? You? You? You're not, right?"

A mere middle-ranked warrior thought of fighting against a highest-ranked monster? If it was the past, he wouldn't have even been worried. However, didn't he act recklessly, saying how he wanted to have a feel of their power, just today? Lankin was worried about Choi Hyuk.

'Crazy. Why is this talented guy so hasty? It'll be such a waste if he was to die like this!'

To Lankin, a member of one of the top 4 tribes, the Armored Soul Tribe, Choi Hyuk was a warrior from the countryside whom he had never heard of before. However, after having a deep impression of the talent he possessed, he kept worrying about him as if he was a child near water. Lankin wanted to see Choi Hyuk fully realize his potential. He didn't want to see him break like other warriors who died before they could.

Fragment-Light scattered and flew around Choi Hyuk.

{I sense belligerence. Don’t tell me you’re planning on rushing towards a highest-ranked monster? Stop it. It’s not a matter of mutiny, you will die a dog’s death.}

Choi Hyuk hadn’t said anything, yet the two aliens were making a fuss.

Lankin calmly tried to soothe Choi Hyuk.

“Although I understand how you feel, stay calm. Even if Dragonic is captured, as long as your key military force is okay, you will be able to make a comeback. Instead, the worst situation for earthlings is you dying!”

Even when Lankin said this in such an earnest manner, Choi Hyuk just wordlessly fiddled with his sword. Frustrated, Lankin asked,

“You’re not going to do it, right? I’m just making a fuss, right?”

Looking at Lankin, who suddenly shoved his face towards him, Choi Hyuk replied with one word.

“What?”

He was uncommunicative. Like this, he passed the two of them and left.

From the beginning, he hadn’t listened to a word they had said. There was only one thought on his mind.

‘I know the secret behind the power of high-ranked warriors. Since the Steel Battleship’s power can restrain a highest-ranked monster, if I can use a skill at the level of a high-ranked warrior, then I can deal a blow to the monster. The key factor is the magnitude of my power. Even skilled high-ranked warriors couldn’t deal a proper blow… I need a powerful strike that exceeds theirs.’

While walking out, Choi Hyuk tightly clutched his sword, which

he had been fiddling with.

Clack.

As Choi Hyuk's Imprint was grasped, it made an interlocking sound.

'Also, it definitely said that the power of a Sword of Vow was... <Unlimited>, right?'

Although 'theoretically' was written in front of it, either way, a Sword of Vow's power was <Unlimited>. That was why Swords of Vow were so precious in this massive universe.

Choi Hyuk considered it objectively.

'Although I discovered the secret of high-ranked warriors, my power isn't beyond that of middle-ranked warriors. However, my opponent is a highest-ranked monster. Will I be able to wield a power that can overcome 2 levels with the Sword of Vow alone?'

Then he conducted a critical analysis.

'Before that, did I really discover the secret of high-ranked warriors in its entirety? Could this be just one of the multiple obstacles one must overcome to become a high-ranked warrior?'

He considered his judgment and doubts objectively in order to make a sensible decision... Choi Hyuk began to think furiously. Choi Hyuk did his best to worry.

'What do I do if I can't bring out sufficient power with the Sword of Vow?'

'What do I do if I didn't discover the secret to high-ranked warriors in its entirety?'

However, an answer came forth from deep within his heart.

'No way.'

No matter how pessimistically he thought about it...

He didn't think he couldn't do it.

**

“The results are in.”

A few days later, after fighting against the monsters as much as he could, Richard, who was visiting the ‘nest’ while recovering his karma, heard the ‘El race’s decision’ from the great elder.

“After discussing with all the trees, if we become allies, the likelihood of victory is the leftmost branch not blooming flowers out of ten.”

Richard was slightly shocked at the passage.

“… What does that mean?”

“It means there is a high chance we’ll lose.”

Richard’s expression became dark.

Although he wasn’t completely sure, it seemed like it meant their chances of victory were less than 10%. No, considering that it wasn’t only one branch not blooming but the leftmost one, it might mean a 1% or even 0.1% chance of victory. The El Tribes were guessing that their chances of victory were extremely low.

‘As expected… Will they not participate in the war?’

However, Richard couldn’t give up now. The progression of the battle had become worse over the past few days. They absolutely needed the El Tribes’ help.

‘I have to somehow persuade them… We don’t have a lot of time…’

Richard quickly darted his eyes. Even in this moment, Richard’s ‘Eyes of the Judge’ distinguished the executives of the El Tribe into two groups. Those to keep alive and those to kill. Under normal circumstances, he might have devised a scheme.

However, the problem was that he was an outsider in this current situation. He couldn’t act rashly and didn’t have enough time to set up a plot. On top of that, what could he do about the El Tribes

who lived in other trees?

‘I’m powerless…’

He felt a powerlessness that was multiple times of that which he felt a few days ago.

Richard desperately hid his look of despair and asked,

“So?”

Then the great elder declared with a very rigid face,

“The entire El race living in trees-“

His voice possessed an unmatched decisiveness.

“-decided to ally with the earthlings and go to war.”

“As expected… However, could you think about it one more tim- Ah, wait a second? What did you say?”

Richard, who had tried to say whatever he could with an urgent heart, became at loss for words.

The great elder smiled and stretched out his hand.

“There has never been a time in our history when we had even the slightest chance of victory in the war against monsters. However, isn’t there a very small chance of victory now? If we don’t choose to fight with what might be our last chance at victory, then we can’t be called the El race. Please take care of us.”

It looked like the great elder felt great happiness at the fact that all the El Tribes chose to fight. He realized that these people of the same race, whom they had never met before, were similar to them, and he felt elated and thrilled about this.

Although the type of happiness he felt was different, Richard’s happiness didn’t lose out to him at all.

“Haha… Hahaha! Please take care of us!”

Richard held the great elder’s hand.

The El race's courage and belligerence were much greater than Richard had expected.

Richard remembered this.

'The El Tribes are much more resolute than I expected.'

Chapter 122: Alien Troops From Earth (7)

The smell of burnt corpses wafted in the air. When the blue flames blazed in the air by themselves, they emitted this disgusting stench.

Looking from the center of Dark City, there was a blue horizon. The hellhounds endlessly ate the city and spurted blue flames. Their front lines kept getting pushed back, and the city burned from its borders.

“Didn’t they say that the supercluster towards the middle has already pushed back the invasion? But why are the reinforcements coming?”

“I heard they were planning on a counterattack…”

“Those crazy! When everyone here is about to die?! Shouldn’t they think about counter attacks or whatever after they push them back?”

“If you say it like that, then what city isn’t being invaded? Stop complaining. You probably don’t know because you’re from Dark City, but this is happening in other places too! Don’t you even know how much preferential treatment Dark City has received until now?”

“What are you talking about? Why are you bringing this up now?”

“Hey. Hey, stop it. Don’t exhaust your energy and focus on recovering your karma.”

The region at the back was like a gigantic hospital. When walking down the streets, from heavily wounded people to those who had exhausted their karma, all sorts of people were taking a break and receiving treatment here. Perhaps it was because of the bad progression of the war, but the mood was disjointed and verbal disputes broke out here and there.

“They say the Steel Battleship took heavy losses this time.”

“So, a highest-ranked monster is still a highest-ranked monster even if it is restrained?”

“Looks like it. Because of it, the front lines retreated a ton again.”

“Apparently, the Great Warrior of the Steel Battleship Kanon died in battle this time.”

“Kanon did? Wasn’t he the pride of the Rondo planet? He became a great warrior of the Steel Battleship while being from a tribe on the outskirts…”

“That’s what I’m saying… Not only that, apparently, a lot were wounded as well.”

“The Steel Battleship… This… Will we lose?”

“Hey! Don’t say such ominous words!”

Choi Hyuk walked down the street by himself.

‘Steel Battleship… It’s been a long time.’

During this time, team 17 of the 3rd garrison had already gone on multiple missions. Although Choi Hyuk looked forward to a fight against a highest-ranked monster every time, perhaps it was due to the previous incident, but they were only sent to places far away from the highest-ranked monsters and he didn’t get the opportunity to.

Lankin looked at Choi Hyuk, who seemed somewhat impatient, and continuously warned him by saying, ‘Don’t think such useless thoughts. Enduring is winning. The position of earthlings is already low, but if you act out, people aren’t going to look favorably upon it.’

Of course, Choi Hyuk paid him no heed.

As soon as he entered the treatment center, he could feel a refreshing karma. The lobby was filled with warriors of the Steel

Battleship, who were taking a break.

“A single defeat is only a single defeat! What’s our motto?!”

“The more we’re tempered, the stronger we get!”

“Fight! Fight! Kill! Kill! While you gradually increase in numbers, we’ll gradually become stronger! If you can’t kill us! We’ll kill you!”

“Fight! Fight! Ooohhh~ Battleship of steel!”

They even started energetically singing a military song. As elite fighters of the alliance, despite facing a loss, their fighting spirit was overflowing.

Someone among them stopped Choi Hyuk, who tried to go up to the upper floor.

“Hey, who are you? You can’t go there.”

It was an alien with enormous antlers. He was a member of a tribe known as the Large Horned Tribe. It was a tribe he had met a few times during missions. The one blocking Choi Hyuk’s path possessed deer antlers like those on Keushisuit but the antlers were much larger. Looking at how he seemed to be a middle-ranked warrior, it seemed he was a hero of the Large Horned Tribe.

Choi Hyuk blankly stared at him and said,

“Move. I came to visit someone.”

“Hey, this place has been assigned exclusively for the Steel Battleship. Isn’t it the basics to reveal your affiliation if you want to go in?”

“Choi Hyuk, overseer of Earth, affiliated with the Virgo Cluster.”

“Virgo Cluster? You’re from the same place as me? There’s a place called Earth there?”

Asked the alien, tilting his head.

“Hey, hey, don’t you know? The planet that newly joined the

alliance this time! That's Earth! That guy was on air and is famous."

"Ah, really? Well, I didn't know since I was busy with missions."

He stared down at Choi Hyuk.

"Go up!"

After saying that, he returned to his group and began singing again.

Although he didn't know if they were like this because they were elites, their attitudes were always overbearing and provocative.

Choi Hyuk sighed and went up to the upper floor.

Commander Mack wasn't as injured as he expected.

"I'd be sorry if I was heavily injured when Warrior Leader Kanon put his life on the line and protected our retreat," she said as she swept her hair up. Although her voice sounded calm, a dangerous energy was emitted and swayed from her golden horns. It seemed she was extremely angry.

"Truly... This is what war is. You never know who will die. No matter how many times I experience this, I can't get used to it."

She shook her head.

"Don't die easily."

Thud. Her fist hit Choi Hyuk's chest.

"Understood. That's why could you dispatch me somewhere else?"

Mack, who had been emotional, burst into laughter when she heard Choi Hyuk's words.

"Puahaha! And here I thought this was a hospital visit! Of course, it wasn't, no way the heartless Overseer Choi Hyuk would do that. Puhah! But you came to the wrong house. I don't have any power. Just where do you want to go?"

“The Steel Battleship. I bet there are a lot of vacancies as well.”

“… What are you saying? I just told you not to die easily, yet why do you want to come to the Steel Battleship? Are you crazy?”

Mack gave a hearty laugh. Then she said in a serious voice,

“Although it’s not like I don’t know that you like to fight, but don’t show your hot-bloodedness this time, and even if that monster comes near you, run immediately. You only have one life.”

Then, after staying silent for a moment, she covered her eyes with her palms and said,

“It has become stronger. Maybe it’s because it’s a new type, but it was a bit clumsy at first then it gradually became more skilled. As expected of a monster that was created with us as a reference. It adjusts and grows stronger. Because of that, an error appeared in our tactic… Kanon dying is really… Either way, be careful. Currently, it’s not a big exaggeration to say that the fate of the earthlings hangs on you. You have to live for the earthlings to grow stronger. And even increase your position within the alliance.”

“Commander.”

Choi Hyuk called Mack. Choi Hyuk unleashed his karma so that Mack could see every nook and cranny.

“I told you you can-Huh?”

Mack, who had been shaking her head, felt Choi Hyuk’s karma. Then she perceived the ‘change’ within it. A trace of karma that a middle-ranked warrior could never have. When using a drawing as an example, it was ‘incomplete’ with only a few lines drawn, but it was a karma that gave her a terrifying feeling with just that.

Choi Hyuk said,

“Commander, I’m not fighting to protect someone.”

Mack couldn’t reply. Only, she thought that even Choi Hyuk himself might be included in that ‘someone’.

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Commander Mack reported Choi Hyuk’s request to her superior.

Not long after, Choi Hyuk separated from the expedition from Dragonic and was dispatched to the Steel Battleship. He was even sent under the premise of the successor of the Great Warrior Kanon.

Although he was still a middle-ranked warrior, he had realized the realm of high-rank. Also, he possessed a universal treasure, a Sword of Vow. These two points were the secret to his lightning quick promotion.

Of course, this didn’t mean Dark City placed high expectations on him either. He was only being used because he could be the slightest bit of help in the fight against the highest-ranked monsters.

“Middle-ranked warrior. Listen well. Your aim is to keep Narci in check. Don’t do anything beyond your capabilities.”

The name of the highest-ranked monster the Steel Battleship was facing was Narci. The one in charge of Choi Hyuk was the Great Warrior Karik of the Giant Orcs. He remembered Choi Hyuk.

“Normally, this isn’t a fight that a middle-ranked warrior can join even if you’ve taken a glimpse of the next stage. Be careful on your own. Stay put until you receive orders. Okay? Don’t die in vain after finally getting rid of your Consumables fate and reaching here.”

While repeatedly telling him, Karik patted Choi Hyuk’s shoulder.

“Understood.”

Then Choi Hyuk didn’t overexert himself and fought following orders. He would stay hiding in the back until he received orders,

then he would slash from afar. Since they fought so carefully, it wasn't very dangerous, and there wasn't any way to contribute enough for it to become dangerous.

"Huh? Who's that?"

"Ah, you know. The middle-ranked warrior who made a Sword of Vow. He joined the fights in the past few days and helped us. You didn't know? He's sort of like Kanon's successor?"

"The hell, what Kanon's successor? I didn't even know he was here."

"That's because he's still a middle-ranked warrior. There's nothing that can be done. It's already amazing he's able to endure being so close to our fight and not being squashed by karma."

"Well, that's that. We're going to retreat for a while again, right?"

"Yeah. The Steel Battleship has accumulated damages, and we also exhausted our karma..."

The great warriors of the Steel Battleship didn't pay much attention to Choi Hyuk either.

Then their fourth clash against the monster began.

This was the fourth battle since Choi Hyuk had joined the Steel Battleship.

This fight was different from previous fights right from the start.

Until now, they had retreated their front lines to drag out the fight so that they could preserve their power. However, this time, the highest-ranked monster Narci was the first to push its way through to a location they couldn't back away from.

"Why? Just why? Why is it forcing its way towards here while receiving attacks?!"

The method of leading Narci to a specific direction had been simple up until now. In the direction it wasn't supposed to go, they

concentrated enough power to make it unable to bear the damages and threw tasty bait (someone's sacrifice) in the direction it was allowed to go. Although they would definitely suffer losses, it was a tactic that allowed them to avoid decisive losses.

However, at this moment, it was receiving concentrated fire on its body, ignoring the easily destroyable targets in front of it, and making its way towards Dark City's strategic point, 'the Dark Ocean'. It was the very same location Choi Hyuk had created his Sword of Vow in the past.

Narci naively pushed its way through as it said.

<<Why aren't you letting me go this way? Is there something over here?>>

As expected of a monster that was created in imitation of karmalings, it knew how to think and also possessed a sense of curiosity. Its movement patterns were completely different from previous monsters. It was much more difficult to control than previous monsters.

The highest-ranked monster Narci possessed enormous freezing wings on its back. Due to its swaying blue wings, even the space around them froze and broke apart. Anything that touched these terrifying freezing wings would freeze, and it would spread everywhere. Warriors said that its wings were similar to the flame wings the Flame Wing Tribe would release during a fight. Only, their properties completely conflicted with each other. Its freezing wings were unbelievably compatible with the blue flames the hellhounds emitted.

Blaaaze!

A scarlet flame wing sprouted from the Giant Orc Karik's back. Expected of a giant orc serving the Flame Wing Tribe, he could use their flame wings. Though it wasn't a complete pair with only a lone wing on his left shoulder.

However, although it wasn't complete, it was a higher-level flame than the 'Flaming Wing Dance' Choi Hyuk used. The intense flames from Karik's flame wing and its feathers obstructed Narci's freezing wings. Even though it fluttered as though it would die out, Karik's flame somehow managed to block the freezing wing's advance. It didn't touch Choi Hyuk at least.

"Be careful. It's different from before. Don't take even a step over my flames."

The Giant Orc Karik warned Choi Hyuk.

{The monster is engaging in combat! We won't avoid! Our goal is to make it back down! We can't give it the Dark Ocean!}

The vice-captain of the Steel Battleship shouted resolutely. As the captain, who was the other highest-ranked warrior, was fighting another highest-ranked monster by himself elsewhere, the vice-captain was the one in command of the Steel Battleship.

The Dark Ocean could be said to be the entirety of Dark City's worth. The Steel Battleship decided to defend it.

The monster's freezing wings spread continuously. It froze space as well as the dark matter, which Dark City was composed of. Space and the parts of the city that had frozen at last shattered and fell, and these freezing shattered pieces froze even more of the city once they fell to the ground. Would it look like this if the sky collapsed? Would the world's extinction look like this? Those who lived near the Dark Ocean all screamed in confusion as they died. The highest-ranked monster Narci advanced, strolling with five hellhounds.

Kwoooh!

The Steel Battleship emitted a noise as it blazed up. It covered Narci and the hellhounds with a strange symbol. It was a karma technique that restrained the highest-ranked monster's abilities.

Then the high-ranked warriors' simultaneous attacks began.

Whoosh!

Sound disappeared this time as well.

It was a clash between Narci and the Steel Battleship that had completely suppressed Choi Hyuk last time.

However, this time, Choi Hyuk wasn't suppressed. He observed their clash more clearly from a closer distance.

A world frozen white by Narci's freezing wings was nullified as it was ripped and torn apart by the high-ranked warriors' attacks.

{Push! Karik! We'll fire the Steel Battleship's main armament so smash its heart. Choi Hyuk, move behind the Steel Battleship!}

As soon as the vice-captain's orders were sent, Karik, who had been protecting Choi Hyuk, spread his wings and shot forward.

Kwoooh!

At the same time, white flames poured out from the Steel Battleship, which had been blazing white. Its main armament was created after researching the powerful breaths of the ancient dragon race. Its flames remained in Karik's sword. As highest-ranked monsters could just avoid the flames shot by the main armament, Karik, who was good at handling flames, directly contained the flames in his sword.

<<Keuaah!>>

Narci, that had continued to advance while overexerting itself, screamed as it was hit by Karik's lightning fast attack.

<<It hurts!>>

However, it soon swung at Karik as though the attack wasn't effective. Karik barely managed to avoid its attack, but his right shoulder was ripped off. Karik's body froze. His brightly shining scarlet flame wing coldly died out as well. Although he wouldn't die, a single attack gave him an injury that made him incapable of fighting.

However, battles were cold-hearted. The vice-captain wasn't perturbed as he called out a name.

{Next, Mack.}

Mack, a descendant of the Dragon race, stepped forward after Karik, who handled flames. Even though the main armament shot flames, it was still created by imitating the Dragon race's breaths so Mack could also handle it well.

Kiriring!

The Crystal of Sentiment 'Mack's Desires', containing the white flames, emitted a light next to her blue hair. Her horns, which stretch out behind her, were engulfed in flames brighter than ever.

"Keuaah!"

<<Kikiki! Again?>>

Mack charged forward resolutely, and Narci received her attack while finding it fun.

Chiiii!

Narci's freezing wings blocked Mack's flames. Although Narci wasn't able to shake Mack off, Mack too couldn't penetrate through Narci's wings. This deadlock was also an opportunity to attack.

{All attack!}

The great warriors' attack rained down.

<<Keuaah!>>

The monster Narci screamed as it was hit. However, it didn't take a single step backwards.

<<It hurts. But this time, it's you.>>

Brrdrrrdrk!

Mack attempted to break away from Narci, but her arm was grabbed. Just by being grabbed, her blue hair froze. Frost covered

her crystal. The flames on her horns seemed like it would extinguish at any moment. Her situation was different from Karik's. The attack didn't glance off her, and instead, her arm was caught.

{Mack!!!}

The vice-captain shouted. However, there wasn't anyone who could land a proper strike on Narci at this time. Even their main armament, which they had fired twice consecutively, was reloading currently.

The one who acted in this moment was Choi Hyuk.

No, he had been secretly advancing ever since Mack started launching her attack.

Following a route he had thoroughly analyzed through the previous three fights, hiding in the shadows of the Steel Battleship's concentrated fire on Narci, he approached right in front of Narci without even his allies being aware of his actions.

From Narci or the other great warriors' perspectives, they hadn't been able to notice him as his aura was too weak compared to the auras unleashed from their clashes.

<<Huh?>>

{Choi Hyuk?! Hey, you crazy bastard!!}

Just as Narci and the vice-captain became aware of Choi Hyuk's existence-

"Hey."

The Sword of Vow 'Choi Hyuk' Imprint' had already been unsheathed. Then it drew a very smooth line.

<<Keuaaak!>>

Narci's scream followed after.

Chapter 123: Alien Troops From Earth (8)

The monsters covered Dragonic. The sky swayed like stirred milk, and the ground trembled due to the onrushing monsters. The plants and animals that had endured Dragonic's previous extinction, became utterly extinct this time around. After every step the monsters took, the plants and animals would be shredded, mangled and infected, turning black. A rotten smell permeated everywhere.

Dragonic was being covered in death. However, there was a line which separated this death from the living. From afar, one could see that one-fourth of Dragonic was still green. That line was the line of defense, splattered with the red blood of humans and the black blood of monsters.

Just then, inverted trees rose up between the fields the monsters were charging through.

Rumble, crack!

Enormous roots erupted through the ground.

Like giant dragon tails, the roots swung around, mangling the monsters. The tree roots, which sprouted from the ground, held onto mountains and fields and eventually pulled out the inverted branches.

The trees rose from the ground.

The enormous leaves, which were seeing the sky for the first time in thousands of years, scattered. The leaves, which were similar to flexible metal when underground, became hard and sharp the moment they saw the sky.

Swooosh!

Slaaash!

The scattering leaves became enormous swords, chopping up the

monsters in the sky and on the ground with swooshing sounds.

Bvrroooo!

The sounds of the El Tribes' horns rang, and the El Tribe warriors leaped out. The earthlings, who were maintaining their line of defense, matched their timing and charged forward as well. The monsters that were at the front were surrounded and killed mercilessly. This was the first time the earthlings were able to push their front lines forward since the war began.

"Maintain this spirit! We recover the El Tribes' sanctum!"

Richard took command. Although the El Tribes' trees rose up, this wasn't even one-third of the El Tribes' population. Only the trees that were within the human's defensive line or not too far away had risen. The El Tribes that were located in regions the monsters had a firm control over weren't able to rise yet.

For that, they needed the El Tribes' sanctum, which was located somewhere between the humans' territory and the monster portals.

'There is an extremely strong power hibernating within our sanctum. It was passed down that it should be used to completely recover this land once the monsters left Dragonic... But since there won't be a next time, I guess it's okay to change the order of things.'

This was what the great elder had said. Even while he made an excuse, saying that he wasn't clear on what it was, since this information had been passed down a long time ago, he confidently said that as long as they could recover the sanctum, there would be a way to have the El Tribes, who were isolated amidst the monsters, participate in the war as well.

Although it was vague, Richard trusted him as, even after he said those words, his eyes showed the great elder as 'someone to keep alive'.

If they wanted to recover the sanctum, they would have to push their front lines forward, even if it meant overexerting themselves.

It was a tactic that would inevitably result in enormous losses.

However, they didn't have anything to fear as the only thing the humans and the El Tribe members had left was resolve.

**

<<Keuaaak!>>

The pinky finger of the hand holding onto Mack was deeply sliced into. Even though Narci had been fine after receiving the Steel Battleship and the high-ranked warriors' attacks, it couldn't help but be injured when facing Choi Hyuk's attack, which focused on one of its weakest points. If he didn't have his Sword of Vow, even this would have been impossible.

Doong!

The moment Narci's grip loosened, 'Mack's Desire' blazed brilliantly. As if it was smashed by an enormous hammer, Narci's head swung to the side, and she shook off its grip.

"Thanks, Choi Hyuk."

Mack, who had regained her senses in an instant, expressed her thanks.

{Good! We'll provide cover so quickly return, Choi Hyuk!}

The vice-captain urgently shouted.

However, Choi Hyuk looked at Mack's frost-covered face and said,

"Commander. Just once. Save me just once."

He, instead, kicked the air and charged forward.

"Hey! You crazy!"

Mack stretched her hand out to stop Choi Hyuk, but he was a step quicker than her.

“Keuu…”

Hesitant, Mack glanced behind her and distanced herself a little from Narci. However, as if she was aware of Choi Hyuk’s request, she didn’t back away completely.

{Mack! At least you come back!}

Only the vice-captain’s shout rang out, falling on deaf ears.

Choi Hyuk felt Narci’s malice, which seemed to tighten around him, wanting to rip him apart.

Brrdddk!

Everything froze around him. His body froze. Even his thumping Karma Heart, which had been protecting him, slowed down.

It felt like even time was freezing.

Everything besides Choi Hyuk and Narci moved slowly, seeming paused. Finally, Mack, who was a slight distance away, began to gradually freeze as well, following suit to the slowing time. Besides them, everything was slow. The sounds heard from outside were wonky as if they were played from stretched audio tapes. They heard the vice-captain’s shout, which had become low and impossible to make out, and they clearly and slowly watched as the warriors of the Steel Battleship readied their karma in desperation.

The only ones who could move properly within this slowed time were Choi Hyuk, Mack, and Narci. Ah, of course, Choi Hyuk and Mack’s bodies were frozen so they couldn’t move properly.

Clang!

Narci shattered the back of Choi Hyuk’s right foot. Although he didn’t know how it did it, when his frozen foot shattered, he felt a pain that seemed as though even his soul was being ripped apart.

<<…>>

Narci didn’t say anything and was completely expressionless. Only, it glared at Choi Hyuk with its white eyes as it mechanically

destroyed Choi Hyuk's body, torturing him. It didn't pay any heed to Mack, who was frozen only a slight distance away.

Clang! Clang! As if it wanted to utterly erase Choi Hyuk's existence, it meticulously shattered Choi Hyuk's body and turned him into dust.

Although a pain so intense that he could faint swept his entire body, Choi Hyuk didn't even blink. He looked at it until the end. Instead, Choi Hyuk was actually feeling joy in this moment.

'Good! It's not killing me right away. On top of that, it's even attacking my foot.'

This amount of pain wasn't much to him. The sweetness of victory would be more than enough to make up for all this pain and more.

Narci was expressionless, but Choi Hyuk could tell that it was completely enraged right now. A bright red light that seemed to want to blind him was emitted from its body. A simple, yet intense, killing intent dyed the horizon, an artificial sunset of Dark City.

Because Narci was so angry, it didn't kill Choi Hyuk right away. It wanted to kill him by thoroughly grinding up his body, starting from his feet. It even started with his feet and not his hands. Although he wasn't sure whether it wanted him to possess a sense of false hope by allowing him to keep a hold of his weapon, because of this, Choi Hyuk could overcome the part he was most worried about.

'If you take after us, then you must also take after our emotions.'

Due to its anger, Narci's judgment had narrowed. It only focused on grinding Choi Hyuk from his feet up.

Choi Hyuk was confident that Narci wouldn't kill him immediately, but he didn't know where it would destroy him first. Although he was prepared to fight him with his sword in his mouth if it destroyed his arms, for it to focus on his legs... There

was no outcome better than this.

‘Now I just need to overcome one last obstacle.’

Choi Hyuk waited. Within this slowed time, even a second seemed too long. Narci crushed Choi Hyuk, savoring it as though it was eating a snack. Still, before even 5 seconds had passed in normal time, Choi Hyuk’s lower body had turned into powder.

During this time, Choi Hyuk’s eyes didn’t waver in the slightest. While unable to wriggle his fingers, his eyes still glared at Narci. Seeing this, Narci’s face distorted.

Blaze!

Red light (killing intent) exploded.

Looking at this light, Choi Hyuk realized.

‘Now!’

He didn’t even take notice of Narci’s downpour of attacks on his body.

It looked like he was prepared to die.

This was Choi Hyuk’s resolve.

Normally, he wasn’t someone who should be allowed to die as it would be impossible to take revenge if he did.

Even if he had to pitifully crawl on the ground, he had to live.

But the world wasn’t so easy that it would give someone crawling on the ground a chance to take revenge. This sort of thought didn’t match Choi Hyuk’s personality either.

The universe was too large for a lowly earthling to imagine.

‘To try to preserve my life when dreaming of getting revenge against something like that?’

It was a foolish thought.

Choi Hyuk dreamt of the impossible. What he needed to

accomplish the impossible wasn't only ability.

Only after throwing his life away and still surviving multiple times could he place the impossible within his reach.

He didn't only need ability, he needed luck as well.

No, he needed fate.

Bang!

Choi Hyuk's karma blazed. His weak and tattered karma became string-like and weaved together.

Fate, Choi Hyuk realized what it was.

He had artificially obtained the fate, {Battle Addict}, through the alliance, but it wasn't that. What was known as the {Battle Addict} might have been a tutorial meant to help others realize how to become high-ranked warriors more easily.

Currently, Choi Hyuk needed a real fate, something that exceeded those artificial fates by leaps and bounds.

A sword that wouldn't break under the pressing malice surrounding it. A terrifying blade that could slice apart anything in its path.

Invincibility. Slash without fail.

Choi Hyuk made this his fate.

'I will even slice death.'

Choi Hyuk's karma had now, at the very least, perfectly matched the quality of high-ranked warriors'. As it straightened out, Choi Hyuk's karma added a new fate to the universe.

Due to the sudden burst of power, Choi Hyuk's frozen body returned to its normal state. Strength was firmly applied to his hand gripping his sword.

'He's still only a proficient middle-ranked warrior, but he's emitting the energy of a high-ranked warrior? I've never heard of

this!’

Even as she saw this, Mack couldn’t believe her eyes.

Choi Hyuk felt Narci’s oncoming power. Unlike his own karma, which had only just awakened, its karma was already complete and more enormous than his. A ‘death’ that was more than enough to break his newly awakened ‘invincibility’ fate rushed towards him like a tidal wave, attempting to swallow him up.

That moment, Mack fulfilled Choi Hyuk’s request.

Thud!

Narci’s attack faltered for a split second.

‘Mack’s Desire’ went beyond just heating up. It was to the point that it emitted a white light and inflated in size so much that it looked like it would break. Commander Mack’s yearning for her declining species’ revival was directed at Choi Hyuk at this moment.

“You think you’ll lose?! You son of a bitch!!!”

Crude swears erupted from her mouth as a formless power pushed forward like a landslide. Narci’s hand, which was approaching Choi Hyuk, stopped as though it was grabbed by a giant.

However, it was only for a moment.

With an annoyed expression, Narci lightly brushed off Mack’s power and, with an attitude of ‘these pests are annoying me’, swung its other hand.

However, that momentary opening was everything Choi Hyuk had hoped for.

The reason why he risked his life and tested his fate.

His Sword of Vow blazed. Bearing Choi Hyuk’s will, which was directed towards invincibility and slashing without fail, his Sword of Vow drew out its power endlessly. The potential of his Sword of

Vow, which added at least 300 karma points to a slashing attack, fully bloomed at this moment. 1,000 points, 5,000 points... Led by the enormous karma it emitted, the fate of the universe swayed towards his sword.

Choi Hyuk's strike, containing a power that exceeded the high-ranked and reached the level of highest-ranked warriors, slashed Narci.

Slice.

Narci's left hand, which was stretching towards Choi Hyuk, was sliced off. It spun in the air.

<<Huh?>>

Confusion burst from Narci's mouth.

It reflexively raised its remaining right arm and covered its face.

Slice.

But it too was sliced off with no resistance.

Splaaash!

'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' pushed forward and chillingly swept across Narci's shoulder and stomach. Black blood gushed from Narci's body. Its sliced intestines were cast into the air and squirmed like worms.

<<Huh? Huh?>>

Narci tried to heal itself, but for some reason, it couldn't. Its power was suppressed by the karma contained in Choi Hyuk's Sword of Vow. If it wasn't under the Steel Battleship's debuff, it could have endured it somehow, but it couldn't right now.

Narci lost all the composure it had possessed until now.

'Since you take after us... You must also take after our arrogance.'

Choi Hyuk revealed a bloody smile.

“Also… You probably take after our fear as well, right?”

After he said those words, Choi Hyuk lost consciousness and fell to the ground.

<<Ahhh… Ahh…>>

However, Narci didn’t have the energy to become enraged from being ridiculed by Choi Hyuk, who it had considered a bug. Its sliced body, sliced intestines, and its wounds which didn’t heal. Looking up with its white eyes, Narci was engulfed in fear.

The vice-captain, who watched this vacantly, jolted to his senses and shouted.

{This is an opportunity! All attack!!}

The Steel Battleship and the high-ranked warriors began to launch their attacks simultaneously.

<<Hiiik! Hiik!>>

Narci died, writhing under the barrage of attacks landing on its body.

The hellhounds that had followed it were completely slaughtered as well.

The progression of the war, in which they were constantly being pushed back, had instantly reversed.

Chapter 124: Alien Troops From Earth (9)

Through washing blood with blood, they recovered the El Tribes' sanctum.

However, every earthling who had arrived here had a dejected expression.

"What the hell... There's nothing here."

A black desert. The land had already died due to the monsters. This wasn't what they risked their lives for.

However, the attitude of the El Tribes was different from the earthlings.

"Ah..."

They all showed expressions of having just woken up when they stepped into the sanctum. As if they had realized something important but were still dreaming, they walked in a daze towards a certain location. The earthlings mistook their dazed, slow movements at first.

"As expected... Is this place a dud? Look at them, they've completely lost it."

Yet, the El Tribe members' walking pace became gradually faster. They were all walking towards the same location. What seemed like a small commotion at first became a single stream, and then soon, a tidal wave.

The El Tribe members no longer walked. They all ran. The earthlings were taken aback.

"What? What's happening?"

The El Tribe members gathered in a large, round circle at the location. To the earthlings, this place was a wilderness which looked no different from the other places, but the El Tribe members seemed to have felt something as they placed their lips

on the ground and began to cry.

"... It seems we came to the right place."

Diana said as she thoroughly wiped off the monster blood smeared on her sword.

"It seems so. What will they do now?"

Richard seemed slightly tense. He had recovered the sanctum after believing in the great elder's 'intuition', however, it was still unclear just how this would help in the war. He crossed his arms as he looked at the great elders and great warriors from each tree discussing this.

Unable to hide their yearning and compassion, the great elders and great warriors were the first to arrive, but they were currently hesitant for some reason.

"... Wasn't it set that we should only lift this restriction once we obtained Dragonic's safety?"

"Great Elder of the Lassel Tree, didn't we already discuss this?"

"But... Don't you feel it too? This is an inheritance we cannot afford to lose."

"I know. I'm scared and my heart is in pain, but we can't forget that it was due to the earthlings that we were able to step forth into the sanctum."

The most elderly great elders were more likely to be hesitant, while the younger great warriors urged for the fulfillment of their promise.

"We already rose up. There's no place to retreat to anymore. This could be our first and last chance. We need to awaken the sanctum."

"That's..."

The El Tribe members instinctively hesitated but, in the end, accepted that this was the only way.

“Your words are right…”

The hesitant El Tribe members shut their eyes.

“We can’t fight if we are afraid of losing it.”

When they opened their eyes again, they looked more determined. They piled their hands together.

Someone began to sing a strange song.

“Don’t resent.”

Then all the other El Tribe members began to sing along as well.

“Even if you lose everything.”

“As it is the fate of those who live.”

“Don’t look back when you fight.”

“Since it will only result in, at best, you joining those who died first.”

“Or brightly opening the future, which was only but a string.”

“Don’t be afraid to lose everything.”

This song was originally sung to celebrate the El Tribes’ sacrificial rite, the harmony ritual. The ‘those who died first’ referred to the warriors who had died in the previous harmony rituals as well as those in the past who couldn’t enter the inverted trees during the extinction.

It was a very old song, but all the warriors of the El Tribes had killed their own in order to survive. They sympathized with the song more than anyone else.

They would fight when necessary. This was to respect those who died before them.

Piiing!

A bright light shone from their gathering of hands.

A change began to occur in the sanctum.

Rumble!

The ground shook as though there was an earthquake. Enormous trees rose from the ground, surrounding the earthlings and El Tribe members gathered there. They were the inverted trees of the El Tribes.

A tree with red leaves, a tree with green leaves, and all sorts of trees rose up from the ground. Among them, there were even a few the earthlings were familiar with.

“Huh? Isn’t that the tree that rose up near Overseer Camilla’s territory? Isn’t that the tree near Barhaloleun?”

Not only their branches and appearance, but even the shape and color of their leaves were distinct, making each tree identifiable.

“All the trees moved here! All the inverted trees in the world gathered in one place!”

A quick-witted person shouted in excitement.

It was as he said.

The ground shook crazily, and an endless number of trees rose up from afar, covering the horizon. As all the ‘inverted trees’ in the entire world gathered, the horizon was covered from all angles. The earthlings and El Tribe members were surrounded by an enormous fortress of trees.

Amongst the risen trees, the tribes, who had been unable to bring out their armies due to being located amidst the monsters, leaped out, their hearts being moved.

The El Tribes leaped out, and the trees rose up. Those that rose up spread their branches and roots further out. The trees tangled together and became one. More leaves grew out from each branch. The appearances of these inverted trees changed.

The earthlings fell into a trance at this great transformation.

“Those are… Dragons…”

Like the words someone had foolishly muttered, the curving branches and sprouting leaves looked like the appearance of a dragon from afar. The dragons tangled together and formed enormous trees, and these trees combined to form a gigantic fortress. The leaves shined like dragon scales above the fortress.

“Oh, my god…”

Richard had uncrossed his arms at some point. Looking left and right, his expression showed he couldn’t believe his eyes.

“This is… a fortress blessed by nature.”

Filled with wonder, the Queen of England Diana didn’t know what to do.

The fortress, created through the gathering of all the inverted trees in the world, encompassed enough land that tens of millions of people could enter within. A warrior from Seoul looked at the land and the surrounding trees and recalled Seoul, which was surrounded by mountains. This was much larger and grander than that.

Ddddrr… Drk!

The continuous noise died down. However, the El Tribe members had yet to untangle their clasped hands.

“…”

“…”

“…”

A momentary silence.

Hrddrk!

Thin roots sprouted from the middle of the gathered El Tribe members, breaking the silence. The roots tangled together and created a large nest, and seven enormous eggs shot up from the nest.

“Eggs?”

Richard couldn’t take his eyes of the eggs, which housed immense karma, for some reason.

Shake.

The eggs shook.

Shake, shake, crack!

Each of the shaking eggs began to crack.

{Kireureuk!}

A small baby dragon stretched its head out of the shell of a broken egg.

The El Tribe members bowed their heads in front of the dragon.

During this time, the tree roots continuously grew slowly to create large buildings and towers.

Karma, filled with delight and vitality, filled the fortress and spread out endlessly. This power, which was spreading like a wave, could probably be felt from the other side of Dragonic.

{Kireureureuk!}

{Kyah!}

The seven small newly born dragons cried excitedly.

The great elders from each tribe came out and carefully held the dragons, which were tilting their heads.

“Dragons… The pact we must uphold.”

They alternated between being deeply moved and solemnity.

“Euheuheuk! Nice to meet you.”

“For this day to come… Heuheuheu…”

“Ah… Dragons. Yeah, I heard of them. Noble existences. Existences we need to protect…”

The El Tribe members, who had finally reunited after an extremely long time, hugged each other and cried. They worshiped the birth of the dragons together.

“Although I don’t know what’s what… I’m elated.”

Diana didn’t hide her smile.

“It definitely… seems like it went well.”

Richard smiled with a relieved expression.

The two smiled as they walked towards the baby dragons. However, before they could even take a few steps, they flinched in shock and stopped in their tracks.

Shaaaaaa…

Everyone shivered. There was an obvious foreboding.

A terrifying and heavy karma suddenly appeared, suppressing the karma of life that had just stretched out.

Its power pressed down on the fortress of trees as though it was saying ‘Who dares raise their head in my presence?’ A terrifying energy that no one had experienced before.

“A high-ranked monster…”

Someone mumbled, his jaw trembling.

**

“Although it had been lost, we recalled everything the moment we entered the sanctum.”

The El Tribes explained it like this.

Like how one could infer from the name Dragonic, dragons undoubtedly used to inhabit this planet. Also, the El Tribes were the friends as well as the followers of the dragons.

During the extinction, the monsters obstinately focused on the dragons, and the dragons, fearful that their generation would come to an end, sealed their eggs and hid them in a special

location. That place was the sanctum. They had chosen the El Tribes to undo the seal of the sanctum and take care of the dragons which would be born from it.

As compensation, the dragons provided the El Tribes with safe havens. They created the ‘inverted trees’ with dragon corpses and with the sacrifices of living dragons. The dragons had hoped for a regeneration in the far future as they gave up their own lives with this place, the ‘Dragon Nest’, as their focus.

“Because of this, this place is filled with the inheritance of the dragons. Forgotten knowledge, forgotten technology… With this place, not only the El Tribes, but even the earthlings can change greatly.”

The great elders of the El Tribes said this unanimously.

However, Richard added with a solemn face,

“If we protect it… you mean.”

At his words, the El Tribe members slumped their heads.

The high-ranked monster was approaching the ‘Dragon Nest’.

It was time to make a decision. Would they defend the Dragon Nest or leave it behind?

“… To be honest, we would like to defend this place. However… we will follow the earthlings’ decision.”

While saying this, the El Tribe members tightly hugged the baby dragons. If they wanted to properly take care of and teach the baby dragons, they needed the sanctum, but the baby dragons’ lives came first. They weren’t in a situation where they could diverge from the earthlings’ plans.

“Though it’s regretful, we have to leave. We are outside our line of defense. If we slip up, we might be isolated here, unable to move. Even if we consider the fact that we have a fortress which contains traces of the dragons of the past’s power… We can’t block

the high-ranked monster's path with just our strength."

Diana's words were reasonable.

Richard was lost in thought. If he considered which was safer, it would be to retreat. They would be able to buy more time and preserve their key forces. Only, that method wouldn't keep them safe until the very end. They wouldn't be able to evade the high-ranked monster forever. The longer strong warriors like Richard and Diana avoided fighting it, the more warriors would be sacrificed and the front lines would be a mess. It would be like building a castle in the air.

Not only that, but Richard was concerned about the inheritance left behind by the dragons of the past. The basic knowledge and technology necessary for humanity's prosperity could be found in the dragons' inheritance. However, if he chose to fight the high-ranked monster, there was a chance that their key forces, which came to recover the sanctum, and all the El Tribes, as well as himself, would die.

They were both choices he didn't want to make, but he had to.

Would he choose momentary safety or take a risk?

At the last moment, Richard called for Leah.

"Leah, give me a mirror."

Everyone's eyes widened at his unexpected request, but his aide, Leah, calmly took out a hand mirror. Richard motionless looked at his face reflected in the mirror. He closely examined each detail, from his platinum hair to the wound given by Choi Hyuk.

Then he grinned.

He decided.

"We'll defend."

"Pardon?"

Diana showed a strong reaction.

“The authority to command currently lies with me, correct? Please follow me. In return, I will stand at the forefront.”

This was Richard’s decision.

Chapter 125: Sovereign Of Judgment

“Then, shall we write our wills?”

“Our wills?”

“Yeah. Let’s all write one. Like always, we don’t know when we’ll die.”

They never knew when they would die. Even still, Richard ordered people to write their wills. This was because he knew very well that the fight against the high-ranked monster would be unlike any fight they had experienced so far.

**

Choi Hyuk was lying in bed.

During this time, Choi Hyuk became the hero of Dark City.

“How did a middle-ranked warrior slash apart a highest-ranked monster?”

“He has a Sword of Vow… Also, he had the help of the Steel Battleship.”

“Even still, does it make any sense?”

“Why can’t it? All the elderly who possess a Sword of Vow right now had created legends back when they were young. There’s nothing more to say about those known as the Exalted Wings. Although I didn’t think I’d see it in my lifetime, there were definitely cases like this in the past.”

“You’re saying Overseer Choi Hyuk is at their level?”

“Then he isn’t?”

“… Wow…”

“What should I say? The fact that I saw this historic scene with my own eyes… I’m very proud of it.”

Choi Hyuk’s heroic feat had become a legend.

The citizens of Dark City were proud that a legend like this had occurred in their own hometown.

{To be honest, it wasn't only Overseer Choi Hyuk. The troops from Earth fought better than we expected. We will now see a scene of the earthlings' fighting.}

Choi Hyuk wasn't the only one under the spotlight. Various broadcasting media platforms praised the earthlings' fighting techniques.

{Although the earthlings' fighting techniques are crude and simple, their utility is on the level of experts. Who would have thought that a species that hadn't even awoken karma until four years ago would fight this well? This is why some argue we need to research the earthlings' fighting techniques and their growth and add it to the alliance's manual.}

"That's right. The earthlings were fiendishly good at fighting. Those who possess innate skills are rare and their karma isn't special... yet they fight strangely well. When it looks like they might die, they survive and attack. I've never seen fighting techniques like theirs before."

From the aliens' perspective, the earthlings really possessed nothing special. Like how the Flame Wing Tribe was born with the ability to create flames, the majority of alien tribes possessed a distinct characteristic in how they used karma. However, the earthlings didn't have such a characteristic.

From the beginning, the process in which the earthlings began to control karma was different from other species. The earthlings were suddenly able to use karma once the alliance dismantled Earth and allowed them to artificially inherit it. It was like forcefully making a flower bloom before it was ready. Because of this, there was no way their karma would possess a distinct characteristic. If they were to look for a distinct characteristic, it would only be that it contained the perseverance of lifeforms that

were created and had evolved throughout Earth's 5-billion-year history.

However, with just this, the earthlings were able to create a fighting technique that wasn't lacking when compared to the other species. In only four years.

"The earthlings are already reassuring, but they'll get stronger in the future. I look forward to it."

That was how Choi Hyuk and the earthlings became renowned in Dark City.

At first, when Choi Hyuk said he would attack the highest-ranked monster Narci, Lankin made a fuss, saying, 'The status of earthlings is currently low. If you act insubordinately, all the earthlings will be criticized!' but the result was different once things settled. Such things like 'my side' and 'your side' weren't decided from the beginning, it depended on one's actions. Even those who didn't even show an ounce of interest would, at times, gather to someone's side after an incident. What Choi Hyuk accomplished was exactly this.

The earthlings, who were an unspectacular species from the countryside, had, at the very least, become a species affiliated with the hero of Dark City.

Everyone had taken the earthlings' side.

Specifically speaking, what Choi Hyuk had done was insubordination, but there was no one who would dare say he needed to be punished.

As the war waged on and a new hero was born, the time outside passed by like a blur.

However, Choi Hyuk, who was lying down this whole time, didn't have the leisure to enjoy this mood.

{We can't heal the lower half of your body right now. It has been completely crushed by a highest-ranked monster's power. To

recover, we need to wait for a healer from the center. Due to your contributions this time, the alliance will undoubtedly send a healer… But it will take time. Since we're in the middle of a war right now.}

Fragment-Light said as it scattered like a fog and thoroughly looked after Choi Hyuk. The lower half of Choi Hyuk's body was still in a shattered state. Although he had regained consciousness in a day, all he could do was lie down.

If it wasn't for Fragment-Light, who was healing Choi Hyuk around-the-clock, he would have already died. His condition was just that severe.

{On top of that… Since you used such an enormous power with the body of a middle-ranked warrior, the karma in your entire body has been torn up. Even if a healer arrived right now, you would still have had to recuperate for a month.}

This was what Choi Hyuk felt as well. The karma, which had filled his body like honey, was now like dried clay, broken and split. He couldn't expend any strength.

Even still, Choi Hyuk urged Fragment-Light again today.

"Is there really no method? Aren't you aware of Dragonic's current situation?"

{Yes. I do. Isn't that why we sent Earth's expedition back to Dragonic even though the war in Dark City hasn't ended? However… There is no other way.}

"Really?"

Since the moment he had regained consciousness, Choi Hyuk restlessly troubled Fragment-Light.

Faced against his perseverance, even the objective Fragment-Light became fed up with it.

{Yeah, there is a way. A warrior at the same level or stronger

than you just needs to cut their karma and body and pass them down to you. Rather than regenerating your destroyed body and karma, you are transplanting them. Although it is a dangerous method, if it works, you can move immediately and even become stronger. However, which warrior will transplant their perfectly fine body over to you? That is why I said there is no method.}

"…"

Choi Hyuk couldn't help but be silent.

Although it was cruel, time simply passed like this.

The third day.

Choi Hyuk was still lying down. It seemed they seized their chance to victory as the sky, which had flashed with lights until yesterday, was now dark and calm. It was dark and quiet. There were almost no lights, as one would expect from Dark City. There was nothing to do.

If it was like normal, he would be able to see and touch dark matter, but due to his torn-up karma, his senses were completely in the dark. Since he didn't have feet, he couldn't move, and he simply lied down in his designated spot as he blankly waited for time to pass.

His only enjoyment was watching Fragment-Light fly around like fireflies.

'Ah…'

Choi Hyuk blinked.

Anger surged multiple times a day and made everything seem like a dream. He simply had to endure during this time. He was powerless as though he was already dead.

"It's peaceful… Damn it…"

Choi Hyuk found this period of time spine-chilling.

'Why am I so anxious?'

Perhaps it was because his body wasn't in its normal condition, but Choi Hyuk had been engulfed in an unknown anxiety multiple times now.

The lights from Fragment-Light swayed around Choi Hyuk's face, and the shadows of Dark City cast over him.

Step.

Just then, someone entered the infirmary. Due to the busy war and the fact he needed complete rest, no one visited during this time.

"Who is it?"

"Hello."

The one in the shadows with her head lowered was Richard's aide, Leah. It seemed she had just come from the battlefield as her entire body was smeared in blood.

"Aide Leah? What about the war?"

"Yes. It's me. I'm..."

Leah, who had raised her head in the darkness, lowered it again. Her shoulders trembled miserably.

"... This. If you read this, you'll understand. Then, I'll return to the battlefield now."

What she had handed to him was Richard's eye, which was as solid as a jewel, and his will.

Choi Hyuk accepted these items in a moment of bewilderment. The warm blood smeared on the eye and will wet Choi Hyuk's hand.

——

Choi Hyuk.

I hope you will use my final gift well.

Remember.

You don’t need to kill even if it says you need to. You don’t need to keep them alive even if it says you need to.

A skill is a skill. Don’t trust it blindly.

I’m leaving it up to you.

——

As a will, its contents were exceedingly simple and lackluster.

“Leah. What is this?”

Choi Hyuk called out to Leah, who was about to leave. She, who had been walking uneasily, stood rigidly as if nailed in place. However, Leah couldn’t open her mouth easily.

“…”

Unable to endure it, Choi Hyuk urged her.

“Don’t drag it on and tell me quickly.”

Even though he couldn’t even stand up, his voice was frightening and as sharp as a blade.

“… A high-ranked warrior appeared. Overseer Richard, Yohan, and Diana and the great warriors of the El Tribes fought it.”

“A high-ranked monster?”

Choi Hyuk felt his heart tighten. He knew precisely how powerful these ‘high-ranked’ individuals were. If a high-ranked monster appeared, there was no one on Dragonic who could face it. Only then did Choi Hyuk understand the sudden words that Richard had died. This wasn’t the only problem though.

‘If I don’t return, I can’t protect Dragonic.’

Middle-ranked warriors couldn’t understand the true power of high-ranked monsters as the difference in power wasn’t in ‘quantity’ but ‘quality’. Choi Hyuk’s heart became urgent.

“Fragment-Light! Make a proposal to the higher ups! Isn’t Dark City stable now? We need support troops in Dragonic.”

But before Fragment-Light could reply, Leah shook her head.

“There is no need for that. The high-ranked monster has been dealt with.”

Choi Hyuk was shocked at her words.

“How?”

“Overseer Richard… ended it.”

Choi Hyuk was at a loss for words.

A high-ranked monster wasn’t an existence that could be killed just because a few middle-ranked warriors gathered to fight it. This was especially true for earthlings.

The only way a middle-ranked warrior could wield a power beyond their ability was with a karma-weapon. Something like the Sword of Vow or the Sword of Calling that Choi Hyuk and Chu Youngjin possessed. However, besides those two, no other earthling was in possession of a karma-weapon. As such, it was impossible for a middle-ranked warrior to deal an effective blow on a high-ranked monster. Even if they could somehow hold it back, it was impossible for them to kill it.

No, it might even be impossible for them to hold it back as they didn’t possess a technique to suppress their enemy like the Steel Battleship.

“How?”

That was why Choi Hyuk asked again like a fool. Leah shook her head.

“… I don’t know how. Either way, the high-ranked monster died in Overseer Richard’s hands… Also, he passed away in its hands.”

Tap. Tap.

Clear teardrops fell at her feet. Leah still couldn’t raise her head.

“… I think Overseer Richard knew that he was going to die.”

"..."

Choi Hyuk couldn't say anything.

Perhaps Richard had obtained enlightenment at the last moment, like how Choi Hyuk had when he fought the highest-ranked monster. Perhaps what determined their fates was the existence of a karma-weapon. Richard was a warrior much more talented than Choi Hyuk had thought.

Yet, he died.

Like how Leah had said, she didn't know how he died, but he had died in a place where no one recognized his talent.

"Why didn't you run?"

"... Instead, we protected the inheritance of the dragons of the past."

'The inheritance of the dragons of the past...? Was that worth exchanging Richard's life for?'

Choi Hyuk's expression was cryptic.

{Ha... So that's what happened.}

The one who joined in was Fragment-Light.

{Dragonic used to be inhabited by dragons that were the closest to the original form. Many exalted dragons lived there. For example, the ancient dragon Barhaloleun was evaluated to be at the peak of the highest rank. The inheritance left behind by them will probably not be ordinary. Although we will only know the details after examining it, if they fought in the presence of that inheritance, I believe that the high-ranked monster's strength might have been somewhat restrained.}

Fragment-Light, who had been tilting its head at the news that a middle-ranked warrior had killed a high-ranked monster, revealed an understanding expression.

On the other hand, Leah's expression became darker.

Twinge.

Choi Hyuk felt a pain in his chest.

This was a pain he was experiencing for the first time since he learned his mother had died.

In the distant Dark City, Choi Hyuk had lived, while in the distant Dragonic, Richard had died.

Choi Hyuk, who had promised to return quickly, couldn't fulfill his promise. On the other hand, Richard protected Dragonic as promised. Using his own life.

Choi Hyuk blankly looked at Richard's will and his blood-smeared eyeball.

"Then I'll take my leave..."

Leah said her farewell and returned to the battlefield, but Choi Hyuk was so lost in his own thoughts that he didn't return her farewell.

'I still have a long way to go.'

Cold water was poured on his heart, which had become slightly cocky due to the fact he had slashed a highest-ranked monster. Choi Hyuk trembled from his powerlessness. Dragonic was suffering under a tidal wave of monsters. Even Richard, who he trusted, died. However, Choi Hyuk was still lying in bed.

He felt a regret that exceeded feeling powerless.

"The end result is the same... Would it have been better if I had just kept my body in good condition while we waited for support?"

{No. It would have taken longer to wait for support troops than it would have taken for you to recover. You did the right thing.}

Like always, Fragment-Light presented the cold, hard truth, but it didn't comfort him in the slightest.

Victory didn't come cleanly.

Like how he learned of his mother's death not long after beating the Wyvern of Destruction, Choi Hyuk's life was always in the middle of a war, where the greatest victory and the worst loss simultaneously intersected.

{But, that eye. It looks like it's a body part containing an innate skill. If you leave it outside for too long, the karma inside will scatter. It seems she came running as soon as he died… I'll preserve it for you.}

Fragment-Light stayed objective even in situations like this.

This trait actually opened Choi Hyuk's eyes.

"It's fine."

Choi Hyuk raised his hand and overlapped Richard's eyeball with his own eye. Inside was the most fundamental karma Richard had possessed.

{Uh, it'll be difficult to inherit that right now.}

Fragment-Light tried to stop him, but Choi Hyuk didn't listen.

Even though his eye hurt as though it was burning, this much pain was nothing.

Fragment-Light calmly looked at Choi Hyuk and said with an awkward voice.

{You're doing well. Well, since only the essence is there, there isn't much in terms of quantity. But, you know, right? As its power is weak, it won't be able to recover your injuries. You will only inherit his innate skill.}

"I know."

Red blood flowed from Choi Hyuk's left eye which had fused with Richard's eye. Choi Hyuk blinked.

When the blood drained a little, his left eye, which emitted a dark blue light, was revealed.

Choi Hyuk looked at Fragment-Light.

It emitted a white light (goodwill), and above its head was a blue shield symbol.

Fragment-Light was ‘someone to keep alive’.

Choi Hyuk closed his eyes.

He inherited Richard’s innate skill.

It was truly a shabby inheritance ceremony. Veins bulged on top of Choi Hyuk’s tightly clenched fists.

**

During this time, the expedition which returned to Dragonic underwent intense battles.

The blades of the expedition, which had returned from Dark City even stronger than before, ripped apart the invading monsters without mercy.

In the situation where both Choi Hyuk and Richard weren’t present, the one standing at the very front was the Sovereign of Paradise Camilla.

“Penelope.”

While letting her karma rest for a moment, Camilla called out to Penelope, who was standing by.

“What, unni?”

Like always, Penelope replied affectionately.

However, Camilla’s expression was solemn.

“Like always, our clan will stand at the front.”

“That’s a given.”

“… But observe the other warriors outside of battle well. Pass it on to everyone.”

At Camilla’s rigid attitude, Penelope instinctively became tense.

Her round eyes, which had always been good-natured, contained a keenness to them.

“What should we consider when observing them?”

“Whether they have the qualifications to join our clan for one. Especially focus on Richard’s clan members. Also, secondly… Those who might potentially become our enemy.”

“… Enemy?”

“Yeah. Enemies. Tell them to be careful. Since Richard died… Although I don’t know how he did it, the peace until now was all due to him. But he died. The ones remaining are those wrapped in their own desires… People who feed off their own pride… Everything will change now.”

Camilla raised her sword, which had been resting to the side for a moment.

As she glared at the onrush of monsters, she said,

“In the end, the sword is what protects paradise.”

Rather than looking at the monsters, she looked beyond them as she fiercely wielded her sword.

Episode 8 - Recruit Training

Chapter 126: Establishing Troops (1)

The God Dragon Leviathan was maintaining the ‘Net of Fate’ today again.

He was the 1st seat of the 13 seats of the Exalted Wings, the strongest dragon. At the same time, he was also known as the ‘Dragon of Beginning’ as he was the longest living member of the alliance.

The Pyrio Tribe called him ‘Kangtwearoa’ and the Quasar Tribe called him ‘Kirihareulak’. Rather than saying that they actually called him that, it was more apt to say that this was how the names would sound like if the earthlings were to imitate them through human speech. Of course, the words would be incredibly distorted, even more than when one used Google Translate to translate Korean into English and then back to Korean.

Even if they had different names for him, the meaning behind them was the same – The ‘Snake of Terror’, the name of something large, powerful and terrifying. Because of this, although the earthlings didn’t know him yet, they would come to know him as the ‘Leviathan’.

If they were to dig deeper into his name ‘Leviathan’ and his nickname the ‘Dragon of Beginning’, they would discover a logical rift in their meanings.

In fact, this would be the case if they thought about it objectively.

No matter how close the function of the ‘Language Resonance Device’ was to telepathy, it was almost impossible for the earthlings and aliens to communicate with no discomfort. Humans used air waves to communicate while the Dark Tribe used gravity, and the Flame Wing Tribe used light waves. There were also species that used telepathy like the narolings. Their cultural backgrounds and the matter that individual alien species were made up of were completely different.

When such beings communicated with each other through telepathy, it was inevitable that there would be fragments of thoughts that were difficult to comprehend. This was similar to how Koreans would think in Korean what Japanese would think in Japanese. If a Flame Wing Tribe member transmitted the thought ‘Choi Hyuk is stronger than I thought’ to an earthling, the feeling of surprise he felt would be sent along with an image of quickly alternating red and blue lights mixed with infrared and ultraviolet lights, which earthlings couldn’t see. It was impossible for an earthling to understand this.

However, when they used the Language Resonance Device, all alien species could communicate easily and naturally as though they were using their mother tongues. The Steel Battleship wasn’t created with steel, but the language of the aliens who called it that was so fantastical that the earthlings instinctively called it the ‘Steel Battleship’. It didn’t matter even if they knew the Steel Battleship wasn’t made of steel. Like how one might call a powerful punch a ‘rock fist’, the earthlings clearly understood the ‘meaning’ behind it.

This wasn’t something that could be explained entirely by the Language Resonance Device.

There was another rift in logic. Leviathan was called the ‘Dragon of Beginning’. This was because he was born in the very center of the universe and was an ancient dragon who had experienced the longest life out of everyone else in the alliance.

However, strictly speaking, there were many members of the Flame Wing Tribe who were older than him. Even still, Leviathan was the individual with the most experience in the alliance.

This was because the passage of time was different throughout the universe. Time moved differently for a quickly moving target compared to one that stayed still. In the great universe, one second for someone might be ten thousand years for another.

This was the case for the Flame Wing Tribe. As those who were born in the fires of the Big Bang, they were born on the edge of the universe's expansion. From the perspective of Earth, which was located near a cold star, it looked like time had 'stopped' for the Flame Wing Tribe. They said Earth's history was 5 billion years old, but from the perspective of the Flame Wing Tribe's homeland, the Big Bang occurred only a few million years ago.

Even on Earth, if people's languages and time zones were different, there would be difficulties when working together.

However, the alliance embraced aliens, who were incredibly different from each other, as one. Within it, aliens were able to overcome the obstacles of language and time. They were able to communicate in real-time and perceive the same time as each other.

How was such an 'impossible feat' possible?

What bridged this logical rift was the 'Net of Fate'. It was the most fundamental infrastructure which allowed the alliance to function properly, and the key tactic in fighting the war against the monsters.

The primary duty of the Exalted Wings, who were the alliance's greatest leaders and most powerful warriors, was to maintain this 'Net of Fate'.

{Whoo.}

Leviathan let out a deep sigh within the 'Net of Fate'. The 'Net of Fate' he saw was actually a single, enormous net. It was a net created by interlacing the entire universe's fate and the fates of individuals within it together.

The Net of Fate, which filled up the entire space, shined blindingly. There were people, oceans, stars, and galaxies. All things in the universe gathered to create what seemed to be a brilliant light from afar. It bound the fates of alliance members

together with a powerful karma. Within this one fate, the members of the universe were able to overcome the laws of physics and communicate with one another.

However, there were holes here and there within the net. These holes were dark and terrifying, and they seemed to infest the net like maggots. These holes signified the invasion of the monsters. However, looking at it as a whole, the holes, fortunately, didn't take up a large portion of the net.

{Is it a blessing in disguise? Although I don't know how long it'll continue, the situation has turned for the better right now.}

After overcoming the monsters' extensive invasion, the monster forces set up in various regions throughout the universe shrunk in return. It was due to the destruction of a countless number of Kahur Kabkuns. Because of this, the net was in a better condition than before.

{We need to reinforce our fate in times like this. Whooo...}

Leviathan let out another long sigh and drew out his karma. The 'Net of Fate' emitted a more brilliant light as it was guided by his karma (retribution) towards his fate.

The brighter the Net of Fate shined, the more advantageous it became for the alliance in the war against the monsters.

It became harder for the monsters to create Kahur Kabkuns and they were oddly unlucky, while things would go well for alliance members no matter what they did. This was why the 'Net of Fate' was not only an 'infrastructure' but a 'tactic' as well.

As such, it wasn't an easy task for Leviathan, who exceeded the level of highest-ranked warriors by an extreme degree, to reinforce the 'Net of Fate'.

Crrrk. Crrrk.

His long, ocean-blue body was crushed by a powerful pressure.

Kaching! Kaching!

His scales, which were incomparable in toughness, shattered like glass and red blood gushed out.

Still, Leviathan didn't stop using his power. His large eyes were fixed onto a particular corner of the Net of Fate.

Grin.

The enormous dragon smiled, revealing his terrifying teeth.

{My relatives on Dragonic... I didn't think I'd see them again. Barhaloleun, how happy would that child be if he was still alive? Since they are helping out this much, I need to put more of my strength into it.}

He was gazing at the newly born baby dragons in the embrace of the El Tribes with delight.

**

The 'Brain' was 13 stone plates, which were so large that it seemed they would reach the sky, gathered in a circle.

The stone plates, which were as dark as gravestones, began to emit a light one after the other, and the meeting of the Exalted Wings began without so much as a greeting.

{Leader of the reconnaissance troops.}

When someone began to talk, the Exalted Wings began to quickly share their opinions. The topic was who to select as the leader of the reconnaissance troops that would explore the monsters' headquarters.

Countless names were mentioned in a moment. They were reduced to three.

{The problem is that they are all commanders who are assigned to key strategic points.}

{It is only natural for those who have reached the level of

transcendence to occupy such positions. But, regardless, it's time for us to make a decision.}

The level of transcendence was the next level beyond highest-ranked warriors. It was a supreme level that only a little over a hundred in the entire universe had reached. It was also the first qualification in becoming an Exalted Wing. The level of transcendence was so long and arduous that it was almost impossible for one to reach its limit. No, it was as though every moment was an obstacle. Because of this, there was an extreme difference in strength between those at the early stages of the transcendence level and those in the later stages. The majority of warriors at the transcendence level were between the early and experienced stages, and it was known that only the Exalted Wings reached the later stages of the transcendence level. Only the legendary king of the Flame Wing Tribe, Flame-Sky, who was also considered as the strongest in the history of the universe, was known to have 'perfected' the transcendence level and seen its limits. In reality, if it wasn't for him, they wouldn't have even known there was a 'limit' to the transcendence level. Before then, the reasonable opinion was 'to group the obstacles together as the transcendence level since they were faced with too many of them to name them all individually'.

However, no matter how they put it, they were existences who had reached the same level as the Exalted Wings. There was no way their duties would be mundane.

{Considering the difficulty of the mission, we definitely need at least one warrior at the transcendence level. If not, they will not be able to return.}

{However... If there's a slip-up, it could result in a huge political problem...}

Depending on who they chose to be the leader of the reconnaissance troops, the species who would suddenly lose their reliable leader would undoubtedly oppose it.

Still, they needed an outstanding leader.

The Exalted Wings ceaselessly attempted to probe each other's thoughts. Such a long silence during their meetings was odd.

At that moment, someone broke the silence and said.

{… In times like this, I think it's right for the species appointed as the head of the alliance to bite the bullet. I'll try to persuade the princess.}

{Absurd!}

{There's no other choice. I also agree.}

{… If it's the princess, she'll accept.}

{…}

{…}

They were Exalted Wings from the Flame Wing Tribe. One opposed the decision, another agreed, while another condoned it.

Looking at them, the other Exalted Wings from the other species kept their mouths tightly closed and read each other's mood.

{Would it be okay to progress like this? Like you all know, the princess is a warrior who is almost proficient in the transcendence level. Of course, there is the flaw that she doesn't have a lot of experience commanding an army, but since the reconnaissance troops are a small group of elites and not a large one, it might be better that way.}

{… Well, there's nothing for us to say. If the noble princess of the Flame Wing Tribe will make a move, then we can only be grateful.}

{Then we'll progress like this.}

That was how the leader of the reconnaissance troops was nominated. While expressing his agreement through silence, Leviathan clicked his tongue inwardly.

'The princess of the Flame Wing Tribe is always suffering

hardship. Tsk, tsk.'

Although he felt bad for her, Leviathan wasn't in a position where he could interfere. Also, the matter he had been waiting for was brought up next.

{Next is... the matter about the earthlings. The mayor of Dark City personally requested this. He suggested that we drop the restrictions on earthlings and give them the 'right to establish troops'.}

{I agree.}

Leviathan, who had kept his silence this entire time, quickly agreed.

{... But, wasn't the reason we set restrictions on their rights because of their selfish tendencies? If we drop those restrictions, it will cause chaos. And to add the 'right to establish troops' on top of that... When they are barely able to keep their own species in check? If we gave them this right, the problem will become worse. From the start, establishing troops isn't a part of civil rights.}

Someone immediately opposed.

'Establishing troops' wasn't a concept that lay within civil rights but a right related to the alliance's military.

The alliance's military organization was largely split into three sections – regional troops, division troops, and independent troops. Regional troops were comprised of lifelong positions (composed of residents living in the particular region) and term-length positions (composed of those dispatched by the alliance) and had a duty to defend the specific region autonomously. Commander Mack's Virgo Cluster Army was one of them. On the other hand, division troops were special troops comprised of members dispatched from various regions, and they received orders directly from the center and were active in various regions. The famous 'Steel Battleship' of the Laniakea Supercluster was an

example of these troops. Finally, independent troops were, like the name implied, troops that could operate independently. They weren't assigned to a region and weren't restricted to certain duties. They were troops that had intense competition for military merit but was also a rapid promotion pathway, where those who were skilled could quickly distinguish themselves.

The rights to establish troops was the right to establish 'independent troops'. If they were granted this right, they would also receive the right to establish their own troops and receive resources from the alliance. Their ranks were decided by their military merits, and depending on their rank, the quantity and quality of resources they could receive changed.

Until now, the earthlings were affiliated with the regional troops, so their area of movement was limited to the Virgo Cluster. To them, receiving the rights to establish their own troops was a huge benefit.

Because of this, Leviathan responded more determinately.

{The earthlings have proved themselves a lot this time. They completely drove out the monsters that invaded Dragonic. This means they firmly recovered the territory we lost in the past. That's not all. They also allied with the native species there and revived the 'Dragon Tribe' from the past. What I'm saying is that the earthlings' forces aren't only comprised of earthlings but also the El Tribes and 'Dragon Tribe', thus already possessing the trait of an allied force. Also, they made a decisive contribution in protecting Dark City. Especially when looking at Choi Hyuk, you can tell the earthlings possess great potential. They are a species that can do greater things for the alliance. There is no reason to not give them the right to establish troops.}

Following Leviathan's persistent assertion, Dark-Sound of the 'Dark Tribe' stepped forth.

{Although I'm not sure about expanding their civil rights, giving

them the right to establish their own troops is worth considering. At least, Choi Hyuk. He is the real deal.}

The opposing Exalted Wings read Dark-Sound and Leviathan's expressions. Dark-Sound was an existence who received the absolute support of the Dark Tribe, while Leviathan was the type to foam at the mouth when it came to matters related to his species. In times like this, they needed to compromise.

{... I still oppose expanding the civil rights of the earthlings. However, I believe there is meaning to giving them the right to establish troops. How about a condition automatically granting earthlings who satisfy certain qualifications the right to establish troops? While maintaining the seven overseers, we grant this right to any troop commanders who satisfy these qualifications. From the start, competition is a virtue among independent troops.}

{...}

{...}

Everyone expressed their agreement to the newly suggested compromise with silence.

It was the same for Leviathan.

'Now, I opened up a path to make you guys grow faster. Whether this is good or bad will depend on you... I have high hopes for you.'

That was how the earthlings' fate was decided once again.

Chapter 127: Establishing Troops (2)

{We grant the earthlings the right to establish troops. We also accept the El Tribes as members of the alliance as they are already under the protection of the alliance. Unlike the earthlings, there are no restrictions on the civil rights of the El Tribes. However, we do not grant the El Tribes with the right to establish troops.}

This short announcement made waves throughout Dragonic. The earthlings and the El Tribes separately racked their brains at this great change.

The right to establish troops was a new opportunity for the minor clans. If they could exercise this right and establish independent troops, they would be able to request resources from the alliance depending on their military merits, which would weaken the authority of 'overseers'. Until now, the overseers were their only window in trading with the alliance so they held enormous authority, but there now was a method to go around this exclusivity.

The El Tribes had their own share of headaches. In their position, they couldn't openly welcome the news of joining the alliance as this meant the El Tribes would have to participate in the war as part of the alliance from now on. Their best option was to get a free ride under the earthlings and peacefully live on Dragonic, but the earthlings and the alliance weren't such easy organizations. Whether this turned out to be a glass of poison or not, they would have to drink it. To reduce their losses even by a little, each tribe went around looking for colonizer clans to ally with. As they had no experience in space missions, they undoubtedly needed the earthlings' experience and power.

Also, Richard's clan, which boasted of being the most powerful and prosperous, completely disbanded due to Richard's passing.

Dragonic's power scene was facing an extreme change.

**

Choi Hyuk was still lying in bed.

The war ended while he was still lying down.

In fact, he was very surprised.

‘They protected Dragonic without me?’

Perhaps it was arrogance, but Choi Hyuk thought that they wouldn’t be able to protect Dragonic without him. However, the result was different from his expectations. Without Choi Hyuk, the earthlings and the El Tribes were able to completely chase the monsters out of Dragonic. Although Richard died in battle during this process, either way, it was a complete victory.

The earthlings became stronger through this process.

‘… Maybe I underestimated them too much.’

Choi Hyuk smiled. This was a happy miscalculation.

A few people visited him.

The first ones to visit were Camilla and Jessie, both who suffered hardships with him during the expedition.

“I heard you slashed a highest-ranked monster? I was busy running away from hellhounds, which were only high-ranked monsters… Haaa, to think I raised my sword against someone like you… When I think about it now, it sends shivers down my spine. I was crazy… From now on, let’s get along as friends! I’ll be good!”

Sovereign Jessie gave an amiable, crafty smile as he stretched out his hand. Choi Hyuk didn’t hold his hand and blankly stared at him for a moment.

He saw the white light (goodwill) Jessie was emitting and the vivid shield symbol above his head.

‘A person to keep alive.’

Because Choi Hyuk was blankly staring at him, Jessie awkwardly

pulled back his hand. That moment, Choi Hyuk calmly grasped his retreating hand.

“Please take care of me.”

Jessie smiled like a child.

“Yeah. Let’s do our best!”

Jessie harbored respect for Choi Hyuk after this incident.

Jessie, who had been heralded as a hero in the extreme sports industry before awakening karma, shared similar qualities with Lee Jinhee. They both possessed endless passion towards challenges. Of course, there was also an important difference. Lee Jinhee was the type who kept truer to herself while Jessie had outstanding showmanship and a disposition of wanting to be the center of attention. Because of this, Jessie had been envious and competitive towards Choi Hyuk rather than admiring him until now. However, the incident this time was on another level. Jessie couldn’t envy him, not when he slashed a highest-ranked monster. On top of that, he wasn’t so immature to feel envious of this fact either.

Jessie now admired Choi Hyuk.

‘I want to be strong like him.’

On the other hand, Camilla placed her hand out with an ambiguous expression. She was smiling, but it wasn’t a smile that couldn’t keep itself contained like Jessie’s.

“Thank you. It’s thanks to you that we were able to return quickly and defend Dragonic.”

Choi Hyuk carefully examined Camilla before holding her hand.

She emitted a faint black light (hostility), and there wasn’t any symbol above her head.

‘She has her guard up against me. And I can’t tell if it will be better to kill her or keep her alive at this moment.’

Choi Hyuk nodded and held her hand.

Camilla, like her title ‘Sovereign of Paradise’, was sensitive to ‘justice’

She would willingly endure sacrifices if it was for the weak, and she would willingly raise her sword at ‘injustice’ even in disadvantageous situations. Because of this, she was someone who could be hostile to Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers at any moment since, if they were to classify them, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers were closer to the side of ‘evil’ than of justice.

That was why she was uneasy right now. In the current political landscape without Richard, there was no one who could keep Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers in check.

Although she smiled outwardly, inwardly, she was very wary of Choi Hyuk.

And Choi Hyuk was estimating her value.

‘In Richard’s eyes, she was probably considered ‘someone to keep alive’ since his goal was humanity’s survival and prosperity. However, my goal is… revenge. I don’t know if she was a necessary existence for the survival of humans, but she could be an obstacle in my path for revenge.’

One thing was clear. She and her clan were people who could raise their swords against the Exalted Wings without hesitation. If that was justice, then they would be willing to fight even a hopeless battle. The problem was whether they would classify the alliance as ‘evil’ or not.

Also, another point of importance to Choi Hyuk was whether the Camilla Clan possessed the strength to attain justice. There was a likely chance she would obstruct Choi Hyuk’s actions at every step in times of chaos in the future. When facing her obstruction, how useful she and her clan were as troops would determine if he acknowledged her obstruction or not. If it was more beneficial to

go against her than to accept her, then he would deal with her without any hesitation, though he currently wasn't sure how things would progress.

Choi Hyuk strengthened his grip on her hand as he told her, "Get stronger. At least as strong as Richard."

Camilla bit her lips at the terrifying feeling she felt from those words.

'... Damn it... Is he really injured?'

Choi Hyuk had lost his lower body and his karma wasn't in a good condition. Yet, Camilla became discouraged like a mouse standing in front of a snake. It was so upsetting.

Drip.

As blood dripped from her lips since she bit on them too hard, Camilla replied, "Definitely."

Her eyes gleamed with resolve. They contained a madness-laced belief which asked who would save the world if not her and an animosity which indicated that she wouldn't lose to him. Pleased with her demeanor, Choi Hyuk's lips curved up into a smile.

Richard's aide, Leah, and the head of 'der Schatten', Zero, visited after them.

They brought over another one of Richard's wills.

"... You want to join the Berserkers?"

"Yes, that was Overseer Richard's final order."

Leah said while showing his will. Zero was silent.

"Overseer Richard entrusted his dream to you along with his Eyes of the Judge."

At Leah's words, Choi Hyuk tilted his head.

"Yeah, he did, but my dream is different from Richard's. You know that, right?"

“I don’t know, but Overseer Richard believed that it would be fine if it was you.”

“Why?”

“… He said he had a hunch.”

Leah stared directly into Choi Hyuk’s eyes.

Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly.

Richard too placed the Exalted Wings as his final goal. He was similar to Choi Hyuk in this respect. However, he was someone who dreamed of the earthlings’ survival and prosperity in the end. He was different from Choi Hyuk as the only thing important to him was revenge. Contained in his heart wasn’t survival or prosperity. To him, the world had already fallen into ruin. Even if he dropped all the earthlings into the depths of hell, it didn’t matter as long as he could realize his revenge.

Because of this, Choi Hyuk was uncomfortable with Leah and Zero. Even though they were outstanding warriors, they weren’t as simple as the Berserkers. Also, it wasn’t like their relationship wasn’t built upon comradery like it was for Ryu Hyunsung, Lee Jinhee, Baek Seoin, Bae Jinman, and Handke. It was uncomfortable to use them as he wished.

“My path will probably be different from what you think.”

Choi Hyuk distanced himself from them. No matter how outstanding a troop was, it was dangerous for distinctive entities to join a united army.

It was Zero who answered this time.

“That doesn’t matter. Der Schatten doesn’t ask questions. We do not think. We only follow the orders given by Overseer Richard.”

Since Richard’s final order was to follow Choi Hyuk, they wouldn’t hesitate to follow him. That was what he was saying. Zero was ‘colorless’ in Choi Hyuk’s eyes. He was indifferent

towards Choi Hyuk to a surprising degree, similar to how Jung Minji was in the past.

On the other hand, Leah was slightly different.

"... I don't really know. However, if there was anyone else who could make the world move besides Overseer Richard, it would be you. That's why I plan on realizing Richard's dream even if it means using you."

Leah was emotional. Her color was gray, a mixture of white and black light. Yet, if he were to strictly classify it, it would be closer to black. She was more hostile towards Choi Hyuk. 'How was it that Richard died and Choi Hyuk survived?' It seemed she held this sort of resentment. She didn't hide her intentions. Her eyes currently burned, seemingly in anger.

She calmly said,

"I will do my best to assist you. Der Schatten, as a secret organization, will be your eyes and ears. Also, I am in command of the Richard Clan's most elite troop. It won't be lacking compared to the Berserkers. We will definitely show you our usefulness."

She meant that they would persuade him with their skill.

'I will do my utmost to serve you so that you will lend us your ear.'

She didn't hide her intentions.

Choi Hyuk now began to become interested in them.

Looking at their self-control, Choi Hyuk recalled how talented of an overseer Richard was. Now that he thought about it, he was curious about something.

"I have something to ask."

Leah raised her head at Choi Hyuk's question.

"How did I look in Richard's eyes? Was I someone to keep alive? Or someone to kill?"

He felt that he was probably someone to keep alive considering what he did for him, but he was somehow doubtful.

‘I was necessary for the survival and prosperity of humanity?’

Even Choi Hyuk had difficulty believing that.

Leah gave him an unexpected answer.

“… I heard it was both. He said that both a blue shield symbol, indicating you were someone to keep alive, as well as a red blade symbol, indicating you were someone to kill, were clearly above your head.”

“There are cases like that?”

“You were the only one. When I asked if that was dangerous, he said it was fine, that you were needed, and that he had a hunch. Overseer Richard had high hopes for you, saying that you were, without a doubt, someone who would accomplish the impossible. Although I didn’t really understand, Overseer Richard interpreted the information in front of his eyes his own way. And he was never wrong. In fact, in this incident, he didn’t kill those labeled as someone to kill and only locked them up, which produced a better result in the end.”

She was referring to those, like Penelope of the Camilla Clan, who would have obstructed the decision to launch a pre-emptive attack. In the end, the decision to launch a pre-emptive attack was achieved smoothly, and they, who joined the war later, achieved brilliant military merits.

“Overseer Richard requested that we work hard for your unknown fate.”

Choi Hyuk shook his head at Leah’s words.

To trust someone he didn’t know was an ally or foe? Unless he possessed tremendous confidence in himself, it was impossible. Yet, Richard always proved his confidence was correct.

‘Admirable.’

This was why Leah and Zero showed such loyalty for him even when he was dead.

However, he was already dead.

If Choi Hyuk accepted Leah and Zero, he couldn’t depend on Richard’s order. Choi Hyuk didn’t need two troops. He only needed the Berserkers.

Choi Hyuk met eyes with Leah then Zero.

“Remember. I’m not Richard. I can’t promise big things like him. I can only promise you one thing. Victory. The strength of invincibility that won’t allow anything or anyone to play around with our fates. Can you follow that?”

Choi Hyuk’s words meant that he would accept Leah and Zero.

Leah nodded his head and Zero smiled faintly.

“That’s enough.”

The two replied simultaneously.

**

While welcoming visitors lying down, Choi Hyuk felt frustrated. The situation in Dragonic was rapidly changing, yet he was still bedridden. Since his body was like this, he couldn’t even analyze the enlightenment he had obtained.

Even though he tried not to, he kept feeling a sense of urgency. When he welcomed visitors, he showed off an imposing and confident appearance, but he didn’t feel well when he was alone as he kept feeling powerless.

It was Commander Mack who came to visit this time. She, who had been fighting at the forefront until recently, was dirty as though she didn’t wash before coming here.

“How have you been? Sorry, I’m late. My duty in Dark City

finally ended.”

“What is there to be sorry for?”

“No, no, still, you saved my life.”

Although she looked very exhausted, she really seemed to be in a good mood. She smiled like a child without worries.

“You saved me from Narci’s grasp and… You revived my race.”

“You’re right about Narci, but I wasn’t the one who revived the Dragon Tribe.”

“I know. It was Overseer Richard. He chose to sacrifice himself, believing in you. You were handed his dying wish, right?”

“…”

Although he wasn’t thinking of accomplishing Richard’s dying wish, since it was true he received everything, Choi Hyuk simply kept his mouth shut.

“So I thought about your reward.”

Mack sat next to Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk didn’t refuse.

“A reward would be nice.”

“Ehh, be happier about it.”

“Although I want to stand up and dance, it’s difficult since I don’t have legs.”

Mack revealed a meaningful smile at Choi Hyuk’s truthful words.

“You will be able to.”

“Pardon?”

Mack raised her left arm.

Thud.

As her hand brushed past it, her left horn fell with a thud. A brilliantly shining golden horn. It was the only dragon trait she possessed on her beautiful, human-like body.

“Although I’m from the dragon race, as you can see, I’m quite far off from them. Still, the reason why I can be considered a part of the dragon race are these horns.”

She placed her horn on Choi Hyuk’s chest.

“Absorb it.”

“…”

Choi Hyuk blankly stared at Mack.

“Will it be okay if I do?”

“Ahh, all it is is me dropping to the experienced stage of high-ranked warriors. Even though it will take me a while to recover, it’s not long from the perspective of the dragon race. Since I was at a loss in trying to become a highest-ranked warrior, I’ll just think of it as relearning the basics.”

Commander Mack was a powerful warrior who had reached the peak of high-ranked warriors. Dropping down to the experienced stage of high-ranked warriors was a huge loss. Yet, she didn’t hesitate in the slightest.

“This is also a bribe as well as repaying you for saving my life. The baby dragons who were born recently absolutely need the El Tribes and Dragonic. If it’s you, you should be able to take good care of them. I entrust you to take care of the baby dragons from now on.”

“… Understood.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t refuse. If it was Commander Mack’s horn, he would be able to not only recover from his injuries but step forth onto a higher stage. Fragment-Light definitely said that he would be able to recover if a warrior that was at or above his level were to pass down a part of their body to him.

“Good thinking. The bed isn’t a place where a hero should be.”

Mack smiled brightly.

Mack’s horned scattered and was absorbed into Choi Hyuk’s heart.

Whoooo.

A karma that overwhelmed Choi Hyuk’s power swarmed into him. This was an inheritance of fate. The retribution which Commander Mack, a descendant of the dragon race, had accumulated her entire life was passed down to Choi Hyuk.

Thump. Thump.

His heart thumped crazily, and every time, a strong karma surged from his heart.

The karma spreading from his heart pushed down towards Choi Hyuk’s lower body.

His bones formed with golden light. His nerves and muscles formed as well. A body composed of pure karma.

Then the remaining karma began to fuse with his own. The power of dragons, which could fundamentally manipulate flames, suited Choi Hyuk very well. Not only that, but their unique karma, which could communicate with the universe since they were born, awakened an entirely new sense in Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk felt an extreme sense of transcendence.

Invincibility and slashing without fail.

The fate he had engraved onto the universe shined in a more brilliant light and became larger and more resilient.

From a bent tree trunk grew roots which were thicker and tougher than before. Golden leaves scattered.

Although the time he spent lying down powerlessly in bed was long, his recovery was instantaneous.

“Ah…”

Choi Hyuk shot up from the spring water he had been lying in.

His entire body overflowed with power.

“Congratulations on becoming a high-ranked warrior.”

Commander Mack smiled meaningfully as she tidied her remaining horn.

Chapter 128: Establishing Troops (3)

Choi Hyuk, who brushed himself off and stood up, was the first to use the right to establish troops.

Accompanying him, it was inevitable for the Berserkers to reorganize as well. As he wanted to establish troops to launch independent military operations in the great universe, he needed a massive increase in personnel.

Choi Hyuk was an overseer who managed five colonized lands by himself. Among all the overseers, he possessed the vastest territory. Although the average population of each colonized land was significantly lower compared to the colonized lands of other overseers, still, the combined population was over 100,003,000.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn't interested in managing his territory. He was still only interested in leading the over 20,000 elite Berserkers into ferocious battlefields. However, as there was a need for more soldiers to maintain public order in his territory, Baek Seoin had recruited people separately as well. They were Berserkers known as the second and third string. As their numbers weren't small, their numbers reached 200,000 after the war. As Choi Hyuk wasn't interested in increasing the size of his organization, this number was the maximum Baek Seoin could manage. When even this was insufficient, he would cooperate with minor clans to maintain public order.

Although they were known as second and third-string Berserkers, officially, their positions were ambiguous. There was a need to grant them a proper status during the reorganization this time around.

"We need to increase our military forces to at least 600,000."

"That many?"

"Definitely. If we want to capture a planet or destroy higher

ranked Kahur Kabkuns, we need at least this many. However, it's only 600,000 when considering superhuman warriors. In the past, 600,000 would only be enough to capture a few countries, how could we capture an entire planet with this number?"

"That's true, but our troops only need to fight. With the trifling matters, such as the administrative processes and supplies, being handled by the alliance, do we even need 600,000? Where will we even recruit that many people? I say this clearly, we don't need weak warriors."

"Still, after enduring the tidal wave of monsters this time, all of humanity has advanced significantly, so recruiting that many won't be too difficult. Also, the El Tribes, which recently became alliance members, are also targets of recruitment."

"Still, 600,000 is too many. If that's the case, then, even if we include all the second and third-string Berserkers, we still need to recruit double our current numbers... That's not good. It could harm our culture."

"Since there will be more frequent expeditions from now on, don't we need forces to protect our colonized lands?"

"Then let's reorganize them separately and not into the Berserkers. There's also no need to reorganize the second and third-string members into the Berserkers either. The only important traits are that they are skilled and that they possess a mentality that doesn't care if they die in a fight. Let's only go with elites. To be honest, if you want to go around the universe, you need to at least be a lowest-ranked warrior. 200,000... No, let's go with 100,000."

"That's too small..."

"No, I even yielded a lot with this number. 100,000. I can go lower if possible, but I won't go higher. Let's launch a massive recruiting campaign and try to assemble all the war-maniacs of Dragonic."

"... Haa..."

Baek Seoin let out a sigh. In reality, he never thought Choi Hyuk would accept 600,000 from the beginning. It was simply a trick to start high before compromising. Originally, the number he expected they would compromise on was 200,000.

'But... To cut that number in half.'

Baek Seoin counter-argued,

"The scale of missions will increase in the future... How will we cover an entire planet with only 100,000 people? Although it's not a planet, tens of millions of people participated in the Cayenne Star capturing operation."

"That's why I'm saying we pick warriors who can do the work of 200 or 300 people. Also, why do we need to cover an entire planet? We just need to kill everything in sight. 100,000 is already too much when just smashing and killing things. I really yielded a lot. What I need are Berserkers who don't die even in situations where it seems like they will. If we pick a lot and a lot die every time, what's the point? The number of applicants will drop as well."

"..."

Baek Seoin eventually raised a white flag.

"Ah, understood. Then, please pay a bit of attention towards the Berserker school so that we can consistently recruit new warriors."

"That's something I'll leave to you. You can distribute the budget however you want."

"No, not that. I'm asking you to go and give lectures. Do you know how many people with potential enroll because they admire you? If you're going to lead troops and not fight by yourself, you also need to focus on training new recruits. Even if we gloss over the past by saying it was run as an experiment, now that we are going to run them more diligently, please show a little interest in them?"

Choi Hyuk flinched at Baek Seoin's words. The top executives of the Berserkers had all given lectures after being pressured by Baek Seoin. Among them, Ryu Hyunsung pretty much lived in the school as teaching seemed to suit him. However, Choi Hyuk, who was busy with training himself, had never gone to the school.

Yet, like Baek Seoin had said, if he needed his own army, he couldn't neglect his warrior training school. In the end, Choi Hyuk nodded.

"Okay."

**

"Hyungnim, hyungnim. Let's enroll in the Berserker school."

"What now? I'm already exhausted."

"Ah, those are words ignorant of the world. Don't you know there's now a right to establish troops?"

"Doesn't that only matter to the guys who call themselves clan leaders? What does that have to do with us enrolling in the Berserker school?"

"No, no, hyungnim. The status we earthlings have held in the alliance until now was nothing more than a neighborhood watch in a town on the countryside. Since we're a part of the regional troops of the Virgo Cluster, though we are considered as independent troops with the right to take independent military action, in the end, we're simply regional troops. Ones that slave away in various regions following the orders of a district magistrate."

"... So?"

"But, independent troops, which were created with the right to establish troops, are formal armies that are ranked by the alliance. Think about it. Regional troops are weak and are pretty much a service job, but what about formal armies? Won't they have benefits? I mean, we even gave soldiers pensions on Earth. In

places like the US, they even paid for their children's education."

"So... You want to earn more Mission Points? I'm fine. You do that on your own. Independent troops or whatever... and the Berserker school? Although I don't know what they have to do with each other, either way, I heard their lessons are harsh. I heard that there were so many deaths during the training that more died than regular colonizers. Is money of any use when you're dead?"

"Ah, hyungnim, don't be like that and listen to me. Didn't you contemplate whether to stick to the president or Choi Hyuk last time?"

"I did. And I followed your words and chose Choi Hyuk. That's why I went through hell. I fought against monsters for the first time in my life."

"Yes. Yes, you did. But did you suffer any losses? To be honest, if we didn't progress here, do you think we would have endured the tidal wave of monsters this time? You know that the number of casualties in Choi Hyuk's colonized lands is much lower than other colonized lands, right?"

"... Well, that's true. Since the front lines were like holes in a sponge... Didn't they say those who weren't skilled were too slow to escape in time? They were slaughtered when they encountered a 1-star monster. That... I did well to listen to you."

"Yes. This is the kind of world we're living in. Hyungnim. The world these days isn't a world where you can live by trying to spare yourself. What I'm saying is, even if it's a bit dangerous, becoming stronger is a way to increase your chance of survival. Rather than trying to avoid the dangers of this world all the time, isn't it better to jump into it and live in style? Trust me. We need to join the independent troops. It's not simply a problem of earning more Mission Points and living better. We will gain the backing of the alliance. Right now, we can't take a step out of Dragonic without

the approval of the overseers, right? Even if we wanted to, the fee to use the portal is insanely expensive. And continuing to stay in outer space isn't logical. But when we're part of the formal army, do you think they won't let us enter a city in the alliance? As long as we join the independent troops, hyungnim, we'll be nobles. Nobles. What this means is we can enjoy even a small bit of the authority the overseers exclusively possess. And the future, hyungnim? A world where all the peasants living on Dragonic will go out and die. A time where they say 'Welcome warriors of the independent troops' will come. Hyungnim, don't you want to live in style?"

"Koff, koff. Ah, well. If I can live like that, it'll be great bu-"

"That's why we need to join the independent troops. If we want to do that, we need to go to the Berserker school. The Berserker school is like a royal road leading to the independent troops the Berserkers will create."

"What? You're going to join the Berserkers? Are you crazy?"

"Hey, hyungnim. We worked well together until now. We put our backs against each other and protected each other. If we were scared, we would flee together. Like this, we became stronger faster than anyone else and survived."

"That's true."

"It's the same when we go there. As long as we do whatever it takes to survive over there, our lives will become easier afterwards. After enduring hardship once, it'll get easier. Or are you going to be a fool, trembling and begging to live?"

"What? Fool? You bastard."

"No, no, I didn't mean to say that to you. Haa."

"Bastard, watch your mouth... Anyways, I get it. Since you're going that far, let's do it."

"You made a good decision, hyungnim!"

“But not Berserkers, okay?”

“Haa, okay. I get it, hyungnim. I do.”

Strength in itself was a spell.

Even people like them, who were quite different from Choi Hyuk’s ideal Berserkers, applied to be Berserkers. Each possessing their own desires, warriors from all over Dragonic gathered.

**

{The ‘Berserkers’ have been registered as independent troops of the alliance. 1 high-ranked warrior (6-star), Choi Hyuk, 8 middle-ranked warriors (5-star), 3,174 low-ranked warriors (4-star), 85,317 lowest-ranked warriors (3-star) as well as 10,000 probationary warriors belong to this troop. Their fighting power is evaluated at C-rank.}

The total number of casualties from the tidal wave of monsters reached 500 million... It was the greatest number of casualties since the advancement evaluation. 500 million out of 2 billion. Before, it would have been such an absurd number that people would have burst into laughter, but it was the reality the earthlings were living in right now. Especially after the expedition left, the front lines were pushed back ceaselessly and gaps opened up in their front lines, allowing monsters to trample the rear. During times like those, non-combat-oriented colonizers were massacred. Due to this, the voice urging for the reformation of earthlings gained power.

Paradoxically, the earthlings’ fighting power improved through this terrifying war. Compared to before the war, where there were 7,000 low-ranked warriors (4-star) and 700,000 lowest-ranked warriors (3-star) in the total population, currently, there were 10,000 and 1 million respectively. Although many warriors had died in the battle, the numbers had increased significantly. When looking at the ratios, the number of low and lowest-ranked warriors increased by the same rate. However, since the death rate

for lowest-ranked warriors was actually overwhelmingly higher than low-ranked warriors, advancements were so common that it felt like the person sleeping next to you had advanced to the 3-star level overnight. It was simply that intense of a war.

During this time, not only Lee Jinhee and Ryu Hyunsung, but even Baek Seoin, Bae Jinman, Handke, the newly joined Kim Honghyun, Richard's aide Leah, and Zero had all advanced and became middle-ranked warriors.

Was it because they had experienced this war? Countless warriors applied to be Berserkers, who were notorious for being an organization of crazy war-maniacs. Not only that, but even the El Tribes, who now had to serve in the military after joining the alliance, lined up to apply. It was because Choi Hyuk's independent troops were appealing to them as well.

As a result, 3,000 low-ranked warriors (4-star) became affiliated with the Berserkers, and they were even able to reach 80,000 lowest-ranked warriors (3-star). In reality, they accepted all low-ranked warriors, but they rejected some lowest-ranked warriors after evaluating them. They strictly assessed one's fighting senses and their potential for future growth rather than their current stage. Even Choi Hyuk attended the evaluation after being pestered by Baek Seoin.

Also, in the same way, they accepted 2-star warriors whose talents were especially eye-catching as probationary warriors. This too was because of Baek Seoin's strong insistence that they needed to always be prepared for the future.

Among those who weren't picked and from the second and third-string Berserkers, they established a formal army consisting of 300,000 members assigned to maintaining public order and defending the colonized lands. They were called the 'supervising troops'. Although everyone opposed that name (Lee Jinhee even said loudly, "Hey! Why is the name of the unit maintaining public order the supervising troops?!"), Choi Hyuk went through with it.

The supervising troops were not independent troops and were left affiliated under the Virgo Cluster as regional troops.

That was how the first independent troop established in Dragonic, the ‘Berserkers’, received the C-rank.

The establishment of troops from each overseer and sovereign, as well as clan leaders who had a bit of power, followed soon after.

Complete control of Dragonic and establishing independent troops. With these, the earthlings once again entered a new era.

Due to the great changes that had occurred almost every year, the earthlings could now quickly familiarize themselves with these changes.

Rather than feeling fear or anxiety, the number of people who felt excited gradually grew.

Chapter 129: Establishing Troops (4)

When selecting new Berserkers, Choi Hyuk didn't exclude those who were hostile towards him.

However-

"What was your reason for applying?"

"I want to fight without hesitation like Overseer Choi Hyuk!"

He rejected everyone who held hostility towards him that said this while smiling.

Choi Hyuk believed that there was sufficient reason to be hated considering the things he had done.

"Although I hate people like you... I hate monsters more."

"To kill you one day."

It was people like them who he would accept after evaluating their skills and checking that they weren't 'people to kill' with his Eyes of the Judge.

The problem wasn't that they were hostile towards him.

He didn't need people who spoke differently from their actual thoughts.

The Berserkers were crazy warriors, and those whose inner thoughts differed from their external appearance weren't crazy.

**

When Lee Jinhee moved, beads of sweat and blood splattered upwards.

Pakang!

"Keuk!"

She was unable to endure the backlash as their swords clashed, and her hand had become tattered. Blood dripped down, but she

didn’t drop her sword once. Her eyes didn’t lose their determination.

Although her appearance was quite horrible, Baek Seoin didn’t bat an eye while looking at her.

He was, for a completely different reason, grumbling to someone else since wounds like those were normal for Berserkers.

“Leader! Please talk while doing it!”

Pakaang!

Puch!

“Keleuk…”

With blood spewing from her lips, Lee Jinhee was thrown backwards.

Unable to endure Baek Seoin’s urging, Choi Hyuk, who had reflected Lee Jinhee’s sword and kicked her stomach, opened his mouth.

“Director Lee Jinhee’s sword swung in a straight line. That’s why if you hit it, it’ll reflect off with a ‘ba-bang’.”

Baek Seoin held his forehead when he heard his explanation.

‘Who will know what you’re saying with that sort of explanation?!’

Just in case, he glanced behind him, but the students of the Berserker school simply stood there with wide eyes. They didn’t look like they understood at all.

Looking at them, Choi Hyuk tilted his head.

No matter who saw him, it seemed like he was asking, ‘You don’t understand?’

Turning around, Choi Hyuk faced Lee Jinhee, who was rushing towards him with gritted teeth, and kindly added a bit more detail.

“So… Like this. ‘Ba-bang’!”

Baang!

When Choi Hyuk's practice sword tapped Lee Jinhee's short sword, Lee Jinhee's right hand, which was holding her sword, was pushed upwards.

"Grrr! Damn it!"

Lee Jinhee screamed in anger. She tried her best to endure, but her power wasn't able to overcome the impact in the end and she rolled on the ground. She got back up as soon as she started rolling and shot towards him at the speed of light.

"I'll see it! I'll definitely see it this time!"

However, Choi Hyuk was calm. He once again kindly explained,

"Like this, 'ba-bang'!"

Thud!

Due to Choi Hyuk's downwards swing, Lee Jinhee's hand slammed onto the ground while still holding her sword.

"Keeuhup!"

Swallowing her scream, she quickly dissipated the strength of the swing and escaped from Choi Hyuk's attack range, but Choi Hyuk followed her this time.

"When attacking first, 'ba-bang'!"

Ting!!

Roll, thump.

Lee Jinhee, who had hurriedly retreated, was unable to dissipate the strength behind Choi Hyuk's sword and spun in midair before collapsing on the ground.

Choi Hyuk, thinking that he had explained enough, turned his back on Lee Jinhee and faced the students.

'They probably understand now, right?'

His expression soon became one of bewilderment. He tilted his head…

‘… Don’t tell me they still don’t understand?’

His confusion was wholly revealed through his expression without the need for words. The students of the Berserker school avoided his gaze. In the end, Choi Hyuk frowned.

“It’s not like you’re copying my actions. I’m just telling you to look at it and sense it but you can’t even do that…”

The words he had mumbled in disappointment dug into the hearts of the students.

Just then.

“I get it! I get it! I get it now! You damn leader!”

Lee Jinhee, who had been collapsed on the ground, stood up and charged at him like lightning.

However, Choi Hyuk didn’t even look at her properly and swung his sword in the same way as he did in his examples. Ba-bang!

Yet, the sound which resounded out was lackluster compared to before.

Tik!

“Huh?”

“I get it now!”

Shouting triumphantly, Lee Jinhee let Choi Hyuk’s sword pass her with the gladius in her right hand. In her left hand was another short sword. Imbuing the short sword with karma, she aimed at Choi Hyuk’s neck.

At the same time, Choi Hyuk’s disinterested eyes sharpened.

Clang!

Choi Hyuk reflected Lee Jinhee’s short sword and simultaneously kicked her.

Thud!

Lee Jinhee didn't avoid his kick, instead, blocking his kick by lowering her elbow and continued to charge towards him.

The two clashed in close quarters.

As it was no longer suitable to swing his sword in such close quarters, Choi Hyuk punched Lee Jinhee's face.

Thud!

Accompanied by the sound which was quieter compared to the vigor behind the punch, Lee Jinhee's face tilted backwards. Lee Jinhee had purposely tilted her head back to reduce the impact. With her blue eyes observed Choi Hyuk, she rotated her body and slashed with her sword. The tip of her sword definitely made contact with Choi Hyuk's forehead.

"Yes!"

However, Lee Jinhee's joy was short-lived.

Choi Hyuk's sword completely pierced through her body.

Puscht!

"Ah..."

A dejected sigh escaped her lips. Choi Hyuk added more strength to his sword, which had pierced through Lee Jinhee's shoulder, and pushed her down to the ground. Lee Jinhee grabbed his sword with both hands and resisted, but she pushed back slowly and her butt touched the ground in the end.

Choi Hyuk asked,

"Surrender?"

Yet, Lee Jinhee didn't reply to his question.

"Grr..."

Biting her lips while looking up at him with her blue eyes, she didn't give up and resisted Choi Hyuk's sword.

"Die!"

Then it seemed like the blue light from activating Mind's Eye grew brighter as she flung her body like a spring and attempted to bite Choi Hyuk's sword-wielding hand. She didn't care whether the blade in her shoulder dug in further or not. It seemed she even utilized her karma as her teeth were dyed blue as well.

'I'll take your hand at least!'

Lee Jinhee only saw Choi Hyuk's hand. She revealed such a resolute competitiveness that she would wound her opponent even if she died.

Choi Hyuk's hand approached from a close distance.

Then he smashed Lee Jinhee's face.

Punch!

Choi Hyuk threw a punch at Lee Jinhee without the slightest hesitation.

Her teeth, which had been imbued with karma, flew out, and she collapsed rigidly, unconscious.

The students of the Berserker school watched this with horrified expressions. Although their training was tough, it wasn't this insane. On top of that, wasn't the Berserker who was collapsed on the ground with swollen eyes Lee Jinhee, one of the top three experts in the Berserkers?

After mercilessly crushing such a great warrior, Choi Hyuk calmly stretched his arms.

"Ah... It was fun."

He even unintentionally mumbled this.

A drop of red blood dripped down from his forehead. That one drop of blood made him very happy.

"Jinhee nuna, I was surprised this time."

Although it was only a drop of blood right now, if Lee Jinhee had wielded a karma-weapon, it would have been quite a dangerous situation.

The fact that she accomplished such a feat against Choi Hyuk, who was a high-ranked warrior, was incredible. Even considering how he had matched his karma to her level, there was undoubtedly a wall, which middle-ranked warriors couldn't overcome, between high-ranked warriors and middle-ranked warriors.

Expressing his admiration, Choi Hyuk flung Lee Jinhee on his shoulder. Looking at this, Baek Seoin said in surprise,

"Wait! You have to finish your lecture!"

Choi Hyuk shrugged his shoulder holding Lee Jinhee and said,

"This is what Berserkers are."

Choi Hyuk's lecture had somehow ended well thanks to Lee Jinhee.

**

As he was walking out after leaving Lee Jinhee in Bae Jinman's care, a small hand tapped his shoulder. A woman he couldn't sense.

"It's been a while."

Choi Hyuk said as he turned his head slightly. As expected, Flame-Rain was there.

"Hey~ This place looks nice!"

She pretended to look around at her surroundings. Her gaze landed on the territory pyramid erected in the center of the Berserker school then glanced at the various shops and the students discussing and training there.

"It's because Baek Seoin kept telling me we needed a school. It's my first time here as well."

Flame-Rain giggled at Choi Hyuk's words.

"Good. For this to be your first time. It's my first time as well."

Choi Hyuk simply grinned. Choi Hyuk no longer asked Flame-Rain why she came or who she was.

However, this time, it was Flame-Rain who spoke first.

"I came to say my farewell."

"Farewell?"

"Yeah. I'm going far away… I don't know if I'll be able to return."

She looked up at Dragonic's rippling white sky.

"As I thought… Your homeland's sky was prettier."

Choi Hyuk stepped towards her, who was immersed in her emotions, and asked,

"Where are you going?"

"The world where monsters live. I have been dispatched to the reconnaissance troops. I leave tomorrow."

While saying this, her voice didn't contain any fear or regret.

"… The reconnaissance troops the princess of the Flame Wing Tribe is commanding?"

"Have the rumors spread even here? Well, since you're a high-ranked warrior, you're considered an elite of the alliance."

She looked proud.

That moment, Choi Hyuk impulsively asked,

"It's you, right?"

She replied as though it was a trivial matter,

"Yeah."

Her thoughts seemed to be 'it might be our last meeting, so why hide anything?'

Choi Hyuk's insides twisted.

"Is it okay for the princess of the Flame Wing Tribe to be dispatched to a mission like that? Don't the top 4 avoid stuff like that?"

"Like you already know, there are some people who hate me."

Flame-Rain really didn't seem to care and Choi Hyuk bit his lips.

Although anger suddenly surged within him, he was strangely relieved.

'Is it okay to not consider her my enemy...?"

To be honest, the Flame Wing Tribe was an existence which stood at the top of his list of enemies.

However, Choi Hyuk had already unconsciously considered Flame-Rain to be different. He had simply been unaware of this change.

"Maybe, if they were to send someone other than me... A warrior who wasn't one of the top 4, I probably would have been angrier."

Flame-Rain revealed her white teeth and happily burned her hair as she gave a meaningful smile.

"When we have received so much... We need to repay what we can."

Choi Hyuk could see a faint golden light (sacrificial will) emitting from her through his eyes. The golden light that he wouldn't see many times during his lifetime he had seen multiple times from her.

"... You..."

He stopped what he was about to say and shut his mouth. As there was a saying 'What you say will come true' so he couldn't bring himself to ask, 'Are you planning to die?'

With his Eyes of Distinction, he could tell that Flame-Rain was

willing to die for the mission. The golden light which indicated a sacrificial will was proof of this. Normally, he would have simply glossed over the golden light even if he saw it, but since he saw the golden light as she prepared for such a dangerous mission, he felt torn by anxiety.

'I really have no idea what she's thinking.'

Flame-Rain was always like this. She would suddenly show her sacrificial will to Choi Hyuk. Since she did it back when they weren't really close, Choi Hyuk could tell that this sacrificial will wasn't only for him. She wanted to embrace all the small and weak tribes. Choi Hyuk was one amongst them.

Looking back, the first time he met her was in the first mission he went on as a Consumable. A great warrior of the transcendence level wandered onto the battlefield of lowest-ranked warriors and became friends with many people, regardless of their status. Although the majority of them were unaware of Flame-Rain's status.

"Anyways, now that we've become friends that know everything about each other, I'll give you some inside information... You're going to be getting busier."

Suddenly changing the topic, Flame-Rain's eyes began to fill with sadness.

She had been calm when she said that this might be their final farewell.

"Why?"

"Old Mr. Dragon seems to have taken a liking to you this time... They are assigning you a key duty of the alliance... Recruit training."

"Recruit training?"

"Yeah. When you guys awakened, the thing you experienced on Earth. It was probably... <Ring of Rebirth>, right?"

Choi Hyuk, who had been hung up on thinking about Flame-Rain's sacrificial will, suddenly felt as though he was suffocating. The name that felt like a sudden attack, <Ring of Rebirth>.

His voice became heavy.

"... We're going to do that?"

"Yeah. The method and rules, you guys will be deciding everything."

"..."

He had never trembled in front of any enemy, yet his hands were trembling right now.

"If I were to request something as a friend... Don't be so harsh on them."

Flame-Rain lightly held Choi Hyuk's hand. However, Choi Hyuk was too preoccupied to notice. His mind was churning rapidly.

'They want us to do it? Are they telling to become a definite part of the alliance? Then do we have to do it? We have to make people kill each other like we were forced to? Do we really have to do it? No, there might be a different method. Since it all depends on what we decide. However... Will we be able to foster warriors who can survive in fights against the monsters by going easy on them?'

Flame-Rain said as if singing,

"Although rage makes a strong warrior... Doing it this way won't make them my ally."

"..."

Although Flame-Rain's voice was pleasant to listen to, Choi Hyuk didn't pay attention to it. Flame-Rain's words went in one ear and out the other as he was lost in his own thoughts.

Looking at Choi Hyuk's blank expression, Flame-Rain eventually realized he wasn't listening to her and became annoyed.

“Hey!”

Punch!

“Kak!”

Although Flame-Rain only swung her small fist, Choi Hyuk vomited blood while standing. Her punch possessed a terrifyingly superhuman strength.

However, as a warrior among warriors, Flame-Rain didn’t care about this amount of blood.

“When someone is speaking… I, hmm? Came all the way here, hmm? To see you, hmm? When I’m so busy, hmm? When I have so many friends, hmm? I only came to say farewell to you, hmm?”

Flame-Rain hectored him as though she was trying to fix his manners.

Although the place he was hit hurt, Choi Hyuk smiled when he saw her like that.

“Okay, okay.”

Flame-Rain, who had been hopping up and down, eventually let out a sigh when she saw Choi Hyuk’s plain reaction.

“Haaa…”

After sighing, she changed the mood again. Her eyes turned serious as she said,

“To be honest, I hoped that the earthlings wouldn’t be assigned to this duty… However, it’ll be a chance for you. The fact that you are in charge of training recruits means that you have already been acknowledged. In fact, if the results are good, you’ll even accumulate great merits.”

‘Acknowledgement’. ‘Merits’. Choi Hyuk hadn’t hoped for any of them.

“Whether you pick an easy path… Or a hard one… I hope that

you consider it carefully, friend.”

Tap.

Flame-Rain’s fist lightly touched Choi Hyuk’s chest.

“I’m going.”

Taking a step away, she waved her hand. Choi Hyuk hurriedly called out to her.

“Flame-Rain!”

“Huh?”

“… Let’s see each other again.”

Flame-Rain grinned. Placing one hand in her pocket, her entire body surged with flames. Flame-Rain disappeared, and cleanly burning flames remained in her place. The flames seemed to be waving, and they disappeared while waving.

Blaze.

For some reason, Choi Hyuk couldn’t easily leave the place Flame-Rain had disappeared.

Chapter 130: Kundle Tribe

With Choi Hyuk being the first to establish troops, troops began to be competitively established by others. There was nothing more to say about the five overseers, excluding Choi Hyuk and Nasir, but even the nine great sovereigns and four regular ones acted quickly. Even if they weren't sovereigns, leaders of large clans competed to attract experts and establish their own troops.

They needed to establish troops to be able to leave Dragonic.

If they could leave Dragonic, they would be able to reach a land of opportunities.

"Have you been to the city in the center of the Virgo Cluster, 'Virgo'? That place is no joke."

"Are you teasing me...? You know that my clan hasn't established our troops yet..."

"Ah, ha! That's right. Haha, sorry. But that place really is no joke."

"Why? Is it different from the lowest-ranked supply store?"

"Supply store? You crazy. What do you think is better, commercial goods or military supplies?"

"... How is it, really?"

"First, the quality of equipment is incomparable. Also, we get a discount as D rank independent troops. But, do you think that's all? I enrolled in the Virgo Cluster Warrior School. It was also free as one of the benefits! I trained there for a day, and it was on another level compared to the techniques we find in the supply store. Also, above all, just staying there feels different. It's more refined and lively, and warriors discuss amongst each other... I could easily tell how much of a backwater place Dragonic is! Hahaha!"

“Damn it… If there’s a good place like that, shouldn’t they share it with everyone? When we are all members of the alliance anyways?”

“What can they do when resources are limited? Isn’t it natural for the alliance to invest in more skillful and devote warriors?”

“… Good for you. God damn it.”

Although there were instances when silence would follow due to their excessive bragging, this silence wouldn’t last long. They couldn’t help but ask,

“So… Have you been to Dark City?”

“Even if I get a discount as a member of D rank troops, the cost to travel there is too expensive… Still, if I diligently collect Mission Points, it’s a place that is worth taking a plunge for. Like the cost of traveling from Seoul to New York on business class?”

“You crazy, to compare… Either way, I’m envious. Ah, when will my clan be able to establish independent troops? Should I just join your clan?”

“Yeah, if you’re going to join, join quickly. The later you join, the larger the difference will be.”

The conversations between warriors around this time were all like this.

New cultures were like this. Even if it hurt their pride, they were envious.

As the situation was like this, clan leaders hurried to establish their own troops. However, they couldn’t do it as easily as Choi Hyuk did.

Due to wanting to recruit a few more warriors to increase their beginning rank slightly, they set aside ample time to prepare before they established troops. Also, as they didn’t utilize tactics that disregarded their lives like the Berserkers, they had to train

their newly joined clan members.

During this time, where everyone was in a hurry but delaying establishing troops, the one who rose to overwhelming prominence was Camilla. She established her troops right after Choi Hyuk. It was a shocking speed.

The Berserkers were able to quickly establish their troops because of the Berserkers' simplistic spirit and Choi Hyuk's popularity.

On the other hand, Camilla was able to quickly establish her troops because she didn't expect any more people to join her clan. This was because the Camilla Clan only accepted those with the hero's fate, 'Savior', which increased their karma when they helped others and gained their trust. Also, because all the heroes in the world had already joined her clan, there was no need to consider whether they should accept more people or not. They only decided to accept members of the El Tribes who were compatible with them.

{The 'Valkyries' have been registered as independent troops of the alliance. 2 middle-ranked warriors (5-star), 1,492 low-ranked warriors (4-star), 135,317 lowest-ranked warriors (3-star) as well as 300,000 probationary warriors belong to this troop. Their fighting power is evaluated at D rank.}

Camilla's troops 'Valkyries' received a normal D rank. A matter of significance was that 400 of the low-ranked warriors (4-star) were members of the El Tribes. They were El Tribe members who owed a life debt to her clan members or were charmed by their characters.

She was the clan leader who had accepted the most El Tribe members after Choi Hyuk, who accepted a thousand members.

The alliance gave priority to quality over quantity.

To be a B rank, one needed at least 1,000 members and at least

500 of them had to be middle-ranked warriors (5-star).

To be a C rank, one needed at least 10,000 members, a commander who was at least a high-ranked warrior, and at least 5,000 members had to be low-ranked warriors (4-star).

To be a D rank, one needed at least 100,000 members, a commander who was at least a middle-ranked warrior, and at least 50,000 had to be lowest-ranked warriors (3-star).

Below them were E and F ranks, which weren't allowed to be independent troops. Those were troops which were operated like 'boy/girl scouts' of the young warriors of the top 4 tribes.

That was why, with barely 15,000 low-ranked warriors (4-star) among the El Tribes and earthlings in total, it was difficult for independent troops to be established on Dragonic with a rank exceeding C. Choi Hyuk was the only high-ranked warrior, and the top elite troops on Dragonic, the Berserkers, only had around 3,000 low-ranked warriors.

"But how did the Berserkers receive a C rank? Even if it's a C-... They didn't fulfill the minimum requirements."

Camilla's devoted follower, Penelope, asked with widened eyes. She sounded as though she had just thought of it.

Camilla calmly replied,

"That's because Choi Hyuk isn't just a normal high-ranked warrior but a high-ranked warrior with a Sword of Vow."

"Is a Sword of Vow really that amazing? Enough to compare with 2,000 4-star warriors?"

"Since he slashed a highest-ranked monster with that sword when he was a middle-ranked warrior... It's an unbelievable treasure."

"Wow... Unni, aren't you going to make one of those?"

"I will. That's why I came this far."

As she replied, Camilla looked in front of her.

They were in the dark and vast outer space. The three Kahur Kabkuns, which had created a triangular formation in outer space, were completely destroyed. Around them were monster corpses, which had poured out from when the Kahur Kabkuns were destroyed, floating in space. Her troops, the 'Valkyries', were treating their wounds as they rested. They were all observing the brightly shining light in front of them.

Three suns were rotating around each other as if they were affected by each other's gravity, and a large planet was revolving around the three suns. As there were three suns and the distance between the suns and the planet were short, all the liquid on the planet seemed to have evaporated as gray steam covered the planet.

"And here I had thought it was weird for three of the new type of Kahur Kabkuns, which were rare to find these days, to be gathered in the same place..."

Camilla sent a wary look towards the planet covered in gray steam.

"To think that karmalings were living on a planet like that..."

A lone planet was emitting powerful karma within this dead space. Karma was the energy of fate created when intelligent lifeforms, who wanted to change their fates, despaired against the world and, at times, came out victorious. For karma to be so concentrated here was a decisive proof that karmalings lived here.

It was at this time when the reconnaissance team sent to the planet returned.

"There's no doubt. We confirmed that there are aliens that are capable of communication. Although they are weak, ranging from no-star to 1-star levels, they are a species that knows how to use karma."

As she heard their report, Camilla nodded her head.

“Nonetheless, if they know how to use karma, their starting point is better than ours.”

Then her gaze saddened.

“Three Kahur Kabkuns and the discovery of karmalings... Although we’ll probably receive a generous amount of Mission Points... It will now be the start of a nightmare for them.”

Earth should have undergone the same process. Someone from the alliance discovered Earth, which had then begun the long, hellish journey for the earthlings.

“Let’s return.”

After saying this, she turned her back. However, due to an inevitable sense of sympathy, she gazed once more at the steam covered planet. It was a planet which would be later called the Kundle Planet.

**

Choi Hyuk was in the free city, the ‘Holy Land’.

The El Tribes’ sanctum, where the dragons were born, was granted the name ‘Holy Land’, and it became a type of public land. Although the El Tribes were the ones who were actually managing the city, to show respect towards the earthlings, who protected Dragonic and their sanctum, they opened the city to everyone. All earthlings could freely enter the Holy Land and were allowed to use and research the dragons’ inheritance.

Only one location was restricted from public access.

It was the ‘sanctum’ where the baby dragons lived. The El Tribes, who had the duty of protecting and teaching the dragons, patrolled this area with glaring eyes.

Choi Hyuk was precisely in this ‘sanctum’.

{Kiyaah!}

{Kiroorook!}

The dragons, which were only slightly larger than dogs, stretched their heads out of their nest and acted cute towards him. It was to the point where Choi Hyuk felt embarrassed.

“Haha… They don’t even act this happy to us…”

The Great Warrior Lantz, who was selected as one of the guardian warriors of the nest, burst into a hearty laugh when he saw this scene.

Choi Hyuk parted from the baby dragons who were biting his sleeves and licking his face and asked,

“Why are they acting like this?”

“I think it’s because they sense the energy of dragons and Overseer Richard from you.”

“Let’s say the dragon one makes sense, but why Richard?”

“Since everyone was able to live because Richard gave his life. Even if they are young, dragons are dragons. They know who protected them.”

When he heard this, Choi Hyuk felt a greater burden. The affection of the dragons wasn’t directed at him. When he thought about how it was the affection Mack and Richard were supposed to receive, it felt more burdensome.

He wasn’t used to this sort of affection from the start, and for some reason, he recalled his childhood where he followed his mother around everywhere, which made him emotional. It didn’t feel good.

As he separated from the dragons surrounding him, Choi Hyuk moved away and sat at a desk.

“Anyways, you became stronger, Lantz.”

Like Choi Hyuk said, Lantz had rapidly become stronger. When Choi Hyuk first met him, he was a low-ranked warrior (4-star).

Yet, currently, Lantz had reached the peak of the middle-ranked warriors. No matter how diligently he trained or how rapidly he progressed through experiencing the tidal wave of monsters this time, it was still an incredible progress.

That wasn't all either. The majority of the El Tribes became stronger at such a rapid rate that they increased by at least one level.

"Ah, we received the blessings of the dragons."

The El Tribes perceived this phenomenon as a blessing they received after making a pact with the dragons. It was as though the El Tribes' true potential awakened after they fulfilled their promise. If they were to explain this with the knowledge of the alliance, they could describe it as 'inheriting the fates of the past species that had lived and gone extinct on Dragonic after gaining full control over it'.

It was good anyways since Choi Hyuk was able to fill up the lacking number of low-ranked warriors (4-star) with them.

"Anyways, leader. It seems they really like you."

Baek Seoin, who was swaying on a chair, pointed behind Choi Hyuk.

Flap, flap.

The baby dragons flapped their underdeveloped wings as they flew and ran towards Choi Hyuk. They sat on Choi Hyuk's knees, rested against his feet, and even took spots on his head and shoulders. It was a mess. Choi Hyuk couldn't bring himself to treat the baby dragons badly since he recalled what he received from Mack and simply sat there rigidly.

"Puhahaha. You really are the dragons' lover!"

Lantz laughed loudly as he saw this.

Choi Hyuk gave up and let out a sigh.

To be honest, this wasn't a bad situation. Although the baby dragons annoyed him, the mood was more gentle thanks to them.

This situation was better for getting their agreement.

"Anyways, please take care of us. You guys won't be losing anything through this proposal either."

Lantz nodded at his words.

"Yeah. Although we guardian warriors are tied to the sanctum, which will slow our progress, your proposal asking us to join the Berserkers as honorary members when we have the time isn't bad for us either."

"Exclusively with the Berserkers."

"I know, I know. Also, if they saw your current appearance, everyone would agree."

Choi Hyuk was surrounded by baby dragons. Looking at his appearance, Lantz's gaze couldn't be gentler.

On their way out, after successfully concluding the meeting with Lantz, Baek Seoin's expression was serious.

"Anyways, leader, you said our next mission will be training recruits, right? We have to do the opposite of what we experie-"

"It's what Flame-Rain said. Since the rewards will be generous... We have to do it. I don't know about anything else but we are in urgent need of Mission Points. All those who have newly become middle-ranked warriors need to possess a karma-weapon. And, if possible, Weapons of Sentiment."

"That's right... It's not like it's just a couple Mission Points or anything. We can't miss such a big mission. However, leader, if we are assigned to train new recruits, aren't we allowed to make our own curriculum?"

"Probably?"

"... Then isn't there no need to use the method we suffered

under?”

Choi Hyuk stood in place when he heard Baek Seoin’s words. To be honest, it was a thought that never left his mind after he heard it from Flame-Rain. ‘Do we need to train them in the same manner we suffered under? So cruelly? Then how are we different from the alliance?’ There was no way such questions of morals left his mind either. However, Choi Hyuk shook his head every time. It was the same now.

“If that’s the best method, then that’s what we’ll do.”

What did he care about what was morally appropriate? Choi Hyuk prioritized revenge.

“No. Leader, please think about it carefully. Even if it’s difficult, we have to act in a way that doesn’t garner their resentment.”

Yet, Baek Seoin didn’t retreat.

Choi Hyuk looked back at Baek Seoin with eyes devoid of emotion.

“How so?”

Baek Seoin didn’t lose heart and replied,

“Only then will you get your revenge. Leader, to get revenge on the alliance means that you are going to make the entire universe your enemy. No matter how deep our resentment towards the alliance is, the alliance is also the last stronghold that can protect our lives. If we become hostile against the alliance, those who are hostile towards us will crop up successively, not because they like the alliance but for their survival.”

Baek Seoin’s comment struck the point Choi Hyuk had overlooked. Until now, he had thought of revenge in a simple way, to kill everyone at the top of the alliance. However, unless he killed all of them at once, there would be a snag in Choi Hyuk’s revenge like Baek Seoin said.

"… So?"

"That's why we need to show them that we can do better than the alliance."

Baek Seoin's argument included 'proposing an alternative' rather than a simple revenge. Instead of blindly trying to get revenge on the alliance, it was a revenge that included creating a new order afterwards. His plan was already too grand to consider it as getting revenge.

That was why Choi Hyuk felt frustrated. An 'alternative to the alliance'? It felt like they were taking an excessively long roundabout path.

"… I'll think about it."

Choi Hyuk couldn't help but push back his decision.

"We don't know what kind of people will receive the recruit training yet anyways."

With great timing, this conversation took place the same day they received a new mission.

{The independent troops 'Valkyries' have discovered a new karma species. The assessment and training of them will be assigned to the 'Berserkers', 'Sur', and 'Jangkok'.}

The Sur and Jangkok troops were troops from outer space and not from Dragonic.

To the Berserkers, who had established their troops, a completely different mission from the ones they had undergone until now had begun.

Chapter 131: Kundle Tribe (2)

It was the alliance's custom to have three troops cooperate in training recruits.

This was because there was no one right way to train. What might be the best learning experience for one might end up being useless to another. It depended on the student. When it was like this amongst earthlings, how much more would it vary between species?

As the alliance didn't know the personality of the newly discovered species, the alliance gave the duty of training them to three separate troops to diversify the teaching methods. In the beginning, these troops would compete against each by using their own methods, but in the end, things were set up so that the other troops would have to follow the one with the best results.

The alliance accurately calculated each troop's performance at each stage, and the troops with the best results received the right to use the most resources. Also, the alliance made it disadvantageous for those who were excessively competitive, negatively affecting the results by reducing their rewards or, if severe, taking disciplinary action against them.

Because of this, in the beginning of the training, they competed to take leadership, but around halfway through, it became more structured, with one as the leader and the other two as assistants.

**

It was cold in outer space.

At the 5-star level, the empty space around him should have felt as comfortable as his living room, but strangely, Baek Seoin's body kept trembling.

He could see the three suns and the single, large planet in outer space.

He suddenly recalled his past. Looking up at the vast sky, in a small room, he and his friends would discuss if they thought there were aliens ‘over there’. The Fermi paradox and the SETI project… They would bring up things they had heard about and talk for a while before always ending with, ‘Ah, if there are aliens, I want to see them while I’m alive!’

How reckless those words were… Baek Seoin shook his head.

“Baek hyung, what are you thinking about?”

Baek Seoin was vacantly looking out into space when Choi Hyuk tapped his shoulder.

Baek Seoin didn’t show much of a reaction and simply said,

“Just… As a lowly human from the Pale Blue Dot, I can’t believe the circumstances we’ve experienced.”

“What are you saying? Anyways, pay attention. Aren’t you the one who said we needed to focus on this matter?”

At his urging, Baek Seoin dragged his sights, which had been looking far off into the distance, to the front and began to focus.

As expected, it was an unreal sight.

Within the expansive, lonely universe, there was an untimely banquet.

Three space vessels were anchored in a triangular formation, and in the middle of this formation, all sorts of rare foods were floating in mid-air. Aliens and Berserkers mingled with each other as they ate and drank their fill.

To Baek Seoin, this scene felt awkward. Although he had gone to Dark City and Virgo, this place, similar to how Dragonic used to feel, felt like a completely different world. However, although this place felt unfamiliar due to its three suns and planet, it also felt somewhat familiar as well. This was why he was more bewildered. In the middle of outer space, which he had only seen in movies,

there was a party? On top of that, one of the three anchored space vessels was the Berserkers' – Naro's spaceship.

'We've reached a level where we can party here.'

Change would sometimes suddenly surprise people.

"Now, now, what are you doing by not eating? It seems you are still inexperienced, but there aren't many days when the alliance allows us to hold a get-together. There are tons of food that you won't be able to eat if you don't now. Hurry up and eat. Hey! Artificial intelligence over there! Sing something to heat up the mood! Let's see what kind of music earthlings listen to!"

The one who was shouting loudly was the leader of the Jangkok Troops, Hashishi. He only reached one's waist and had fur covering his entire body, giving him the impression of a cute fox. However, his voice was husky and his nails were as long as blades, giving him a dangerous look. With his long nails, he stabbed the pieces of unfamiliar meats floating in the air and shoved them into his mouth. He could open his mouth so astoundingly wide that Baek Seoin thought he could swallow him whole.

"Can't you hear me? Artificial Intelligence! I told you to sing!"

Hashishi urged Naro again. His attitude was undoubtedly that of a superior ordering his subordinate.

Naro's face bulged to twice its size as it glared at Hashishi. Looking at it, Hashishi's expression became strange.

"What? Are you mad right now? Kelungkeleung!"

Hashishi laughed.

"How cute! What emotions does a simple artificial intelligence, who isn't an Armored Soul Tribe member, have for it to act angry? Ah, Leader Choi Hyuk's hobbies are quite unique. To express emotions... The settings for the artificial intelligence on your spaceship is fun. Keleung! Keleung! Now, really."

Hashishi ridiculed Naro while covertly rubbing Choi Hyuk the wrong way.

“Naro is my comrade.”

Choi Hyuk said this as he stared at Hashishi. It was a warning to not be excessive. However, Hashishi’s attitude didn’t change. Instead, as if he took offense from Choi Hyuk’s informal speech, he immediately responded informally,

“What? Then are you saying you didn’t program its emotional settings? Then that’s really its emotions? Wahahah! The hell… Then what? Why don’t you just say it awakened as an Armored Soul Tribe member like the Steel Battleship? But considering that, isn’t your spaceship too shabby? Haaa… It looks like a relic from ancient times.”

Hashishi fouled Choi Hyuk’s mood more straightforwardly this time. Since Naro’s spaceship was the last inheritance of the narolings who went extinct a long time ago, it wasn’t exactly wrong to say it was a relic from ancient times, however, that didn’t change the fact that his attitude was incredibly disrespectful.

Naro, who heard Hashishi’s mockery, quickly extinguished its large head. Like a still drawing, Naro really did look angry as it glared at Hashishi.

Looking at this, Choi Hyuk fiddled with his Sword of Vow.

‘Should I pick a fight? Will he take the bait when I provoke him?’

If Hashishi was his superior, it might have been different, but Choi Hyuk and Hashishi were meeting in this place as equals. When he was acting like that, there was no reason for Choi Hyuk to simply take it.

Just then, as if he noticed Choi Hyuk’s change in mood, Manta, the leader of the Sur, joined in. He stuck his large hand in between Choi Hyuk and Hashishi. His hand was so large that the small Hashishi was completely covered by his hand.

“This is an important mission. They set this event up so that we can get acquainted. If we cause a commotion, what will they think of us?”

He was right. Choi Hyuk took his hand off his sword for now, but he didn’t take his eyes off Hashishi, who was covered by Manta’s hand. He couldn’t hide from Choi Hyuk’s senses just because he was covered by a hand.

“Ah, ah, okay. Okay. Was I rude again? I always get confused since this is normal on my planet. I’ll apologize. Leader Choi Hyuk, I didn’t have any other meaning, it’s just a difference in cultures. Earthlings are more sensitive than I thought! Keleung! Keleung!”

Hashishi apologized with his mouth, but the tone of his voice was still one of arrogance.

“Is that so? Now, what a trashy species.”

Baek Seoin, who was behind Choi Hyuk, said in an irritated voice as he joined in on the conversation.

Hashishi’s nails, which had been extended out, retracted before extending out again with a swoosh.

“Ha?”

Choi Hyuk smiled. It was just then that he saw Hashishi’s eyes emitting a faint red light (killing intent).

However, Hashishi casually laughed,

“Keleung! Keleung! What a funny guy! Leader Choi Hyuk! It seems that the earthlings’ humor does match ours!”

As if he was simply playing with his fingers, he kept extending and retracting his nails as he laughed. It was as though Baek Seoin’s words hadn’t put him in a bad mood.

Bowing slightly, Baek Seoin greeted them before stealthily glancing at Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk nodded his head subtly. He was indicating that Hashishi’s attitude was simply a disguise.

Seeing this, Baek Seoin also acted friendly as well. While smiling brightly, he replied to Hashishi,

“It’s great that you looked on me favorably. Thank you. Hahaha.”

Just as the Jangkok and the Berserkers had finished testing each other, the enormous Manta changed the topic. He was as big as three earthlings. His hands and shoulders were especially large, emitting a large pressure even when simply seated. He had angular goggles on his eyes, and he gave the impression of a public official.

“Anyways, let’s continue what we were discussing before. We have to ‘commence’ soon so let’s discuss our methods since we’re all here.”

‘Commence’.

Baek Seoin rolled this word in his mouth. The reason why he was unreasonably emotional before was precisely because of this word. ‘Commence’ literally meant ‘the start of training’. The early process which let them know everything would change from now on.

The ‘commencement’ the earthlings experienced was different for each individual. In Baek Seoin’s case, it started with him witnessing the Wyvern of Destruction, and in Choi Hyuk’s case, it began with the ‘Ring of Rebirth’.

Although they were only aware of it now, the reason why the methods were different was because there were multiple troops with control of the training. Like now.

“Ah, commencing by having them kill each other is the best! Glancing through the data, it seems like they are a species that have experienced very few wars. If you want to jolt them back to their senses after having lost their determination, you can’t use monsters. There’s nothing better than having them kill each other to jolt them back to their senses. Isn’t that right?”

While saying this, Hashishi threw a piece of meat at Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk hit it away with his hand as he said,

“That depends on what kind of species they are. Aren’t we lacking in information?”

Unlike Manta and Hashishi, who had experienced training recruits multiple times, Choi Hyuk, who had no experience, expressed caution.

Hashishi laughed and Manta slowly shook his head.

“It’s not too late to observe what kind of species they are after we commence. They will show their true nature in extreme situations.”

“…”

As his words weren’t wrong, Choi Hyuk stayed silent.

When he did, Manta spoke to Hashishi. It seemed his method of commencing was different from Hashishi’s.

“I said it before, but having them kill each other wastes too many resources. When dealing with such a weak species, it’s better to start with mining. Then, by looking at their reactions, we can just use them as resources if they aren’t worth using as soldiers. There will be no waste then.”

The mining Manta was referring to was the process of forcefully extracting the planet’s karma. It was the same method Earth suffered under. Earth became a barren planet that could no longer support any life after having all its karma extracted and losing its fate thanks to the alliance. There wasn’t much time left before it too would cease to exist. Also, the earthlings who died during the advancement evaluation, they too also underwent a type of mining process.

When looking at Manta and Hashishi discussing nonchalantly, Baek Seoin felt shivers run down his spine as he thought, ‘So this was how Earth suffered…’

“Ah, Manta. What are you saying? You’re saying this when the successful case of a species killing each other is right in front of you?”

At Hashishi’s words, Choi Hyuk’s eyelashes flickered.

“… Success?”

Choi Hyuk’s voice was grim. However, Hashishi continued as though he didn’t notice it,

“Yeah. Success! The legendary case of someone becoming a high-ranked warrior within 5 years after the training is right in front of you. Kyah, although I don’t know who was in charge of the training then, they are probably earning a ton of royalties? Right?”

Yeah, there was even something called royalties.

If the trainees showed outstanding results, those in charge of their training received a portion of their merits. Although it was a frustrating situation in Choi Hyuk’s position, Hashishi continued to casually rub Choi Hyuk the wrong way.

“The majority of rewards are paid out once they become alliance members… But since a high-ranked warrior appeared, those in charge of the training must have received a hefty reward.”

If there was one thing Choi Hyuk regretted, it was that who trained who was kept strictly secret so no one could know who it was. As this was a law created by the Exalted Wings using the ‘Net of Fate’, it was a type of secret that couldn’t be divulged no matter how much they wanted to.

“Probably. However, if we risk everything on such a rare case, we’ll lose it all. It’s best to be safe. I honestly think that mining the species living on this planet is the safest way to earn benefits.”

Manta, who seemed rational, wasn’t much different. To them, the karma species living on this planet were nothing more than ‘resources’. This was how they treated non-alliance members.

Choi Hyuk couldn't hide his disgust. At this moment, he hated those in front of him more than the Exalted Wings.

Which was why he said emotional words that he wouldn't say normally.

"Aren't they people who might become alliance members like us? You're being too harsh."

"Alliance members like us? How romantic. While doing this, I've never seen that happen before. The majority are useless species."

Manta coldly drew a line when he heard Choi Hyuk's words.

Hashishi laughed.

"Yeah! So let's go with them killing each other. Leader Choi Hyuk should know since you've experienced it, right? How great of a method it is."

"..."

'I'll do it if it's effective.' Choi Hyuk certainly was of this mindset, but when looking at the guy acting up in front of him, he didn't want to admit it.

In the end, Manta made a conclusion.

"Then it's set. Since we can't come to an agreement, we'll all each choose our own method. Which one is the most effective will be judged by the alliance."

"That's good for us. First place in contributions will be us, the Jangkok Troops. Kek! Kek!"

After ending the discussion, they resumed eating.

Pieces of strange meat floated in the air.

When looked into, it was discovered that the meat was from other karma species.

Whether it was the meat of the dragon hunters, who had gradually ventured deeper into the deep seas throughout their lives

like seekers of truth, or the meat of a species that weren't suited to be warriors but had accumulated karma by enduring endless hardships, eating these meats would not only better one's flow of karma but, if lucky, could even develop their karma, which was why the alliance deemed these meats to be valuable.

This was another side of the alliance, which said they pursued the prosperity and survival of all karma species.

Facing this cruel truth, Choi Hyuk regained a bit of his senses.

Once he did, he laughed.

'Keuk, keuk. Whether they are the alliance, earthlings, or monsters, they are all the same. All monsters. They are all dying to devour each other.'

You would be eaten if you were weak.

This was law, wherever you were.

If this was law, then Choi Hyuk was ready to eat anything in his path.

Choi Hyuk observed Manta and Hashishi with his Eyes of the Judge.

Chapter 132: Kundle Tribe (3)

“You saw them, right? How were they?”

After the meeting, Baek Seoin stuck right next to Choi Hyuk and asked.

Although he hadn’t told anyone about his ‘Eyes of Distinction’, which he had from the beginning, he told his executives about the ‘Eyes of the Judge’ he inherited from Richard.

Baek Seoin was curious about the evaluation the Eyes of the Judge gave Manta and Hashishi.

However, Choi Hyuk shook his head.

Seeing this, Baek Seoin rubbed his chin as if it was troublesome.

“They didn’t have any symbols? What should we do in cases like this…?”

The reason why Baek Seoin was curious about the symbols wasn’t because he was going to kill them or keep them alive because of them. The laws of the alliance weren’t easily glossed over, and Manta and Hashishi were strong, having reached the level of proficiency as high-ranked warriors. Which was why the Berserkers didn’t have the power to decide whether they would kill them or keep them alive yet. Only, he was planning on deciding whether they should be warier of them or respond positively depending on their symbols.

‘But what should we do if they don’t have symbols…’

While Baek Seoin was in thought, Choi Hyuk thought about it simply.

“We can ignore them. It means we can do whatever we want.”

Whether they were friend or foe, it was something they could think about when their symbols appeared later. If their symbols never appeared, then they didn’t have to be concerned about that

either.

This was how Choi Hyuk comprehended the symbols.

“No, I just wanted to consider the symbols since we don’t know whether doing whatever we want is good or not,”

Mumbled Baek Seoin behind him.

“Don’t worry,”

Choi Hyuk said as he looked back slightly.

Meeting his gaze, Baek Seoin felt shivers run down his back. Since some time ago, even if his eyes seemed to glance over him, an afterimage remained like a brand. Choi Hyuk simply looking at him gave a terrifying feeling as though a sword hung over his neck. These shivers didn’t stop quickly.

Was it because he had become a high-ranked warrior? But he didn’t get this feeling from Manta or Hashishi.

‘… Is it my Intuition?’

Perhaps this was Baek Seoin’s innate skill ‘Intuition’ peering into Choi Hyuk’s true nature. A rage that could burn the entire world and surge towards the sky. It might be that his ‘Intuition’ felt Choi Hyuk’s extremely dangerous aggression and kept sending him warning signals. Someone whose existence itself was dangerous.

Baek Seoin relaxed because of this as well.

“Yes, yes, we’ll win anyways.”

Even though he replied in a joking manner, he was being sincere.

Since there was no way Choi Hyuk would lose.

**

How would they go about with the recruit training?

This problem brought a heated discussion amongst the Berserker executives, who all had unique personalities.

“Damn it! Then how are we different from the alliance?”

Lee Jinhee, who was very affectionate and had a very just personality, raised her voice.

Bae Jinman didn’t raise his voice like her but rather tried to persuade Choi Hyuk.

“... Wouldn’t accomplishing a difficult task that others can’t do be a bigger feat than succeeding at something everyone else can?”

On the other hand, Hanke, who prioritized profit, suggested they go with Manta and Hashishi’s methods.

“The shortcut to success isn’t choosing a path of difficulty and greatness, it’s taking the fast and easy path. There’s a reason everyone else does it. Isn’t that right, leader?”

Leah, who had been listening silently, raised her hand.

“I too think that following what other troops are doing and learning from it is better than being too ambitious.”

She too was the type who didn’t care about the lives of the aliens.

After listening to their words, Lee Jinhee leaped up and down.

“Ah! Really! There are things you shouldn’t do if you’re human!”

“No? There is nothing a human can’t do.”

Lee Jinhee and Leah’s gazes tangled with each other in mid-air.

After quietly observing them, Choi Hyuk abruptly asked,

“So what does Jinhee nuna think? What do you think we should do?”

Lee Jinhee replied as though she had been waiting for this, “There are a lot of methods! We can found a school! We can even become gods and lead them!”

There were a few murmurs at her words. A school, gods? As earthlings, who advanced while being stepped on like dogs, this sort of gentle thought was hard to believe.

“I checked the data! There are tons of examples of this in the alliance! We experienced a harsher training than others from the start! Isn’t it strange? You don’t have to kill your own race or have your homeland destroyed to become stronger! A troop approached them as if they were gods and trained them as though they were selecting warriors for the gods! There was even a species who received the approval of the Exalted Wings to reveal their identities to the species they were training before they started to teach them step-by-step! They even became strong enough later to join the alliance!”

“Just hearing those methods is a pain… It’s easier to just let them fight each other… But where did you find that data? There weren’t any examples of that in Dark City…”

Handke grumbled, but his voice was quieter than before. It was because he had never imagined that Lee Jinhee would have found data he didn’t know and bring it up here.

“That’s because we’re on the border and there is an especially large number of psychos! I went beyond Laniakea. I went to the ‘Armored Constellation’ that can confidently be considered a city by the alliance! I spent all the Mission Points I had saved up until now as travel expenses! Just going there, there’s an overflowing amount of data. The alliance is a massive organization. They aren’t simply a gathering of abnormal people!”

Baek Seoin joined in after Lee Jinhee’s ardent shouts.

“There definitely… is something strange about this as well. I heard that the reason they assign three troops to train recruits was to promote various methods of training… But the two troops besides us are pursuing methods similar to what we endured. As though… it’s a scheme to make us become the same as them.”

The same as them.

There was something that people who were extremely angry and hurt despised. It was ‘becoming the same as that bastard’. Just

thinking about it made them shudder.

However, if, for some unavoidable reasons, they acted in the same way as them, then everything would change from that moment on. The endless rage directed at those bastards would slowly simmer down. This was because, once they were in the same position as them, they would gain an ‘understanding’ rather than feel rage or horror. There were even instances when these adverse changes felt like ‘growth’. It would be similar to how a private might think, ‘I’ll never be like those assholes!’ but might understand ‘why those bastards acted that way’ when he became a sergeant.

“The incident this time might, in fact, weaken the justification for our anger.”

Baek Seoin said seriously. As the executives knew that Choi Hyuk’s goal was ‘revenge’, they could do nothing but groan. Baek Seoin’s words were reasonable.

They all looked at Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk’s lips slowly became crooked.

A laugh that sounded like air was escaping his mouth flowed out from his lips.

“Same as them? So what?”

He ridiculed.

Baek Seoin felt a terrifying sensation once more.

Choi Hyuk’s attitude was clear.

‘Whether I become the same as them or lose my justification, what does that have to do with revenge?’

This was a truly blind thirst for revenge. A pure thirst for revenge that didn’t require any moral emotions. This blindness was also the best virtue Choi Hyuk possessed.

Choi Hyuk, who had been troubled over what sort of attitude he

should display, clearly decided on his guidelines.

“Don’t look at anything else. Don’t tarnish your heart. Whether we are the same as them or not, and whether they were right or wrong isn’t important. Killing. Killing every fucking thing. Only this is important.”

If they were still living in the peaceful world of the past, it was a declaration that would label him as a psychopath.

It was also a declaration that directly faced off against Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman’s opinions. Even if they were to use a reconciliatory gesture, it wouldn’t be because of ‘respect for life’ or ‘out of moral justification’. It was a declaration that the Berserkers wouldn’t act on reasons like those.

Even still, his voice moved the hearts of the executives as though they were under a spell.

Who here hadn’t seen hell?

Who here hadn’t witnessed everyone they loved die and felt their entire life crash down on them one morning?

Who here didn’t have nightmares? Who here was sane?

Choi Hyuk’s words were absurd, but at the same time, they gave them a strange sense of satisfaction.

‘Killing every fucking thing.’

These words even moved Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman’s hearts. They even felt ecstasy as if they had taken opium.

Also, the fact that they were moved by those words and that things had changed this way made them sad and angry.

With her eyes brimming with tears, Lee Jinhee said as though she felt wronged, “So, if we do that, what remains?”

Choi Hyuk scratched his head and answered,

“What remains once we kill everything? I don’t know, we’ll have

to see once we do.”

“…”

Silence.

Only silence accompanied his words.

Choi Hyuk, who brought this mood upon them, decided,

“What Jinhee nuna said about a school, I’ll think about it. However, it probably won’t be the type of school you’re thinking of.”

**

{Welcome to the environment control system. Choi Hyuk, in charge of the training. Identification complete. It is the day to commence training. What training would you like to commence?}

“Change the outer appearances of the Berserkers so they look exactly the same as the Kundle Tribe members and scatter them throughout the planet. Have them return tomorrow.”

{Understood. It will consume a total of 100,000,000 Mission Points. All expenses for training will be supplied by the alliance. However, you may receive a penalty if your training performance is lacking compared to your expenses.}

“Got it.”

Although the system said it as though it was trying to scare him, 100,000,000 Mission Points was a trivial amount in respect to such a massive project like training recruits. It was an amount that Choi Hyuk could pay if he slipped up.

While Manta and Hashishi were both planning on using billions of Mission Points each to mine the planet and launch a large-scale slaughter of the same race respectively, Choi Hyuk simply disguised the Berserkers and sent them down to the planet.

“See you tomorrow.”

This was simply a preliminary step in preparation for the true start of the training.

The species receiving the training were called the ‘Kundle Tribe’.

Their limbs were thin like string while their bodies were thick like sausages.

“Don’t their appearances look pathetic? What the hell?”

Following Choi Hyuk’s order, there was one mission given to the Berserkers scattered throughout the planet.

‘Check their personalities… Drag it out of them.’

Everyone thought it wouldn’t be hard.

Sinkholes appeared throughout the planet because of the mining of the planet started by Manta, and Hashishi commenced a brutal game where they could never escape unless they killed each other.

Like how Earth had been in the past, this place would be a melting pot of fear and chaos so dragging out their true personalities would be very easy. No, that was what they thought.

However, this was their miscalculation.

“Just what the hell is wrong with them?”

The Berserkers scattered throughout the planet grumbled.

Those known as the Kundle Tribe were endlessly at peace.

A Berserker cut off the arm of a passing Kundle Tribe member without a word.

“Haa, what’s the matter with you?”

Even though his arm had been cut off, he smiled once as though he was looking at a strange person before going his way. His thin arm had grown back at some point. They didn’t get angry nor did they try to fight them.

Other Berserkers infiltrated Hashishi’s training and incited that they needed to kill each other. The reactions they received were

dumbfounding.

“Hey… They’ll disappear when we wake up after sleeping.”

“What are you saying?! If we don’t kill, then we’ll cease to exist!”

“Ehh… We won’t die. We won’t.”

There was no one more at peace than them.

“I… I want to live!”

When an infiltrated Berserker acted like this and stabbed the bellies and cut off the heads of the Kundle Tribe members who were lying down-

“Huh? Why is that mister acting like that?”

“Let him be. He’ll tire out eventually. Let’s just sleep.”

The Kundle Tribe fell asleep as a group.

“What the hell?”

The heads and limbs of these sleeping Kundle Tribe members were sucked into their sausage-like bodies. After turning into individual lumps, they stuck to the ground like barnacles. Then their weak karma was energized.

“What the hell… Are they completely focused on recovering?”

The karma the Kundle Tribe possessed had strong traces of the recovery property. Their attitude was that this scary incident would have passed by the time they woke up. When they fell asleep, nothing could wake them up as if they had lost consciousness.

When they returned, the Berserkers reported everything they heard and observed from the Kundle Tribe. Naro collected and organized all the data.

“The planet of the Kundle Tribe is very hot because it has three suns. That’s why they say early lifeforms either lived underground or in especially cool areas. Then a species that awakened the karma

of ‘recovery’ appeared. That was the Kundle Tribe.”

“As they possess an outstanding regeneration ability, they might not fear dying anymore. Not only that, but they have no reason to fear their natural enemies as well.”

Speaking up to this point, Naro acted like it was collapsing before opening its eyes wide and saying, “Whatever scary foes they face would either hide underground to avoid the sun or be burned by the suns and die by the time they wake up.”

The executives nodded. This was precisely the attitude the Kundle Tribe had. When they perceived danger, they would quickly hibernate.

“It looks like the Kundle Tribe members won’t age or die if they don’t want to thanks to the recovery ability of their karma. That was why their civilization developed in a way to overcome the boredom of their long lives, which is why there are so many weirdly shaped buildings. Rather than out of necessity, they made them out of boredom… Apparently, their cities seem like large antique stores.”

This time, Naro acted as though it was absentmindedly making something. Its every hand movement was half-hearted.

“According to the observations of the Berserkers, they can’t devote themselves to one thing. They said that if they bothered people who were working, they would just shrug and leave without showing any lingering attachment to whatever they had been working on until then… They were just doing it for fun. They won’t do it if it became hard.”

“Haa…”

Sighs erupted amongst the executives.

“If this is the case, then weren’t the Sur Troops correct? I don’t think there’s any other way besides mining to profit.”

Handke said.

They didn't become angry or fight. They didn't even show any backbone. They were utterly ill-suited as warriors.

However, Choi Hyuk shook his head.

"No. In this situation, I think the school Jinhee nuna brought up is pretty good."

"A school? When they will probably sleep if things became even slightly difficult or dangerous?"

At Leah's question, Choi Hyuk shook his head once more.

"I said it already. It won't be an easygoing school like that."

Choi Hyuk looked down at the Kundle Tribe's planet below his feet and said, "You're saying that they don't feel fear or anger... Then we just need to teach them in school."

"Pardon?"

A school that taught fear and anger... They felt a chilling feeling for some reason.

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Hashishi frowned while Manta smiled.

"As expected, just mining is best. Since we are coming up with a planet mining plan, you just need to help out."

Manta had said that it was safer to simply mine everything than to train them as warriors from the start. At this rate, he was certain to become the greatest contributor of this recruit training.

Hashishi didn't like it, but he couldn't find any other way. No matter how vicious his methods were, they simply slept.

"Keung! Keung! Haaa... It can't be helped. Please take care of me, Manta."

Hashishi decided to yield and work with Manta. This time, Manta looked at the empty seat.

"It looks like Leader Choi Hyuk won't come?"

Hashishi laughed.

“Let him be. He’s a child who doesn’t know what’s good for him.”

Hashishi held Choi Hyuk in complete disregard. However, Manta was looking at Choi Hyuk’s empty seat with a thoughtful expression.

Chapter 133: Kundle Tribe (4)

Baek Seoin nodded his head as he asked,

“How are we going to teach them fear and anger?”

Choi Hyuk looked down at the planet spread beneath Naro’s spaceship. It was incredibly big. It looked to be five times the size of Earth. But since its rotation was quick, its entire surface was being evenly fried by the suns. Since there were three suns, the days were also much longer than the nights on the planet.

Lee Jinhee said that its appearance reminded her of a rotisserie chicken.

Choi Hyuk brought up a topic that seemed to be unrelated to the question.

“Karma is the record of successes and despair lifeforms have accumulated over time. It’s created from happiness, rage, sorrow, joy, love, hate, and greed.”

“That’s true.”

“Earthlings are as greedy as any other species, but the Kundle Tribe awakened karma by themselves while we hadn’t been able to.”

“That’s right. Well, I understand why. They have three suns, and it’s not like the lifeforms on the planet are completely immune to heat… It must have been hell before they awakened karma. It was probably difficult to breathe in such a hellish environment. They should have been emotionally sensitive-Ah, don’t tell me?!”

Baek Seoin’s eyes shined. Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Yeah. Although it seems like they lost their sense of pain entirely thanks to their recovery ability, there will definitely be traces of that period remaining deep within them. Fear of the suns. Also, there is the rage from being unable to do anything but watch

as their comrades burned to death.”

“Wow… Leader, when did you think that far?!”

Baek Seoin looked sincerely impressed. With a happy expression that said, ‘Our leader has changed’, he looked at Choi Hyuk as he asked,

“Then, how do we drag out their true nature?”

Choi Hyuk leaned back and replied dully,

“That I don’t know. Figuring that out is Baek hyung’s job.”

“Ah…?”

Baek hyung looked at Choi Hyuk with his mouth agape, like a developer looking at his company’s CEO.

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Although the majority of the buildings created by the Kundle Tribe were so weirdly shaped that it was difficult to guess their use, they still had a practical part to them. It was the minimal trait for something to be called a ‘building’. Which was also why it had previously been glossed over.

It was that they had roofs. Even if they didn’t have walls, they all had roofs. This was very significant.

“I always felt this, but their buildings are really dark. Their roofs are so long that they darken the streets. It was already looking a lot like an antique store with all the junk… But doesn’t it feel gloomier?”

Lee Jinhee mumbled.

Currently, Choi Hyuk, Lee Jinhee, and Baek Seoin were disguised as Kundle Tribe members and were on the surface of the planet. While the Sur and Jangkok Troops were busy mining the planet, the Berserkers, who had yet to set a training plan, were wandering around the planet and diligently collecting information about the Kundle Tribe. Although this looked pathetic in Hashishi and

Manta's eyes, they didn't care.

The Kundle Tribe's city had especially long roofs and an unnecessarily abundant number of outdoor structures, and the shadows from these structures covered all corners of their city. Due to the substances that evaporated under the sunlight and crumbled dust, the weather was hazy and suffocating as though there was a thick fog regardless of night or day.

The group, who had been walking down these streets which were so dark and gloomy that it felt like ghosts would pop out, soon entered a market.

Markets in Korea would be filled with clothes, household items, and food, but the Kundle Tribe's market was a bit different.

"Is this really a market?"

It was to the point where Lee Jinhee even asked this question.

First, this place wasn't a long passageway but a wide plaza.

While there were market stalls, there weren't a lot of them. Also, they didn't have clothes or food.

"Due to the Kundle Tribe's regenerative ability, they don't wear clothes. Also, as they evolved to digest the overabundant solar energy, evaporated substances, and airborne dust, they don't really need food… but this is strange."

Baek Seoin shook his head beside her.

Rather than a market, it was more like a workshop. Various materials were spread amongst the stalls, and the Kundle Tribe members gathered together and chatted while they made unidentifiable objects. These objects didn't look practical. Seeing as how they chatting noisily, it seemed like they were objects purely created out of interest.

Rather than a market, it was more like a playground where they made objects on the spot, enjoyed them, and then made more.

“Now that I think about it, I received a report about this. I heard that there was an area where the Kundle Tribe members were especially absorbed in creating things. It seems this is the place. But, apparently, even if they are enjoying it, they will immediately leave elsewhere with disinterested expressions if Berserkers start to cause a fuss.”

“… How tiresome.”

Choi Hyuk said with a tired expression. The Kundle Tribe members here looked to be having more fun than anywhere else. It was clear that they were having fun as their sausage-like bodies rippled, but to not get angry when they were bothered… They were matchlessly tiresome lifeforms.

However, not everyone here was creating objects. There were also ‘feats of strength shows’.

Some of them spat hard bubbles from their mouths and others melted their bodies into what seemed like mud and were creating weird sculptures. Spectators gathered around them and were chattering noisily.

“Look at this. This. It’s a new gene we discovered.”

The ‘feats of strength performers’ shouted before scooping parts of their bodies and passing them amongst the spectators.

As they didn’t have a concept of currency, everything was free. To them, who had no worries of eating or surviving, everything they did was for fun.

The spectators, who implanted themselves with parts of the feats of strength performers’ bodies, trembled before performing strange acts like spitting out solid bubbles, covering their bodies with needles or even grow fur like the feats of strength performers.

Looking at this, Baek Seoin sincerely admired them.

“Wow… It’s even possible to do this with the regenerative ability of karma?”

Extreme heat, noxious sunlight, and a regenerative ability that exceeded the laws of science. With these combined, the Kundle Tribe members could function as gene factories. The ability to artificially increase the mutations within their genes and only cultivate the traits they liked. They also had a regenerative ability that went ‘outside the laws’ and could make them return to their original forms.

The Kundle Tribe members used their bodies like blackboards, repeatedly sharing various genes and erasing them. The aim of all this was for ‘fun’ as well. Since the traits of the shared genes created couldn’t be maintained for a long time due to karma.

Baek Seoin, whose eyes were shining as he looked at them with an interested expression, sighed,

“Haa… They are a species who are more carefree than we thought. I wonder if there really is fear deeply ingrained in their true nature…”

Unlike Lee Jinhee, who was enjoying herself as if she were on a trip, Baek Seoin was constantly thinking about the work Choi Hyuk had given him… the training plan to teach them fear and rage.

Since Manta and Hashishi were focused on mining, they needed to quickly obtain results as well.

Although the mining of this enormous planet wouldn’t end in a year or two, if they didn’t obtain any results within a certain period of time, they would be deprived of their right to use the alliance resources, which included the ‘environment control system’.

“Baek hyung, why is your expression so dark?”

However, Choi Hyuk, the culprit of his headache, was acting in a leisurely fashion. Looking at him like that, Baek Seoin felt like a hole might form in his stomach due to stress.

‘Ah… really. Should I just start by capturing the Kundle Tribe members and dissecting them?’

Although he even considered such extreme thoughts, this method was useless against karmalings. Bodies fused with karma couldn’t be analyzed by scientific means.

‘Well, nothing else I can do.’

In the end, Baek Seoin compromised. Even though he wanted to go on with more concrete evidence, he didn’t have any more time.

To be honest, there was a method he wanted to test as soon as he heard Choi Hyuk’s words. Since it was so simple and imprecise, he had hoped to find a better method, but there was nothing more he could do in his current situation.

‘Please… I hope they react to this at least.’

While hoping earnestly, Baek Seoin requested Choi Hyuk who was beside him,

“Umm, leader. Why don’t you light some flames?”

“… Like this?”

Choi Hyuk followed Baek Seoin’s request and lit some flames. As soon as he did, the Kundle Tribe members on the streets were shocked as they murmured amongst themselves.

“Ah, damn! That shocked me! Why the hell would you light flames on the streets like that?”

“I know, right? There are too many rude people these days.”

“Haa, there isn’t much time before the day ends either, this sucks… I guess I’ll go home, purify mud and shake off liquid.”

“I mean, wasn’t it just too rude?”

The Kundle Tribe members showed a more intense reaction than when their arms or heads were cut off. Of course, all they did was pass by while murmuring to each other, but they couldn’t hide

their displeasure as their thick, brown necks folded three times.

Only then did Baek Seoin reveal a smile of relief.

“They react to this at least… Ah… What a relief. Their true nature of fearing the sun remains in their culture.”

Although their bodies had already developed to the point where it was no longer necessary to fear fire or the suns, the Kundle Tribe members still held fire and the suns in contempt.

They had found a minimal amount of evidence. As pitiful as it was, this was all Baek Seoin had. They no longer had time to gather more data. Even if they repeatedly underwent trial and error, they had to push forward with this.

‘Ah, damn. I’ll take the risk.’

The moment he decided to run with it, the scenes Baek Seoin had observed during his investigation arranged themselves in an orderly manner in his mind.

The especially long roofs, the shadows cast over the city, the game where they gave and received genes, and their nature of holding fire in contempt… When these things gathered together, they formed a single picture.

Baek Seoin decided to bet on it.

‘Well, if it fails, the leader will have to take responsibility for it.’

**

Five days since the Sur and Jangkok Troops commenced their training (mining).

Baek Seoin finally briefed Choi Hyuk on the training plan.

“The aim of this training is to awaken the Kundle Tribe as outstanding warriors and create a positive relationship between them and the Berserkers.”

Although having them awaken as warriors was obvious, the

‘positive relationship’ was Baek Seoin’s greed. Knowing this, Baek Seoin subtly attempted to read Choi Hyuk’s mood. Choi Hyuk wordlessly nodded his head. Slightly relieved, Baek Seoin continued his report.

“First, we will use Guardian Bae Jinman to expand and arouse their hostility towards sunlight and fire. So that it can apply to other targets as well.”

Choi Hyuk tilted his head.

“The guardian can do something like that?”

“Yes. It seems it’ll be possible. In the past, we used his buff to incite madness amongst the Berserkers when we fought against the eyeless observers. It looks like it’ll be possible if we combine the knowledge related to the mind we obtained when we joined the alliance and the guardian’s abilities.”

“However, isn’t it just temporary?”

“We have no choice but to leave that part somewhat up to chance. As the Kundle Tribe members start to learn how to fight… We can only hope they create aggressive genes and actively share it among each other…”

As he said this, Baek Seoin hunched his shoulders slightly.

It was because there were too many jumps in logic. He wasn’t even sure if Guardian Bae Jinman could make the Kundle Tribe fight. On top of that, whether the Kundle Tribe members shared their aggressive genes or not was an issue he had no control over.

If he could, he wanted to use the alliance’s technology to personally change their genes. However, that was impossible. This was because there was no doubt the Kundle Tribe’s karma, which was fused with their bodies, would reject artificial gene segments. In reality, the genetic changes they accepted by trading genes would return to ‘normal’ after a while due to their karma. It wasn’t some lasting, repetitive evolution. It didn’t go beyond being

a game.

Which was why sharing the altered genes relied entirely on the Kundle Tribe's 'willingness'. It wasn't once or twice either, they needed to be continuously willing, like a game of baseball or soccer. This was something Baek Seoin could do nothing about.

While Baek Seoin was feeling intimidated after losing confidence during his report, Choi Hyuk coolly nodded his head.

"Okay. Since it was me who decided to look for another method from the start, this much risk is expected. Anything else? What are we going to do afterwards?"

Brightening up at Choi Hyuk's positive reaction, Baek Seoin quickly replied,

"We need one approval and two preparations."

"What?"

"First, we need the approval to reveal our identities to the Kundle Tribe. This is something you need to personally request to the center. Only when we get this approval can we consider establishing a good relationship with the Kundle Tribe or not."

Choi Hyuk nodded.

"And? The preparations?"

"There are two preparations. As human resources... I want the assistance of Overseer Jessie and Overseer Camilla."

At the unexpected reply, Choi Hyuk's eyebrows twitched. Yet, he didn't immediately ask for the reason and accepted it.

"And?"

"Monsters. We need an army of monster powerful enough to give the Berserkers a hard time."

"Hmmm..."

Choi Hyuk began to become interested in Baek Seoin's plan.

A monster army that could give even the Berserkers a hard time… Although he wasn't sure what it was about, it was a preparation that would inevitably lead to a battle.

Just thinking about it made his heart race. Choi Hyuk, who had inwardly been bored since this was a mission that didn't involve a lot of fighting, brightened for a change.

'Ah, jeez. He really likes anything to do with fighting.'

While Baek Seoin was inwardly clicking his tongue as he saw this, Choi Hyuk suddenly said,

"Ah, also, I came up with another method."

"What kind of method?"

"A method to help the Kundle Tribe revive their sense of fear and rage. It'll probably be of great help to Baek hyung's plan."

"So what is it?"

"Wait a moment."

Still sitting down, Choi Hyuk called for the environment control system.

{Welcome to the environment control system. It has been 5 days since training has commenced. The leader of the Berserkers, Choi Hyuk, has yet to distinguish himself. What additional environment would you like to control?}

Without the slightest hesitation, Choi Hyuk said,

"Seal all the Kundle Tribe members' karma."

"What?!"

Shocked, Baek Seoin looked at Choi Hyuk.

{It is impossible as your contribution is too low.}

"Then as many as possible."

{… Environment control complete. The karma of a hundred

million Kundle Tribe members has been sealed.}

“Leader! We decided to get in a good relationship with the Kundle Tribe!”

Baek Seoin protested with wide eyes. However, Choi Hyuk replied without any change in his expression,

“They won’t know we did it anyways.”

Shiver.

Baek Seoin felt shivers run down his spine again.

He looked at Choi Hyuk, who was still sitting in front of him, in a new light.

The demon king was there.

“Euaah!”

On the Kundle Planet, the Kundle Tribe members who had been walking outside screamed as they fainted. Their flesh slowly burned under the hot heat.

A play on ‘Our children have changed’ – A show about the difficulties of raising children.

Chapter 134: Kundle Tribe (5)

The Kundle Tribe members moved.

The expressions of the Kundle Tribe members, who had laughed it off when the Berserkers made a fuss, when the mission of slaughtering each other was announced, and when earthquakes and sinkholes appeared, became serious.

“Euaahh!!”

The Kundle Tribe members carried other members whose flesh were sizzling under the heat. They evacuated deep underground. Thanks to the cool environment underground and their resistance to the heat that had been developed throughout their long evolution, no one had lost their life. However, they were still distressed.

The Kundle Tribe members, who had never felt any pain in their entire lives under the protection of their karma, couldn’t endure the degree of pain they felt from the burns and suffocating heat.

“Aah… Euu…”

“Haa… Haaa… It’s hard to breathe. So hard. Aaack….”

The Kundle Tribe members felt a sense of futility as they gazed at others who were groaning, unable to endure the pain.

“Just what is going on…?”

They couldn’t understand what had happened to them.

They had never experienced the ‘pain of others’, let alone their own, in their entire lives. The word ‘pain’ had long since been forgotten from their language.

However, their hearts were thumping heavily right now.

Although their minds didn’t understand, their bodies knew.

Their bodies remembered their fear of the heat that had been

ingrained at a genetic level.

Just watching others, they could vividly recall this pain that they had never experienced before.

Even those Kundle Tribe members who could maintain their karma were shocked as they felt a terrifying heat on their flesh.

The ability to sympathize with others, which had evolved since the distant past when the Kundle Tribe was powerless, activated. It wasn't only those who were suffering that felt pain but even those who were watching.

"Just what is happening?!!"

A Kundle Tribe member shouted suddenly. Its wrinkle-free, stumpy face distorted greatly.

The feeling of sorrow. The feeling of rage. An unbearable pain.

These emotions, which had been forgotten for a long time, began to bud again.

However, they were only budding.

Like children throwing a tantrum for the first time, they didn't know anything besides wailing and throwing their temper.

They were still a pathetic species.

"Okay, I acknowledge it,"

Said Manta.

"Yeah, I acknowledge that you were able to drag out their true nature which I couldn't do with the mission I created. I acknowledge that. But so what?"

Hashishi, who spoke immediately afterwards, had a somewhat thorny tone of speech.

"If it's freedom due to karma abilities, then you just need to restrain the karma. Who wouldn't know something so simple? We thought about that too. However, think about it logically. Just

because they've awakened their true nature now, will it make them excellent warriors? Could we even use them as Consumables? 10 years? 100 years? No, we might not even be able to use them even after all that time. Do you know how many karma species are discovered throughout the universe every year? It's more beneficial to simply mine those without potential and use the rest of our capacity to develop more promising species. Can't you even do such simple calculations?"

Because Choi Hyuk didn't answer their calls, Manta and Hashishi had come to Naro's spaceship.

Choi Hyuk found them bothersome.

"You just focus on your job."

Manta's face stiffened and Hashish's gaze sharpened at Choi Hyuk's rebuke.

"You, just because we overindulged you... Hey, rookie. Don't you understand the situation? Because of you, this simple job became much more complicated! Do you have to drag this mission, which could have been ended quickly by mining through our cooperation, on for years? Since you're going to fail anyways, we're telling you to join us now rather than come crying to us later. It's not just you who suffers losses but us as well! You selfish bastard."

Whether it was because Hashishi completely decided to be at odds with Choi Hyuk or because he thought Choi Hyuk had decided to be at odds with him, Hashishi didn't hold back his words.

Manta didn't try to hold him back either.

He stared solemnly at Choi Hyuk and said,

"If you restrained the karma of a hundred million Kunde Tribe members, you probably used up all the resources you could use in the beginning. If you can't obtain any results from this, then you, the leader of the Berserkers, will not be acknowledged for any

contributions and might end up assisting us. No, if severe, you might even receive disciplinary action."

Yet, their warnings went in one ear and out the other.

"Leave."

He said while unsheathing his Sword of Vow a little.

"Or be chased out on the grounds that you are interfering with my work."

He smiled like a child as if he thought this method was good too now that he thought about it.

"Leaving an arm and a leg each."

It was a clear provocation.

"What?! You bastard, a new high-ranked warrior relying on your weapon!"

Hashishi was about to throw a fit when Manta held him back.

"How foolish, overseer of Earth. There were a lot of talks about earthlings... yet you are a species of unmatched foolishness."

Manta shook his head and left with Hashishi.

Only Baek Seoin was a nervous wreck.

"Guardian, please take care of me."

Returning to the planet's surface, Baek Seoin said this once more. He couldn't remember how many times he had said it.

If the Berserkers couldn't obtain any results here, they would inevitably be reprimanded by the alliance. However, there were unfortunately too many leaps of logic in Baek Seoin's plan. A plan that didn't rely strictly on evidence but was rather one 'that might work'. Since Choi Hyuk observed this with an attitude that read, 'I'll leave it all to you, Baek hyung,' Baek Seoin couldn't help but suffer from stress.

Fortunately, Bae Jinman was highly motivated.

“Although we’ll only know once we try it… I am quite confident. We experienced the method of influencing one’s emotions and nature during the eyeless observers incident as well as the monster of the night and doppelganger incident. There was also a lot of data from the alliance as well. Also…”

Guardian Bae Jinman watched the Kundle Tribe members who walked the streets with depressed expressions.

“Isn’t this the only method for these lifeforms to survive in this universe? I researched a lot. I’ll definitely succeed.”

As he said this, he thought of Choi Hyuk.

Earthlings picked Choi Hyuk and Bae Jinman as the oddest combination. Bae Jinman, who devoted himself to all lifeforms, didn’t seem suited for Choi Hyuk, who thought of lives like insects.

Yet, in this cruel universe, Choi Hyuk’s method unexpectedly overlapped with Bae Jinman’s goal and path.

The essence of life was, perhaps, the struggle against death.

Life that could only be protected through an endless struggle.

Although Choi Hyuk was cruel, as someone who loved fighting, his method paradoxically made life ‘life’. The struggle of life, where one didn’t endure a beating, but, was instead, hitting back. Choi Hyuk constantly demanded this.

Manta and Hashishi’s method, which didn’t consider life as life and decided to ‘mine’ them, could, in fact, be considered the most ‘anti-life’ method.

“I will make them fight.”

Hiding his appearance, Bae Jinman went down underground and observed the Kundle Tribe members, who were lying down, groaning, and the members who were looking at them with worried expressions.

“Against this damn universe, I mean.”

Bae Jinman closed his eyes.

“For the guide to life to reside in them…”

Bae Jinman’s chant continued like a prayer.

Change began within the hearts of the Kundle Tribe members.

The Kundle Tribe members who didn’t know what to do against this pain they were experiencing for the first time in their lives, and the Kundle Tribe members who didn’t know what to do as they watched those in pain… they gradually began to become aware of this change.

A line was being drawn in their hearts.

A sharp blade was being raised.

At the same time, this was also a ray of light within the darkness.

Bae Jinman’s karma permeated their hearts and led their pain, which had nowhere to go, towards a single goal. He made them resolute and gave them courage. He gave them a ‘motive’. It was a great buff but also a powerful mind control.

The pain which suddenly began one day.

The fear of the sun, which they couldn’t avoid as long as they were living on this planet. Aversion to heat. They, who didn’t know what to do against this ancient hateful past that had come upon them like a calamity, began to grind their teeth.

Yes, like the time they first awakened karma a long, long time ago.

Thump!

A Kundle Tribe member, who had been flailing on the floor, slammed his head against the ground. He made wrinkles throughout his body and shouted. It wasn’t the appearance of a Kundle Tribe member, who had always smiled friendlily.

“Do you think we’ll lose?!”

Thump! Thump!

It wasn't only him. Other patients acted the same. While slamming their bodies against the ground, they then kneeled and stretched their arms out before getting up.

Their bodies were stained with burns. Unperturbed by these sore, acute wounds, they stood up while slamming their heads against the ground and walls.

Although they didn't know the origin of this pain, they couldn't keep crying like children.

Even if they were to cry, they decided to cry while standing up.

With their eyes, blurry from the pain, wide open, they gazed at the other Kundle Tribe members around them.

"It's like a part of my body has disappeared. Something inside me suddenly disappeared. We have to find what has disappeared."

They were referring to the karma they had instinctively awakened. They, who didn't know what to do and had simply been groaning, began analyzing their symptoms and looking for a solution.

"Yeah, let's look into it."

The Kundle Tribe members who had been watching this agreed.

"But first,"

One of them opened his body and took out a blood vessel that had been flowing deep within him.

He cut the vessel, drawing blood. When the wound closed, he cut it again.

Refreshing blood, which acted as a coolant within his body, gushed out. His blood soaked the patients exhausted from the heat.

"Since we're going to find a method even if it means destroying the suns... Bear with it."

“No, like how blood flows within our bodies, let’s first make something flow down here. Let’s try to make this place cooler.”

The Kundle Tribe members, who liked to create new toys, began to utilize their talents in a practical manner.

This time, it wasn’t for fun. Their eyes were brimming with desperation.

“Wow… This is beyond our expectations.”

Baek Seoin admired as he saw this scene. He rubbed the goosebumps that ran down his arms. He hadn’t expected to see such seriousness from the friendly Kundle Tribe members.

Looking exhausted, Bae Jinman smiled faintly as he shook his head.

“But it’s only temporary. Using their pain as a catalyst to come up with a single goal… It wasn’t from their own strength but required my intervention. When my karma scatters over time, they will become muddled once more. Even though I only used my power on the small group gathered there, I am quite exhausted. I don’t know what we should do to cover this entire planet.”

Bae Jinman did his best for the Kundle Tribe, but his expression wasn’t bright when thinking about facing the bleak task which lay ahead.

However, Baek Seoin’s expression was bright. The anxiety he had just now was gone without a trace.

“No. This is enough. We’ve resolved the most uncertain part. With this result, we should be able to persuade the alliance.”

Baek Seoin held Bae Jinman’s hand.

“Now it’s my turn to work. You worked hard.”

Baek Seoin observed the Kundle Tribe members who were brimming with determination. The picture in his mind became even more detailed.

He mumbled to himself,

“Now we just need to keep this good mood going. If it’s Camilla, who has a strong sense of purpose, and Jessie, who had an outstanding talent for directing... We’ll definitely be able to continue with this momentum. Let’s do it. Let’s try. Our situation became much better!”

Baek Seoin said as he stretched his arms happily.

“The leader will get the approval of the alliance. We earthlings will reveal our identities and become their mentors. Earthlings, who confidently became members of the alliance after being Consumables, and the Kundle Tribe, who are suddenly faced with the fear of extinction. Also, an outpour of monsters! Can’t you picture it? A hardship overcome by the seniors and their juniors! Let’s film a drama, guardian!”

“Huhuhu, I have high hopes.”

At Baek Seoin’s energetic vigor, Bae Jinman became slightly relieved as he laughed.

However, his heart wasn’t completely at ease.

While he felt hopeful, he couldn’t help but feel guilty.

Even if everything proceeded as planned, many Kundle Tribe members would die.

Also, this whole plan was also deceiving the Kundle Tribe as well.

‘Still, it’s better to punch and kick out rather than just suffering.’

Thinking this way, Bae Jinman was able to lessen his sense of guilt.

‘But...’

Bae Jinman’s conscience couldn’t easily be relieved.

His resentment towards the alliance and the universe, which only functioned if people deceived and killed each other, became

deeper.

His rage towards the world and himself.

His rage that even burned himself.

He lived his life, not for wealth and fame, but to someday end everything, for the end.

Since the day he lost all the patients he had been caring for, this became his life.

In this respect, Bae Jinman was an outstanding Berserker.

Chapter 135: Species Bloom And Wilt (1)

To the earthlings, who had recently joined the alliance, the alliance seemed god-like – A centralized organization that functioned on a thorough, standardized system... but that wasn't the case. As a gathering of countless species, it was an organization where everyone's rights and values were tangled together with no solution. This was the alliance.

The division troops were the slaves of the top 4 tribes.

The regional troops were slaves maintaining their specific region.

The independent troops were the slaves of desires.

Although there was only one war, everyone saw this war from different perspectives, and their goals were infinitesimally different. As this was the case, establishing the alliance's tactics was more pluralistic than unitary, and it was always accompanied by endless disputes and competitions.

An example of this was the existence of the 'tactic market'.

———-

{Investigation Project for the Hourglass Cluster}

There has been a lull since the large-scale invasion of monsters last time.

However, we know that it is currently the calm before the storm.

The monsters' next attack will be fiercer. Also, when we recall the monsters' strategy, there's a high chance that this attack will start in regions of the universe that remain a mystery rather than parts of the universe the alliance controls.

During this time, exploring uncolonized lands and controlling the resources there, before the monsters can, will be a very important tactic.

During this time, a... can be of a big help to the alliance and might be able to discover a new species that has a great potential in earning an enormous amount of Mission Points. Like the jackpot in the Virgo Cluster!

The Mer species, who showed an outstanding performance in building defensive fortresses, the Lenoss Troops, who are exceptional at exploration, and the Bota Troops, who are excellent in training recruits, are all participating in this project.

Over 95% of the Hourglass Cluster is uncolonized. There haven't been any karma species discovered yet. However, a karma index of 1,500 has been detected after checking the flow of interstellar karma, and it is expected that many karma species reside there...

———-

"Do you think the Hourglass Project will take off?"

"I don't know. It's not bad index-wise... But exploring has too much risk. After exploring 90% of the cluster, the treasures might only be gathered in the remaining 10%. Before that, it could collapse facing the monsters' invasion. There are even cases where people explore all of it and find that there aren't any useful species despite the karma index..."

"But still, isn't it high risk, high return? To be honest, who knew that Earth, which was discovered in the Virgo Cluster, would become so prominent? Those who invested in that project must be reaping in profits."

"Ah, stop there. It's not like one or two species have kicked the bucket trying to get rich overnight. In times like these where uncertainty is growing, it's better to put your hand in the alliance's center strategy."

"Doesn't the alliance screw up? The independent troops had to clean up after their shit multiple times."

"Still, they screw up less."

This place was similar to a stock market.

It was a place that invested Mission Points and various resources in tactics that looked like they would take off and troops that seemed to have potential. A plaza that was responsible for a variety of tactics which the bloated organization known as the alliance couldn't fully take in.

However, the side effects were considerable as well.

It was originally created as an assisting role, to fill empty holes in the alliance's strategy and vitalize alliance member activity, but now the bloated 'tactic market' could shake important strategies of the alliance.

"Anyways, wasn't the alliance's evaluation of the Nathanial Defense System too exaggerated? I don't think it's able to display that sort of effectiveness? Since they say they are going to introduce a controversial system like that to more galaxies... Ah, there needs to be a limit to wasting the budget..."

"The Nathaniel Troops have an incredibly strong influence in the alliance. They probably had some sort of deal. They have a lot of contacts with the top 4... More than half of their executives are from the top 4."

"Damn it... Can those without connections survive in such a sad world? What are the Exalted Wings doing?"

"They are busy just managing the Net of Fate. Also, aren't they just a part of the top 4 in the end? ...Also, the truth is something that changes depending on the perspective you look at it from. If their experts come out and say, 'It wasn't the defense system but something else that was the problem. We were able to defend this much thanks to the defense system,' what can we say?"

"I don't know. I just can't believe there are people who think about making money in a war that risks the fates of species. Damn it. Don't they know how many species disappear overnight out on

the borders...?!”

“It’s because the war is too long. In the end, those in the center were able to endure such a long time without much danger. They’ve fallen into simple mannerisms.”

In the past, the earthlings had unilaterally followed the alliance as Consumables and under the Virgo Cluster Regional Troops. However, by establishing independent troops, they gained the right to participate in the ‘tactic market’ as investors and planners as well. It was the start of their lives as true alliance members.

This change brought with it a huge opportunity as well as an enormous risk.

“Tactic market? Forget it. We don’t need to care about things like that and focus on our job.”

Camilla struck down this new opportunity.

“However, they say there are species who earned a ton of Mission Points in one go? If we have that much, we can prepare karma weapons and set a good foundation for the warriors we develop in the future. To be honest, our clan’s finances aren’t good compared to other clans of the same size. There’s nothing much we can do since this is our style, but couldn’t we research this market and participate in it as well? Although they say it is a negative influence, it’s also a greatly positive one as well.”

Penelope said in a slightly worried tone.

However, Camilla shook her head adamantly.

“We can’t lose our essence. The goal of our Camilla Clan is the survival and prosperity of species. You can’t have such naïve thoughts that the alliance will protect us just because we joined them. I felt this during the tidal wave of monsters, but their priority is the alliance. If the war becomes difficult, we could be cast aside at any time. Although Mission Points and equipment are helpful, we need to obtain them through our own strength. Don’t

think about earning them through risky games. What we need to focus on right now is significantly improving ourselves. As independent troops that have only now become D-ranked, if we get caught up in such nonessential matters, we won't be able to do this or that."

"Yes... If you're firm on it, why don't we at least receive some investments? To be honest, we only have two middle-ranked warriors including me... We need to pick out at least one good karma weapon, unni. Overseer Choi Hyuk has been on a roll ever since he created a Sword of Vow... Haa, where did he get the money to create one...?"

"The moment we receive investments, we need to take the thoughts of our investors into account. Why do you think they call independent troops slaves of desires? There are a ton of those who don't look back at the safety of their species as they act to obtain more investments and more profits. We can't be like them, can we? Let's think about this matter once we accumulate results where we no longer have to be so mindful of what our investors think."

Eventually, Penelope sighed.

"Yes, unni. It seems I became a little greedy after learning about this new information."

Of course, not everyone was like Camilla. A new world, a bigger opportunity. There were many more who attempted to sink their feet into it.

There were even some who daringly jumped into it.

"Leader. Isn't there a high risk? They say there are quite a few troops that ruin themselves because of it..."

It was rather the members of the Jessie Clan who were worried about their daring leader. However, there wasn't the slightest sliver of fear in Jessie's shining eyes.

“Fool. That’s why we need to do it. In the end, whether they are early or late, everyone will end up participating in the tactic market. Humans won’t change even when the world has changed this much. There is no end to greed and they repeatedly make the same mistakes. Then what should we do? We need to take the lead and become pioneers. As we tread towards this demon-abode-like tactic market, isn’t our role to be explorers who find constellations before anyone else? Isn’t that good?! Sovereign Jessie’s tips on tactic investments! Then we can set up a legitimate investment company! Look back at Earth. Wasn’t being an investor more exciting than being a producer?”

“That’s true, but we are a clan founded on the banner of supplying refined fighting techniques? We aren’t a finance company that deals in money…”

“Hey, don’t say such words. Do you think this is really like investing in stocks just because it’s similar? This is tactic investments. Tactics. Don’t we know how important tactics are? To be honest, during the tidal wave of monsters, earthlings would have gone extinct right there and then if it wasn’t for Overseer Choi Hyuk and Richard. And Richard died in battle… Damn it! Do you want to want to only look towards Overseer Choi Hyuk if a situation like that arises again? Normally, you can’t give up on tacticians even if you give up on soldiers. This is the only path if guys from the country without any connections like us want to understand and take hold of the alliance’s strategies. This is a kind of fight as well! It’s not simply just dealing with enemies in front of you with a sword. What I’m saying is that tactics are the fighting techniques that can skillfully deal with enemies on the scale of troops and the universe. There’s a need for earthlings to broaden their perspectives.”

“Haa… Well, who can stop you, leader?”

“Yeah. Let’s use this opportunity to gather some clans who want to jump into the tactic market but aren’t qualified to and clans that

are too nervous to even try. Looking at it, it's not something we can do with one or two points, and it's safer if we have more capital."

"How are you going to bear all the resentment if we all go bankrupt?!"

"Don't worry and don't be nervous. We just need to keep our heads in the game. Aren't challenges and adventures our mistresses? Wahaha!"

Jessie laughed like an innocent child.

While the earthlings were heading to this new opportunity, the Berserkers, who were the first to establish independent troops, were quite a distance away from this change.

As their key members were caught up in the important mission 'recruit training' soon after they became independent troops, they didn't have the time to figure out what the tactic market was.

Well, even if they did know, it wouldn't change much. Choi Hyuk and his subordinates were like seekers of truth. Seekers of truth drenched in blood. They simply fought. If they fought and fought, things would approach them on their own. They never looked or snooped around.

Hadn't the Sword of Vow in Choi Hyuk's possession and the opportunities the Berserkers received come to them first?

In this respect, the Berserkers' method was closer to the Camilla Clan than the Jessie Clan.

Maybe it was because of this? Camilla, who had been quite wary of the Berserkers, looked upon Choi Hyuk's proposal in a positive manner.

"So, are you saying you'll plant our will of wanting to take care of species into the Kundle Tribe?"

"That's right. I think when the Kundle Tribe's fear encounters

the Camilla Clan's will, it will advance fantastically."

Baek Seoin replied simply at Camilla's question.

"Then what do we need to do?"

Asked Jessie.

"You simply need to direct them such that they think that everything we did was for the Kundle Tribe and so the Kundle Tribe members are moved and proud that they created history. So that their hearts race. The Berserkers just aren't good at stuff like this."

"Make them feel moved... It's easier said than done."

While he picked at Baek Seoin's vague explanations, Jessie smiled leisurely. His attitude showed that he was confident either way.

"Then what will the Berserkers do?"

Asked Camilla.

Baek Seoin smiled as he replied,

"We will prepare the props and take the lead role."

The meeting regarding the distribution of rewards followed afterwards.

As the Berserkers used up all their allocated resources to restrain the Kundle Tribe's karma, they needed to make up the resources they would consume from now on. The Camilla Clan and Jessie Clan decided to take up this role, and in return, they decided to split the rewards, where the Berserkers took 60% and the Valkyries and the Extremers took 20% each.

"Ah, if the training happens to flop, we might receive disciplinary action... But that's something we Berserkers will take care of on our own so you don't need to worry. All you will lose is your investment.

Baek Seoin said it in such a way that it was uncertain whether he

was trying to scare them or make them relax.

However, Jessie and Camilla had already decided.

“You’ll become our first investment. I hope for your success.”

Jessie said while smiling brightly.

“Although the risk is high… Knowing how to train warriors is a skill we absolutely need. Since there is something to be obtained if we fail, it’s fine. If we can reap some profits from this, it’ll reduce Penelope’s nagging.”

Camilla showed her enthusiasm.

Screenplay and leading role: Choi Hyuk’s ‘Berserkers’

Director: Jessie’s ‘Extremers’

Acting guide: Camilla’s ‘Valkyries’

All preparations were done.

Regardless of whether it would be a success or flop, the true recruit training began.

Chapter 136: Species Bloom and Wilt (2)

In a place where the Kundle Tribe didn't know, their history and fate were being smashed into pieces.

Two forces fought. The victor took the loser's karma and the loser would lose everything. This rule, which the earthlings had become familiar with since the Ring of Rebirth, applied to the planet and its destroyers as well.

Boom! Boom!

Violent explosions didn't cease within their planet. Rather than calling it mining, it was a war against the planet.

The members of the Sur and Jangkok Troops held karma vitalizing devices in their hands as they fought intensely to advance even another step. The karma vitalizing devices emitted rainbows, and these rainbows gave off the scent of grass and blood. Every time these rainbows, which emitted a scent of bitter, bloody iron and flowers, made contact with the planet, the planet's hidden karma pulse clearly revealed itself. If one were to look at the karma pulse, the original scene would turn black and reveal a stream of stars flowing in the darkness. It was as dark as outer space and as radiant as a galaxy. Each shining star was melded with a memory of the planet. Ancient lifeforms which were the first to go up to the surface of the planet and burn to death. The first lake formed underground and the colony of lifeforms which flourished in this lake. When one looked at it closely, each of their figures were present like hallucinations.

The Sur and Jangkok Troops wanted to completely smash this stream apart, while the planet resisted vehemently with earthquakes, lava, tidal waves, and storms.

Boom!

Accompanied by a loud noise, the mine the Sur and Jangkok

Troops had worked hard to create began to crumble. Even as they faced the thick cloud of dust approaching them, they didn't back down.

"How dare this thing struggle...! Push onwards!"

The Sur Troop members, who possessed large shoulders and were thrice the size of earthlings, supported the collapsing ceiling with their hands. Their arm and shoulder joints creaked. The falling gravel and sand hit their thick goggles. However, they didn't even bat an eye as they endured the weight of the earth with their powerful bodies and tough karma.

Within the planet, the stream of karma, which stretched out like oceans and lakes, emitted a brighter light as it writhed. Using the karma like muscles, it squeezed out lava and made the earth collapse. However, this didn't work either.

When the Sur Troops blocked the planet's counterattacks, the Jangkok Troops used this opportunity to rush towards the flow of karma. They each had a 'planet karma pulverizing stake' in their hands and stabbed them into the 'pulses' where the streams of karma overlapped.

Gong!

Kang! Gong! Creeak!

The shining karma desperately resisted the stake, but in the end, the stakes stabbed into the pulses where the streams gathered.

Kureung! Kureung! Kiyaaah!

The planet let out a scream of deathly agony. The lights, which made up the streams of karma, scattered and flowed into the Sur Troops' 'karma storing device'. Every time this happened, an earthquake erupted on the surface and a sinkhole was formed.

The planet, which had resisted by moving its insides, fell into an eternal silence.

“Suppression complete!”

When a Jangkok Troop member shouted, a Sur Troop member stretched his stiff shoulders as he shouted,

“Good! We advance!”

Bang! Bang!

Accompanied by these sounds, they destroyed rocks as they dug a hole that led deeper inside the planet.

“It looks like we’ll have to mine a bit faster.”

Manta, the leader of the Sur Troops, said as he adjusted his goggles.

“I agree. You received an investment proposal, right?”

Manta nodded at Hashishi’s question.

“Of course, since planet mining is a safe tactic where we never take any losses.”

“Yeah. Though the fools from Earth don’t know this. They don’t even know that the first goal of recruit training is to ‘not leave any resources for the monsters’. If we took years dealing with such worthless species, how would we obtain the resources of this vast universe first?”

“Yeah. ‘It’s better to have three resources in reserve than train one warrior species.’ The basics of recruit training. But why are they acting like that…?”

“They just don’t know the ways of the world. Let’s just take the investments and quickly finish mining. Let’s not give them a chance to join in later at all. They’ll only learn once they hit the ground in regret.”

Hashishi said this easily, and Manage tilted his head.

“They don’t know the ways of the world, huh? While that may be true…”

Manta crossed his arms and closed his eyes.

His relationship with Choi Hyuk had broken down somewhat. While Hashishi kept looking down on Choi Hyuk, Manta was concerned about the potential Choi Hyuk might possess. Even throughout the universe, it was rare to see a warrior at the no-star level rise and become a high-ranked warrior within a few years.

'Now that things have come to this, I need to look into them.'

Manta, who was careful, decided to look into Choi Hyuk and the earthlings just in case something happened in the future.

"Let's try to accelerate our mining and employ earthlings from Dragonic at the same time."

"Why earthlings? Won't they all be as dumb as Choi Hyuk?"

"We'll have to see about that. There might be a reason to use them. We need a cheap labor force anyways. Isn't it obvious for there to be sacrifices if we want to quickly mine this planet?"

"Well, do what you want. This is your business and we're only taking part of the credit for it."

This was how the Sur Troops, true independent troops of the alliance, attempted to contact Dragonic.

To the clan leaders of Earth, who desired to enter a larger world, this looked like a terrific opportunity.

**

The world of the monsters didn't have stars or a dark outer space. It was an enormous anthill split into different dimensions. Mountains and oceans taken from various universes, and even planets themselves, were stacked up like piles of garbage, creating pathways towards 13 different dimensions. This place, which looked like an ant hill, was the garbage landfill of universes.

"Princess, you have to rest..."

A highest-ranked warrior from the Flame Wing Tribe worried

about Flame-Rain, who was wounded.

It had already been a month since they crossed over to the monsters' world. Battles continued endlessly and there were countless casualties. There weren't any able-bodied warriors remaining. However, amongst them, Flame-Rain's appearance was the most terrible. Her brilliant flame wings had dwindled to the point where it was difficult maintaining them, and the stab and slash wounds to her abdomen and chest didn't heal easily.

While the other warriors had time to treat their wounds, she didn't.

This was because she was the only warrior at the transcendence level amongst the reconnaissance troops.

She showed a faint, tired smile.

"You know… that we need to access the Net of Fate."

The reason why the reconnaissance troops could move about within their enemy's territory was because she was connected to the Net of Fate and hid their whereabouts.

Because of this, she couldn't rest at all.

This was because there was a more intense struggle for the Net of Fate following the intense battles. The reconnaissance troops were smaller than a grain of sand relative to the vast world of the monsters. If they could get 0.1% share of the Net of Fate, it would be enough to hide them.

However, this was simply too difficult. Because it was, there were times when they had to sacrifice others by using them as bait for the monsters. Flame-Rain was tormented every time they had to do this.

She gritted her teeth.

"The monsters are much stronger than we expected…"

Initially, the Exalted Wings believed that Flame-Rain would be

enough to take care of the reconnaissance troops. However, the monsters' strength went way beyond their expectations. Every fight was so intense they were on the border of life-and-death, and to obtain 0.1% share of the Net of Fate, Flame-Rain had to endure a pain so severe she felt like she would faint.

"The alliance's strategy was way off. What we need are more powerful warriors. Simply trying to occupy resources before the monsters... Mining new species... We won't be able to escape ruin like that. Even for one warrior, we need to develop planets. I must put this in the first report I send the alliance."

With this burning resolve, Flame-Rain closed her eyes and said with a slightly dispirited expression,

"... Of course, that is if we can survive until then."

She accessed the Net of Fate with closed eyes. Not long after, her face distorted and blood began to flow out from her eyes, nose, and ears. This always happened.

"Princess..."

The highest-ranked warrior of the Flame Wing Tribe held back his furious tears.

**

{We give the 'Berserkers' approval to reveal some information to the Kundle Tribe. The information that can be revealed are 'personal details about the Berserkers' and 'information about the monsters'. Revealing any information besides this is strictly prohibited.}

{There are 43 days before the first contribution evaluation. Currently, the Berserkers have made 0 contributions. If the contributions are below the threshold, you may receive disciplinary action.}

"Ah... My stomach hurts..."

Baek Seoin let out a sigh.

“Everyone’s expecting us to fail… On the other hand, investments are pouring in for the Sur and Jangkok Troops, so it seems the mining will proceed faster…”

Baek Seoin sighed as he examined the movements of the tactic market he had learned from Camilla and Jessie.

“Ah, how can the troop leader say such weak words? It was you who insisted we find another method besides mining… Ah, damn it. I had hopes that I could get a karma-weapon after this mission… Won’t we flop?”

Handke, the artillery captain, scolded Baek Seoin. He had been restlessly standing up and then back down for a while now.

“Although when I think about how Earth suffered, I want to find a different method than that cruel one… I’m nervous now that we’re actually about to do it. I also think that there’s a reason so many people use that method… When I read the data Jinhee brought, cases where they trained species who were as bad at fighting as the Kundle Tribe were rare even in the history of the alliance…”

Unfitting of his nickname ‘Knight Captain’, Ryu Hyunsung, who was quite weak-hearted, revealed his nervousness.

Then Guardian Bae Jinman, who had been silently sitting, calmly said,

“We’ll know soon enough. Don’t worry. Haven’t we, the Berserkers, always tread the path others don’t? We will come out victorious this time as well.”

Although they weren’t much, his words possessed a strange strength. The executives, who had been nervous before the start of their plan, were finally able to calm down.

“Hey, the man’s right. Well, have we ever acted while calculating this and that? We just shut up and fought when the leader told us

to. Whether it's the alliance or the tactic market, you'll only get a headache thinking about them. Didn't we get Clan Leader Camilla and Jessie to do those annoying things for us anyways?"

Handke grinned while agreeing with Bae Jinman's words and sitting back down. Only then did his attitude seem calm.

Looking at him, the other executives relaxed their stiffened shoulders. Unlike the past, where they simply had to fight, there was a moral and political element this time, and when profits were added into the mix, their minds unconsciously became more complicated. However, their job right now was basically the same as before. They simply had to advance with all their might until they reached their goal. Whether they were dealing with monsters or getting results for the recruit training, nothing changed.

However, the tension that had relaxed slightly tightened up with Baek Seoin's next words.

"We're starting!"

Gulp.

They heard someone swallow his saliva.

Ggoong!

Space distorted on the Kundle Planet and a gate opened. It was a long-distance gate they had rented with the Mission Points the Camilla Clan and Jessie Clan had invested.

The Berserkers, led by Lee Jinhee, jumped out from inside. Then monsters poured out right behind them. Endlessly.

"... Aren't there too many?"

Ryu Hyunsung said with a gulp.

"The leader did say to gather enough that it would be difficult for us... But that's going to be really tough...?"

The Berserker troop Lee Jinhee was leading was a bloody mess. Monsters poured out endlessly from the gate. Each and every one

of them wasn't easy to deal with.

The Berserkers shook off the monsters' endless pursuit and ran towards the Kundle Tribe's cities. Saliva dripping from their mouths, the monsters chased after them.

As soon as a Kundle Tribe's city entered their sights, the Berserkers fiercely shook off the monsters chasing them and teleported to Naro's spaceship.

Lights from teleportation flickered throughout the planet.

All that was left were the cities in danger and the monsters.

Hell arrived on the Kundle Planet.

{Hey, you crazy bastard! What are you doing bringing the monsters here?!! If you're going to bring them, you should have brought in a moderate amount! Just how many Kahur Kabkuns did you drag over here?! You pieces of monster shit! We're doing recruit training to take control of resources, yet are you going to just offer up these resources to the monsters?! What are you doing?! Are you screwing things up because you can't win?!}

It seemed he was very angry as Hashishi's message came down on Naro's spaceship like thunder. His message was so loud it seemed like he ignored the communication channels and turned the speakers on.

{The New Recruit Evaluation Agency expresses their concern for the Berserkers' actions. Losses to resources may be immense due to the monsters' slaughter. We hope that you will wrap this situation up as soon as possible. Once again, this is a warning.}

They even received tons of messages from an alliance agency.

The situation on the Kundle Planet was that severe.

The Kundle Tribe was faced with extinction within half a day. This place was hell.

If it was like before, they would have all gone into hibernation,

but the Kundle Tribe weren't certain of what to do because of the other members who had lost their karma.

"Le-let's sleep."

A Kundle Tribe member said.

"Then what about Kunkun! Shut up and run!"

They carried those who had lost their karma and ran down the streets.

"Stop them! We won't die so let's block them with our bodies!"

Many Kundle Tribe members blocked the monsters for their tribe members who had lost their karma.

"Gack! Pointy! Hot! What is this?! Aaah!":

"What? What?! Lunlun!! Lunlun! Why aren't you moving?? Hey! Hey!!!"

The others fell into a greater state of panic.

If they had all went into hibernation together, they would have died in peace without knowing they had died, but as they didn't hibernate to protect those without karma, they watched as their tribe members were ripped apart and killed by the monsters, their regenerative abilities being powerless. Even if they somehow survived, they couldn't keep their heads straight under the pain they had never experienced before. Their wounds ached and felt as though they were burning.

The Kundle Tribe's karma was completely overwhelmed by the monsters' power and their wounds didn't close.

"Hehe, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'll be fine when I wake up from a nap..."

"Pointy, hot fire ... It's not something we can beat... It'll be fine if we fall asleep."

Their instinctive fear of heat was overlaid on the monsters. The

Kundle Tribe members began to call the monsters ‘pointy fires’. Out of instinct, the Kundle Tribe members tried to go into hibernation to avoid this danger. Their long force of habit didn’t disappear.

Bae Jinman, who had been nervously watching this, got up from his seat.

“It’s time for me to act.”

Like what he did in the underground before, Bae Jinman granted resolve to a few Kundle Tribe members. His steadfast karma swept the ground.

“No, no. We need to do something… Or we’ll all die…!”

Those affected by Bae Jinman’s karma raised their heads and shouted. However, there was a limit to Bae Jinman’s power so there wasn’t even a handful of those who pulled themselves together.

“There’s nothing we can do… It’ll be fine when we wake up. Hasn’t it always been the case?”

The majority of the Kundle Tribe members still chose to disconnect from their surroundings and hibernate.

{I’ll help as well.}

It was Naro who acted in this moment. Naro, who could perfectly transmit one’s emotions and thoughts through telepathy without the need for language, copied the emotions of those who were affected by Bae Jinman and transmitted them to all the Kundle Tribe members.

Although the Berserkers used up all the karma fuel they had bought with their Mission Points in the process, this mission was no different from risking everything. They couldn’t hold anything back. They focused on one result.

“Huh…?”

Those who received the emotions of the members who felt that they absolutely had to find a solution blankly stood in place.

‘We can’t hibernate. We need to find another way. Or else we’ll all die!’

Those earnest hearts moved their own slightly. They asked themselves,

‘Then what do we need to do? What can we do?’

There was nothing. No matter how much they thought about it, there was no solution.

As they thought this, the emotion of ‘fear’, which had been in deep slumber until now, grew larger and larger.

“What is this feeling? I don’t know. I can’t bear it. Can’t I just sleep?”

“No, I hate the pointy fires…”

The faces of the Kundle Tribe members distorted. This was the first time they were making this expression.

However, this was as far as they changed.

It was impossible to change the attitude of an entire species with only Bae Jinman and Naro’s power.

They only made them hesitate for a moment and made them more emotional.

The Kundle Tribe members were a bit more distressed, but they still were about to choose to hibernate.

However, it was at this moment when Baek Seoin felt shivers run down his spine.

The ‘slight distress’ was all Baek Seoin had hoped for.

The crack that would make their always-calm hearts waver.

Baek Seoin clenched his fists and stood up.

“Good! Now start stage two!”

Following his shout, the Berserkers, who had been observing the situation from Naro’s spaceship, got up simultaneously.

“Descent!”

All the Berserkers simultaneously prepared their bodies for teleportation. Their destination was the Kundle Planet’s sky.

Rumble!!

At the same time, dark clouds covered the planet.

“Haha! The alliance’s technology is the best! Anything is possible as long as we have Mission Points!”

Overseer Jessie shouted as he jumped up. The scene progressed naturally as though he had become a god. Rain covered the hot planet. This supernatural scene was under his direction.

Rain began to fall from the dark clouds, which covered the sky. It was the first time there was rain since the birth of the planet.

“Huh?”

The bodies of the Kundle Tribe members, who were about to sleep, trembled as they felt the rain fall on their cheeks and bodies.

“What’s this?”

It was their first time seeing rain, but their hearts surged.

Cool rain fell as it covered the sun.

The rain fell while soothing their hearts, which had been filled with fear of the ‘pointy fires’. More and more rain began to fall. They couldn’t see in front of them. It wasn’t that the monsters had disappeared, but once their vision was covered, their hearts became calm for some reason.

“Ah, ah, ah…”

The Kundle Tribe members all began to cry. Even if they had teared up from laughing before, the Kundle Tribe members, who

had never cried from sadness or from being moved, cried because of the falling rain.

The refreshing rain gave their hearts, which had been trembling from the fear of those ‘pointy fires’, hope.

Also, the Berserkers fell from the sky.

Bang, bang, bang!!

The Berserkers split the heads of the monsters as they dropped down.

The Kundle Tribe members widened their eyes.

The monsters they had no way of fighting against were being pulverized like rotten tomatoes.

It was at this time when Choi Hyuk stepped onto the ground.

Thump!

The moment his foot touched the ground, the raindrops which had covered their vision was cut up with a splash. They clearly saw the monsters collapsing after being cut in two as their vision cleared up.

Then Choi Hyuk mumbled.

{Let’s fight together.}

His voice pierced the hearts of the Kundle Tribe members.

Chapter 137: Species Bloom and Wilt (3)

In the central square of Naro's spaceship was a sky.

The sky, which imitated the exact sky of the naroling's past planet, was a light-yellow color. A fist-sized celestial body was emitting a slightly yellowish-green sunlight which gently blended into the sky, much like cream.

The light-yellow color and yellowish-green sunlight swayed on the floor of the central square, which was composed of glass plates, like an illusion.

The illusionary light rays fell on the expressionless naroling corpses below the glass and made it appear as though they were smiling somewhat.

Camilla was sitting on her knees in the middle of the central square.

Next to her was Penelope, also known as the Knight of Honor, standing with her hands clasped together.

"Are you okay, unni?"

Penelope asked carefully after discovering a teardrop running down Camilla's cheek.

"Huh…? Ah, a teardrop…"

Camilla wiped the single teardrop on her cheek with her right hand. She raised her head and took a deep breath.

"The narolings' planet is beautiful as well. As much as Earth."

Her voice was thick with nostalgia.

"I went to our homeland before we came here… Since it might be the last."

At her words, Penelope's body flinched as though she had been hit.

“Unni… Why did you go…? It’s obvious anyways…”

“You’re right. It was obvious. The sky turned into an ash-grey. The ground was dried up and cracked. There wasn’t a trace of a river, and the cities were piles of concrete with sinkholes so deep they reached the core.”

Camilla chuckled.

“To be honest, I wasn’t even sure that it was our homeland.”

The sky and land the earthlings had loved were gone forever. Even from outer space, Earth was now a lump of grey rock. Most likely, it would turn into dust and disappear into outer space forever by the time this mission was over.

Camilla swept the tips of her fingers on the glass. The species that had only left behind the A.I. known as ‘Naro’ before going extinct. Only their external appearances remained here. While some could say that they could revive them with biotechnology… It was useless. This was so karmically. Their fate and history had already been smashed to pieces, and even their remaining feeble fate had already been collected by the alliance. Even if they genetically revived the narolings, they couldn’t be the narolings. They only looked similar, the paths of their fates would be completely different. The cloned narolings would not have any retribution and, accompanying this, they wouldn’t have a fate or any rights. Although they might appear the same as the narolings, they would face malicious coincidences and degrade over time. This was fate.

After spending a vast amount of time in this endless degradation, they would create a new karma suitable for them, and the newly born species would be very different from the narolings. What decided the identity of an existence was the path of retribution it had walked, not its biological composition. The basics of karma. Naro knew this as well and so did the earthlings now.

Camilla gazed at the completely extinct species as she was

overwhelmed with grief.

“We are all different but the same. Existences appear and disappear like a sudden shower. Which is why they are beautiful…”

Camilla gently swept the top of the glass. Her hand couldn’t reach the naroling corpses. It was like the fates of the earthlings and narolings that would never intertwine.

Camilla stood up. Next to her was a screen displaying the Kundle Planet.

Her gaze was now fixed on the Kundle Tribe members fighting alongside the Berserkers.

Driven by the Berserkers’ madness, the Kundle Tribe members threw themselves at death.

It was all in vain. Even if they had the assistance of the Berserkers, they were only at the 0-1-star level. They were of no use against the monsters that were at least of the 2-star level and on average were at the 3-star level. They simply caught the monsters’ attention and made the Berserkers’ fight easier while they died regretfully.

The pouring rain and the mountain of corpses washed by this rain.

Camilla’s eyes regained their calm.

“They are weak… but there is no god. Even if they struggle, no one will look back at them. This is the universe. You either survive through your own strength or die. If that’s the case…”

Swish.

A sword and shield appeared in the air and were grasped by Camilla’s two hands. She said,

“We will be each other’s gods. If not me… Who else?”

Swoooooosh!

It sounded like flowing water. A refreshing fragrance spread out from Camilla's body.

Unlike Choi Hyuk, whose flames gushed out with his karma heart as the core, her karma ran down her spine like a waterfall and spread out densely like mist. This was the result of improving the karma training method she had obtained from the alliance in her own way.

Seeing Camilla finish her preparations, Penelope opened the communication channel connected to the Valkyries.

"All forces..."

After saying her preparatory command,

"Valkyries, advance."

And following Camilla's words, she commanded,

"Advance!"

The third stage of Baek Seoin's new Kundle Tribe training method began.

Vrroooom!

A change occurred on the battlefield where the corpses of Kundle Tribe members were plastered over the monster corpses. A milk-white, semi-transparent dome surged up along the frontlines.

At the same time, the restricted karma of the hundred million Kundle Tribe members was released. The Kundle Tribe members who dragged their heavy bodies to fight suddenly felt their bodies become lighter.

"Huh?"

They felt as though something was changing. It was different from the change they felt when the Berserkers appeared previously. This time, the change was warmer and gave them relief.

Sovereign Jessie proposed that this would be the best time to release their restrictions. Also...

“Gaah... Huh?”

“Huh?”

The wounds that didn’t heal because they were suppressed by the power of the monsters began to stanch like magic. This was the effect of the Valkyries, who were known as Earth’s best healing organization.

“Since their regenerative abilities are outstanding already, a buff that raises their spirit is enough!”

Penelope commanded,

“Slowly send the Kundle Tribe members back as you heal them! Have them evacuate inside the dome!”

Following her orders, the Kundle Tribe members, who were fighting the monsters, were led by the Valkyries and backed away from the frontlines. The Kundle Tribe members, who had fought amongst the Berserkers without knowing whether they would die, were able to catch their breath under the Valkyries’ gentle care.

On the other hand, Camilla stood on the frontlines next to Choi Hyuk.

“The Swords of Paradise will create a defensive line around the dome! Hold down the frontlines with the Berserkers!”

Shwah!

Her karma, which spread densely around her, recovered the Berserkers’ exhausted bodies and heavily suppressed the monsters’ raging karma.

Her single strike didn’t possess the intensity Choi Hyuk’s did, but in front her, monsters would become unenergetic like cockroaches that had been sprayed with bug spray and die.

When the Kundle Tribe members fell back, the Berserkers would

face more pressure, but with the support of Camilla and her elites, the Swords of Paradise, they were able to maintain the frontlines without many losses.

Plip, ploop, plip!

Rain continued to fall. They finished evacuating the Kundle Tribe members, who had fought like they were entranced until they died, inside the dome. The sky was dark. As the heat from the battle and the coldness of the rain, which ran down their skin, mixed together, the Kundle Tribe members shivered.

The intense battle didn't stop once during this time.

"What the heck is going on...?"

"Haa... Haaa... Are they still alive...?"

"What are they...? Incredible..."

While soaked in rain, the Kundle Tribe members gathered together and watched the battle ongoing outside the dome as their bodies shivered.

As expected, the most eye-catching person was Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk, who hadn't used flames in case the Kundle Tribe members would become chaotic, used flames without care on the battlefield now that they were gone. His flames surged upwards as they devoured the heavy rainfall. His flames even devoured the thick mist and scattered their brilliant lights. Even when his flames, which were terrifying and as red as blood, met the heavy rain, it was a beautiful sight, like an illusion.

The scary monsters couldn't flee when facing Choi Hyuk and became ash while trembling.

"The shadow of flames..."

A Kundle Tribe member said exasperatedly. The Kundle Tribe, which disliked the suns, had a particular meaning in the word 'shadow'. Hearing this, the other Kundle Tribe members nodded

and spread the word. The shadow of flames. Shadow of flames. “Flames of protection…”

The Kundle Tribe instinctively felt fear when they saw the flames, but what they felt this time wasn’t simply fear. A mixture of fear and respect, ‘awe’. To them, Choi Hyuk was a hope and fear that descended from the sky. He was like a god.

There was also Camilla. Her karma squirmed as it mixed with the pouring rain. As if a dragon was ascending into the heavens, every place she passed, the rain would distort to create a fantastical scene. Also, the monsters fell down as though they fell asleep under the cold rain.

Behind them were the Berserkers and the Valkyries. The monsters pushed forward endlessly, but they couldn’t reach the dome. They were pounded into meat paste and washed down by the rain before they could.

When they took a step back to watch, the scene sent shivers down their spines. They couldn’t believe the fact that they fought alongside them in this great, frightening war.

‘Could I fight amongst them again?’

They didn’t dare to.

Their hands simply trembled with shock and emotions. As his body trembled, a Kundle Tribe member asked a Valkyrie who let them inside the dome,

“Who are you?”

The Valkyrie replied,

“We are the Berserkers who fight monsters. We came here to fight alongside you who have been invaded.”

At the reply, the Kundle Tribe members let out a shout.

“As expected… They came to save us.”

“They came down from the sky to save us…”

The Kundle Tribe members, who had only now awakened their forgotten emotions, were naïve like children. The recent incidents were too difficult for them, who had never encountered monsters before. The rescue that arrived when they were at their wit's end, like welcome rain, gave them an entrancing sense of comfort that they had never experienced before. In their eyes, the Berserkers were the envoys of gods, angels.

Like newly hatched baby chicks, they imprinted the name 'Berserkers'. This was all according to Baek Seoin's script. The Camilla Clan and Jessie Clan involved in the plan couldn't reveal their affiliation. In this moment, their role was to simply engrave goodwill in the hearts of the Kundle Tribe members towards the Berserkers.

The Kundle Tribe members were touched to an uncomfortable degree.

However, the Valkyries didn't only provide the Kundle Tribe with goodwill.

"We didn't come to save you."

"Pardon?"

"Didn't you hear what Leader Choi Hyuk said? We came here to 'fight alongside' you."

"Ah..."

Only then did they awaken to their reality. Their bodies unwittingly flinched. Although they fought previously because they were led into a frenzy under Choi Hyuk's words, their instinct to survive awakened now that they had a short break. To fight again... They couldn't.

However, the Valkyrie's smile was full of confidence as he gazed at them.

"Don't worry. We will fight alongside you."

Was this a signal?

The Valkyries, who had all awakened the karma trait ‘Heal’, used their powers simultaneously. The emotion sharing device they had prepared with the investment from the Camilla Clan activated. The milk-white dome shined brightly. Bae Jinman and Naro gave a hand on top of that.

The Camilla Clan was a gathering of all the self-sacrificing people amongst the earthlings. Their noble hearts influenced the Trundle Tribe’s minds.

Something warm and gentle yet steadfast filled the hearts of the Kundle Tribe. A heart that was more broad and steadfast than anyone’s came down on the Kundle Tribe’s hearts.

Camilla’s voice faintly brushed their ears.

‘Let’s not go extinct. I will fight for you.’

This wasn’t a normal vow of protection. When Camilla said ‘I’, each Kundle Tribe member, whose hearts were being influenced, thought of ‘themselves’. An oath that, not ‘you’, but ‘I’ would ‘fight for myself’ even if ‘I’ was weak. The eyes of the Kundle Tribe members shined like stars.

This was the third stage of Baek Seoin’s plan. The script where the Kundle Tribe would awaken as warriors had passed the beginning and developmental stages and had now reached the ‘turning point’.

It was the tempering stage.

In the second stage, with the addition of the Berserkers’ madness and Jessie’s directing, they drew out the Kundle Tribe’s forgotten emotions to their extremes. Since it was to the point where the well-behaved species would throw themselves at the monsters, it was a great success. However, a passing flame would simply burn everything and only leave ashes.

Hot steel would become stronger once it was cooled then

reheated. Camilla's appearance was the cold water, which cooled the hot steel, the anvil, and the hammer.

The entire process progressed as smoothly as flowing water.

"Inside this dome, you will rest and learn fighting techniques!"

Jessie's troops, the 'Extremers', who could be considered the greatest in developing and supplying refined fighting techniques, appeared and taught the Kundle Tribe.

"Those who have recovered while training will be sent to battle in teams!"

With Naro's transcendental intelligence, they were instantly divided into teams. A healer from the Valkyries was assigned to each team to reduce the death rate of the Kundle Tribe.

It was now the real fight.

"Woaaah!!!"

"Block them! That's right! Block and hit! What are you doing?! Hit them! You fool!"

It was a real fight without even the slightest mercy. The Berserkers, who didn't know how to act, stubbornly pushed the Kundle Tribe members.

"No matter how strong the monsters are and no matter how weak you are, block and attack when you need to!"

They were Berserkers straight and through. They didn't hesitate to kick indecisive Kundle Tribe members in front of the monsters. If the Valkyries' healers weren't present, then countless Kundle Tribe members would have died. After experiencing the hellish real battle, they would take a break in the cozy dome and receive training.

Following the system that was created while they were dazed, the Kundle Tribe was thrown into battle and then allowed to take a break while learning and polishing up their fighting techniques

before being thrown into battle again.

The monsters were as strong and numerous as the time Dragonic struggled under the tidal wave of monsters. It wasn't a war that would end overnight.

Even the Berserkers, whose karma were exhausted from fighting, moved into the dome at the back. However, they didn't simply rest there either. Like workaholics, they didn't take a rest as they taught the Kundle Tribe.

Unlike the considerate and refined training style of the Extremers, theirs was rough and explanations were nonexistent.

"Guuueeeck!"

A Kundle Tribe member was cut in half by a Berserker's strike. A healer from the Valkyries quickly came over, put both halves of his body together and healed him. The body of the Kundle Tribe member, who almost died, trembled.

However, the Berserker gave him a pathetic look and mocked,

"How can someone who can't even block this attack block monsters?"

This was the Berserkers' training style. Pushing them to overcome their obstacles. Their attitude was, 'if they could overcome it on their own, they could become Berserkers, if not, they should apply to a different troop'.

Of course, many Kundle Tribe members couldn't overcome the obstacles. However, there were people hired for situations like this. The Extremers guided the Kundle Tribe members, who were dispirited because of the Berserkers, courteously once again.

"When you think you see a flash, move your feet this way and bring your karma from the left to the right..."

Like this, the Kundle Tribe members, who learned these techniques, repeatedly challenged the Berserkers again and again,

before they were rolling on the ground screaming. They repeatedly went from hot to cold, and their emotions kept going back and forth between being calm and desperate, gradually tempering them. The steel-like will provided by Camilla's troops kept the weak-willed Kundle Tribe members together.

This period, which felt like an eternity, passed day after day, and the Kundle Tribe members slowly became stronger.

Everything was proceeding as planned. However, this wasn't a leisurely situation.

The training the Kundle Tribe members were undergoing was incomparably systematic and safer than the training the earthlings had undergone... But their progress was slower than the earthlings.

It wasn't the Kundle Tribe's fault. It was because they couldn't use the 'warrior training system' where they received a portion of the karma mined from the planet. Since the Berserkers chose a completely different path from the Sur and the Jangkok Troops, the mined karma was in the complete possession of the alliance and the two troops. While the Kundle Tribe diligently killed monsters, since they couldn't receive extra karma from the planet, their progress couldn't help but be slow.

There were 40 days until the first contributions evaluation.

They had to obtain results within this time. If they didn't, they would be in a situation where they couldn't avoid disciplinary action from the alliance and would suffer losses.

Since Lee Jinhee rounded up enough monsters to suit Choi Hyuk's preferences, if the Kundle Tribe, who numbered more than the monsters, didn't pull their weight, it was an intense war where the Berserkers, Extremers, and Valkyries would not be able to avoid taking huge losses.

It wasn't only the Kundle Tribe that was desperate.

Within this war where blood didn’t even have a chance to dry, time kept flowing.

Chapter 138: Species Bloom and Wilt (4)

{T/N} The beginning is quite gory. You have been warned.

A Kundle Tribe member was being chewed on by a monster. The monster, which looked like a wolf, shoved its head in, biting into the Kundle Tribe member's sausage-like body and swallowing.

"Ahhh...."

The Kundle Tribe member, completely restrained by the monster, could only shed tears as he pled,

"Please... Please... Stop... Acck!"

However, as though it couldn't hear his words, the monster bit off his head and swallowed it. There was no one to save him. Team 8,321 had completely collapsed and had been utterly trampled by the monsters.

"Huck!"

The healer from the Valkyries, who had tried to save everyone in Team 8,321, was pressed under a monster. The monster, whose limbs were transparent like glass and possessed a long tongue like a snake's, chuckled. It was a monster at the 4-star level that knew how to talk.

"Are you scared? Scared?"

The monster chuckled as it used its long tongue to carve out one of the healer's eyes, swallowing it.

"Euaah!"

The healer squirmed, but the monster stepped on his arms and legs as if he was a toy, turning them into paste. Closing his remaining eye, the healer shook his head. When the monster's fingertip brushed past the healer's eye, his eyelid was sliced off. The monster gently licked his eye, which couldn't blink without an eyelid.

“Should I let you live? Huh? Do you want to live?”

The monster brought a dying female member of the Extremers, whose stomach was pierced, in front of the healer. A bit of her guts spilled out from her pierced stomach.

“Eat. Eat? I’ll let you live. I’ll let you live?”

The monsters that could talk were ones that learned the emotions of the karmalings. They didn’t simply slaughter people but also knew how to step on their pride and dignity and make them tremble in fear.

“You’re not eating. You’re not?”

“Healer! Healer!”

The last remaining Kundle Tribe member of Team 8,321, Moonmoon, shouted mournfully as he rolled on the ground. The healer, who had warmly taken care of their wounds since their team was established, was being mercilessly trampled on in front of him. Moonmoon felt like he would go crazy with agony.

“Loud. You’re loud? Then you eat. Here, eat?”

The monster ripped open the healer’s stomach with its hands. It then pushed the steaming stomach in front of Moonmoon.

“Open your mouth. Open?”

Moonmoon shook his head. The monster forcefully opened his mouth and shoved the healer’s flesh and organs into it. As Kundle Tribe members lived on sunlight and dust from the ground, they didn’t have a digestive tract, only a respiratory one. The monster filled Moonmoon’s windpipe by shoving the healer’s flesh and organs into it. Moonmoon wretched, but he couldn’t match the power of the monster that was forcefully shoving them down his windpipe. Even now, the healer hadn’t died and was shaking his head in agony. “Please, please... Stop...” His pitiful moans dispersed in vain. Beside him was a Berserker who had resisted until the very end. His face had been completely ripped apart and

his corpse was sprawled like trash.

Moonmoon shed tears.

He was powerless. He hated himself for having felt proud, thinking he had gotten a little stronger. The moment he encountered a powerful monster... his growth until now was completely inadequate.

'Growth? What's the point of that? Growth isn't important. Not losing is! Just what have I been doing all this time?!'

He inwardly despaired as his windpipe was blocked and he couldn't breathe properly. As he cried, his regrets had nowhere to go.

"... You fucking asshole...!"

Just then, accompanied by a curse filled with bloodthirst, something flashed in front of his eyes. A small figure. He was a young Berserker. He was Lee Jinhee's eternal follower, Alexei.

"Kiyack?!"

The monster, who had been full of confidence, was flustered by Alexei's sudden attack and retreated. Alexei nimbly stepped on mid-air and swung his sword at the monster's face.

Clang!

However, the monster was at the 4-star level. It blocked Alexei's sword with its transparent arm at the last moment.

"Kihi! You eat too. Huh? Feed you?"

It seemed it was slightly relieved after blocking his attack as the monster mocked him. However, Alexei didn't reply and lowered his head as he pressed his sword down. His head rushed in like lightning and bit down on the monster's neck.

"Kik?"

Pwaaaah!

Alexei ripped its throat out with his teeth. A lot of black blood spewed out into the air. Alexei stabbed his sword into the monster's head, which had lost its balance, embedding it into the ground.

Thud.

The 4-star monster that had been a nightmare for Moonmoon and Team 8,321 had instantly died and was slammed to the ground. This was the skill of Alexei, a top elite of the Berserkers, who was known to have the highest seniority amongst those on the level of team leaders

Alexei chewed on the monster's throat he had ripped out before spitting it out.

"Fuck. Tastes like shit..."

His eyes were different from the ones of a love-struck youth when he was in front of Lee Jinhee. With eyes shining with madness, he glanced at the monster before looking around the battlefield for another elite monster.

Moonmoon hastily got up.

"Reeetch! Reetch!"

While vomiting the healer's flesh, which filled his windpipe, he clung onto Alexei's leg.

"What the hell?"

Alexei stared menacingly down at Moonmoon.

Moonmoon clung onto Alexei's pant leg and shouted,

"I want to become stronger... I want to become stronger! Please teach me! Please, I beg of you!"

Moonmoon's eyes shed tears mixed with blood.

Alexei heartlessly broke free from Moonmoon's grasp.

"What are you saying? You're looking for a way to get stronger in

the middle of war? Look for that as a hobby. For now, just fight. Is your opponent stronger than you? Then what can you do besides getting devoured? But, while you're being devoured, bite and rip open its esophagus or stomach. Just think about how you will wound it. Stop crying. If you survive by luck, then at some point, you won't die easily."

Alexei clicked his tongue.

After he left, Moonmoon, who rolled on the ground like trash, screamed.

He cursed at how weak he was, he even cursed his sadness.

He wanted to become like the Berserkers.

He wanted to be like them, who only thought about stabbing monsters' bodies with their swords even while their faces were being ripped apart. He felt that, if he became a Berserker, this pain that made him want to go crazy would disappear.

"Euaah! Euuuuuuaaahhh!"

Moonmoon screamed. At the same time, a change occurred in his body.

Under this extreme stress, his genes quickly caused a mutation. It was the genetic mutation they had originally used for entertainment. Moonmoon's body bent in strange ways before returning to normal. It then sprouted wings before returning to normal. His arms and legs thickened before thinning, and his skin became hard before melting... However, in the end, he returned to his normal appearance.

As if he was dead, he was silent for a moment before getting up. He didn't tremble anymore. He looked calm. Only, his eyes were dyed red. His eyes emitted a terrifying killing intent.

"Grrr..."

This was the moment the gene known as the 'Berserker Gene'

amongst the Kundle Tribe members was first created.

As a characteristic of their genetic mutation, it wasn't a trait that would last forever, but at least, for a moment, these mild Kundle Tribe members could become bloodthirsty demons.

It wasn't a will created by Camilla or Bae Jinman, but one they created themselves.

**

"Their movements have become better these days?"

At Baek Seoin's question, Leah replied,

"Yes. They are changing their personality on their own by using their 'genetic mutation'. It's not permanent as it seems they turn it on like a switch during battle or training... Either way, even without the Camilla Clan forcefully boosting their will, there's no doubt they can function on their own. It seems that the Valkyrie's burden lessened because of this as well."

Baek Seoin's lips curled into a smile.

"It's the fourth stage."

The last stage of the warrior training he had created. It was precisely the stage where the Kundle Tribe motivated themselves without any external interference. It was something he had thought of when he first saw their genetic mutation in the market, but it worked out as expected.

However, his smile soon turned bitter.

"But there are too many monsters."

Drawing in powerful monsters was incredibly risky. The monsters that appeared on Earth were only of the 1-2-star level. On top of that, there hadn't been a lot of them. The troops in charge of recruit training were more than enough to deal with them. However, the monsters currently sweeping through the Kundle Planet were at a level that could utterly destroy an entire planet.

The Berserkers, the Valkyries, and the Extremers couldn't avoid suffering losses.

On top of that, they received a final notice from the alliance.

{Intentionally letting monsters invade a new planet is a grave crime. We will no longer stand the plundering of resources. In the case you do not seize complete victory against the monsters and obtain results beyond the resources that have been lost, the alliance will immediately dispatch a punitive force to suppress the monsters. We will disqualify the Berserkers from the recruit training mission and take disciplinary measures.}

It was a notice of unmatched strictness. This was the result of Manta and Hashishi, who were furious with the Berserkers' actions, resolutely sending an appeal to the alliance.

There were only 20 days left before the first evaluation.

The monsters' force was still powerful. Yet, Choi Hyuk, who had to take down the monsters' vigorous attack, acted leisurely. Even now, he didn't go out onto the battlefield and spent his time sitting in the command room of Naro's spaceship in contemplation.

Baek Seoin sighed.

"Leader. Can't we act a little safer? I think this much is enough... If we keep dragging it on, the gap between us and the Sur and Jangkok troops will only get wider."

Baek Seoin had a plan. However, the master of the Berserkers wasn't Baek Seoin but Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk had long since been carrying out a new plan with Baek Seoin's plan as its base. It was under his command that Lee Jinhee brought over an unbelievable monster army that shattered everyone's expectations.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn't satisfied. He hadn't personally made a move since the first battle. Because of this, the frontlines were frozen, repeatedly advancing and retreating. There was no progress. Although they were all constantly growing because of

this, their losses were gradually accumulating as well. Even now, the monsters continued to pour in from the gate. On the other hand, the Sur and Jangkok Troops were expending all their energy on mining the planet to completely leave Choi Hyuk's troops behind.

"Just how far are you thinking?"

Baek Seoin felt frustrated at Choi Hyuk's lack of reply as he looked at Lee Jinhee. 'Just what is the leader waiting for?' He asked with his eyes. Lee Jinhee avoided his gaze.

Choi Hyuk was waiting for the monsters' force to grow larger. However, he didn't state exactly how big he wanted their force to be. Every time Baek Seoin asked, 'Isn't this enough?' Choi Hyuk would shake his head.

Baek Seoin, who sighed once again today, suddenly became surprised.

The tips of his fingers trembled.

"... Huh? Huh?"

Baek Seoin's innate skill, Intuition, had activated. His Intuition only activated when a situation where his life was at risk approached. It had been a long time since it last activated.

"What's wrong?"

Leah asked in surprise. However, Baek Seoin didn't answer and looked at Choi Hyuk.

"Leader... Don't tell me...?"

Just then, what Baek Seoin felt through his Intuition, Choi Hyuk had discovered with his keen senses. He opened his eyes, which had remained closed. On his face hung a satisfied smile.

"Baek hyung. Your plan this time was very good, but there was something that bothered me."

Choi Hyuk held his Sword of Vow and got up.

“I don’t like tricking people and performing. Being conscious of the alliance is enough. There’s no need to perform in front of a species weaker than us, right?”

His gaze was fixed on the gate Lee Jinhee had opened on the Kundle Planet. A hand was coming out from beyond the gate. It exuded an ominous feeling.

“If we decided to bring the Kundle Tribe onto our side… It’s only right we enter hell together, right? Aren’t comrades people you overcome hardships with? Including me, of course.”

{Karma reaction! It’s a monster at the peak of the high rank! It’s stro… strong to a bizarre degree! It’s stronger than Commander Mack!}

Naro shouted.

“Uh… Uh… Something’s weird…?”

Lee Jinhee, who had been tasked with the duty of drawing monsters in, spat as she turned pale. Only Choi Hyuk looked like he found this fun.

A monster that possessed a gigantic horn and hands came out from the gate. However, the real threat was elsewhere.

No matter how one looked at it, a figure that looked like a human stood arrogantly on top of the enormous monster. If it wasn’t for its eyes, which were black with white pupils, it would certainly look like an earthling.

It was a never before seen monster that looked entirely human.

When it hit the enormous monster’s head with a thud,

{Kuaaaah!}

The enormous monster let out a roar like a loyal dog. Its roar rang throughout the planet. Surprised by its vigor, everyone stopped fighting. Even the Sur and Jangkok Troops stopped mining.

Everyone shuddered at the appearance of the new monsters.

Choi Hyuk's smile deepened.

"I can't let the Sur and Jangkok Troops just watch. Now... Let's test who will survive this hell."

**

{Choi Hyuk this bastard... He's strangely passive in pushing the monsters back, isn't he? Since he's a high-ranked warrior, he should be able to push them back with his strength, but he's just watching. Is he seriously trying to screw us over since he can't win? Shouldn't we at least go out and chase the monsters out? The amount of resources the monsters ate is quite significant.}

Hashishi was, yet again, not in a good mood today because of Choi Hyuk.

{No. Just wait until the first evaluation. Since this loss will entirely be Choi Hyuk's responsibility. If we make a move, it might become a pain later if he says something like we obstructed his training or whatever. He still has authority in this training. It won't look good if we interfere.}

{That's true, but how regretful...}

Hashishi licked his lips. The parts of the planet and Kundle Tribe members the monsters had devoured would have been the karma they would possess under normal circumstances.

However, Manta was at ease.

{It's okay. Because of this, we got to know about the species known as earthlings. They were a species I had underestimated because only Choi Hyuk was famous, but they are better at working than I thought. Our labor costs are only a quarter of what they should be, but our mining speed doubled. They are aggressive and enthusiastic. If Choi Hyuk receives disciplinary measures this time, we should bring more earthlings to our side. I think they'll be decent hunting dogs.}

Manta revealed a satisfied smile.

The earthlings were in a quite isolated position within the alliance. If even Choi Hyuk, who was liked by Leviathan and Commander Mack, was overthrown, then there was no doubt they would become more isolated.

The earthlings had the skills and ambition but didn't have information or resources... And if, on top of that, they didn't have a master to watch their backs either... Then they were up for grabs. Wasn't it the fate of new recruits to say thank you even if they worked for free?

Manta chuckled.

Though, it only took a moment for his face to stiffen.

"... What?"

Hashishi was the same. As if in shock, he jolted up.

"... A high-ranked monster? Is it really a high-ranked monster? But... Why? Why is it so strong?"

"Choi Hyuk that crazy bastard... Just what kind of monster did he bring...?!"

Manta's leisurely smile disappeared from his face. That wasn't all. His face quickly turned pale.

"Huh... Huh?!"

The high-ranked monster didn't head towards the Berserkers. It prioritized the Sur and Jangkok Troops mining inside the planet.

"Immediately! Escape immediately!!"

Manta shouted, but the monster was a step faster.

{Kuaaaah!}

When the enormous monster it was riding roared, the military gate system went down. They couldn't even communicate, let alone teleport.

{You rats dare plunder my planet?}

Rolling its black eyes, the monster gazed in the precise direction Hashishi and Manta were located. On a planet with three high-ranked warriors, it was exceedingly at ease.

{It'll be fun if you all came at me at once... Well, should I go after the two gathered together? Then the last one will probably come on its own.}

The recruit training was no longer the problem. The playing field had been completely flipped on its head. All calculations became meaningless.

A real war, where only the strong would survive, began.

Chapter 139: Species Bloom and Wilt (6)

The leader of the Jangkok Troops, Hashishi, held a sword in each hand and a spear with his tail.

“Monster bastard, doesn’t even know its place…”

His pride scratched, his eyes trembled. He acknowledged that the newly appeared monster was strong.

‘But you attack not the Berserkers, but us first?’

When facing multiple enemies, it was the basics of fighting to hit the weakest one first. Whether they looked at it in terms of seniority, average troop level, exhaustion from fighting, or numbers, the weakest in this situation was clearly the Berserkers. However, the newly appeared monster targeted the Jangkok and Sur Troops first solely because it found them an eyesore. Precisely speaking, it targeted Hashishi and Manta first. It was evident that it was looking down on them.

“Fine. I’ll rip your face to shreds.”

Hashishi’s eyes narrowed. As the whiskers on the bridge of his fox-like nose trembled, he shouted.

{Choi Hyuk, you bastard! Don’t even think about joining in! You just stay there and be prepared to be arrested!}

Since their proper communication channels were blocked, he announced this to the entire planet. Next to him, Manta shook his head with an expression that read, ‘Did you really have to go that far?’ but he didn’t go out of his way to restrain or correct him.

Instead, he ordered his subordinates through a planet-wide announcement.

{The Jangkok and Sur Troops will leave their current positions and form a field formation. Those below the middle rank are requested to not join in the fight. The elites are requested to keep

the enormous monster it's riding in check.}

Afterwards, Manta stretched his large shoulders by swinging his arms in a circular motion as he gathered his fighting spirit. Although his rage was surging because of Choi Hyuk's outrageous behavior, he wasn't the type to become agitated before a fight. He calmed his rage as he prepared to fight.

Thuuud!

A gigantic hemispherical shield appeared around him as it filled the space around it. The shield could move freely without him touching it.

"Although it would have been good if we could give Choi Hyuk a beating first... This isn't bad. Let's first take down the monster before reporting Choi Hyuk to the alliance."

Manta calmly composed a plan. The monster was displaying waves of power that well exceeded that of a high-ranked monster, which was why he was nervous. However, he didn't think he would lose.

'Fortunately, my compatibility with Hashishi is pretty good.'

Hashishi was extremely powerful when attacking and Manta's defense was outstanding. He believed that this would be enough to take down the monster. Of course, while there would be unexpected losses, they could simply seize compensation from the Berserkers.

"Come."

Manta quietly chanted after erasing all traces of being flustered and finishing his preparations for battle. No matter what, they were still high-ranked warriors of the alliance. They were great, experienced warriors.

Thud!

It was at this time when the monster appeared in front of them.

Compared to the vigor it emitted, it was exceedingly calm and at ease.

“Ah? Were you planning on fighting my friend as well? Ehh? It’s too boring if we start off like that. Friend, you go over there and play.”

It patted the enormous monster like a dog before sending it off towards the Sur and Jangkok Troops who had started their retreat. Then it turned towards Manta and Hashishi and said,

“I hope you will entertain me.”

The monster gave a bright yet brutal smile.

**

{Choi Hyuk, you bastard! Don’t even think about joining in! You just stay there and be prepared to be arrested!}

Hashishi’s warning rang loud and clear. Choi Hyuk, who had unsheathed his sword and was preparing for battle, scratched his chin. He looked like he was in a bit of a predicament.

“Don’t tell me… that’s all?”

He looked at Lee Jinhee with a questioning gaze.

Naro replied in her stead.

{Yes. The Kahur Kabkun that is connected to the gate doesn’t have the energy to send more high-ranked monsters than this.}

At its words, Lee Jinhee was flustered.

“Uhhh… That’s strange.”

The current situation was unbearable for her. It was because Choi Hyuk was questioning her from the front while Baek Seoin was glaring at her from behind.

“Are you hoping that that isn’t all?”

Baek Seoin asked with a dumbfounded voice. Choi Hyuk nodded.

“I told her to gather three or four high-ranked monsters if possible.”

At Choi Hyuk’s absurd remark, Baek Seoin’s mouth opened agape.

However, this was within Choi Hyuk’s calculations. Since there were three high-ranked warriors here, to make it a real mess, they needed at least three high-ranked monsters as well. It would have been perfect if there were four.

But only one high-ranked monster appeared after they opened the gate.

“No, is it two if we consider the monster it’s riding…?”

The rider seemed strangely strong for a high-ranked monster and the monster that appeared to be its steed seemed strangely weak for a high-ranked monster.

“Eh…? I definitely stuck four Kahur Kabkuns that could summon high-ranked monsters together. I almost died because of it…!”

Lee Jinhee’s expression showed that she felt falsely accused. After going through all that hardship, only one appeared. Even if they considered the one being ridden on, there were only two.

Listening to their conversation, Baek Seoin shouted, almost screaming,

“It’s already a huge mess! What more are you hoping for? We’ve already reached a level where we can’t avoid being charged by the alliance!”

Yet, Choi Hyuk’s expression showed that he still found this troublesome. The one who came to his defense was Richard’s former aide, Leah.

“No. We’re already on the tiger’s back. In our current situation, it is better if the monsters are stronger.”

Listening to her, Baek Seoin was about to throw a fit, but he

suppressed it. When he thought about it, her words weren't wrong.

"Since the situation has already come to this... You're saying that the Kundle Tribe and the Berserkers should achieve a brilliant merit while Manta and Hashishi's troops get trampled on, right...?"

Baek Seoin calmed his agitation while Leah nodded at his words. It seemed she felt that the current situation wasn't good as well since she was biting her lip.

"Yes. If Manta and Hashishi suppress the monsters first because the level of the monsters is poor, then only us Berserkers will be to blame."

Choi Hyuk had overturned the playing field. This meant that the protagonists of this overturned field had to be Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers. This was the only way they could recover from this situation that had gone too far. This was Choi Hyuk's original plan as well. If there were three or four monsters, then Manta and Hashishi would take care of one each and Choi Hyuk would take care of the rest. Then he would suppress the monsters before anyone else. His Sword of Vow, the power of dragons he received from Commander Mack, and the absolute confidence he had in himself... this plan was created for the sake of this confidence.

However, his plans went awry from the start. When they opened the gate, only one high-ranked monster appeared. If Manta and Hashishi took it down before him, then Choi Hyuk wouldn't have any opportunity to gain contributions and would be labeled as a traitor.

As if troubled, he fiddled with his Sword of Vow.

"Then I guess I need to hope that it's strong enough..."

-Bzzt

Due to the monster's obstruction, they couldn't see the battle

situation. Choi Hyuk crossed his arms as he looked at the static-filled screen.

Then.

Thuud!

The Kundle Planet shook.

Baaang!!

Like an eruption, the surface of the planet exploded, and from it shot out two warriors and a monster tangled together.

The high-ranked monster and the high-ranked warriors' fight was great enough to have an effect on the entire planet. In the end, it was a fight that couldn't be hidden even if they tried.

"We'll know by watching."

Choi Hyuk's voice lowered.

**

The monster called itself the 'Punisher'.

It introduced itself as so while saying that it came to 'punish' the warriors of the Flame Wing Alliance who didn't know their place.

Also, it was as strong as its name suggested.

"Kuaaah!!!"

Hashishi shouted while vomiting blood.

Every time he swung the swords in his hands, the Kundle Planet was sliced like tofu. However, the small monster leisurely avoided his attacks.

"Is that all?"

Although they were all high-ranked, the 'Punisher' was on a different level than Manta and Hashishi. Their attacks couldn't touch it, and they also had difficulty dealing with the counterattacks it skillfully launched.

Even still, Manta and Hashishi didn't think they would lose.

'Looking at how it talks, it's a newly born monster. It lacks experience. Also, above all, we have karma weapons.'

From an outside perspective, it looked like Manta and Hashishi were in a one-sided predicament, but in reality, the fight until now was simply them testing each other. Manta and Hashishi had yet to use their karma weapons properly. Against the inexperienced 'Punisher' who looked down on them, they planned on making use of a moment's opportunity to deal it a fatal blow.

"Like this, I'm disappointed... Go and bring the other one too."

Hashishi gritted his teeth at the 'Punisher's provocation.

He thought that this was the time to use his karma weapon. The swords in each of his hands were supplementary weapons anyways. The real weapon he possessed was the Spear of Sentiment 'Hashishi's Cruelty'. It was a Weapon of Sentiment that was considered a masterpiece amongst karma weapons.

Hashishi aimed for the leisure the Punisher displayed.

"Euaaah!!"

Hashishi screamed as if he had abandoned himself to despair. This was a calculated move. While the swords in his hands swung exaggeratedly to express rage, his tail holding the spear trembled.

Piing!

His trembling spear, which had been hiding behind Hashishi's back and waiting for an opportunity like a venomous snake, stopped moving suddenly. Although Hashishi's body moved forward, his tail, holding the spear, didn't move as though it was nailed in place. Looking at it from afar, it was a strange scene that reminded one of a mime.

Hashishi's reckless attacks were all blocked by the Punisher as expected. Hashishi's momentum naturally came to a halt. The

Punisher looked like it was still bored.

“Done?”

It looked disappointed as its hand swung towards Hashishi. The timing was precise. It subtly avoided Hashishi’s final attack, and at the same time, it launched its counterattack.

However, its attack was blocked by Manta’s shield.

Goong!

Manta drove himself between Hashishi and the Punisher and reflected the monster’s attack with his hemispherical shield. Even though he blocked it with his shield, his body trembled from the monster’s lingering power.

The Punisher’s eyes were filled with irritation.

“This pattern is boring.”

This pattern of Manta blocking and Hashishi attacking had repeated constantly within this short period of time. The monster was already sick of it. While yawning widely, it gathered its strength in its fist. Although its fist was small compared to Manta’s fist, when it clenched its fist, Manta felt like he was being drawn in along with it. This was simply the degree of power gathered in its fist.

‘Hashishi, now!’

Manta, who didn’t want to take its attack head-on, shouted inwardly.

Fortunately, Hashishi’s thoughts aligned with Manta’s.

Hashishi’s tail, which had been taught like a bow, moved. His spear, which seemed to have been nailed in midair, shot forward. It was the instantaneous attack he had been preparing for!

Hashishi’s tail drew a strange line as it went over Manta’s shield. It was a completely astonishing attack. The Spear of Sentiment pierced through its mouth, which had been yawning.

“Yeah, it’s the end. You asshole.”

Drrk!

Hashishi felt the tip of his spear pierce through something.

At the same time, Manta resolutely launched a physical attack at the monster.

Kwiiing!

His hemispherical shield, which had been focused on defending until now, rotated like lightning. It was the karma weapon Manta possessed, the Shield of Sentiment ‘Manta’s Selfishness’.

Jjoong!

The rotating shield hit the top of the monster’s head.

Crack!

Manta’s kettle-lid-sized knuckle slammed into its chin.

‘We did it!’

Manta cheered. It received two proper blows. They weren’t normal blows either but attacks launched with karma weapons.

Karma weapons. While their appearances were that of ‘weapons’, they were, in fact, similar to lifeforms, existences that were like companions to one’s soul. Although they were merely weapons, they were existences that possessed karma like living beings. Objects that confidently displayed their names within the fate of the universe. Because of this, warriors who possessed karma weapons were able to display abilities beyond their capacity. As long as one had a karma weapon, it was no different from fighting as two instead of one.

Even if it was a monster that had reached the peak of high rank, there was no way it was fine after taking two blows from karma weapons. This was because it was not a highest-ranked monster but only a high-ranked one.

‘We were able to easily finish the battle due to its carelessness.’

Manta became happy. Since the fight ended quickly, the losses to their troops would be small without a doubt. When he thought about the contributions he obtained from dealing with the high-ranked monster that invaded and the compensation he would rip off from the Berserkers… Choi Hyuk bringing over the monsters was actually beneficial to him.

However, Manta’s expression quickly stiffened.

“Uh… Hey. Something’s off.”

Hashishi’s voice was bitter as well.

Ssaaaaa….

The monster’s pierced throat and cracked head became hazy like smoke before they began returning to their original state.

Manta was shocked.

“It immediately recovered wounds inflicted by karma weapons?”

This was impossible unless it was a highest-ranked monster. However, the monster, which had turned to smoke, healed its wound as though they were nothing.

“Look over there.”

While Hashishi had fallen into a state of confusion, Manta quickly comprehended the situation.

“Uh? That… That monster is disappearing?”

What Manta was pointing at was the enormous monster that had accompanied the ‘Punisher’ here. That monster, which had been facing the elites of the Sur and Jangkok Troops, was currently scattering like a fog and gathering towards the ‘Punisher’.

The monster, which had scattered like a fog, mixed with the ‘Punisher’ and healed its wounds. It was a scene they had never seen or heard about. However, the change didn’t end there. Even

after all its wounds were treated, the monster and the Punisher's body continued to mix together before combining into a single entity.

An exoskeleton comprised of bone and leather covered the Punisher's body, which had originally looked like it was on a stroll, and it now possessed large hands that had sharp blades around them like teeth. An enormous horn sprouted from its head.

It looked like it was wearing the enormous monster... It was an armament that reminded them of karma weapons.

After concluding the change, the Punisher shook its body.

"Woohaa... That hurt a little. Yeah. So were they the karma weapons you guys brag about?"

It aimed its now more brutal looking fists at Manta and Hashishi.

"So that's why we made something similar to them."

Shiver.

An unknown chill swept across Manta and Hashishi's skin.

"Protect the leader!!"

The Sur and Jangkok Troops, who felt an ominous feeling, rushed towards the monster like a swarm. Manta and Hashishi didn't stop them. Although there was no way middle-ranked warriors could be a match against the Punisher, if they could create even a slight opening, they could use it to try and land an effective blow.

However—

Bang!

The elites who ran towards it exploded before they could touch it. Their blood formed into a fog, and their shattered bones fell down in every direction like hail.

"Kekek, they just smash apart?"

It seemed the Punisher was happy as it began laughing. Manta was shocked.

“Unbelievable. That isn’t a power a high-ranked monster can use…”

As if it heard Manta’s astonishment, the monster’s eyes curved into a mocking smile.

“That’s why I told you. It’s similar to the karma weapons you guys have.”

Karma weapons allowed them to overcome their own limits. This was the same.

“After combining with my friend, should I say I’ve now become destruction itself? I came here to smash your worthless weapons.”

The Punisher’s eyes were filled with a hatred mixed with ridicule.

Clench!

As soon as it clenched its fist, Hashishi and Manta felt a pain that felt like their arms and legs were being ripped off.

‘Its fist hasn’t even connected yet!’

This suppression occurred even before their karma could clash. It was similar to the pressure Choi Hyuk felt when facing the highest-ranked monster Narci. At the very least, it was a sensation that Manta and Hashishi shouldn’t feel from a monster that was the same rank as them.

Still, Manta and Hashishi didn’t lose their will to fight.

“Keah!”

Shouting, Manta raised his shield. Behind him, Hashishi coiled his tail around his spear again, tightly holding it.

Looking at them, a smile hung on the monster’s lips.

“Try to block it.”

At the same, its brutal fist swung towards them.

Thuud!!

The Shield of Sentiment ‘Manta’s Selfishness’ was powerlessly pushed back. It was no use even though Manta supported it with his body.

“Do you think we’ll lose?!”

Hashishi, who had been waiting for an opportunity behind Manta, launched a lethal attack. ‘Hashishi’s Cruelty’ revealed its strength as it shot forward like lightning.

Thump.

However, the Punisher easily grabbed the spear with its left hand. The muscles in its arm bulged as ‘Hashishi’s Cruelty’ creaked as though it would snap at any moment.

“W-what?”

Hashishi’s face was distorted in confusion. However, that wasn’t all.

Bang! Baang!!

It wielded its enormous left hand to grip both Hashishi’s spear and Manta’s shield before beginning to smash the shield with its right fist.

“Euaaah!”

Manta and Hashishi struggled, but the situation continued one-sidedly. With their spear and shield in its clutches, they were beaten one-sidedly. Manta was busy enduring its attacks, and Hashishi, whose spear was held by it, crazily swung his swords at it but was unable to deal an effective strike.

Gong! Gong!

Manta’s shield gradually began to dent after receiving the Punisher’s continuous punches.

Ggooong!

With a spine-chilling sound, a fine crack appeared on his shield.

Manta's eyes shook.

"You can break Weapons of Sentiment?"

At the very least, this didn't happen in fights between warriors and monsters of the same rank. This rule was wavering in this moment.

Creeeeak!

Even Hashishi's spear, held in its left hand, was emitting an ominous sound. As soon as they heard this sound, Hashishi and Manta realized.

'We can't win!'

Grinding his teeth, Hashishi shouted. It was an announcement that rang throughout the entire planet this time as well.

{God damn it! Damn! Damn!! Choi Hyuk, you dumb bastard! Retreat immediately! Retreat then report the situation and call for support!!}

Hashishi wanted to devour Choi Hyuk right now for making the situation like this. However, he judged that it was better if Choi Hyuk brought support rather than dying here. It was a completely new type of monster. If information about it didn't get relayed to the alliance, then the alliance would undoubtedly suffer heavy losses. No matter how much he hated Choi Hyuk, his resentment towards the monsters was obviously deeper than towards Choi Hyuk, who he had only recently met. This was the obvious action a warrior of the alliance should take.

Hashishi and Manta gave up on living. They only thought to keep the Punisher here somehow until support arrived.

Bang! Bang! Clang!

Just then, Manta's shield let out a terrifying sound as it

shattered.

Manta's hopeless expression which had been covered by his shield was clearly revealed.

"Toys like this should..."

The Punisher smiled teasingly as it grabbed Hashishi's spear with its now free hand and instantly broke it with a crack.

Its expression showed it was quite refreshed.

"It's now been confirmed. Ours are stronger than your toys."

After brushing its hands, it clenched them into fists.

"Keu..."

"Euk..."

Manta and Hashishi felt pain as if they were being clenched by its fists.

"It's now time for you to die."

Its fist swung towards Manta. Manta rotated his body like a windmill so that he wouldn't be hit by the attack head-on. Although he would die anyways, he needed to somehow endure until support from the alliance arrived.

"Huh?"

However, the face of the Punisher, who had been vigorously swinging its fist at Manta, suddenly changed. It hastily retracted his fist and pulled its body back.

It was a close call. A chilling sword slashed down at the place its arm had been.

Swish.

While devouring the space around it, the blade rang like a living creature. Manta and Hashishi felt goosebumps run across their skin once more.

“I’m in trouble if those two die.”

Choi Hyuk was standing in front of the Punisher. The Sword of Vow ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ in his hand gave off a chilling light.

“You didn’t flee?”

As if entertained, the Punisher examined Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk didn’t reply as he raised his left hand.

In response to his signal, they heard Camilla’s shout from afar.

“All forces! Advance!!!”

Choi Hyuk turned around to look at Hashishi and Manta, who were completely dazed.

“I’ll handle things here, so you two go down and assist in the war or return to the alliance. Do whatever you want.”

Then, looking at the Punisher, he gave his thanks.

“Thanks for being stronger than I thought.”

Thanks to that, Choi Hyuk was able to conduct his real plan. There was only one thing remaining, killing all the monsters in a desperate battle. During this, the Kundle Tribe would learn what a real war was like right down to their bones.

Gazing at the Punisher, a ferocious smile hung on Choi Hyuk’s lips.

‘Are you stronger than me?’

His smile asked.

A desperate situation where you can’t get off a tiger’s back in the middle in fear of getting eaten by it.

Chapter 140: Species Bloom and Wilt (6)

‘I will win.’

Choi Hyuk resolved himself just once.

He could sense the Punisher’s movements. He could sense its large two hands swaying in the air, its pupils examining him, its horns and its body odor.

Choi Hyuk could sense all of it.

“Now really…”

As if it found this entertaining, the monster, who was observing Choi Hyuk, rolled its black eyes.

Their surroundings became silent.

The silence between Choi Hyuk and the Punisher was so thick that they could almost hear the stifled judgments of the warriors watching.

‘It’s a monster whose level is between the high and highest rank. There’s no way Choi Hyuk, who has only recently become a high-ranked warrior, can win!’

‘If it’s our leader, he’ll win. We only need to focus on our own fight.’

‘Will the monster attack first? Or Leader Choi Hyuk?’

The moment right before a fight, when all possibilities were up in the air.

Choi Hyuk deeply liked this moment. It was the starting point where the unknown would turn into a victory.

In this moment, which was like taking his final breath before diving deep into the water, the Punisher suddenly said,

“That sword looks quite tough?”

It clenched its fist.

Whoosh.

Choi Hyuk felt as though a mountain was pressing down on his body.

The monster's eyes rolled.

As expected, it wanted to break 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'. Choi Hyuk watched its eyes roll around.

Baang!!

He couldn't see it. Its attack was too fast. However, Choi Hyuk, in that moment, noticed its motive through its eyes and blocked it with his sword. Receiving its attack, Choi Hyuk's shoulder groaned. An electrifying pain ran through his body.

"Doesn't even bend?"

Unlike Manta and Hashishi's weapons, Choi Hyuk's sword didn't bend nor did it make a cracking sound. Displeasure was evident in the monster's voice.

{Imprinted with his will, it will not break or dull.}

That was precisely what was said in the description of the Sword of Vow. It was born as a Sword of Vow the moment the 'Vow' inside it was acknowledged by the great universe. This was the reason why the Sword of Vow could be so special. Even if it was the Punisher, who was armed with a new weapon, it couldn't break the Sword of Vow.

However, it seemed the monster didn't want to admit it.

The monster attempted to grab 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' with its outstretched hand. Under extreme concentration, Choi Hyuk noticed its motive, turned his blade upwards and pulled it back. He even added the principles of 'Instant Void Annihilation', which could even cut the air, into this move. The monster's hand, which attempted to grab 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint', was struck by his blade.

Slice!

A sharp metallic sound rang out. This time, it was Choi Hyuk's turn to be surprised.

"Not even a scratch?"

The monster rolled its black eyes. It giggled.

"Why would it scratch?"

It mercilessly swung its fist down.

Every time its fist swung down, thunder rang throughout the sky. The heavy ground of the Kundle Planet shook as though it was met with a storm.

"Euaaah... We're all going to die..."

"What if we went to sleep now? Then we might wake up on a cool day?"

The appearance of the Punisher greatly shook the mentality of the Kundle Tribe members, who had been fighting diligently. 'We are gradually getting stronger. We can beat those monsters which we originally felt despair towards.' The hope they maintained was wiped out the moment the Punisher appeared. The Punisher felt like a monster on a completely different level, something they couldn't beat even if they trained for all of eternity.

Wasn't even the leader of the Berserkers, Choi Hyuk, being powerlessly pushed back?

Their hearts were wavering. However, the seeds of resolve the Berserkers had worked hard to implant weren't weak.

"Did you already forget?! If we need saving, I will become salvation itself! If we die, I will be the first to die!"

A Kundle Tribe member shouted as if struggling. He dug out his flesh and spread it everywhere. It was the 'Berserker Gene'. Spreading his flesh, the Kundle Tribe member's eyes reddened. All the distracting thoughts that complicated his heart began to burn away.

Only resolve remained in his heart.

‘Advance, advance, kill, kill!’

The hearts of the Kundle Tribe members around him, who were covered in the Berserker Gene, were influenced as well.

“What’s the point of sleeping? Will the monsters retreat on their own? Instead, use the Berserker Gene! Isn’t that losing our minds anyways?! Let’s fight as though we’re going to die! When we come to our senses… A refreshing sky might be waiting for us!”

Grrrk!

Grrrr…

The surrounding Kundle Tribe members erupted in heavy breathing.

The Kundle Tribe members, after manifesting the Berserker Gene, rushed towards the monsters without the slightest hesitation.

“We’re screwed… Fuck… That fucking Choi Hyuk bastard… He went completely insane on Earth and now here… Bastard…”

Around the time the Kundle Tribe members had pulled themselves together and began fighting again, there were existences who had fallen into a deeper state of despair.

They were the earthlings. The earthlings who were employed by Manta to mine. Their current situation was actually impending.

“Take us with you! Take us! You fucking bastards!”

While the military gate system was down, the only way they could escape the Kundle Planet was on the Sur and Jangkok Troops’ spaceships.

However, they were left behind.

After narrowly escaping death, Manta and Hashishi hurriedly boarded their spaceships and attempted to evacuate.

‘We don’t know when Choi Hyuk will lose!’

The moment their karma weapons were broken, their resolve to fight was completely crushed as well. Suppressing the curses and screams that attempted to surge out their mouths, they urgently evacuated.

“Let’s leave immediately!”

“But leader! There are still a lot of members who haven’t boarded!”

“Why aren’t you quickly teleporting them in?!”

“Due to the waves emitted by the monsters, it is taking time to track all our members’ signals!”

“Ah, damn… Ack! Damn it! I don’t know anymore! Evacuate first! Let’s search for survivors when support from the alliance arrives!”

Shouted Hashishi eventually.

“…! But…!”

Hashishi completely lost his temper at his adjutant, who kept questioning him.

Bang!

He grabbed the adjutant’s throat and shoved his face forward.

“You amoeba-looking motherfucker! Do you want to die? Shouldn’t those, who can live, live? Or, if you’re still caught up about them, do you want me to throw you on that planet as well?”

The Sur Troops’ situation wasn’t much different either. After surviving, Manta first objectively calculated his gains and losses.

‘I was able to survive thanks to Choi Hyuk somehow. Hashishi and I, rather than the two of us dying, it’s better for the alliance if Choi Hyuk alone dies. For Choi Hyuk’s death to not go to waste, we need to preserve our key forces and let the alliance know as soon as possible. We don’t have time. Throw away what we can… Also, I

should reduce the compensation I was going to charge the Berserkers. Even though Choi Hyuk was the one who brought this shit along, a debt's a debt.'

{The Sur and Jangkok Troops are urgently evacuating. Troop members left behind are to wait for support.}

"Left behind?! What 'left behind'?! You didn't have any plans on taking us with you from the beginning!!!"

The earthlings shouted.

The warriors who were left behind despite being official members of the Sur and Jangkok Troops stood beside them with bitter expressions.

Just how did things come to this...

Leader Luy of the 'Luy Troops', an independent troop from Dragonic, felt like he would die from rage.

Was it wrong to have been charmed by the Sur Troops' mission, which paid more than the regional troops' missions? It was true that the missions which the independent troops took on were riskier than the alliance's official missions, which had a solid backing...

'No, this is all that bastard Choi Hyuk's fault.'

No matter how much he thought about it, Luy wasn't at fault. He had looked into it the best he could. As he had established independent troops later than other large clans, he had fiercely looked for work that they could do to catch up, and during this time, Manta approached him. Although he felt pressure in having to walk a different path from Choi Hyuk's Berserkers and the labor price had, without a doubt, been slashed to much lower than the market price, but as independent troops without any experience, they even had to be thankful for that. On top of that, this mission regarding recruit training was rumored to be safe.

However, what was their state now?

He was about to collapse due to his hatred for Choi Hyuk.

“Leader! If it’s like this, will we have to fight alongside the Berserkers as well?”

A member of the Luy Troops shouted.

Clan Leader Luy frowned.

“What do you mean fight?! Don’t you see Choi Hyuk being pushed back powerlessly over there? We retreat as far back as we can and hide! We’ll somehow survive until support from the alliance arrives!”

It was as he said. Choi Hyuk, who was fighting against the Punisher in the sky, looked shaky as though he would fall at any moment.

The Punisher’s attacks were heavy and tenacious.

Bang! Baang!

Choi Hyuk didn’t want to clash his sword against its fists if possible, but the monster stubbornly smashed down onto ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’. It was to the point where Choi Hyuk wondered if it was more focused on breaking ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ than striking him.

Thanks to this, the burden of his injuries lessened. Even in the worst of situations, the only thing he could do was raise his sword and block. He didn’t allow a single strike to land on him.

He didn’t even have to worry about his weapon breaking like Manta and Hashishi did. ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ had no problems enduring its punches.

However…

‘My sword isn’t the problem, my body is…’

Ironically, while ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ could easily endure its terrifying attacks, he couldn’t.

Every time his sword and its fist clashed, the karma in his entire body jolted as though it was convulsing. His back, shoulders, and calves, there wasn't a single place on his body not affected by it.

'Instant Void Annihilation', which could cut through the air, didn't work, and even 'Flaming Wing Dance', which burned everything and rapidly improved his physical abilities, was useless.

Whoosh!

Every time it clenched its fists, Choi Hyuk's flames shook dangerously.

Bang!

When it punched out, it became difficult to move, almost as if he had fallen into a swamp. Space itself was crumbling and shattering towards the monster at the center. Like a star caught in a black hole, Choi Hyuk couldn't get away from it. All he could do was raise his sword and endure.

Thump! Bang!

"Endure a bit longer. It'll be hilarious if you broke faster than your sword, won't it?"

The monster mocked.

Every time he heard those words, Choi Hyuk's heart growled fiercely.

'Am I simply going to listen to those words?'

'Will it be able to take that? Will it be able to mock me after taking that?'

Flames surged in his belly. Choi Hyuk had never lost in his entire life and possessed a particular destructiveness since birth.

Choi Hyuk swallowed it back. The flames in his heart died down and returned to a cool calm.

Bang!

When its fist and his sword clashed once more, blood spurted inside him. Unable to endure the pressure, blood dripped from his eyes and ears.

“Yeah, keep enduring like that. Won’t those insects below be able to live for a second more if you do?”

The Punisher continued to ramble on like a madman. His eyes contained an obsession. An obsession that he would shatter his Sword of Vow no matter what.

Rage surged inside Choi Hyuk. The will created by a single lifeform. Karma weapons were the crystallization of these wills. The monsters wanted to utterly shatter them. The monsters were always like this.

‘The strong will trample on the weak.’

This was always the case in nature. However, the principles behind the monsters’ actions weren’t so. They just wanted to make lifeforms despair. Shattering what lifeforms desperately accumulated was their happiness.

Perhaps… this was why the alliance’s recruit training was like this as well.

The method of training warriors who could polish their swords despite having everything they considered precious and representative of ‘themselves’ smashed apart. Did they, perhaps, think that they couldn’t face the monsters, which pressed down on them with their power, without such determination?

And, ironically, one of the greatest warriors created from this brutal method was Choi Hyuk.

Weak ones. Poor humans.

Although Choi Hyuk looked like he was indifferent to everything besides revenge, he was also someone who knew what they had lost better than anyone else. Choi Hyuk’s mother had wanted to create a peaceful, healthy family despite being a single mother, and

Choi Hyuk, influenced by her, also wanted to create his own peaceful family one day. The rule he upheld even if he was beaten up like an idiot. ‘Do not kill other people.’ Why? Because people were precious. Humans were existences who dreamed.

This was why those who lived their shitty school lives and those who lived their shitty work lives endured and endured. It was for the small peace and sanctuary they might someday grasp in their hands, hoping to step forth on the shadow of paradise called a ‘dream’.

However, where did that all go?

Where did those children who shut themselves in study rooms and cram schools to get good results on their midterms, those examinees who intended to pass their exams this time, and those business owners who opened their stores with fluttering hearts go? Where did they all go? They all died. Their dreams? Became trash. Their dreams, which they had dedicated their entire lives to, had turned into nothing.

Because they were abominably weak.

Because those abominably strong monsters wanted to end them.

When he recalled his wonderful past, Choi Hyuk’s happiness turned into rage and this rage turned into sorrow, and this sorrow then turned into hopelessness, and if he drew his karma out like this, a brilliant flame exploded from Choi Hyuk’s body. A true flame that even Flame-Rain would admire. A flame belonging only to Choi Hyuk.

Blaaze.

On top of this flame, the flame of dragons, which Commander Mack had passed down to him, blazed. The dragons who had raised their heads up high even when facing the Flame Wing Alliance. Their pride burned alongside their flames.

Choi Hyuk’s ferocious heart whispered,

‘How is it? Don’t you think it’ll be possible with this new flame? If it’s a flame that combines yours and the dragons’, won’t it be taken aback? Don’t you want to see its face?’

However—

Gulp.

Choi Hyuk swallowed his flame down this time as well.

Choi Hyuk didn’t explode forth with anything. He scrunched his body up and endured the downpour of attacks.

Endurance. This was the inheritance his mother had passed down to him.

Also, Choi Hyuk’s innate talent was ‘achieving victory in fights’.

The moment Choi Hyuk blocked its fist, he instinctively knew.

‘I can’t beat it with a normal capacity for victory.’

Looking at stats, the monster was above him in all aspects. Skills could only be used once one had a basic foundation. If Choi Hyuk fought while hastily revealing his power in this current situation, then he would be the first to fall. The new flame would undoubtedly be able to surprise it. However, he wasn’t confident that he could take its life.

In the end, Choi Hyuk only had one method. It was the single strike he had used to deal a fatal blow to the highest-ranked monster Narci. The transcendent strike where he poured all his strength into his Sword of Vow. That was why he had to wait and wait. For the moment it revealed an opening. For the moment he could hold its life in his hands.

Choi Hyuk calmly waited.

There was a time limit to the Kundle Tribe’s ‘Berserker Gene’.

Even if they fought crazily, once time was up, they would return to their senses. When they regained their senses, they looked up at the sky. They looked at Choi Hyuk who was still being beaten up in

the sky.

At first, the Kundle Tribe members were depressed.

‘When I regain my senses next time… Will I be able to see the world?’

To forget this depressing premonition, they quickly fell back into the Berserker state.

However, they were still alive the next time they reached the time limit. When they looked up at the sky, Choi Hyuk was still being beaten up.

It was the same the next and the next.

‘He’s still taking hits?’

They returned to the Berserker state, thinking that it would be the last time, but they always opened their eyes again under the sky. Their advances were slowly but steadily progressing, and Choi Hyuk, even though he looked like he would die at any moment, was always there in the sky.

In front of them, the Berserkers, Valkyries, and Extremers were foaming at their mouths as they slashed at the monsters.

Thump.

Something surged within their hearts.

Even if we aren’t victorious,

We won’t break.

We won’t lose so easily.

This unyielding will wrapped around their hearts.

Although the monsters’ vigor felt like a storm, they endured and endured like deep-rooted trees.

Also.

Gulp.

Choi Hyuk swallowed down the flames surging in his heart once more. He swallowed down the audacity of wanting to explode forth with his entire strength and wipe the sky and the earth away.

The flames he swallowed again and again condensed deep within his Karma Heart. Like the singularity before the Big Bang, although it was nothing but a single dot right now, he was waiting for it to become the light that would establish a new universe when the time came.

He was waiting to open his eyes.

Double meaning: You ‘lose consciousness’ when you sleep. They also lose their minds when they use the Berserker Gene.

Episode 9: Shackles of Judgment

Chapter 141: The Future Starts Now

{TL/N: Choi Hyuk's fates have been changed to 'never losing' and 'slashing without fail'.}

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The once leisurely Punisher gradually became more and more irritated.

"Not smashing? Not smashing even now?"

It had punched out so many times that even a planet would have been destroyed. Yet, despite this, Choi Hyuk's Sword of Vow was fine.

The Punisher's annoyance grew more severe as time went on, and the ones who were trembling due to this were the warriors of Dragonic and the Kundle Tribe members.

The more the Punisher threw a fit, the dizzier the warriors became. They felt as though everything in front of them was shaking. Although they wanted to focus on their fight, it was difficult. They saw the Punisher even when they looked away and heard it when they tried not to.

It was an existence on another level.

In their eyes, Choi Hyuk looked like a resolute second-year middle schooler acting up against a large-bodied teacher in charge of his grade. Not a modern school, but a school from the past. It reminded them of the times when teachers didn't hesitate to slap their students' cheeks or grab them by the hair and smash them on the blackboard.

Like a middle schooler who didn't say he was sorry and kept glaring at the teacher, Choi Hyuk endured, and the Punisher's violent attacks became stronger as though it was saying it would break him no matter what.

The Punisher no longer cared about his Sword of Vow.

“Those eyes! Those eyes!”

The Punisher didn’t like the way Choi Hyuk looked at him. The more it saw it, the more its anger surged. Someone who wasn’t even as powerful as its toes dared appraise it. His eyes seemed to say, ‘Someone like you?’ when he was the one who would be squashed like a bug if it attacked seriously!

The Punisher’s killing intent exploded. It resolved itself to destroy all of Choi Hyuk, who was as slippery as an eel.

Its simple attacks became more complicated. When it seemed like it was targeting his sword, it aimed for his finger, and when it seemed like it was aiming for his head, it kicked at his leg. When it stretched out its arm out to break his arm, the impact of the blow would actually explode inside him.

Bang! Punch!

Choi Hyuk’s flesh exploded, his blood gushed out, and his bones broke. Choi Hyuk was gradually becoming a wreck. However, the light in his eyes didn’t dim at all.

Gulp.

Choi Hyuk gulped something down again.

‘Please… Please stop…’

One of the Valkyries thought. Choi Hyuk fiercely held the Punisher back. Although he did admire Choi Hyuk’s fierce fighting spirit, he began feeling fear and terror. Seeing Choi Hyuk, who was the strongest on Dragonic, becoming a wreck was saddening.

‘This operation is a failure… Shouldn’t we retreat?’

Someone from the Extremers thought. His belief in their victory became hazier as time went by. He looked at Overseer Jessie. He saw a nervous light in Jessie’s eyes as well. He was glancing at Choi Hyuk. However, he saw Jessie grit his teeth and charge into the

enemy lines in the end.

“Don’t be scared! If you can’t even endure this much thrill, how can you call yourselves Extremers?!”

Shouted Overseer Jessie.

Many Extremers sighed inwardly. However, they didn’t make any unnecessary remarks and instead followed Jessie. As their leader charged forward, they naturally charged in as well. Even if this was akin to skydiving without a parachute, they were Extremers.

“We don’t back down. Believe in yourselves.”

Instead, it was the Sovereign of Paradise Camilla who was rather calm. She didn’t waver at all. As this was a fight they promised to fight until the end, she wouldn’t back down. That was all.

A decision that didn’t consider the end result. This was the trait of those with beliefs.

Valkyries followed her, swallowing their fear. Dying or living wasn’t important. Even winning or losing wasn’t important. Only one thing remained – their determination to fight.

The Berserkers rushed past them.

“Kill! Kill! Ack! Wahaha! Is that all?”

“Come at me! Come at me! Keuak!”

“That’s it! I dodged it! Now die!”

They simply resembled Choi Hyuk’s resolve. They didn’t even look at Choi Hyuk, who was being beaten up. They didn’t gaze at his wounds. Even if their enemies were stronger than them, they wouldn’t acknowledge this fact.

Each of them fought on with their own method.

Looking at them, the Kundle Tribe members were comprehending what kind of existences ‘warriors’ were and what

‘war’ was.

Every time they regained their senses, their hearts became more resolute.

‘Even if the enemy is stronger than me…’

‘Why does that matter? When we have people fighting alongside us.’

It was similar to the time earthlings first learned of friendship. Whether they were up against scary older men, teachers, schools, or even the entire world, the feeling they felt when they were teens, of not being afraid as long as they were with their friends, was an feeling that the Kundle Tribe members were currently experiencing.

Comradery was budding.

They looked at Choi Hyuk, who looked like he would fall at any moment.

‘Sorry we aren’t of much help in this fight.’

‘We’ll die with you.’

The fight between Choi Hyuk and the Punisher was reaching its end.

The Punisher couldn’t contain its irritation any longer. It despised Choi Hyuk, who had endured while avoiding fatal attacks no matter how it attacked him, so much that it could die. In the end, the Punisher prepared a powerful attack. ‘Yeah, try avoiding this,’ it thought while resolving itself.

The Punisher gathered more power than it could control into its fist.

‘Aah.’

The warriors groaned. Their vision went dark. This wasn’t a figure of speech. Like how one’s surroundings would fade when they saw a bright light at night, everything besides Choi Hyuk and

the Punisher disappeared from their senses. This was the same for the monsters. The fight going on throughout the planet suddenly came to a halt. They couldn't do anything. All they could do was watch the Punisher's fist slowly smash down towards Choi Hyuk.

'Can't avoid.'

This wasn't only true for Choi Hyuk.

Including the monsters, everyone on the Kundle Planet felt this. They felt like they were in front of its fist. Their bodies stiffened like the main character of a drama blankly staring at the light of an oncoming truck.

Within this period of time, where things seemed to move at an endlessly slow pace, the Punisher's fist swung out and Choi Hyuk pulled his sword back with a swish.

'He's smiling?'

Choi Hyuk was smiling.

Slice.

A sudden strike from Choi Hyuk's sword.

This strike cut the memories of everyone on the planet.

Only middle-ranked warriors, who reached the 5-star level, remembered a fragment of this moment.

Lee Jinhee said she saw a light emitting from Choi Hyuk's sword.

Jessie said he saw a shooting galaxy.

Camilla said she saw the creation of the world through what seemed to be a kaleidoscope. Then they tilted their heads.

Those below the middle-ranked warriors didn't remember anything.

When they opened their eyes, they were in the middle of the battlefield once again. For some reason, the monsters were scared, circling in place like ants that had their antennae cut off, and the

Punisher, who had been overflowing with confidence, was screaming in the sky.

“Euaaaah! Ahhh! What! What!!”

The armor and fists it had on had been cleanly cut off. The horn on its head had been smashed, leaving only a pitiful remnant. Having lost all the armaments that covered its body, it was left bare, trembling as it attempted to stop the blood gushing out from its wound, which ran diagonally from its shoulder to its side.

As if exhausted, Choi Hyuk’s shoulders slumped. He grabbed the Punisher’s shoulder and—

Pscht!

He stabbed his sword into it multiple times.

“Aaack!”

Pscht!

“Aah…”

Every time his sword stabbed its body, the Punisher’s screams gradually died down. The remnant of the horn remaining on its head turned into powder and scattered, and the terrifying vigor it had displayed was gone without a trace. Excluding its black eyes, it undoubtedly resembled a weak human.

It even rubbed its hands together as it pled,

“Please…”

“I’m sorry…”

“Stop, stop… I’m sorry… Keuu… Heuk… I’m sorry…”

It cried while drooling.

Choi Hyuk was taken aback. A monster that begged for its life? It was rare for monsters to be stricken with fear, but he had never heard of a monster begging for its life.

Choi Hyuk wrapped his hand around its neck and raised it up.

“Kaah… Kaheuk.’

The Punisher squirmed as its body trembled in pain and fear. It was so scared that its teeth were chattering. It seemed to have lost its strength to stay in the air as it desperately hung onto Choi Hyuk’s hand, which was wrapped around its neck. It looked like it was scared of falling.

Choi Hyuk threw it as if he was tossing it away.

“Guardian. Don’t let it die. We can obtain a lot from it.”

“Euaaah!”

It screamed as it fell. Powerless. If it smashed against the ground, it would turn to sludge without a doubt.

Thud.

Fortunately for it, Guardian Bae Jinman jumped up and lightly grabbed its neck.

“Eeerrwaak!”

It seemed that the Punisher still felt the aftereffects of the fall as its limbs distorted and its bones broke. If it wasn’t for Bae Jinman’s apt treatment, it wouldn’t have been able to endure the pressure when it was grabbed and might have died from shock.

After catching it, Bae Jinman examined it before mumbling,

“For it to not even be at the no-star level…”

How could this be? The terrifying high-ranked monster was now all too pitiful.

“Hrrk… Hrrkk… So that’s what happened… The one who killed Narci was…”

As if it had realized something, the Punisher wept as it writhed in Bae Jinman’s grasp.

“Am I… a fail… ure…? Am… I…”

Suddenly, the Punisher lost consciousness while crying.

It became quiet.

The monsters were like drugged rats, still unable to come to their senses, and the warriors weren't able to come to their senses due to the sudden reversal.

Looking at them, Choi Hyuk, while staggering, said,

"What are you doing? Kill them all."

Although his voice was quiet, it clearly rang in everyone's ear.

Tremble.

It felt like a ton of carbonation rushed up from their bellies and escaped through their noses and ears. The warriors expressed this electrifying feeling coming from their bellies with a shout.

"Woaaaaaahhh!!!"

They became a crushing force.

A massacre began.

Just then, a message appeared.

{The warrior training system has been opened for the Kundle Tribe. From now on, they will receive a portion of the karma obtained from mining the planet every time they kill a monster.}

'Who?'

'How?'

They had already used up all their mission points. The 3 independent troops from Dragonic, with the Berserkers at their core, didn't have the mission points or the contributions to open the warrior training system. It wasn't like they had an investor either.

The warrior training system, which they had pushed back because of these reasons, had suddenly been opened.

Although they weren't without their questions... It was something they had to think about later.

This was the best opportunity.

“Berserkers! Give all the trivial monsters to the Kundle Tribe members!”

Baek Seoin commanded. Even the Valkyries and Extremers, who were currently under the guise as Berserkers, slowly retreated from the battlefield.

They didn’t know what Choi Hyuk did, but the monsters couldn’t pull themselves together. The warriors dealt with the stronger ones amongst them and left the rest to the Kundle Tribe members.

As they killed off an entire planet’s worth of monsters, the Kundle Tribe members grew at an incredible pace.

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The corpses of monsters were lined up. The Kahur Kabkuns, which were connected to the planet through the gate, were being destroyed one after another.

In the middle of the battlefield, which was settling down, Choi Hyuk clenched and opened his fist.

He recalled the strike he had dealt to the Punisher at the last moment.

‘It was different.’

At first, he had planned on activating as much of the Sword of Vow’s power as he could before dealing a blow like he did when facing Narci. However, the strike he dealt exceeded his expectations.

It wasn’t an ‘Instant Void Annihilation’ that cut air nor was it a ‘Flaming Wing Dance’ that burned everything.

The flames Choi Hyuk had swallowed and compressed deep in his Karma Heart during the fight had exploded out all at once. He couldn’t simply call it cutting air. Like the Big Bang, something completely new began from his hand.

‘… Was it… the creation of a world?’

However, Choi Hyuk shook his head. No, his power wasn’t so stable or abundant. It was rather-

“Reset.”

His sword clearly possessed enough energy to push the universe back and open a new, small one. However, considering Choi Hyuk’s nature, this power wouldn’t flow in such a constructive direction. It wasn’t a new beginning, like creating a new world, but contained traces of a ‘reset’, wanting to completely erase the order and laws that the existing universe had created.

The Punisher had lost all its power as a result of this. Choi Hyuk couldn’t kill it, but he did something which exceeded that. It had lost all its power and even lost its traits as a monster. Because of this, he was able to make an unprecedented contribution of capturing a high-ranked monster as a prisoner. ‘Monsters don’t submit.’ This theory was widely accepted. This was why they could only use them as test subjects or training tools when captured. However, it was completely different this time. The captured monster had already thoroughly submitted. It was a prisoner that could cough up all it knew after scaring it a little. This was unprecedented in the history of the alliance.

Although there were many existences stronger than Choi Hyuk, the only one who could do this was Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk backtracked to figure out what the power, which had extended from his hand, was. Since the sensation of his strike was still vivid, it didn’t take long for him to find an answer.

‘The fate I established when I became a high-ranked warrior – to never lose and slash without fail.’

This splendid feat was the result of his fate, which declared he would never lose and would slash anything. Following his fate, if the universe itself was his enemy, he would obtain the power to

push it back and cleanly erase it.

Of course, it was still weak. Right now, all he could do was barely finish off a monster that was between the high and highest rank.

However, if Choi Hyuk accumulated enough retribution that suited his fate, then even if the entire universe was his enemy, he would have the power to ‘never lose’ and ‘slash without fail’ one day.

Thump!

Choi Hyuk felt like a steel pillar was erected deep in his soul. This was his newly accumulated retribution, his karma.

Retribution was something that was accumulated. One could only exercise their fate relative to the amount of ‘suitable retribution’ one accumulated.

Just now, Choi Hyuk established retribution that suited his fate, which was ‘never losing’ and ‘slashing without fail’. He had slashed and beaten the Punisher, who was objectively much stronger than him. Choi Hyuk detected his growth even without any notice. He probably overcame the proficiency stage of a high-ranked warrior in one go. He now knew everything without needing the system’s help.

Choi Hyuk now knew what karma, which was the foundation of a warrior’s strength, truly was.

‘Retribution and karma… Baek hyung originally said that they meant the same thing and that he didn’t know why the system classified them as two separate things…’

Yeah, he was right. They were, in fact, the same thing.

Only, the warrior training system’s function was providing additional karma that was separate to the retribution a warrior established. It had no choice but to classify them as two different things. Normally, one would only have as much karma as the retribution they established, but due to the system’s intervention,

there was a gap between the two. Even still, since retribution was the true level of one's soul, when advancing to a higher ranked warrior it was required that one had to elevate their Retribution rank.

Choi Hyuk also realized why a high-ranked warrior could no longer receive the system's assistance.

'Since you can only become a high-ranked warrior after establishing your own fate.'

Before this, the fates of lifeforms were vague, simply 'survival or death'. Because of this, they could accept the retribution that they hadn't personally establish. Up until the 5-star level, they would be acknowledged for building a house, it didn't matter whether it was built with wood or mud. However, starting from the 6-star level, they could only establish retribution that suited their fates. A retribution like the steel pillar erected in Choi Hyuk's soul. A retribution of never losing and slashing without fail that he had personally established.

Because of this, there was no room for the system to intervene. High-ranked warriors were warriors who stood solely on their own.

"Hoo."

Choi Hyuk exhaled. It was difficult to tell if it was a sigh or a laugh.

He looked very refreshed.

Highest-ranked warriors and transcendental beings... although there were still many stages and obstacles ahead of him, they no longer felt stifling.

It was because he knew there was only one path for him.

'I will not lose. I will slash without fail.'

If he could push forward with the fate he established until the

end, whether it was becoming a highest-ranked warrior or a transcendental being, he would inevitably achieve it.

“I see… it now.”

The survival game that began in school one day.

Choi Hyuk’s world had collapsed that day.

‘Kill. Kill. Only then can you kill.’

The single proposition that had been contained in his heart.

While only holding onto this proposition, he had wandered like a blind man. His enemy was so enormous that he couldn’t even see its edge.

However… He now saw the end to this journey. He saw the path towards it.

“Hu, hu.”

The breaths Choi Hyuk exhaled were definitely closer to a laugh this time.

The future he had been waiting for while lying flat on the ground and holding his breath.

His determination that he would find the core of the alliance, stand confidently in front of them, and take revenge on everything that brought him pain.

Choi Hyuk realized that the start of such a sweet yet once imperceptible future was ‘now’.

“Haha, hahahahaha!”

The war was concluding on the Kundle Planet.

Choi Hyuk laughed like a child who couldn’t contain his happiness.

Chapter 142: Radical Reform (1)

After the destruction of all the Kahur Kabkuns connected to the Kundle Planet, the Recruit Training Evaluation Agency summoned Choi Hyuk. Although the first evaluation period had yet to end, this was an exception.

The recruit training evaluation team leader, who he had met in Dark City, was the same species as the one he saw in the supply store in the past. His head was white, his nose was long enough to almost touch his chin, and his wide mouth ran along his jawline.

“The Sur and Jangkok Troops don’t look like they will be able to continue with the mission for the time being. A third of the Kundle Tribe has died in battle. Furthermore, a million out of the ten million troop members, who participated in the mining, died in battle. The Berserkers, Valkyries, and Extremers also suffered heavy casualties…”

The evaluation team leader curled his long lips. His eyes gleamed.

“Don’t you think these losses are severe considering they occurred during recruit training?”

It was an unpleasant question. Choi Hyuk answered indifferently,

“We captured a high-ranked monster that wielded a new weapon and destroyed four Kahur Kabkuns. Weren’t such losses expected when executing a plan like that?”

The evaluation team leader nodded his head.

“Of course, that’s true. But what I’m saying is, wasn’t your mission recruit training not destroying Kahur Kabkuns?”

The lights flickered like old fluorescent lights. There were creaky chairs and musty smells that reminded one of a basement. This sight, which seemed as desolate as an interrogation room, was an

environment the Keunib species, which the evaluation team leader was a member of, liked. Apparently, when they were in dreary place such as this, they felt like they were back in their homeland or something.

Drip, drip.

While listening to the sound of water dripping somewhere, Choi Hyuk wondered how he should take the evaluation team leader's absurd remarks. It didn't take long.

"Nonsense... Is a third of the Kundle Tribe population dying in battle such a big deal? When the Sur and Jangkok Troops schemed to kill the entire Kundle Tribe as well as the planet?"

Choi Hyuk's voice was chilly.

He wasn't intimidated even though he was in front of the leader in charge of evaluating his contributions. Choi Hyuk knew his value very well. He was a high-ranked warrior in possession of a Sword of Vow. Even when considering the entire alliance, he could be considered an elite, and in the countryside-like Laniakea Supercluster, he stood confidently at the top. He was no longer just a 'number' who had to bow down even when hearing unpleasant words.

The evaluation team leader spread his seven-fingered hands open and backed away.

"Don't act so sensitive. Interrogating is my job. I have no thoughts on denying your contribution, you know? Only, the loss of warriors is quite significant. Also, the casualties of a third of the Kundle Tribe is different from mining. If we mined them, then we would obtain some karma, but if they are killed by the monsters, as in this case, nothing remains, you understand?"

Every time the evaluation team leader talked, it rubbed Choi Hyuk the wrong way. However, like he said, he didn't have any malice towards Choi Hyuk. When looking at him through his Eyes

of Distinction, the evaluation team leader clearly wasn't emitting any color. Like he said, he was simply doing his 'job'.

'Though I don't know why he's handling it this way.'

Once again, Choi Hyuk regained his indifferent attitude and said,

"Then let's talk about results. The Kundle Tribe's growth."

A thin, sharp tongue, resembling a knife, slid out of the evaluation team leader's mouth. The oddly shining red tongue licked his wide lips.

"It wasn't bad... No, it was overwhelming. It's especially surprising that they advanced this much considering the other two troops judged they had no potential as warriors. Only, is this result enough to redeem the losses? That's the problem."

The evaluation team leader continued tenaciously. Choi Hyuk simply shut his mouth. Instead, his eyes contained curiosity. 'So what is it that you want to say?' Choi Hyuk didn't show even a sliver of unease because he was confident in the contributions he made and the abilities he displayed.

In the end, the first to say his inner thoughts was the evaluation team leader. He waved his hand as he said,

"Meaning, this isn't something someone of my level can judge. Someone of higher rank than me will come."

As soon as he finished talking, the door opened with a thud.

"What? Why is the hero of the alliance in such a shabby place?!"

A small robot raised his voice as soon as he entered. Around a hundred metallic pieces were tethered together in chains of exquisite, gentle lights to form a human figure. At a glance, he looked more like a member of the Speckled Light Tribe than the Armored Soul Tribe.

The evaluation team leader jolted up from his seat, got into position, and shouted,

“For life and freedom! Greetings to Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom of the Shapley Supercluster!”

The Shapley Supercluster was a higher ranked region than the Laniakea Supercluster, which Choi Hyuk was a part of. The Laniakea Supercluster and the Horologium Supercluster following it were both small superclusters influenced by the gravity of the Shapley Supercluster. It could be said that if the Shapley Supercluster was Seoul, then the Laniakea Supercluster would be Hanam or Gwangmyeong.

If he was the commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster, then he was Choi Hyuk’s superior by a great margin. Choi Hyuk stood up awkwardly and saluted him.

“For life and freedom.”

Armor-Phantom was clearly a highest-ranked warrior.

‘But he seems a bit weak?’

Choi Hyuk’s question was quickly answered.

Armor-Phantom’s body floated up, wrapping his arm around Choi Hyuk’s shoulders and saying friendlily,

“Haha, it’s alright. Anyways, sorry for meeting you, the hero of the alliance, in my secondary body. It was difficult to come personally due to all my work.”

It seemed his real body remained in the Shapley Supercluster and he was moving this mechanical body in Dark City with his mind. It was surprising that he could give off the spirit of a highest-ranked warrior despite this. He wasn’t the commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster for nothing.

Such a powerful warrior was showing goodwill towards Chio Hyuk.

“Anyways, those who call themselves the evaluation team are so inflexible... Hey, I’ll personally reward Leader Choi Hyuk so you

just write a report matching it.”

“Ye-yes! Understood! I’ll write up a report in 30 minutes!”

The evaluation team leader, who had been pressuring Choi Hyuk just now, was currently pale as he repeated after Armor-Phantom. His behavior seemed to indicate that, while he knew that someone from above would come, he didn’t think that it would the commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster.

“Tsk, tsk. Now! Let’s go! A hero needs a suitable victory party!”

Armor-Phantom clicked his tongue once before leaving the evaluation team office with Choi Hyuk.

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A party commenced.

It was a party beyond one’s imagination.

There was a place called the ‘Hall of Glory’ in Dark City. This place simulated a black hole.

From the border of a black hole, known as the event horizon, there was an extreme force of gravity that distorted space and time, making time stop. Because of this, from the moment a black hole was created, all matter sucked into it accumulated on its border. In the end, it created a shining band of light.

The floor of the Hall of Glory embodied the shape of a black hole. There was a small hole in the middle where someone could fall through and a shining band of light spiraled around it.

Also, almost all types of food found throughout the universe existed in this light. As if fishing for salmon, one just needed to place their hand in the stream of light and snatch out one of the foods that came up in their mind.

The troop members from the countryside known as Earth and Dragonic couldn’t pull themselves together after seeing the banquet of food in front of them.

“Wahaha. Now, now, drink this through your nose!”

Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom mingled amongst the Berserkers without caring about ranks. He stuck out a heavy liquid, similar to mercury. Even though the Berserker was suspicious of it, he snorted it up his nose.

“Kuaaack!”

Screaming, the Berserker’s limbs became paralyzed and he collapsed. Everyone’s eyes widened, but the collapsed Berserker quickly got back up and brushed himself off. While shaking his head, he said,

“What was that? As soon as I drank it, the karma in my body froze up… I thought I would die.”

“Kuhaha! This is, in fact, a deadly poison from a swamp planet. It’s called ‘Icebound Tears’. It’s so poisonous that lowest-ranked warriors can lose the ability to use their limbs if they aren’t careful. However, low-ranked warriors can endure the poison. Once you endure it… How is it?”

“Huh? My karma grew!”

“That’s right! Hardships make karmalings stronger! Also, once you start getting a liking to its electrifying taste, you can’t go back.”

“Commander-in-chief, you should try it.”

Even though his karma did grow, the Berserker suggested it to him after the bitter experience. However, Armor-Phantom smiled cheekily.

“Hey now. As you can see, my body doesn’t have a nose. Even if I want to, it’s impossible. Instead, I can do this.”

Armor-Phantom took out what looked to be a black pepper tin and sprinkled it over his body.

Blaaze.

Flames surged from his entire body and his mood changed. He gave off the atmosphere of having fallen in love for the first time. In a loving voice, he said,

“This sweet powder is called ‘Memories of Nebula’. If you sprinkle it on your body, you can smell the scent of the moment you long for. In the past, because I was early, I remember my heart fluttering as I waited for my girlfriend while watching the nebula in the distance. I remember the warm scent of the solar wind, which swept past my body, or something like that.”

Although the scale of his story was oddly big, its meaning was clearly expressed. The Berserkers sprinkled the powder on their bodies with flustered expressions.

Flames erupted one after another.

All around, the Berserkers were momentarily silent. A smile hung on each of their lips.

It was sad when they suddenly recalled beautiful memories they had forgotten because they knew they couldn’t return to those times. Memories where they were either tossed away or tossed someone else away. However, ‘Memories of Nebula’ was a bit different from that. The scents, temperatures, and tastes of the moments when they had been happy covered their bodies like magic. When was it, when was it? When had they been so happy...? This sensation faded at some point while they were fumbling through their memories.

It was at this time when the Berserkers’ eyes reddened.

As they lived in the middle of a battlefield, there were times when their past memories felt like a previous life. ‘Did I fight against monsters since I was born?’ The hearts of the Berserkers who thought this softened slightly. It was the moment they realized there was warm, soft skin under their calluses.

However, they could no longer fully immerse in this sensation.

The Berserkers, worried that the mood would become awkward, hurriedly changed the subject.

“Ah, commander-in-chief, you had a girlfriend?”

“You think I didn’t?!”

‘How do robots get it on?’ ‘Want me to show you? I’ll show you if you guys show me first. Wahaha!’

The awkwardness was quickly replaced with these terrible jokes.

It was a noisy drinking party. Even the stoic Camilla Clan comfortably enjoyed this event.

The Berserkers, who had lived tensely as if they might die at any moment, especially enjoyed this party.

Armor-Phantom, who had been mingling and fooling around with the Berserkers, who had worked hard, suddenly raised his body and met Choi Hyuk’s gaze. He said,

“I just got the report.”

The metallic pieces, which were emitting a light from his body, floated up like a butterfly. He smiled.

Waang!

Armor-Phantom’s declaration rang out like thunder.

It rang out beyond the Hall of Glory, beyond the Laniakea Supercluster and even reached the Shapley Supercluster.

{The Berserkers destroyed four high-ranked Kahur Kabkuns. They revealed the monsters’ new weapon and were the first in the alliance to capture a prisoner. They awakened warrior talent in the Kundle Tribe, who seemed to have no hope. This is a new precedent in the alliance’s recruit training methods. Although they used extreme measures, the Berserkers proved that they had the ability to handle this risk on their own. This has been determined by Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom of the Shapley Supercluster.}

Armor-Phantom officially rejected the problems the evaluation team leader had brought up. Unless they were challenging his authority, no one could persecute Choi Hyuk with this matter.

{The rewards for this heroic merit are as follows. One! For destroying four high-ranked Kahur Kabkuns and obtaining a prisoner, the Berserkers (C-Rank) will be specially promoted two ranks higher to the C+ Rank and are allowed the resource transfer right of a B-Rank troop. Also, I will provide the opportunity for all the middle-ranked warriors within the Berserkers to create Sentiment-ranked karma weapons. Two! For successfully training the Kundle Tribe, the Berserkers will be in complete control of training the Kundle Tribe members from henceforth. All contributions will be given to them and they will be rewarded with twice the Mission Points they spent during the first evaluation period. That is all!}

“Ho…”

Choi Hyuk’s mouth opened a little. The reward was better than he thought. Specially promoted two ranks and a monopoly on the recruit training. These two would create a foothold for the Berserkers to advance and assume important positions within the alliance. To be granted the opportunity to create Sentiment-ranked karma weapons for all their middle-ranked warriors on top of that was a huge profit.

However, Armor-Phantom’s rewards didn’t end here.

“However, I think the rewards are still lacking with just this. It makes no sense to keep personnel with such potential like the earthlings at the border. This is a personal gift. We will establish a military gate between Dragonic and Dark City. From now on, you will be able to go back and forth from Dark City without much burden. The current cost it takes to get to Dark City will be more than enough to reach the Shapley Supercluster. The civilization on Dragonic will develop explosively.”

Armor-Phantom spread his arms as he said,

“You have worked hard until now! The earthlings now need to try living grandly, right?!”

“Waaaah!”

The warriors gathered here shouted in excitement. They had constantly suffered in the past. Now he said to try living grandly… These words couldn’t be any more pleasant.

Looking at this, the tips of Choi Hyuk’s lips curled upwards. He whispered in Baek Seoin’s ear,

“Why is he being so good to us?”

Baek Seoin shrugged.

“You said the evaluation team leader came off quite sternly before, right? When he didn’t possess any good or ill will… The Commander-in-chief is the same… This could all be a show. Shrugging off the working staff and reversing their decisions to show his ability and generosity. He’s trying to buy your heart since you now possess such value.”

Choi Hyuk looked at Armor-Phantom as if he found this entertaining. The commander-in-chief showed generous goodwill towards the Berserkers. However, no light surrounded his body. No color was seen with his Eyes of Distinction. If the Eyes of Distinction weren’t malfunctioning, then this was the same as with the evaluation leader before. The commander-in-chief’s actions didn’t contain any emotions. He was simply doing his ‘job’.

“What a funny place this alliance is.”

Choi Hyuk snorted.

Smaller cities in Korea. 2017, Seoul had a population of 9.9 mil, whereas Hanam had a population of 150 thousand in 2011.

Chapter 143: Radical Reform (2)

After the party, Choi Hyuk had an unexpected visitor.

The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir.

Although he was one of the seven overseers, he was in fact under the control of the nine great sovereigns. He had come to meet Choi Hyuk alone.

As he hadn't yet become a middle-ranked warrior, he couldn't move easily in Dark City. While the Berserkers could easily step on dark matter because they had become registered in Dark City, Nasir had yet to. Nasir's ankles kept submerging below the floor and he faltered with every step he took.

While flailing as he approached, Nasir kneeled in front of Choi Hyuk. At first, Choi Hyuk thought that he wasn't kneeling but had, instead, fallen, but this wasn't the case. Due to losing his balance while kneeling, his forehead, palms, knees, and toes all touched the ground.

While prostrating himself with his head lowered, Nasir said,

"Please save me."

"…"

Choi Hyuk was taken aback. He had yet to decide how to deal with Nasir. It seemed Nasir knew this as he took this opportunity to approach him.

'… What is he planning?'

The Berserkers had devoted their energy to the mission on the Kundle Planet and didn't know much of what was happening on Dragonic. This was the result – Nasir coming alone, bowing his head and asking to be saved.

Although he didn't know how he did it, he was aware of two definitive facts.

One, Nasir recovered enough power to activate the warrior training system on the Kundle Planet.

Two, Nasir disobeyed Choi Hyuk's will.

How taken aback had he been when he first heard that Nasir was the one who activated the warrior training system?

Choi Hyuk, who had been silent, asked,

"... I thought I told you to live like you were dead...?"

Nasir bowed his head once more.

"Please save me."

He didn't bring up his own contribution. This irritated Choi Hyuk.

"It's good that you activated the warrior training system on the Kundle Planet. You made a contribution... However..."

Choi Hyuk's voice became cold.

Nasir's intervention undoubtedly helped since the Kundle Tribe members were able to grow quicker because of it. However, Choi Hyuk wasn't in the mood to settle with this.

The only reason Choi Hyuk left Nasir alive was because of his promise with Richard. Also, the condition for this was 'stripping Nasir of all his power'.

Until now, Choi Hyuk had killed everyone who he had deemed he should kill. The only person he left alive was Nasir. Choi Hyuk was already displeased about this fact. However, Nasir overturned the constraint Choi Hyuk and Richard had decided on and recovered his power. Even if he did help a little on the Kundle Planet... It still put him in a bad mood.

Also, there was something else that made his mood even more unpleasant.

"Go back. You already know, don't you? That I can't lay a hand

on you.”

This was checkmate.

Nasir was one of the seven overseers. He was a representative of the earthlings, who had obtained full citizenship, and was protected by the alliance laws. Killing Nasir was a serious crime.

Still, if it was like before, he could have killed all of Nasir’s followers and detained him once more, but the situation was completely different now. As soon as Nasir recovered his power, he established his ‘independent troops’. Independent troops were official troops under the alliance’s troops system. He couldn’t attack them recklessly.

It was a dilemma. Due to Choi Hyuk’s prominence, the earthlings were able to advance into the center of the alliance, and because of this, it was now difficult for Choi Hyuk to handle them as he wished. If before it was a dispute between countryside lords, then now it was a battle of wits entangling countryside lords, the kingdom’s military, and a free city.

Because of this, Choi Hyuk had no way of dealing with Nasir. At the very least, this was true on the surface and everyone knew this.

He definitely knew this, yet he still prostrated himself in front of Choi Hyuk as though his life was in Choi Hyuk’s hands. Whether he was begging because he knew something or because he had some other plan… Either reason displeased him.

Choi Hyuk hated Nasir. He didn’t participate in the advancement evaluation and he tossed his colonized lands away and fled as soon as Choi Hyuk invaded. While restrained by the nine great sovereigns and suffering the humiliation of being their puppet, he continued to survive and plan for his future. Now, he came and begged Choi Hyuk to ‘save him’. Choi Hyuk was displeased by Nasir, who was constantly calculating and displaying the attitude of everything being fine as long as he survived, for no reason.

‘As I thought… Should I exclude him?’

While his thoughts leaned towards this decision, he couldn’t decide.

Choi Hyuk wordlessly looked at the blue shield symbol (someone to keep alive) above Nasir’s head. He also saw the white light vaguely emitting from him. It wasn’t a radiant, bright white light, but a somewhat dark white light. Nasir was clearly in awe of Choi Hyuk. He didn’t have any ill intentions. That was the problem.

‘These skills are making it difficult to decide…’

The Eyes of the Judge and the Eyes of Distinction, which had always lessened his worries, were actually making it harder for him to decide.

Because of this, his head became more complicated.

Starting with the question of whether or not he should be hostile towards Nasir, his thoughts even traveled to how far he could trust his innate skills. This was troublesome.

The timing of Nasir’s visit was excellent. Nasir came and prostrated himself in front of Choi Hyuk, who was always quick at making decisions, when he was indecisive for a change.

Nasir didn’t retreat even when Choi Hyuk said that he couldn’t lay a hand on him. He took Choi Hyuk’s confusion as an opportunity and began to speak his thoughts.

“The advancement evaluation… Destruction of the dimensional wasp nests. I honestly didn’t think we would succeed.”

“I also thought the Cayenne Star exploration would be difficult.”

“I thought that the Berserkers would divide during the doppelganger incident.”

“And I thought that the dispatched Berserkers would suffer heavy losses during this monster tidal wave. I even thought that you might die.”

Nasir raised his head. His moist eyes were red and clear. They even sparkled occasionally.

“However, I was wrong every time. You even slashed a highest-ranked monster as a middle-ranked warrior.”

Nasir said calmly,

“Only then did I acknowledge it. That I wasn’t at the level to gauge you. Also, that you won and survived.”

“I have no interest besides living. Honor? Authority? That’s something you think about only after you survive. That is why my karma fate is the ‘one who lives a long life’. As long as I live, my karma grows by itself. The nine great sovereigns didn’t know this. They thought that my growth had halted, but I was slowly getting stronger. Beyond their scope of estimation. Yes. If I could continue to survive, I wouldn’t have taken this risk. However, I don’t trust those nine great sovereigns. They aren’t people I can entrust my life to. There was the possibility that I could accidentally be swept into their struggle for power or that my life could be at risk due to their misjudgment. That was why I overturned them. It wasn’t difficult. They were completely focused on establishing independent troops, and I became stronger than they anticipated. Also, even if I was ruined, I was still someone who had something to give to the clan members who were pushed aside by the nine great sovereigns’ internal competition and the small excluded clan leaders.”

His fate was the ‘one who lives a long life’. It was a fate that disgusted Choi Hyuk, who was filled with thoughts of fighting and killing his enemies. Choi Hyuk cut him off.

“So?”

Then Nasir got to the point.

“… I want to stand on your side since you are someone who wins. I need to stick to the side that will win if I want to survive. I didn’t

hesitate even when I heard that a powerful monster appeared on the Kundle Planet and communications had been lost. While all signs pointed to your death, you are someone who wins. The alliance's laws? I don't believe in them. What I believe in is the fact that you possess power. Do not exclude me. I will definitely not drag you down."

"..."

Towards Nasir, who sincerely expressed his heart, Choi Hyuk was momentarily at a loss for words.

'I want to survive so don't be hostile towards me...' Nasir's proposal made Choi Hyuk recall his most fundamental question once more.

'Who do I keep alive and who do I kill?'

Originally, Choi Hyuk despised those who didn't fight. What Choi Hyuk needed was solely revenge. Anyone who wasn't of help to this goal and anyone who would obstruct him were 'people to kill'. That was why he attempted to kill Nasir in the past.

However, in the moment, Choi Hyuk's thoughts changed a little.

When he saw Nasir trying his best to live...

He thought, 'Perhaps this is the nature of karmalings. Isn't this their weakness as well as their strength?'

Everyone was the same. Species felt hope and despair throughout their lives and created karma through experiencing happiness, anger, sorrow, joy, love, hate, and ambition. While there were countless different species, the way they created karma was fundamentally the same. That was why the earthlings and aliens seemed different but were also very alike. The will, no, greed to live. And the plots and schemes that derived from it.

Sometimes wars would break out because of their selfishness, but this selfishness was also the source of their karma, their only power in fighting against the monsters. He couldn't deny this fact.

Choi Hyuk asked,

“If I order it, can you fight? Your life might be in danger.”

Nasir didn’t hesitate as he answered,

“I cannot be a Berserker.”

This was obvious since Nasir, who placed survival as his top priority, and the Berserkers, who always risked their lives, were fundamentally different existences.

Even still, Nasir pledged,

“However, I will fight occasionally if you want me to. Whoever my opponent is… I know that getting hated by you is scarier and more dangerous than facing any powerful enemy. Only, I ask that it isn’t on the level of dying.”

Although it looked like he was laying everything down, this was precisely a double-edged sword. Currently, Nasir was prostrating himself in front of Choi Hyuk. However, he was someone who could betray him without hesitation the moment he judged that Choi Hyuk wouldn’t be of any assistance to his survival.

Only, this wasn’t unique to Nasir. The more Choi Hyuk established a foothold in the alliance, the more frequent these situations would become. Didn’t Armor-Phantom show goodwill to the Berserkers after calculating meticulously just now? A double-edged sword. They would display goodwill if he was useful but show ill will the moment he became useless. As long as Choi Hyuk’s goal was to ‘take revenge on the alliance’, they might one day return with ill will.

However, Choi Hyuk couldn’t be hostile to all of them as long as he resolved himself to wage war against the alliance.

In the end, there was one conclusion.

‘I need to become sharper.’

He had to kill what had to be killed. Choi Hyuk could never

change. This was a prerequisite.

Only, he had to become sharper than before. To the point where they didn't know they were being sliced. He had to become sharper and stealthier.

He had to change but not change.

Choi Hyuk slowly nodded his head.

"... Then tell me about the current situation on Dragonic."

Choi Hyuk decided to keep Nasir alive. As long as Nasir wasn't doubtful of Choi Hyuk's abilities, he would follow him.

'Then I will slice off Nasir's doubt.'

If there was someone with doubts, he would slice off their doubts, and if there was someone who was becoming greedy, he would cut off their greed. He would slice not flesh or bones but their hearts.

Although his thoughts were complicated, the conclusion was simple.

He would slice what was necessary, whether it was one's heart or soul. He was confident in slicing things.

**

Perhaps it was because of this, but Choi Hyuk decided to cut off some future troubles.

With his authority as the recruit trainer, he declared to the entire Kundle Tribe.

———————

The loss of the regenerative abilities in a portion of Kundle Tribe members and the sudden invasion of the uncontrollable monsters were planned by the Berserkers. It was planned by me, Choi Hyuk, the leader of the Berserkers, to train the Kundle Tribe members into soldiers who can fight against the monsters. It is okay to

resent me. If you can, it is okay to kill me. However, there is one thing you need to clearly understand. The entire universe is being invaded by the monsters like you experienced. Even if it wasn't now, you would have inevitably fought against them one day. Although you probably already realized this, without sufficient strength, the only fate you can obtain is death.

I am about to give you a choice.

If you want to become stronger and obtain the power to fight against the monsters, then you will choose to trade with our land, 'Dragonic'. But if you don't believe me or do not wish to fight anymore, you will refuse to trade. The choice is yours. However, I will promise one thing for certain.

If you choose to fight, you will never fight on your own. Like before, the Berserkers will stand beside you, and if you die, the Berserkers will die alongside you.

I anticipate your good judgment.

Trade with Dragonic.

Refuse to trade with Dragonic.

———————

"Aaack! Leader! You did it in the end?!"

Baek Seoin shouted. The 'warriors who came down from the sky and risked their lives to save the Kundle Planet' image that Baek Seoin had planned was scattered into the wind thanks to the message Choi Hyuk sent. Although he was told about it before it was released, it still hurt inside.

"Sorry, Baek hyung. I don't want okay soldiers, I want soldiers I can completely trust."

Although the alliance's security was thorough, there would definitely be a hole in there somewhere. From the start, wasn't Choi Hyuk thinking about identifying those who were in charge of

Earth's recruit training? It was most likely possible. If it was possible for Choi Hyuk, then it would one day be possible for the Kundle Tribe.

A suspicion that might sprout in the hearts of the Kundle Tribe members. Choi Hyuk planned on cutting it off from the beginning.

Since he revealed this fact, there would undoubtedly be discontent among the Kundle Tribe. However, revealed discontent was safer than dormant discontent.

Also, he could sufficiently control their current discontent through missions.

In fact, there was no need to control them forever. Until the day Choi Hyuk achieved his revenge. If he could make the Kundle Tribe follow him until then, then that was enough.

He could tell whether the Kundle Tribe truly trusted Choi Hyuk or not by examining them with his 'Eyes of Distinction' and 'Eyes of the Judge'.

Choi Hyuk said,

"Let's make a true army from now on. One that everyone will fear."

The Berserkers' reoccurring problem, 'lack of personnel'. In order to strengthen their position within the alliance, it was now time for them to solve this problem.

Chapter 144: Radical Reform (3)

The Kundle Tribe members learned from this war.

Sorrow.

Rage.

Despair and hope. Comradery and passion. Even sacrifice.

The Kundle Tribe had lived lethargically because eternal life was guaranteed. To them, the war was a day of rebirth. After obtaining the assistance of the warrior training system, the Kundle Tribe, which hadn't reached the 1-star level, grew at an explosive rate. The entire tribe reached the 1-star level, many reached the 2-star level and a portion even reached the 3-star level. This growth had been achieved by fighting countless monsters beyond their level under the influence of their surging emotions.

Their hearts were as complicated as their explosive growth. This growth could even be considered as an evolution of their species. Unlike when they simply fell asleep whenever something slightly bad occurred, they were intensely conflicted.

This was all because of Choi Hyuk's announcement.

"... So, in the end, it was because of Leader Choi Hyuk that Mingming and Dundun died."

There were Kundle Tribe members who couldn't hide their discontent.

"... However, the Berserkers also died fighting alongside us. Also, if his words are true, then this was a war we could have encountered one day. Rather, if we didn't have the Berserkers, we might have faced extinction."

However, there were also Kundle Tribe members who understood the Berserkers and Choi Hyuk's position. While they hated the Berserkers for using them, it was difficult to hate

comrades they had shed blood with.

"..."

They hated them, but the Berserkers were reassuring. They were reassuring, but they hated them.

The Kundle Tribe was swept with conflicting emotions. It wasn't planned, but the majority of the Kundle Tribe members delayed their decision, unable to do this or that.

Just then, the awnings that hung between the buildings vibrated. The awnings vibrated like speakers and relayed a message.

{Leader Choi Hyuk appeared outside the city!}

Although they didn't know what was going on, the Kundle Tribe members looked at one another before running outside the city. Thanks to their growth in karma, their movements were incomparable to the past.

The Berserkers were lined up in black clothing and large tombstones they hadn't seen before were lined up outside the city.

Beyond the frontlines of the concluded war, body parts of fallen Kundle Tribe members floated up and made their way towards this direction. The Berserkers stood beside this line of corpses, and the Kundle Tribe, unaware of when they joined, accompanied them with dazed expressions.

Wearing black clothes, Choi Hyuk stood in front of the tombstones. Standing beside him, also wearing black clothes, was Lee Jinhee.

Lee Jinhee looked at Choi Hyuk and nodded her head.

"Let's start, leader."

Choi Hyuk lowered his head at Lee Jinhee.

Because of her overflowing affection, Lee Jinhee didn't match the Berserkers.

Because of this, Lee Jinhee always thought of things none of the Berserkers would ever come up with. Choi Hyuk recalled the conversation he had with her.

‘Leader, this isn’t atonement.’

‘Then?’

‘It’s etiquette. This is the most basic and only etiquette someone who will die one day can show to those who have already fallen. It’s a time we spend in front of those whose stories have already ended… since we aren’t monsters.’

After listening to her words, Choi Hyuk nodded.

Choi Hyuk blankly gazed at the corpses of the Kundle Tribe members that were making their way towards him. It was strange. The feelings he didn’t feel from the living he felt instead from the dead. Like Jung Minji and his mother, who had died suddenly, when he looked at those who would lie forever, unable to smile anymore, his heart murmured that life was short but death was long. He disliked those who used any method to survive and felt pain when looking at those who died.

‘What is this…’

An emotion he hadn’t thought he had unraveled itself. The karma in his body was agitated on its own. A blue light, which was like the light of dawn, was being emitted from Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk unconsciously took a step forward. The line of corpses reached where he stood.

Choi Hyuk saw an illusion.

The dead corpses stood up. At first, their faces contained resentment.

‘I heard that this was all planned by you?’

‘Although I did live a long time… I didn’t think it would end like this…’

‘To be honest, I hate you.’

As the dead Kundle Tribe members stood up and passed Choi Hyuk, they each said a word. However, the moment they passed Choi Hyuk, the resentment disappeared from their faces.

‘However… What can we do now? It’s already passed.’

‘Yeah, it’s all in the past.’

The dead had nothing they could do. No matter how deep their resentment was or how much they regretted, their lives had already ended. Their songs had already concluded.

The dead Kundle Tribe members simply disappeared after passing Choi Hyuk. They melted into the vast universe and scattered.

‘This is the end. They can’t change anymore. Only those who remain will change.’

The dead passed him. Choi Hyuk unconsciously said,

“You… worked hard.”

The expressions of the souls in the illusion became slightly profound.

‘What’s the point in saying that now? We’ve already died,’

Someone laughed blandly.

‘Yeah… Thanks,’

Someone patted his shoulder.

‘… Hypocrite,’

Someone passed him with an icy face. However, since they were already dead, no matter what they said or how they reacted, nothing changed. There was only the ‘end.’

This wasn’t atonement. Without wishing or aiming for anything, it was a moment of acceptance and etiquette.

Choi Hyuk suddenly called out a name,

“Mingming.”

His hands moved swiftly. He engraved the names of those who had fallen on the tall tombstones.

“Dundun.”

He said another name. The shoulders of the Kundle Tribe members, who had come to watch, flinched. Lee Jinhee, who had been examining the list, looked at Choi Hyuk with surprised eyes. They had already completed the list of those who had died. Of course, they couldn’t figure out the names of all who had died. However, Choi Hyuk called names out one after the other without the assistance of the list.

He didn’t know why, but he saw the names of the dead.

The blue karma light Choi Hyuk emitted began to change color. As darker colors kept mixing in with it, it became a dark navy color before finally turning black.

As soon as it turned black, the color didn’t change anymore.

As he wrote the names, filling the tombstones, Choi Hyuk realized,

‘I’m looking for the end.’

The end.

Choi Hyuk’s goal was the end. Eternity and immortality wasn’t his goal. For the story that had already ended, Choi Hyuk looked for another end. Choi Hyuk wished and wished for the end of those who ended his happiness. Of those that ended his happiness only so that they could prolong their end. The war, the alliance, and revenge, perhaps he wished for the end of everything, including himself. To end things. This was what Choi Hyuk was the best at. Always.

Perhaps this was the reason why Choi Hyuk was unusually

strong. Since his goal was doomed even after obtaining the godly power of engraving his fate on the universe. While he wasn't aware of it, he always intended to die one day. Because he did, he could kill those who were stronger than him. Perhaps it was because he was prepared to die that he could kill those who did whatever they could to live.

Choi Hyuk's fate of 'never losing' and 'slashing without fail' might also be so strong because he had set an end, like how a star created a supernova, shining brighter than anything, upon its death.

Because of this, Choi Hyuk didn't hate the defeated who had died while fighting. Instead, he felt at peace amongst them. He ridiculed and hated those who considered themselves as victors and those who were certain they wouldn't die because they were strong.

'I'll slash them. I'll end them. I'll turn them into nothing.'

Every time he mumbled these words, Choi Hyuk's karma pulsed slowly. Only at this moment did Choi Hyuk realize his karma had turned black. He realized that he somehow knew the names he didn't know and had engraved them into the tombstones. Before he felt curious about what this was, he felt peaceful.

'Now to stop.'

He had filled all the tombstones with names. Choi Hyuk cleanly cut away his sentiments. All he had to do was slowly unravel the remaining questions.

He saw the Kundle Tribe members who were looking at him with perplexed eyes. Choi Hyuk didn't say anything to them. He simply bowed his head once at the tombstones and left.

In the place Choi Hyuk left, the Kundle Tribe members were stupefied. Choi Hyuk hadn't specially made them gather nor did he address them. Lee Jinhee and the Berserkers were the same. After

completing their duties, they bowed their heads at the tombstones and left.

After the Berserkers had all left, the environment control system Choi Hyuk activated went to work. The perfectly fine ground outside the city sunk and freezing cold water filled it to the brim. It was a cool lake that couldn't exist on the hot Kundle Planet. Choi Hyuk made this impossible cemetery with the contributions provided to train the Kundle Tribe members. The grisly corpses of the Kundle Tribe members were submerged in this freezing cold water one after the other. Even after being filled with so many corpses, the lake wasn't contaminated at all. It was crystal clear.

The Kundle Tribe members stood there blankly.

The Kundle Tribe, which had never seen a member of their race die, didn't possess any funeral customs. It was their first time seeing something like this. Although they didn't know what the point of doing this for those who had already died was, their hearts murmured.

A Kundle Tribe member brought the corpse of a Berserker from the distance. The corpse had been left alone due to Lee Jinhee's proposal of collecting them after the Kundle Tribe's funeral. The Kundle Tribe member submerged the corpse, which had white bones protruding out from it, in the lake.

This was the start. They brought the corpses of earthlings and El Tribe members, who had died after coming all the way to the Kundle Planet, and submerged them into the lake one after the other. Also, the Kundle Tribe members erected nameless tombstones.

This occurred in all of the Kundle Tribe's cities.

When they woke up, it seemed like someone had passed by as the nameless tombstones were filled with the names of earthlings and El Tribe members.

It wasn't as though the Kundle Tribe's animosity towards Choi Hyuk had disappeared. However, at the same time, they understood. Although Choi Hyuk didn't say a word, they all just knew. 'He will die one day.' Choi Hyuk wasn't someone who would live forever and laugh above their heads. They simply knew that, even if he wasn't killed, he would face death one day. They just knew this like how Choi Hyuk just knew the names of the fallen.

It was okay. Still hating what they hated and understanding what they understood, this was how the deaths of a third of the Kundle Tribe concluded. Like how things didn't have to end with revenge or forgiveness just because they hated someone and like how people didn't need to reconcile just because they fought, still hating and still thankful, the Kundle Tribe decided to accept the Berserkers and Dragonic.

The funeral occurred throughout the Kundle Planet for three days.

Camilla, who watched it unfold, said,

"When will these wounds and ruin heal..."

When Choi Hyuk saw an 'end', Camilla thought of 'revival'.

Jessie said,

"Haa... How sad. Let's go gravity diving!"

The Extremers washed away the icky feeling of death with electrifying thrills.

Then, when asked what they thought about the funeral, the Berserkers slowly nodded their heads and said,

"I don't know. It just felt... good."

**

The contract between the Berserkers, Valkyries, and Extremers concluded with the end of the first evaluation. This was because the Berserkers no longer needed the other two troops' assistance

now that they were fully in charge of the recruit training. As repayment for the early termination, they decided to divide all the Mission Points they obtained from this mission between the Valkyries and the Extremers rather than the 6:2:2 distribution they had decided on beforehand. In the Berserkers' perspective, this wasn't a loss because they had obtained a lot besides this and still had a lot more to obtain. In the Valkyries and Extremers' perspectives, this wasn't a loss considering that they had, within a month, earned multiple times the amount of Mission Points they had invested.

The ones who suffered heavy losses, however, were the Jangkok and Sur Troops. Although they filed a claim to the alliance that the Berserkers needed to compensate them, the alliance dismissed it.

The alliance, which was always operating on the basis of war, was magnanimous to victors and was so strict towards losers that it was shameless.

{While their process was somewhat excessive, as the Berserkers' training method has been acknowledged as a legal training method and has received rewards, you cannot request compensation from the Berserkers who are not at fault. Also, the recruit training this time was a competition between three independent troops. Since there would be a big benefit to the ones who succeeded and survived this competition and a disciplinary action against those who fell behind and lost, the Sur and Jangkok Troops, who lost in the battle against monsters during the recruit training and incurred damages afterwards, must justly take responsibility for their defeat.}

It meant that they would have to take responsibility for their defeat. The alliance wasn't considerate, especially towards independent troops, who took on as much responsibility as the freedom they had in their operations. Results were more important than the process.

{Only, considering that the Berserkers' training method was

unprecedented and was very extreme, we will transfer a portion of the karma mined from the Kundle Planet to the Sur and Jangkok Troops to sustain their losses.}

The Sur and Jangkok Troops had no choice but to be satisfied that they now had enough power, albeit small, to deal with their losses. Defeats in the alliance were incredibly severe to the point that well-off troops and species could falter.

A wind of change blew.

Faced with the second evaluation period, the Kundle Tribe could go back and forth from Dragonic relatively freely. As a by-product of Armor-Phantom installing the military gate, it didn't cost much for the Kundle Tribe members to travel.

Like how the alliance did to the earthlings, the Berserkers gave missions to the Kundle Tribe. Following these missions, the Kundle Tribe members worked as hired soldiers on Dragonic, explored uncolonized lands around the Kundle Planet, and even went on expeditions with the Berserkers. The difficulty of the missions was very diverse and the nature of each mission was different. Naro steadily classified and recorded data regarding which Kundle Tribe member went on which missions, their personalities, and their fighting methods.

Armor-Phantom's invitation he had been waiting for finally arrived.

{I made you wait a long time, didn't I? It took a while to finish the preparations due to the number of people and because I was trying to get you the best options. Now, come over to create your karma weapons!}

His tone was still very lively.

Although Choi Hyuk already knew that he was actually a very calculating person, he really liked him at this moment.

Finally, the time for other warriors to obtain karma weapons had

come.

Chapter 145: Radical Reform (4)

Choi Hyuk had left Dragonic for at most two months.

During this short period of time, Dragonic had undergone drastic changes.

After the monster tidal wave, Dragonic had become completely colonized. Richard, who had controlled the world from the dark, had died. Many clans became free from the control of the overseers after they received the right to establish independent troops. The Berserkers also didn't show any interest in the order of Dragonic, simply traveling the universe after the past advancement evaluation. With the addition of these factors, the world seethed with disputes like during the Warring States Period.

Now that they had started gaining strength from trading alien techniques, it became a popular saying that a day on Dragonic was more than ten years on Earth.

Whoosh.

Choi Hyuk looked out the window when he perceived a sudden spreading of light and sound. It was currently night outside. Because of the always milk-white sky, there was originally no night on Dragonic, but a dark night always covered the red-light district of the Jessie Clan's city, 'New Washington'. The Al Pacino Clan was famous for profiting immensely by importing an alien technology that created night and selling the usage of it.

"... How surprising."

The surging pillar of light soon faded to reveal an extreme high-rise building that wasn't there previously. It was an alien technology that allowed the simultaneous summoning of materials and 3D printing of them into buildings. That was how the landscape of Dragonic changed every day.

A tall building. A dark sky. Brilliantly lit streets. Alcohol, women,

and men.

All of this stimulated the nostalgia of earthlings.

On these brilliantly lit streets, warriors, exhausted from fighting, squandered the Mission Points they had saved up as they unwound. Warriors that should be focusing on fighting were rotting in red-light districts? Although it sounded absurd, it was somewhat reasonable.

'As they couldn't recover from their exhaustion from fighting, many warriors were suffering from depression.'

'Although it might only be for one night of pleasure, the warriors gained the determination to fight and save up Mission Points.'

This was also a type of reward mentality. The earthlings, who had suffered until now, wanted to free themselves of the struggle to survive. Like what the Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom had said, they wanted to 'live grandly'.

That was how the earthlings slowly lost their edge and earnestness.

Some said that the earthlings would become more solid and rigid through this, but the person who brought the earthlings their riches and safety, Choi Hyuk, didn't like this.

Riches and safety, if they were to develop into the best this way, all they could amount to was being an important species in the alliance. It didn't suit Choi Hyuk's goal of wanting to overthrow the alliance.

In a luxurious bar rented by the Al Pacino Clan to entertain the Berserkers and Extremers, Choi Hyuk drank delicious alcohol. Beside him were beautiful women and each Berserker and clan executive had men or women suiting their preferences. They were entertainers who would constantly meet their gaze, laugh at whatever they said, and fulfill any request.

However, in Choi Hyuk's eyes, even these entertainers had the

possibility of being warriors. Also, the Mission Points warrior used for alcohol and tips was money that could be used to buy better equipment.

Not long ago, after the great war where countless people died, the world seemed like it would result into barbarism where only the warriors were acknowledged. However, as the status of Dragonic strengthened, the alliance provided the earthlings with more comforts. Barbarism didn't come. The humans, who had lived in a modern consumeristic society, couldn't forget the glories of their past.

They still needed military power, yet those with quick thinking realized that those with power were simply humans who needed something else. Providing pleasure to some or art to others, they took advantage of the warriors, and with the power they obtained, they established other businesses. Occasionally, warriors would obtain what they wanted with their own power, but their methods were either a crime or resulted in exploiting other warriors once again.

Normal warriors were primary industry workers, in other words, peasants of ancient times. They were the ones earning Mission Points, but the ones who were sucking their Mission Points dry were businessmen and executives of large organizations. The warriors who risked their lives fighting were considered quite rich, but the truly rich ones were the businessmen who operated extravagant bars, distributed equipment, or acted as intermediate agencies that provided warriors with decent missions.

Choi Hyuk, who had accepted their invitation because he was curious of the atmosphere of the much-changed Dragonic, didn't like this new reality.

He ignored the entertainers who kept showing interest in him and looked outside.

In his heart, the world had already fallen into ruin, yet people

constantly kept looking for a new life, a new excitement, and a new safety. The warriors who risked their lives became the arms and legs of cunning businessmen.

Choi Hyuk hated this.

“I wish I could kill them all.”

Without letting anyone hear him, Choi Hyuk repeated this inwardly.

He closed his eyes.

He recalled the ‘Sharp Sword’ he had thought of while talking to Nasir.

**

‘What can I give?’

To obtain good results in the game known as reality, one had to always be attentive. What kind of cards one held, and how one could obtain new cards with the ones they already had.

The alliance waged war against the monsters.

“The strongest card here should be, without a doubt, military strength… It has to be.”

Jung Chanmin mumbled as he drank the Water Fog in his glass.

“Hey, hey.”

Chanmin’s older cousin, Min Jungshik, took his bottle away. Inside the bottle was ‘Water Fog’, which paralyzed people’s internal karma and gave them the feeling of being drunk. This Water Fog was less addictive and gave its drinkers an alcohol-like buzz. This was the only source of relief to poor warriors.

Chanmin slumped his head.

“Hyungnim… Maybe… Just maybe. What if I was wrong?”

Chanmin, who had always been confident, was showing a weak appearance today. This was all because he met someone he had

gone to school with. He was wearing a suit made from alien materials, and a rifle made by the Seo Tribe, who were renown in the Laniakea Supercluster for their outstanding engineering, hung from his waist. They were all expensive equipment Chanmin and Jungshik didn't dare buy. With that equipment, a warrior who had just reached the 3-star level could toy with any 3-star monster.

Surrounded by equipment that gave off a halo effect, he said,

'What? You're attending the Berserker School? At your age, it must be tough... You have it hard, man.'

Then he said, 'Ah, I'm busy so I'll be leaving first,' before disappearing using short-distance teleportation.

His equipment was so good that Chanmin and Jungshik, who were finally able to go out for a change after enduring hard training, didn't even dare dream of being able to get it.

"I thought that things would get easier once I reached the 3-star level..."

Thump. Thump. Chanmin slammed his head on the table.

Chanmin and Jungshik. They were the so-called third-generation warriors.

The first-generation warriors were those who became warriors after experiencing the alliance's cruel training.

The second-generation warriors were the 'immigrants' who were suddenly sucked into Dragonic one day and those who willingly went to Dragonic to colonize because they dreamed of being warriors.

Finally, the ones who chose to become warriors after being shocked by the advancement evaluation were considered third-generation warriors.

Although they clearly started later than the first and second generations, Chanmin and Jungshik tried harder than anyone.

When others looked for a slightly more comfortable and safer path, they walked a more dangerous one. They followed Demon King Choi Hyuk rather than President Shin Woojin and even enrolled in the Berserker School. There were many times when his cousin, Jungshik, didn't like Chanmin's suggestions, but he was persuaded and walked alongside him on a path more dangerous and full of hardship than anyone else.

Why?

It was because Chanmin was confident that all of it would garner greater returns in the end.

The alliance considered human lives like insects, and the monsters invaded constantly. In this situation, the only way to succeed was to 'become stronger'. It would have been the case...

"Fuck... I'm sorry, hyungnim... Should we change paths now? Before we take any more losses. Like working as a manager in a good red-light district business. Like that bastard."

Bang, bang.

Looking like he could die of frustration, Chanmin slammed his head on the table. His cousin, Jungshik, clicked his tongue from looking at him.

"Hey, man... Hey. Even if that's true, a man needs to see what he started to the end."

The one who proposed they take risks was Chanmin, but the one who persevered through difficult times was always Jungshik.

"Still, hyungnim... After learning from the Berserker School, our fighting techniques are outstanding. We are confident in beating others at our level in a fight without equipment. But our situation is..."

Chanmin's eyes kept trembling. Jungshik clicked his tongue.

"Did we suffer all those hardships just to lick the asses of bastards

like him? Endure a bit more.”

“Hyungnim, you saw it too… That bastard already became a lowest-ranked warrior even though he has less combat experience than us. His equipment! I bet we can’t win even if we teamed up against him? Playing around to his heart’s content and gradually growing on a safe path, yet he’s stronger than us… Does that make sense?!”

Bang! Bang!

Changmin slammed his head on the table once more. It seemed he couldn’t control his strength as the table made of tough lumber from Dragonic cracked.

Jungshik checked if the owner was looking this way as he grabbed Chanmin’s arm.

“Pull yourself together, man.”

“No, I wouldn’t be like this if it wasn’t so severe… ‘One man sows and another man reaps.’ It’s not like this is going on for a day or two. But, but… Ah, damn it! I thought that we would have more breathing room once we reached the 3-star level at the Berserker School! But the Kundle Tribe…”

The problem was that the number of warriors wasn’t small, and for warriors to advance quickly and safely, they needed their organization’s support.

‘The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.’ Late 3-star warriors and 4-star warriors were treated well wherever they went, yet the worth of those who had just reached the 3-star level, like Chanmin and Jungshik, fell drastically. Still, if one reached this level, organizations could develop and use them, however, every organization avoided worn-out middle-aged men like Chanmin and Jungshik. This was because it was better to recruit someone at the same level who was younger as they were less likely to be aware of the ways of the world. Like this, they could use the carrot-and-

stick method to brainwash them and make them loyal to the organization.

During this period, the Kundle Tribe began trading with Dragonic. Billions of Kundle Tribe members, much more than Dragonic's population, entered Dragonic to do missions and earn Mission Points. This resulted in cheap, one-time hired soldiers flooding the market.

At the same time, the war against the monsters had come to a temporary lull. Since there weren't a lot of missions, warriors who didn't belong to an organization, like Chanmin and Jungshik, were hit the hardest. There were fewer missions, and among those missions, their quality and rewards had completely tanked.

"Really... At this rate, even if we worked our entire lives, we won't be able to obtain karma weapons... What's the point in suffering hardship and becoming middle-ranked warriors? A Weapon of Calling costs over a billion Mission Points. A billion... It's not like we are overflowing with talent like Chu Youngjin... How can we save up that much by ourselves? The one card we had has turned to crap. Crap..."

Chanmin's goal was becoming a middle-ranked warrior with a karma weapon since, after reaching this level, he would be treated well no matter where he went in the alliance.

However, the path towards his goal was full of hardship. While others quickly and safely became stronger thanks to their equipment or organization, Chanmin and Jungshik constantly had to fight with their lives on the line. Even if they spent all the Mission Points they had worked hard to save up, the equipment wouldn't meet their satisfaction. The more they advanced, the harder it became to advance. Could they survive until they reached the 5-star level? Even if they did, when would they ever be able to obtain karma weapons? They were expensive, and there was no guarantee that they would succeed in creating one on their first try. Instead, it seemed it would be better to save up Mission Points

by getting employed by a red-light district business, sucking up to their superiors and occasionally doing their dirty work.

Chanmin felt his future was bleak.

Jungshik patted Chanmin's shoulder.

"Just wait. Overseer Choi Hyuk, that idiot, he's not someone who will let things be like this. With his personality, do you think he'll let those who don't fight stand above warriors? If we just let this continue, the Berserkers will shake things up on their own. Even if they are crazy, they are still human in the end. Just wait. The era we are waiting for will come."

Chanmin nodded his head miserably.

"Will it, hyungnim?"

"Yeah. That's why we should leave now. If we're caught for breaking the table, our already difficult lives will become even more difficult."

Jungshik quickly paid for their drinks and helped Chanmin out.

**

Earth used to be a pale, blue dot within the dark universe.

This Earth was now an ash-colored rock.

It wasn't like they scheduled to meet here, but the seven overseers appeared above the orbit of their dead homeland.

"You guys obtained karma weapons as well."

Lee Jinhee examined the Camilla and Jessie Clan. It looked like they had each bought karma weapons with the Missions Points they earned from the recruit training. Each clan possessed two karma weapons.

It wasn't only them. Yohan and Diana also possessed their own karma weapons. It looked like they had used the growth of the service industry and increase in taxes to buy karma weapons.

“Still, you probably don’t have a weapon like this guy?”

Lee Jinhee boasted while tapping the 40cm short sword hanging from her waist. It was her Sword of Sentiment, ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’. As expected of a Weapon of Sentiment, which was considered a masterpiece even amongst other karma weapons, it wasn’t a weapon anyone could make.

Thanks to Armor-Phantom, the Berserkers’ eight executives each had the opportunity to create a karma weapon at the level of a Weapon of Sentiment, which would have cost over five billion Mission Points, for free. As expected of the Berserkers’ talented executives, they all succeed on their first try. However, there weren’t many who created a Weapon of Sentiment.

This was why Lee Jinhee’s weapon was worth boasting about. However, no one responded to her.

“… It’s starting.”

Baek Seoin said in a low voice. The mood became tense.

Even Lee Jinhee, who had been boasting, turned her gaze towards the dead Earth in surprise.

“Ahh…”

Her eyes drooped sorrowfully and a miserable sigh escaped her lips.

Thud!

Earth was crumbling.

It was the end planets faced when they no longer had a fate after losing all their karma.

Earth crumbled like a paper ball that was empty inside. Then, as dust, it scattered into the universe with a bang.

That was how the third planet of their solar system, Earth, disappeared.

Its end was so pitiful that the realization they had lost their homeland didn't sink in.

Blankly looking at it, Choi Hyuk said,

"This is our reality. Species that are no longer useful can disappear at any moment. That is the universe and the alliance. It's... not yet time to celebrate."

Choi Hyuk turned around and, while gazing into the eyes of each of his executives, said,

"There's a need to improve the structure of Dragonic."

The one whose eyes shined especially bright at Choi Hyuk's words was Zero, the former leader of Richard's assassination troop.

The drug that worked on those with karma. Lee Kangjin was addicted to it.

Chapter 146: Radical Reform (5)

Generally speaking, there was a limit to the amount of strength a single person could possess.

However, the world wasn't easy, and because there were incidents people couldn't handle with their own strength, they attempted to obtain power beyond their own strength. This power was typically authority.

Authority was a power that surpassed the power of one's physical or mental strength. A power where people could order others to do their bidding. It was a power that allowed them to order others to lift items they couldn't or think of ideas they couldn't.

Possessing authority was sweet. This was because all sorts of information about the world gathered towards the possessor, and they could accomplish things they couldn't do by themselves like magic and list those accomplishments under their name.

Those drunk on this sweetness were obsessed with obtaining authority. In fact, it was at the point where one wondered if life was a game of obtaining authority.

Also, the most important question in this game was,

'What can I give?'

It was fine whether it was something others dearly wanted or they hated. However, it was best if one possessed both.

"Choi Hyuk isn't an exception to this game,"

Said Ding, one of the nine great sovereigns. While he possessed a Filipino name, he wasn't a Filipino. No, he wasn't someone from any country. While there was no doubt he spent his childhood in the Philippines, he lived a tumultuous life as he traveled throughout the world, occasionally as a mercenary, usually as a criminal. Since he possessed passports from countless countries, he didn't possess a nationality. Since he was written off before his

birth was registered, he had no way of knowing what nationality he was. His fighting senses were excellent, but his philosophy of life was more outstanding than it.

While the majority of the nine great sovereigns grew using their own country as their foothold, he grew his force by gathering unaffiliated warriors and colonizers who lost the foundation of their lives as well as gangsters and pirates, whom he had connections with on Earth. While he didn't become an overseer, he took the position right below it, a great sovereign. He was a sovereign who didn't have a country as his foothold like Choi Hyuk and Camilla. Just looking at this, one could glimpse at his life philosophy.

Ding, also known as the Night Sovereign, was currently preparing for a 'big deal'. He had allied with various forces for this moment.

"As expected... Choi Hyuk wasn't interested in the entertainers?"

"Yes. He didn't even spare them a glance."

The clan leader of the Al Pacino Clan, who hosted the party Choi Hyuk had attended not long ago, calmly replied before quickly adding with a meaningful smile,

"However, there were quite a few among the Berserkers who enjoyed it."

Ding nodded his head as if this fact was obvious.

"Since they are human."

Ding was well aware of how weak humans were to temptation. During his childhood, he had encountered many people from all over the world who had come looking for the red-light district in the Philippines. They wanted people. It didn't necessarily have to be through prostitution. They wanted someone who would smile at their words, hold their hand, and act affectionately. No, they wanted to 'possess' them. While it was good if they smiled next to

them, if it included prostitution ‘without any burden’, then that was icing on the cake.

There was no relation to their age or occupation. Rather, the older they were or the more respected they were, the more they wanted to use people as they wished. Even those who worked hard and had placed value in their work in the beginning changed over time. Rather than governing, politicians wanted to see people dying in front of them. Rather than upholding and enforcing the law, prosecutors handed out punishment in order to obtain positions where they could enjoy themselves. Rather than devoting themselves to make something of value, businessman placed more attention on how others would entertain them.

Their occupations were a façade to satisfy their fantasies.

People like Camilla and Choi Hyuk who didn’t change their values were rare. This was because, after reaching a higher position, most wanted to use their position for enjoyment.

This was the same for Berserkers. Also…

“Good. Then I’ll go to them like this. While people like Choi Hyuk and Camilla, who don’t even give others a glance, may seem difficult to handle, they are actually the easiest targets.”

While looking at the numerous great sovereigns and clan leaders gathered here, the Night Sovereign Ding revealed a friendly smile.

**

Ding thought,

‘The card I hold is sufficient. There’s no way I’ll fail.’

He unveiled his first card.

“Excluding me, eight great sovereigns, four normal sovereigns, and 33 large-scale clan leaders came to an agreement and established the independent troop ‘Freedom’. With this infrastructure as a base, we will be able to provide the Berserkers

with complete management.”

Choi Hyuk, who was sitting in front of Ding, calmly asked,

“Management?”

Ding showed a naïve smile like a farmer’s as he began talking about the things Choi Hyuk needed.

“Yes. There are around six things we can offer the Berserkers. First, by providing comforts to the Berserkers who are exhausted from fighting, we can imbue passion in them. Secondly, we can help the Berserkers solidify their position within the alliance by providing them with information on troops and species in the alliance. Thirdly, we will prioritize reporting Kahur Kabkuns among others of high rank and above found from exploration to the Berserkers first so that you can achieve military merits. Fourthly, we can introduce you to tactics that will reward you generously after mobilizing the best talents to analyze the tactic market. Fifthly…”

Ding, who had been explaining eloquently despite his naïve appearance, stopped momentarily. When Choi Hyuk looked at him with questioning eyes, Ding scratched his head out of embarrassment.

“Haha, I thought there would be at least five, but it looks like there are only four. How embarrassing. Haha.”

Ding laughed blandly.

Yet, even this action was calculated. He purposely exposed a flaw to relax Choi Hyuk’s guard.

To be honest, four was a lot. Ding was certain of it.

‘From looking at him until now, Choi Hyuk is greatly aware of the ranking within the alliance. He can’t help but be tempted by my proposal when each of my points will help him solidify his position in the alliance.’

It was a standard tactic. To those who pursued something other than pleasure, he simply had to use that as bait.

‘I just need to prepare meat for beasts that like meat and fruit for beasts that like fruit. Along with a small sleeping pill hidden within.’

Ding laughed cunningly in his mind.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“Even four is great… Then what you want in return is a license to do business in the five colonized lands possessed by the Berserkers?”

Ding still smiled friendlily when he heard Choi Hyuk’s question.

“No, what do you mean ‘in return’? It’s a mutual benefit… No, we are in the same boat. No matter how you cut it, aren’t we both earthlings? Since there are only a handful of us in the vast, lonely universe, what do you think about us doing business together and introducing each other to our connections in the alliance? As the Berserkers, who are at the forefront, you must know people high up that we haven’t encountered before… If you can introduce us to them occasionally, won’t we be able to collect information for the Berserkers?”

Meaning he wanted the business license and for them to introduce them to their connections in the alliance.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head as he asked,

“That’s a good proposal. However, the Berserkers have been fine on their own. Is there a reason why we need to work together now?”

Ding slightly raised his smiling eyes. In a low voice, he said worriedly,

“You should know that Dragonic’s atmosphere has changed from before. It has now become an era where people seek to improve

their quality of life than survival. The world is different from the past. Various means of entertainment are being created, and the decent livelihood that has been snatched from us is returning. I'm sorry to say... In this current situation, the Berserkers might become dissatisfied and waver."

Ding said it in a worried tone, but his eyes shined with a strange light.

"To prevent the Berserkers from wavering, the Berserkers need a more refined compensation system. We will help you with that. This was included when I said that we would provide the Berserkers with comforts."

This was a bit of a threat.

'If you do not accept our request, the Berserkers will waver.' No, it was also a threat that implied that they would make the Berserkers waver.

Ding recalled the conversations he had with others. They didn't fear Choi Hyuk as much as they did in the past.

'It's not like we're at a time where there are advancement evaluations. Choi Hyuk, what is he going to do if he's angry? Will he kill us when we're protected by the alliance's laws? When we can't do anything against Nasir, who ran off after breaking his pledge? Why should we bother minding Choi Hyuk now?'

'That's right. The military strength of the Berserkers, it's definitely amazing. Then we just need to devour that military strength. Although the world has changed, there's no way Choi Hyuk, that fool, will let the Berserkers run wild. The more exhausted the Berserkers are from fighting and strict control, the easier it'll be to coax them. If we get them addicted to pleasure, they will come to us on their own.'

Many sovereigns and clan leaders wanted to mass recruit the Berserkers. Even still, they didn't fear Choi Hyuk's rage because he

didn’t have a way to personally harm them.

However, Ding dissuaded them.

‘As you know, Choi Hyuk is insane. If we make the wrong move, we don’t know what he’ll do. Don’t be hasty and let’s look at the big picture. Even if we don’t snatch the Berserkers away right now, there is a lot we can obtain from Choi Hyuk. Let’s be satisfied with that as the time goes on. It’ll take longer, but if we first provide the Berserkers with comforts and the Berserkers rely on us enough to trust and accept people we suggest, then who knows if the Berserkers will be ours instead of Choi Hyuk’s after 10 or 20 years?”

That was how Ding persuaded them and how this moment had come about.

The Demon King Choi Hyuk, who they had kept a respectful distance from until now. This was a big deal in order to drag him into their grasps and swallow him.

Ding possessed cards that could make Choi Hyuk happy and cards that could torment him. On the other hand, Choi Hyuk, who had isolated himself, didn’t have many cards to offer them.

Ding was confident because Choi Hyuk could no longer slaughter people like he did in the past. There was no need to yield.

“Everyone will win.”

Ding smiled friendlily.

Hiding his inner thoughts, Choi Hyuk smiled as well.

“Hahaha. How great. But it’s a bit difficult to make a decision now so I’ll need to think over it.”

“Yes, yes. Please do!”

They had misjudged two things.

Firstly, they judged that Choi Hyuk simply wanted to solidify his position within the alliance.

Secondly, they judged that Choi Hyuk had no way of harming them.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't intend on correcting their misjudgments with words.

Words were simply words.

He couldn't make them fear him with just that.

**

Marina, the clan leader of 'Falcon', also participated in the alliance led by Ding.

"He's still stubborn?"

Marina, who had been happily gazing at the new building built in her name, abruptly asked. The luxurious building revealed itself from within the bright light. She planned on setting up various red-light facilities there. She couldn't be happier since she could provide the warriors under her command with benefits and profit a pretty penny off it as well.

Marina's adjutant cautiously spoke while reading Marina's happy face,

"That is... It seems his older sister is quite the powerful warrior. Since she's so resolute and willing to risk her life, the guys are in a bit of a bind."

Marina's gentle smile crumpled.

"What? Is that bitch affiliated with an independent troop?"

"That's not it, but she is a member of a decently strong mid-sized clan."

"A mid-sized clan? Not an independent troop but a mid-sized clan?"

Marina turned around and looked into her adjutant's eyes. Her adjutant became surprised after seeing her expression.

“Are you kidding me?”

“I-I’m sorry!”

“Have that bitch and that guy kneel in front of me naked by tomorrow.”

“Understood! Then we will conciliate with that clan and dispatch a squad to those guys’ mission to deal with them.”

Marina actually became irritated at her adjutant’s report.

“Just handle those things on your own, on your own! Stop annoying me!”

Marina, the clan leader of the large clan ‘Falcon’, was already anxious enough these days.

Like all large clans currently, she too was stricken with impatience, wanting to quickly become a middle-ranked warrior and establish her own independent troop. She went out on missions every day and did her best to arm herself with better equipment. Because she needed to kill many powerful monsters to advance into a middle-ranked warrior, every day felt like hell to her.

She found an outlet to relieve her stress. While walking down the street, if she found a man who suited her tastes, she would order her adjutant to ‘bring him to my room tonight’. She didn’t care about how many there were, and after she became bored with them, she would send them to her red-light business.

While the earthlings were citizens under the alliance’s protection, at least on the surface, the men all ‘voluntarily’ offered themselves to her. Marina could give them a lot of things. She could provide them with a comfortable life, give them a foothold to grow faster, or even declare them as having ‘died in battle while on a mission’.

Whether they were earthlings or El Tribe members, the alliance’s citizens had the duty to go on regional missions in the Virgo

Cluster. As a troop affiliated with the Virgo Cluster's regional troops, Marina's 'Falcon' clan possessed the right to browse through various missions throughout the Virgo Cluster and provide aid. It could be considered a type of overtime. She abused this system.

If she sent 'support troops' to the mission that those she didn't like participated in, then their lives would wholly rest in Marina's hands. While personally killing them would be a problem, they could lure monsters towards them or push them out into the middle of the battlefield. There were many options she could take.

Normal people, who didn't belong to any clan, were her prey. Even if they were part of a clan, as long as that clan wasn't bigger than a mid-sized clan, she could coax them by giving them some benefits or threatening them.

Like a tyrant, she violently wielded her authority.

"Damn it, if I didn't even have this sort of entertainment, how would I live in this damn world?"

Marina shook her head as though the thought made her sick. Then, as if she was regretful, she licked her lips.

"At times like this, how great would it be to have Berserkers as my followers? Since the fight against monsters will become easier and faster, my karma will be able to grow faster... In any case, why are the others so scared of Choi Hyuk? He was the Demon King of the past; Do they really think he's still a demon king? Haa..."

Marina, who had originally planned on recruiting Berserkers, licked her lips, thinking about how much of a waste it was. Although she opposed the Night Sovereign Ding's plan to the very end, she yielded since the general trend was leaning towards him. This was because acting alone in a group was dangerous.

"Let's go."

Marina, who had been planning on reliving her stress at home

and preparing for her mission tomorrow, abruptly stood in place.

Something was strange. Her surroundings were silent. This wasn't possible in this big city which was bustling with people. Even traces of her escort guards disappeared as though they had been washed away. She rubbed her eyes since she couldn't see in front of her.

When she moved her hands away from her eyes, a woman she hadn't seen was suddenly standing there.

"Marina, clan leader of Falcon. It's hard becoming a middle-ranked warrior, isn't it?"

The woman's hair was neatly tied at the back of her head. Her back and shoulders were straight. Leah, a top executive of the Berserkers, was standing there like a picture.

"Huh? You're Aide Leah?"

Leah, who used to be Richard's aide, was quite famous and Marina recognized her.

Leah's lips curved smoothly. Marina felt scared for some reason.

"What is a top executive of the Berserkers doing here? What did you do to my subordinates?"

"Your subordinates are fine. This place isn't reality but inside your daydream. Should I say you're dreaming with your eyes open? I'm too busy to personally make a visit."

"What are you saying?"

Marina couldn't understand what Leah was saying. Inside a dream? Then did that mean Leah plunged her into a daydream? Not only that, but she came into her dream to talk? How? While karma was a supernatural power, it wasn't magic, right? Various questions brushed past her mind.

Seeing her dazed reaction, Leah revealed a devilish expression as if she wanted to boast. Lights that looked like fireflies or lunar

halos shined around her.

“Right? It’s cool, right? This is my Controller of Sentiment ‘Leah’s Tuning’. Should I say it’s a karma weapon, the symbol of middle-ranked warriors, that you so desire to become? Like the environment control system, I can control the fates around me and activate the universe’s law or distort it. It’s a weapon that can be considered as magic.”

Leah explained excitedly, but Marina couldn’t comprehend her words. While Marina prided herself on knowing more about the alliance than normal people, she couldn’t compare to Leah, who was a top executive of the Berserkers. She even had no idea what the ‘environment control system’, which was used for recruit training, was at all.

“Ah, anyways, why are you here?”

Looking at Marina, who didn’t admire and was simply perplexed, Leah showed a dull expression.

“Haa, what kind of conversation could I have with you. Never mind. Let’s go.”

“Go? Where?”

“Where do you think? Hell.”

Leah showed a bright smile.

———————

{Mission – Destroy the high-ranked Kahur Kabkun}

The Berserkers’ B-Rank resource transfer right has been activated.

Starting now, Marina, the clan leader of the Falcon Clan under the Virgo Cluster’s regional troops, will go on a mission given by the ‘Berserkers’.

You will be automatically transported to the mission area in ten seconds.

———————————

“Huh?”

A dazed voice escaped from Marina’s lips.

“What is… I’m part of the regional troops… Why am I doing a mission given by the Berserkers…? No, before that, a high-ranked Kahur Kabkun? How can I possibly…!”

“This is called the resource transfer right.”

Leah teased Marina.

“Even though your strength is insufficient, try your best. If you survive, you might be able to become a middle-ranked warrior, which you desire so much.”

Crunch.

After ten seconds, space crumpled with Marina’s body as the center. The cheap teleportation they hadn’t even heard about recently activated. Perhaps Marina might actually vomit for a change.

“Huh? Clan leader?”

Marina’s subordinates created a fuss as they tried to look for their clan leader who had suddenly disappeared.

Chapter 147: Radical Reform (6)

{T/N: Resource request right -> Resource transfer right}

This place was filled with warm light like the spring sunshine. The area looked white and relaxing like an overexposed spring sky as flower petals fluttered in the air.

'Are all high ranked Kahur Kabkuns like this?'

Even in her bewildered state, Marina's eyes fixated on the fluttering petals because of how odd the scene in front of her was. What woke her from her idleness was a wretched scream that seemed to slice at one's fingertips.

"Heeuuu aahhhhh!"

Marina was startled. Amidst the densely falling petals, she saw a warrior spurting blood.

Long-headed shadows with long, pointy tails dashed through the petals towards him. It was a slaughter.

"You sons of bitches!!"

The well-built man swung his greatsword, ripping into a shadow's body. Marina knew who he was. Like her, he was the head of a large clan and was trying to become a middle-ranked warrior. He had also joined the alliance Ding established, and was renown for wielding his greatsword and unleashing powerful strikes.

Riip!

Yet, was his famously monstrous strength not enough? The shadow monster's tough, rubber-like body didn't slice in two. It was only sliced halfway through, resulting in a tattered state.

{Kiiiee!!}

The wounded shadow became fiercer and agiler. After leaping away as if it had been burned, it wiggled its dangling torso while

glaring at the weak warrior.

“Grr… Kack!”

Its tail, which swished as if it was having a seizure, pierced a lowest-ranked warrior’s belly. It then proceeded to rip the dying warrior’s throat out with its sharp hands. The warrior who had died powerlessly was a warrior of another clan whom Marina had seen in passing.

“Just… What…?”

Why was she here…? The more she thought about it, the more ridiculous it was. To think that there were resource transfer rights!

‘Our affiliations are different! And I’m a clan leader!’

Hot embers surged from Marina’s belly. Although it wasn’t an amazing position, for them to transfer her, who was like a troop leader, as if she was a lowly soldier? This wasn’t possible.

“Something’s wrong!”

{Kirireuk!}

Even though this incomprehensible situation was already a headache, there was a shadow monster that wouldn’t leave her alone. Her irritation reached its peak.

“Screw off!”

Ba-ba-bang!

Marina blasted the ‘Gun of Three Calamities’, which was created using the Seo Tribe’s technology. The bullets, made from gathering the karma of those in despair after encountering misfortune, poured down on it like heavy rainfall. She had personally customized this weapon with a machine gun in mind. It was a weapon of outstanding capabilities, matching its astonishing price. Yet…

{Kiririk!}

The bullets of misfortune didn't rip the shadow monster into shreds. Thanks to its characteristically tough body, even though the bullets pierced its body in certain places, it didn't receive a fatal blow.

Perhaps realizing that Marina wouldn't be an easy opponent, the wounded monster retreated and began to look for an easier target.

Marina, who had been indignant over the unbelievable right that was the resource transfer right, came to her senses when she saw this.

"It's strong...?! Also, cunning."

It seemed to be at least a low-ranked (4-star) monster. While it was weaker than her, they were technically the same rank. Marina looked around at her surroundings. Though the number of low-ranked warriors wasn't low, the majority were lowest-ranked.

Cold sweat ran down her spine. She suddenly recalled Leah's voice.

'Where do you think? Hell.'

Marina's brows twisted miserably like a squashed snowman. Sobs mixed with her voice.

"Am I going to die like this...?"

If something could be considered fortunate, it was that warriors were constantly summoned here. They might be able to survive if they tried their best to endure. Like how someone shouted, "There's no way that the resource transfer right is unlimited! We can live if we endure!" they might be able to survive if they continued to endure.

However, there was no doubt that many would die during this time. If they ended up being one of those who died, what was the point of enduring?

"Heaack!"

Drenched in his dead comrade's blood, a lowest-ranked warrior swung his sword as he was stricken with fear.

{Kiriiireuk! Kiyaah!}

"... Huh?"

The lowest-ranked warrior, who was blindly swinging his sword out of fear, blinked in surprise. The monster, which had previously rushed towards him like the devil, had retreated as if it was frightened by something.

"What?"

He looked around at his surroundings, thinking that someone had helped him, but there was nothing around him besides the fluttering flower petals and his dead comrade's corpse.

{Kirrreu....}

The lowest-ranked warrior swung his sword at the monster, who was crouched like a cat, wary of him, again.

{Kiyak!}

It happened again. The shadow monster leaped up and fled. As though it was scared of being sliced by his sword...

'It's scared of what's on my sword?'

Although he didn't know why, when he swung his sword, the monster couldn't approach. However, the monster, who was scared of his sword, seemed to have adapted to something as it gradually began to regain its original attack prowess.

Kang!

Kaang!

{Kiree!}

Unlike before when it flinched whenever the sword was close to touching it, it approached, smashing against his sword more and more fiercely.

‘What is it? What? Why was it scared before…?’

The lowest-ranked warrior, who had previously taken a breath of relief, felt like his reasoning was about to be paralyzed from fear. The monster gradually attacked him more aggressively.

‘Just what is it?! … Huh?’

While inwardly despairing, he looked at his sword that flew from his grasp. To be exact, he saw his comrade’s blood smeared on it. It had already dried up and was scattering amidst the petals.

‘!!!’

He made a judgment instinctively. Giving up on his longsword, which was thrown back from the monster’s attack, he took out a dagger and sliced his arm. He stabbed his dagger, which was dripping with his blood, towards the oncoming monster’s chest.

Psscht!

As if stabbing into tofu, the dagger easily pierced the monster’s skin. It was a completely different outcome from when he failed to rip it even when slashing at it with all his strength.

{Kieeeyeeeh!!}

The monster let out a loud scream. It wriggled its body in pain. His blood, which had pierced into the monster, spread throughout its body before the monster turned into flower petals, starting from the tip of its tail, and scattered. The shadow monster turned into a whirlwind of petals.

The hairs on the lowest-ranked warrior’s body stood on their end. Confident he had found the solution to overcome the current situation, he shouted,

“It’s blood! Blood! Wet blood is their weakness!”

This information spread in a matter of seconds.

The shadow monsters would powerlessly scatter into petals when they were even touched by wet blood. As long as the blood on their

weapons didn't dry, these terrifying monsters were no different from scarecrows.

The warriors felt hope that they could win.

Only, what they had miscalculated was the greed of those gathered here.

Blood dried quickly. To face the endlessly oncoming monsters, they had to endlessly smear blood on their weapons. Unfortunately, their own blood was insufficient for this.

'If I wound myself anymore, it'll be difficult to survive!'

Thinking this, a warrior stabbed his comrade who was standing next to him.

"Heuuk!"

"Sorry."

Thanks to the blood dripping from his spear, he was able to save his own life, through this, however, he had spread the gates of hell wide open.

No, it wasn't particularly his fault since he wasn't the only one who came up with this thought.

Marina sliced off a lowest-ranked warrior's arm.

"Euaack!"

"Shut it. It's not like you're going to die."

She remarked shamelessly as she squeezed the cut arm and smeared it plentifully on her magazine. She pulled the trigger.

Ba-ba-bang!

Bullets shot everywhere with a deafening roar. Unlike before when it barely pierced them, even if the bullets grazed them, the shadow monsters would turn into petals. Petals fluttered densely.

"Die! Die!"

When the blood dried while she was firing, she would grab another warrior and smear their blood again. At first, she cut off their arms, but she later realized that it was better to just slice their stomachs or throats.

“Don’t be so depressed. You guys killed your comrades to live too, right?”

She had even come up with an excuse at some point.

Since she used a gun as her main weapon, she downed an overwhelming number of shadow monsters and, as a result, killed an overwhelming number of warriors as well.

Warriors now rushed towards the shadow monsters to avoid her. Since they needed to push past the monsters, they once again killed warriors next to them. This vicious cycle continued.

An endless struggle.

“You crazy bastards! Do it in moderation!”

A low-ranked (4-star) warrior yelled. Although it wasn’t like he hadn’t killed others either, he still felt terrified seeing so many warriors being killed by each other rather than by the monsters.

‘At this rate, won’t we die by fighting with each other?’

However, the majority of low-ranked warriors, who had been dragged to the Kahur Kabkun because of Choi Hyuk, ridiculed him. Although they couldn’t compare to Marina, they all had weapons smeared with wet blood.

‘We are already on the tiger’s back. If we can’t keep up, we’ll all die.’

Marina actually yelled back,

“Shut up! Thank me when you get out of here!”

She simply thought, no matter how many died or how disadvantageous it became because of it, they just needed to finish off the shadow monsters before then.

She was confident.

When seeing those powerful monsters scattering into petals when grazed by her bullets, she even felt omnipotent. It was as thrilling as a shooting game.

In a short period of time, an incredible number of shadow monsters had turned into flower petals. It was to the point where these petals would almost hit their faces. An especially large number of petals stuck to Marina's entire body.

"Ptu!"

While spitting out the petals in her mouth and brushing them away from her ears, she killed people and shot at the monsters.

'I can go back! Once I get back, I need to look into just what that bastard Choi Hyuk did. If there's no other choice, then I'll lie low. It's not like he's going to do this again, right?'

That was how she planned for the future.

Then.

Pik!

"Huh?"

The petals that surrounded her like a fog suddenly rushed to her eyes, nose, mouth, and ears.

"Aack! What is this?!"

She struggled to brush off the petals, but the petals now pierced and burrowed into her flesh like leeches.

"Aaack! No.... No...."

She aroused her karma in an attempt to push the petals away, but every time she did, more petals rushed towards her. To make matters worse, her strength was slowly leaving her.

The petals that burrowed into her body sucked in the evil karma she had accumulated from killing her own race. The colorful red

and yellow petals quickly turned dark and transparent. Just like the shadow monsters.

“What is going…?”

The surviving warriors were taken aback as they witnessed this scene. Looking at the fluttering petals, they cautiously retreated. They wanted to avoid the petals. However, there was no way to avoid the petals which had already covered their surroundings.

“Euaaack!”

The storm of petals swept the area.

The petals attacked the warriors as if they were alive. They burrowed into their eyes and flesh. They attacked the warriors, utilizing the evil karma they had accumulated as a medium. It wasn’t easy brushing the petals away even with their karma. As the petals ate the warriors, they clumped together like clay and grew bigger. Then they became shadow monsters and stood up.

“Tr… trap…”

Eyes glaring, the last warrior lost his grip on his greatsword. The petals covering his body turned into shadow monsters and stood up.

The number of shadow monsters actually increased to twice their original number.

The Kahur Kabkun filled with shadow monsters.

A few petals fell from the sky like spring cherry blossoms.

**

“Is it an annihilation as expected…? If they survived until I got there, I was going to bring them along some more.”

{Yes. There were monsters that displayed a very unique tactic. They have never been reported before. I think the name ‘shadows of retributive justice’ is appropriate. How about you?}

“Good. Then report to the alliance with that name.”

At Choi Hyuk’s less enthusiastic reply, Naro swung its arms in the air.

{Euaack! Is that all you feel? Monsters that spread their larvae through blood! A cunningness where they first act like they are scared of blood and then, after getting the warriors to fight each other, nullify the killer’s defenses with the anguished karma of the killed! A strange trait where they instantly increase their numbers after devouring the killers! Is that all you feel after hearing the name ‘shadows of retributive justice’, which encompasses all these aspects?!}

While Naro had expressed various emotions through its telepathy and body language since the beginning, after learning language, it became an incredibly emotional artificial intelligence.

Though, Choi Hyuk didn’t care.

Choi Hyuk dispersed Naro’s hologram with his hand and stepped forward.

“Quiet. I’m busy. I have to destroy the Kahur Kabkun by myself.”

Petals fluttered in the sky. The Kahur Kabkun was filled with a relaxing light. The ‘shadows of retributive justice’ stared at Choi Hyuk.

A smile spread on Choi Hyuk’s face.

“Been a while since I’ve played with fire.”

Blaaaze.

Like his karma, which had turned black since the Kundle Tribe’s funeral, his flames had turned black as well. These flames grew as they even devoured light.

...!!!

Even sound burned as the shadows collapsed. The petals collapsed as well.

Flames of night fell on the Kahur Kabkun, which had looked like a spring day.

Chapter 148: Radical Reform (7)

That day, heavy rain fell on Jessie's city 'New Washington'.

This was an event organized by the Al Pacino Clan. For this 'Rainy Night', a weather device had been flying up in Dragonic's sky, releasing a blue light.

Like the amount of preparations that went into it, the 'Rainy Night' gave an incredible performance. People crowded in the Al Pacino Clan's red-light district.

It was a romantic night of food and drinks where people, together with their lovers, watched the lights reflect from the raindrops in the streets. It was a time where their skin was cold but their excitement heated them up from the inside.

"It's like we've returned to Earth..."

Everything seemed like a dream. Or was this a dream? There were even people who unconsciously began crying.

Like this, everyone enjoyed the night rain in their own way.

Shwwwaaah.

However, the office of the Al Pacino Clan's leader, James, was chilly and dark.

The lights were off, and he sat alone in his large office while nervously rubbing his lips. His eyes trembled as they looked towards the table, outside the window, and the darkness gathered in the air. Nothing could be heard besides the pouring rain.

Just then, someone knocked on his door. It wasn't a slow, polite knock.

Bang, bang, bang!

The knocks rang out like thunder in a single breath.

Soon, a hurried voice was heard.

“Clan leader! Are you inside? There’s big trouble!”

Shwaaaah!

The pouring rain suddenly seemed louder. As if he was soaking in rain, Clan Leader James’s body was trembling.

“What is it? Come in!”

The door opened with a thud. The executive who came in hastily was surprised by the dark office. Looking at James, who was sitting in his dark office and staring at him with terrifying eyes, he thought of an animal driven into a corner.

“Say it. What is it?”

Only after hearing James’s urging did the executive return to his senses and hurriedly say,

“They say they died on a mission!”

“… What?”

“We requested an investigation from the alliance, and that’s what they told us! Even Clan Leader Marina and Clan Leader Xing! They say that everyone who disappeared had died on a mission!”

Died in battle. Death… Did that mean they died? James felt his heart tighten. He had a difficult time opening his mouth.

“Mission? What mission all of sudden? Didn’t they say that Clan Leader Marina suddenly disappeared on her way back to her headquarters? But a mission? Were they forced on a mission? It’s not like we’re Consumables anymore, do they still do that?”

“I am sorry. We received a reply saying that we do not have the right to look at the contents of the mission.”

“No… No. This is definitely…”

James bit his lips. There wasn’t any proof. Although there wasn’t any… He felt uneasy. If it wasn’t him, who would do such a thing?

Shwwaaah…

Flash! Rumble!

Lightning flashed amidst the pouring rain. James's body flinched the moment the lightning flashed, and his expression distorted when he heard it rumble.

-Waahhh!

Unconcerned with James's mood, a cheer erupted outside. At the lightning they were seeing after a long time, people cheered as if it was a firework. No, as if it really was a firework, the lightning displayed a beautiful array of colors. The initially normal looking lightning gradually radiated into different colors. A flower bloomed in the night sky and then a tree was drawn and leaves grew out of it...

Rumble!

-Waaah!

However, to James, who was sitting in his dark office, the lightning seemed like an ominous sign warning him of a grim future.

Swearing, he shouted,

"Damn it! That fucking lightning! That rain! Tell them to shut up! Shut off the water! No, tell them to stop the rain!"

"Pardon?"

The executive's eyes widened at James's irritation. They planned an entire week for this event. How hard did those at the bottom work to materialize the lightning effect that exploded just now? On top of that, what should they say to those spectating the event when they stopped the rain?

While various thoughts brushed past the executive's mind, James shouted once again,

"Turn it off! Turn it off! Tell them to turn the rain off right now and you screw off too!"

Looking at James's eyes filled with madness, the executive left in shock, closing the door behind him.

Soon, the rain stopped.

After glancing at the dark sky outside the window, James shouted while smashing his desk,

"Turn the light on! Turn it on!"

Instantly, the night retreated to reveal Dragonic's characteristic sky.

-What the heck? Why is it suddenly morning?

-Are they joking? What are they doing?!

While the angry spectators erupted into protest, James simply sat anxiously and rubbed his lips.

It was as though they were phantoms.

In a short moment, four clan leaders and a sovereign, including their subordinates, had gone missing, only to later appear on the records of those who died in battle.

Those who joined Ding's alliance were first suspicious of Choi Hyuk, but they didn't have any proof and Choi Hyuk didn't say anything.

Since the most likely suspect was silent, all they could do was investigate and speculate on their own. It only took a moment for the alliance to collapse.

"Calm down! We can't be certain that Choi Hyuk did it, right?"

Yamato, the sovereign of Japan, shouted while tapping the desk, but the only reply he received were listless, hollow eyes. In a voice that seemed like he didn't want to put up with him, someone said,

"But what are you going to do if it is him?"

His voice seemed like he had already decided. He was completely overwhelmed by the possibility that he could be next.

Yamato was speechless.

“No, we can just think about that when the time comes, why are you acting like this already? The situation’s strange, isn’t it? Although it’s true that most of those who disappeared were part of our alliance, there were also those unrelated to us that had disappeared as well. How are we to know that this was Choi Hyuk’s doing or if the Flame Wing Alliance is up to something again? It’s not like this is our first time experiencing incidents like this.”

However, Yamato’s passionate persuasion didn’t have any effect. The Al Pacino Clan Leader James quietly opened his mouth.

“Whether Choi Hyuk did it or not... There’s no doubt he knows more about this situation than us. They are a C+ Rank independent troop, while we are at most a D-Rank independent troop or a civil militia under the regional troops. This is the difference between him and us...”

“...”

A heavy silence pressed down on the meeting room. Regrets were whirling in each of their hearts.

‘We didn’t know enough about the alliance.’

‘Fool... Did I become complacent during this time?’

‘A great warrior... There might be benefits we don’t know about given to powerful troops...’

They deeply reflected on the short period of peace they spent on Dragonic.

Because the recruit training and advancement evaluation had ended and they overcame the tidal wave of monsters... At some point, their hearts had become complacent.

‘There probably won’t be any more terrifying incidents, right?’ This was what they believed and perhaps wanted to believe. This was the price for that.

A death they couldn't resist. Those who had experienced all of that and had survived died without so much as a word. They didn't know whether they would be next.

Recalling the memories of the recruit training and advancement evaluation, which had become a sort of trauma to them, the sovereigns' bodies trembled.

They were scared.

Still, the situation was slightly different from the past.

Unlike when they didn't have any information regarding or method of dealing with the recruit training and advancement evaluation, this time they had a suspect named 'Choi Hyuk'. Like Yamato said, Choi Hyuk might not be the culprit. However, he could be. No, the sovereign hoped Choi Hyuk was the culprit. Only then could they ask him for mercy. If they could, they would be in a better situation than in the recruit training or advancement evaluation.

The sovereigns and clan leaders each read each other's thoughts as they got up. There would no longer be any instances where they gathered together in one place. They all thought about gathering whatever they could to offer the Berserkers and going to them. Even though Choi Hyuk hadn't said a word...

The Night Sovereign Ding watched the sovereigns leave with a dejected heart.

It wasn't that he didn't understand them. Only,

'How pitiful...'

His heart dampened. If they had lost in a fight, no, if Choi Hyuk had come out and said, 'I don't like how you guys do this and that. That's why I am going to kill you,' and that was why they submitted, he felt it wouldn't be as pitiful.

'We don't know what he wants or what he hates. We don't even know why he's acting like this and how we should behave so that

he doesn’t act like this anymore… To only be able to crawl when facing him…’

It was the most pitiful relationship.

The lowest of the low.

‘Why was I being punished? Was it because I didn’t make any offering? Because I didn’t give him a gift? Because I didn’t give him my body?’

‘Why was I being punished after giving everything I had? Was it because I lacked sincerity?’

‘I didn’t get punished this time. As expected, did he like the item I prepared last time?’

‘To crawl on their own meant the endless repetition of subordination and humiliation.

“I would rather die…”

The Night Sovereign Ding had no thoughts on living like that.

**

Choi Hyuk was sitting with an unenthusiastic expression. Naro reported.

{The leader of the Sahil Clan came this time. He says he wants to provide us with information regarding a middle-ranked Kahur Kabkun.}

Information that the Night Sovereign Ding had said he would provide as part of a trade was rolling in on its own every day. Yet, Choi Hyuk wasn’t really interested.

“Good. We needed to gain some military merit anyways.”

“You are going to act like nothing’s happened even while receiving all that, right?”

Lee Jinhee cut in from the side.

“I never asked them for it.”

“Leader, you’re going to accumulate hostility that way. By only receiving and never giving.”

Only after listening to Lee Jinhee scold him did a smile sprout on Choi Hyuk’s bored face.

“Hostility…”

“… What? Why are you so happy….?”

“Hostility will be better. Since they submitted after being a little scared… I don’t know what they are doing. Look at the mood on Dragonic. It doesn’t suit the Berserkers as time goes on. The red-light districts are fine. Even remembering Earth. Peace is good too. However, they always need to maintain a chilling tension in the corner. They need to have at least one eye open.”

As though this thought made him happy, a slight smile hung on Choi Hyuk’s lips.

Lee Jinhee looked at Choi Hyuk with frightened eyes.

“Leader… Still, many people are dying….”

They pushed people into missions with low success rates, and the Berserkers joined in only after enough time for their survival to be difficult had passed. Lee Jinhee passed by horrifying corpses tumbling around and destroyed the Kahur Kabkun every time. This wasn’t something she could be happy about.

Yet, Choi Hyuk calmly said,

“You know it too. They die because they are weak. Like how they suppressed those who were weaker than them thinking they were strong.”

Lee Jinhee was aware of this. Choi Hyuk wanted to know why those reflected in his ‘Eyes of the Judge’ were ‘people to kill, and Zero mobilized ‘der Schatten’ and gathered information about those individuals. Lee Jinhee read the information as well. Human trafficking, murder relying on missions, and extorting Mission

Points as a protection fee. There were unspeakable atrocities.

However, Lee Jinhee was also aware.

‘They are people of status who died because they couldn’t fight.’

To be honest, this sort of rationality was trivial to Choi Hyuk.

He simply liked fighting. He simply loved sticking his head up against someone else’s and competing for who was stronger. Of course, he had a justification for doing this and he was doing it because it corresponded with his goals… But still, the reason why Choi Hyuk was smiling like that wasn’t because of rational judgment but because of a practical ‘joy’. While Lee Jinhee understood his joy, at the same time, she was saddened that people were constantly dying.

While Lee Jinhee was shaking her head, partly in understanding and partly in regret, Choi Hyuk’s smile suddenly disappeared.

In a slightly sullen voice, he said,

“But… Will it be boring…?”

Choi Hyuk was aware that there was too much of a difference between him and the average power on Dragonic.

In the raws, the author uses ‘전사’ which usually means warrior, but in this case, it means ‘died in battle’. The meaning is sort of lost when translating because I used ‘died on a mission’ rather than the literal ‘died in battle on a mission’.

Chapter 149: Collapse (1)

It was the day Choi Hyuk went to the dark ocean for the second time. The day his eight executives, who were all middle-ranked warriors, went to create karma weapons for free as a part of the rewards Armor-Phantom gave them.

“Heah… Haa… Hihih.”

The eight executives of the Berserkers were exhausted as they floated in the dark ocean. They were panting and laughter weakly escaped from their lips.

“How surprising. Very impressive.”

Armor-Phantom nodded his head multiple times with a smile on his face.

“For four out of eight to create a Weapon of Sentiment… To be honest, this is an unbelievable ratio. On top of that, no one failed to create a karma weapon on their first try… Is the potential of earthlings outstanding? Or is it your troop members that are outstanding?”

Armor-Phantom said with a satisfied smile. Choi Hyuk simply lowered his head.

“Warriors that I have high hopes for need to be given the appropriate treatment. If another middle-ranked warrior appears in your troop, I will personally back them in creating a karma weapon. At no cost.”

Armor-Phantom smiled friendlily as he patted Choi Hyuk’s back.

Choi Hyuk once again simply lowered his head.

**

“Did you know? That bastard died…”

“Who died?”

“That guy, you know. The one I went to school with.”

“Ah… That ‘bling bling’ guy? He seemed like he was doing well… Why did he die?”

“There are a lot of similar cases these days. People disappear and are later said to have died on a mission.”

“Ah, that. Tsk, tsk. How unlucky.”

“Haa… Hyungnim, this time, your words were right. You said that Overseer Choi Hyuk was going to do something, and it really turned out like this.”

“Huh? What does that have to do with Overseer Choi?”

“What? Ah, really, Hyungnim. Why is that sometimes you look sharp while other times you’re slow? Who do you think is behind all those disappearances? Of course, it’s Choi Hyuk.”

“How do you know that?”

“It’s obvious. Look. These incidents came up as soon as Choi Hyuk returned to Dragonic, right? Also, look at those who are disappearing. They are all people who put honest warriors, those who do all sorts of work and fight to save Mission Points, in pitiful states.”

“That’s not always true though? One or two people disappeared from the Berserker School too.”

“Those are exceptions. Exceptions. Look at the ratio. The Berserker School pretty much didn’t suffer any losses.”

“No, something’s not right. If your words are right, then only those people need to disappear, why are students from the Berserker School disappearing too?”

“I mean, is Choi Hyuk a sane person? Who can know what he’s thinking? They probably got on his wrong side. Still, if you see how clear the ratios are, Choi Hyuk is the one behind this.”

“I don’t know.”

“Yes, yes, okay. Either way! The opportunity we’ve been waiting for has finally arrived!”

“An opportunity?”

“Yes! All those who went around with straightened backs are now extremely nervous. Ah, as expected, fighting ability is still the most important thing in the alliance! There’s no doubt that you get the right to forcefully send people on missions if you’re capable enough! Even if that’s not true, you will not die powerlessly if you’re dragged over there! You die if you fall behind! Like this, people will start to hurriedly gather skilled warriors. Not as private bodyguards that do other’s dirty work, but real warriors! Now we can go wherever we please. Let’s graduate from the Berserker School, receive great equipment and live grandly!”

“That’s good news!”

“Then where should we go?”

“I don’t know… Let’s think about that slowly. I think we still have things to learn from the Berserker School.”

“Huuh?”

**

Dragonic was boiling. Choi Hyuk’s actions were changing people’s structure of thought. The earthlings, who were adjusting to reality, once again began to tense up and become desperate like during the advancement evaluation. This also indicated just how many warriors were disappearing.

The more warriors that disappeared, the busier the Berserkers became. This was because, after those who were forcefully dispatched on a mission died, they would have to go in and complete the mission. They couldn’t let things be as it would count as the Berserkers failing a mission if it simply ended with the forcefully dispatched dying.

The battles were so intense it even made experienced warriors

sweat from the constant difficulty.

“Even if we’re Berserkers, I’ve never fought this much before…”

“Still, our karma is increasing smoothly. If we get stronger like this, we’ll be middle-ranked warriors in no time!”

“Ah… Was your karma fate ‘Combat Addict’? Damn it… It’s so unfair for people like me with the ‘Raging One’ fate.”

“Keke… Why? I heard those with the ‘Raging One’ fate are also getting stronger at a good pace?”

“Because they are raging from working too hard? Damn it… Don’t forget me if you become a middle-ranked warrior first.”

“It’s not like anyone can become a middle-ranked warrior… I heard that you can’t raise the last bit of your Retribution with free karma points… And that everyone needs to accumulate Retribution that suits themselves on their own.”

“Who said that?”

“Everyone says so. It’s also written in the alliance information record library. You should study a bit.”

“This is the first time I’m hearing about it.”

“That’s because the people on our side are overflowing with talent so they keep going up without noticing those things.”

Destruction of Kahur Kabkuns, the recapturing of planets occupied by monsters, and defending against monster invasions. An endless banquet of missions.

There were even difficult missions where Choi Hyuk had to personally step in among them.

Such was the case for destroying a newly discovered high-ranked Kahur Kabkun.

Due to the monsters pouring out from the Kahur Kabkun, the ‘Blue Ocean Planet’ nearby was already occupied by monsters.

The Blue Ocean Planet was on the outermost border of the alliance. On a map, it would appear on an abruptly extended boundary shaped like an awl since it was in the middle of an unexplored area. The Blue Ocean Planet looked like a planet containing a blue ocean from afar. However, it was actually a world composed of sand made from blue glass. The karma species living here were called the ‘Glass Crabs’. The thumbnail-sized glass crabs would melt the blue glass to create shells and live under them like hermit crabs. While their individual intelligence was low, as they lived in colonies like ants, each colony could share its thoughts and collectively display high intelligence and emotional expression with its queen as the core. When examined closely, the Blue Ocean Planet was filled with beautiful buildings created from melted glass.

Although the Glass Crabs weren’t powerful, since they could cause various phenomena like healing, confusion, and change in topography using karma, they weren’t mined and remained in the alliance as Consumables.

The Berserkers had come to the Blue Ocean Planet to first eliminate the monsters invading this place before destroying the newly emerged Kahur Kabkun.

However, they were faced with difficulty before they could begin.

Not because of the monsters, but because of alliance members.

“Return.”

The Berserkers, who came to enter the Blue Ocean Planet, were blocked by the alliance’s independent troop ‘Keumil’.

Each Keumil troop member wore a hood, giving off a gloomy appearance.

The Keumil troop was created with the Keunib species at the helm. Their leader, Keusaero, was also a Keunib, possessing a long nose and a mouth that stretched along his jaw.

When Choi Hyuk wordlessly stared at him, Keusaero frowned and said it again. Between his wide mouth, he could see teeth as sharp as saws.

“We must give up on the Blue Ocean Planet. This planet is too far out into the unexplored area. If we go out any further, the frontlines will become too long and it’ll become burdensome.”

His reason sounded logical. However, Choi Hyuk coldly replied,

“What are you talking about? Then you’re just going to let the natives of the Blue Ocean Planet, the Glass Crabs, all die?”

“They are Consumables anyways. Nothing we can do.”

Choi Hyuk snorted at Keusaero’s answer.

“The number of Kahur Kabkuns in this area has suddenly increased. Don’t you know that the more the karma species are slaughtered by the monsters, the stronger the monsters that can cross over will be? Also, if this place is taken, then the Minae Planet behind it will face danger.”

“That’s not something of your concern.”

Even if Choi Hyuk tried to refute rationally, what awaited him was Keasaero’s stiff reply. His reply seemed to say that he should just go along with it since his decision was final. A slight amount of saliva gathered in Choi Hyuk’s mouth. He found this situation interesting. He stretched his hand grasping ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’.

“The independent troop, Keumil. I don’t know what right you have to obstruct us. We ‘Berserkers’ are following rightful procedures to conduct our mission. Are you going to stop us?”

While asking this, Choi Hyuk was secretly expecting a fight.

Including Keusaero in front him, the Keunib species were all shameless in his eyes. The administrator of the lowest-ranked supply store who disregarded him, the evaluation team leader he had met not too long ago, and Keusaero were all Keunibs. They

were always arrogant and stiff. ‘Do you even have the ability to?’ Choi Hyuk’s fingers tapped his sword handle rhythmically.

When Choi Hyuk prepared for a fight, Keusaero frowned.

“Although I know you’re strong… You are excessively cocky. You aren’t in a position to be angry. You immoral child.”

“Immoral?”

As soon as he heard the word ‘immoral’, Choi Hyuk suddenly recalled a piece of information. A large-scale clan reported this to him after learning about it recently. The report definitely contained something about a ‘business’.

Choi Hyuk’s lips became crooked.

“Aren’t you doing this to pressure the Minae Planet in the back? Leaving them alone to put pressure on them before ripping Mission Points off them as defense costs?”

Only independent troops could freely establish their own tactics and go on exclusive missions. Some obtained private benefits by using this right. They would go to celestial bodies in danger of monsters and demand Mission Points separate from the amount provided by the alliance.

It was one of the irrationalities born from this long war and discrimination between the central region and the outer regions. Since the alliance had a tendency to carelessly defend the outer regions while firmly defending the central region, there were troops that approached and conducted ‘business’ with celestial bodies in need of immediate support.

‘I thought it was only making excessive profits off of distressed planets… Now I see they even aggravate danger?’

The more he learned about it, the more rotten places he found in the alliance.

“Yeah. The one who’s cutting in is you not me… Now if you

understand, go back.”

Listening to Keusaero’s reply, Choi Hyuk asked with expectant eyes,

“If I don’t want to?”

The mood tensed with those words. As if angered, Keusaero’s wide mouth split up to his ears. The Keumil troop members behind him raised their weapons. Even the Berserkers behind Choi Hyuk aimed their weapons at the Keumil troop members.

It was a volatile situation that seemed like they would clash at any moment. However, the one who took a step back was Keusaero.

“Hooo… Since you are a rookie noticed by Armor-Phantom, we’ll gloss over that for now.”

Then he flapped his mouth as if communicating with someone before sharing the communications with Choi Hyuk. The one connected was an unexpected individual.

Keusaero introduced him.

“It’s Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom.”

‘Commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster, Armor-Phantom? Why? Was… he bribed by Keusaero?’

Choi Hyuk frowned. Just then, he heard Armor-Phantom’s voice. Choi Hyuk first saluted.

“For life and freedom.”

{Yeah. For life and freedom. Nice meeting you. I heard that you’ve been busy these days. How’s your condition?}

“Yes, it’s good. Thank you for looking out for me.”

{Since you’re busy, I’ll make it quick. You probably heard it from Keusaero, but it’s better to give up on that place than protect it. I’ll look for and give you a good mission, so retreat.}

‘Better to give it up than protect it.’

Choi Hyuk mulled over those words. However, there was no way that was the case. The monsters killed karma species and used the fates obtained from killing them to increase their power to interfere with the universe and the scale of their invasion. If they had the power, it was best to annihilate the monsters. Wasn’t that the reason why they created independent troops?

Choi Hyuk cautiously asked,

“Is that… an order?”

{An order? No. How could I, the commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster, order you to not fight monsters? It’s just advice.}

While listening to Armor-Phantom’s friendly voice, Choi Hyuk suddenly recalled the ‘creating karma weapons at no cost’ he had promised.

‘So he said that to do this.’

Thinking about Armor-Phantom, who praised him with words and made such a big promise without showing a trace of white light (goodwill), Choi Hyuk nodded his head. He was trying to tame him.

‘Creating karma weapons at no cost?’

Of course, that was good.

‘A good relationship with an influential person like Armor-Phantom?’

That was good too.

However, they were not good enough for him to lower his head and submit.

As a high-ranked warrior who had to walk the path of the fates ‘never losing’ and ‘slashing without fail’, Choi Hyuk couldn’t submit. He couldn’t accumulate such karma.

Also, their attitude was very unpleasant.

‘After cleaning up the clans on Dragonic with great effort, is the universe the problem this time?’

Choi Hyuk faced Armor-Phantom and laughed. At the end, he replied,

“I don’t want to.”

Armor-Phantom’s face stiffened.

Long-nosed, wide-mouthed aliens seen previously (most recently in Chapter 142). They have been popping up throughout the series I believe, earliest being when Choi Hyuk went to the lowest-ranked supply store.

Chapter 150: Collapse (2)

Armor-Phantom quickly relaxed his stiff face and said.

{Really? Then there's nothing I can do. Try it. Ah, still, since you said it so firmly, it's a bit embarrassing.}

His tone expressed his disappointment.

Choi Hyuk lowered his head. Armor-Phantom looked at Choi Hyuk before turning his gaze to the leader of the Keumil Troop, Keusaero.

{He says he'll still do it. Nothing we can do. Just let him be.}

"Pardon?! Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom!"

Keusaero openly expressed that this was unfair, but Armor-Phantom shook his head.

{Let him be and back off.}

"... Understood."

Keusaero lowered his head while growling like a fierce yet obedient dog. Ending the communication, he glared at Choi Hyuk.

"You're so full of arrogance just because you're on a roll these days. Do you think you'll continue to grow quickly like you've been so far? Even if one becomes a high-ranked warrior in ten years, there are countless of people who can't step into the highest rank after a thousand or even ten thousand years. Let's see if you can still be so arrogant after you stop advancing."

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn't even give Keusaero a glance.

Grrrittt.

While grinding his saw-like teeth, Keusaero disappeared.

**

"Hmm... 'I don't want to'?"

After ending the communication, Armor-Phantom's lips became crooked. The metallic pieces that made up his body trembled while making a dangerous sound. While he acted like he didn't care in front of Choi Hyuk, this was simply to avoid giving Choi Hyuk a reason to cause trouble later. Armor-Phantom was currently quite upset.

He looked at the prostrating earthling in front of him. His eyes were black and clear as though they were drawn with a brush on his brown skin. His muscles were lean, making him look skinny but nimble. He was the Night Sovereign Ding.

Before communicating with Choi Hyuk, Armor-Phantom had been rebuking Ding.

It seemed he had quite the ability as he was able to arrange a short meeting with him while only being a middle-ranked warrior. However, to Armor-Phantom, his teary plead for mercy clearly showed he didn't know his place.

"Hmm... You said you want me to restrict Choi Hyuk because he's purposely eliminating warriors, right?"

"Yes, that's right. While his abilities might be outstanding, he's a dangerous individual."

While jingling, Armor-Phantom's metallic pieces formed a smooth hologram. Armor-Phantom's face on the hologram had a strange smile.

'He still isn't dejected, huh?'

Ding couldn't hear Armor-Phantom and Choi Hyuk's conversation because Armor-Phantom didn't allow him to. Still, just before the conversation, Ding didn't show any signs of being dejected and boldly spoke his thoughts when Armor-Phantom reprimanded him by saying, 'How absurd. The Berserkers possess B-Rank resource transfer rights. It's up to them how they dispatch and use their resources. Even if an excessive number of people die,

this too is the tactical judgment made by the Berserkers, an independent troop. Isn't it still a good result if warriors try their best because the lazy die? The Berserkers are successfully completing countless missions. Blaming others when they died because they were too weak? Did you, a middle-ranked warrior, come all the way to the Shapley Supercluster to say that? …Who's the bastard who set up this meeting with me?'

'He might be useful. Bold with an attitude.'

Armor-Phantom began to like Ding, who had looked disgraceful just moments ago.

This was because he had completely turned his back against Choi Hyuk, who had rejected his advice without a moment's hesitation. The fact that he didn't show even the slightest bit of hesitation was especially disgraceful. It was impossible to control someone like that.

Even though he was a rookie who possessed a Sword of Vow, which was a treasure known throughout the universe, and a frightening talent, he was still a warrior from the border.

'In the end, those who have protected our universe until now and will continue to protect it in the future are the top four tribes. Us becoming stronger and having more resources is the only way to protect the universe in the end. Yet, he dares question me and act how he wants?'

Strength? That was useless. While Choi Hyuk's talent was surprising, warriors with his talent weren't rare in the core of the alliance where the top four tribes gathered. Someone who didn't know to respect the truly strong, a country boy drunk on his own arrogance, would only harm the unity of the alliance.

Armor-Phantom sincerely thought this way. While he didn't show it, in his mind, the true alliance was the top four tribes (Flame Wing, Speckled Light, Dark, and Armored Soul) and the top four tribes were the alliance. The rest were, at best, support

assisting the top four and the majority were simply getting a free ride. The reason why he didn't show any traces of his thoughts and acted as a benevolent commander-in-chief was to make the support work harder as the support and to not give those annoying idealists, who believed that all species were equal, room to find any fault with him. It was never to make others equal to them.

'Even if his ability is worth using, if he doesn't have any thoughts on supporting, then he's useless. The alliance is a team, not something run by individuals.'

After concluding his thoughts, Armor-Phantom looked down at the Night Sovereign Ding with renewed eyes. While he wasn't comparable to Choi Hyuk, his potential was clearly outstanding. It seemed it was true when people said the potential of earthlings was quite outstanding.

'How do I use this...?'

While Armor-Phantom was constructing his plans, the voice of an unexpected third-party cut in.

"I unintentionally heard something interesting."

Ding's shoulders flinched and trembled while he was still prostrating on the ground. "Huh? My eyes?" Darkness encroached Ding's vision. Whether he opened, closed or rubbed his eyes or spread his karma out, he couldn't see or feel anything. An unknown fear invaded his heart. Ding, who had been cold, crouched like a scared cat and lowered his head. His shoulders trembled subtly.

Armor-Phantom's metallic pieces shook with a ring. As if consumed by fear, he trembled uneasily and precariously.

Armor-Phantom jolted up from his seat.

"For freedom and life! Salute to exalted Dark-Sound!"

"Okay."

A member of the Exalted Wings, Dark-Sound leisurely walked in and sat down in Armor-Phantom's seat. Armor-Phantom couldn't even meet his eyes as he backed away to the side.

Dark-Sound said in a relaxed voice,

"That child called Choi Hyuk has already become a high-ranked warrior. It hasn't been long since I personally designated him as a middle-ranked warrior... How quick. On top of that, he performed a wonderful feat of completely dissipating a high-ranked monster's strength and capturing it as a prisoner. Even the Exalted Wings were surprised. Since both the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters happen to fall under my jurisdiction, I came to see you... But, I ended up hearing something interesting."

The surface of Armor-Phantom's hologram trembled nervously. He didn't know how he should answer.

'Does Dark-Sound have a favorable impression of Choi Hyuk?'

If that was true, he had to apologize immediately and separate himself from this situation. However, since he wasn't certain of Dark-Sound's thoughts, he hesitated and was unable to hastily decide.

Fortunately for him, Dark-Sound was the first to speak.

"So... In your perspective, you think Choi Hyuk, who doesn't accommodate the 'top four' tribes that are the key force of the alliance, will be an obstacle to the alliance's development... And that earthling over there is saying that Choi Hyuk is causing an excessive number of victims, making the alliance suffer losses... right?"

Armor-Phantom's hologram became hazy once more. His words were right on the nose. There was no need for an explanation. Dark-Sound could peer into Armor-Phantom and Ding's hearts.

Armor-Phantom lowered his head, hoping that Dark-Sound wouldn't be angry.

“That’s correct.”

“Hmm.”

Dark-Sound got up from his seat.

“Then test him. You can’t harass a high-ranked warrior without definitive proof. Whether Choi Hyuk is strong enough to ignore the existing forces and their interests. Also, whether overusing his resource transfer right is a benefit or not.”

Armor-Phantom didn’t even attempt to reply. He was a warrior at the peak of the highest rank, yet there was a gap as large as the universe between him and Dark-Sound, who was known as one of the strongest amongst those at the transcendence level.

“Understood.”

“Yeah. Let’s also raise the stakes. If he fails, then we’ll have to take disciplinary action against him with added interest.”

Dark-Sound revealed his pale teeth as he smiled.

“Temporarily grant the Berserkers with an A-Rank resource transfer right and order them to colonize all the unexplored lands within the Shapley Supercluster.”

Armor-Phantom, who had been prostrating during this time, couldn’t help but be surprised at Dark-Sound’s detailed order.

“Pardon? However, isn’t an A-Rank resource transfer right high enough to dispatch most high-ranked warriors however they please?! If the losses grow because of it…”

It was an absurd right. It was a right that was only given to independent troop leaders who had either reached the transcendence level or were infinitely close to that level. It was an incredible right that equaled his, the commander-in-chief of the Shapley Supercluster.

“If we’re going to grant it to him, then we need to grant it grandly. Won’t we be able to take a harsher disciplinary action

then? Also... We can recover from any losses suffered in the border region. What's important is the core's strength. Rather than letting him grow to become a rotten apple within the alliance, it's cheaper to just step on him at the right moment... Aren't these your thoughts?"

Dark-Sound smiled oddly as he tapped Armor-Phantom's shoulder.

Armor-Phantom couldn't help but once again feel fear towards Dark-Sound, who could peer into his heart as though he was reading his palm.

Dark-Sound walked away without making any noise before adding,

"Ah, now that I think about it, aren't the Berserkers currently on a recruit training mission as well? Due to regulations, they aren't allowed to take on such a long-term project... But I'll allow it using my name. Tell them to do both at the same time. We need to check if they have the ability to be so confident, right?"

Swish.

Dark-Sound disappeared after finishing what he had to say. Suddenly, the surroundings brightened.

"Huh? Huh?"

The Night Sovereign Ding, whose crouching body trembled due to fear, was still unable to pull himself together as he looked around, and Armor-Phantom calmed his thumping heart.

"For life and freedom..."

Even though Dark-Sound had already left, he saluted just in case.

'Either way, it seems he's not displeased with my thoughts... How fortunate.'

Although he couldn't be certain what motives Dark-Sound had, it seemed like Dark-Sound didn't look very favorably upon Choi

Hyuk. While ‘granting an A-Rank resource transfer right’ and ‘colonize all unexplored lands within the Shapley Supercluster’ seemed like a prize similar to trying to promote a squadron leader to a brigade commander on the surface, this wasn’t the case in reality. If one received a duty beyond what they could handle, then they would inevitably be crushed from the overload.

‘Although it wasn’t what I planned… It’s not bad.’

Since Dark-Sound set up the playing field, it was now time to actively use it. All that was left was to thoroughly train Choi Hyuk, the warrior who didn’t know his place.

‘How could I know what the Exalted Wings are thinking…? But Dark-Sound is a member of the top four like me. He might be thinking about training a useful yet thoughtless warrior when the moment is right.’

Armor-Phantom accepted his order thinking this.

“Euu…”

Ding’s trembling body was still stricken with fear. His nimble body was crumpled pitifully, and drool dripped from his smooth, handsome lips.

Armor-Phantom laughed for some reason.

‘Yeah. That’s a suitable position for you.’

Grinning, he comfortably sat down on his seat once again.

The raws include ‘we, the top four tribes’ because Armor-Phantom is from the Armored Soul Tribe, one of the top four.

Chapter 151: Collapse (3)

Crackle.

When walking on the glass desert of the Blue Ocean Planet, one could hear crackling sounds reminiscent of radio static.

Tap, tap.

This was the sound of glass crabs spending their entire day looking for prettier glass pebbles.

No matter how long one walked, one would see a yellowish green sky, blue glass sand on the ground blowing in the wind, and the sculptures created by the white glass crabs. It was a beautiful and peaceful planet.

However, the Blue Ocean Planet wasn't peaceful today.

Kwa, kwa, kwa!

One-and-a-half-meter-long, eel-like monsters used their bladed legs to shoot forward like a spring as they drew lines in the glass desert. They were monsters known as 'bladed loaches'.

Crack! Crack!

Facing the bladed loaches that were approaching like a waterfall, the glass crabs piled glass stones to create geometric shapes.

Blitz!

As soon as the monsters came within range, the shapes drawn on the sand shot lightning out while emitting a bright light.

Zziii...

The blue sand was burnt black and melted together. However, there wasn't a single bladed loach corpse in the area burnt black by the lightning storm.

"Wheeek! Whio!"

{{{Whio! Whio! Wheeek!}}}

When a long, clear whistle came from glass towers as tall as people, and the glass crabs behind it echoed the whistling sound. While each individual sound was quiet, as the sounds combined, they grew louder like an ensemble.

Tap, tap.

While the meaning behind the whistling sounds were unknown, the glass crabs, who had been watching the situation for a moment, began to move quickly. They moved the glass stones once more and prepared another defense measure.

However—

Pukuahak!

The bladed loaches that abruptly shot up from the ground shattered the glass shapes that the glass crabs had made. Their bladed legs folded into their bodies and, like actual loaches, they swam through the glass sand and trampled over the glass crabs.

The glass crabs were a colonial species. They weren't strong individually and were only strong when they were together as a 'city'. As there weren't many lowest-ranked (3-star) cities in the first place, the glass crabs, which were Consumables, were unable to block the bladed loaches attacking them from underground at all.

Whooosh!!

Occasionally, a strong power would radiate from the glass towers, which were the glass crabs' cities, and take down a bladed loach, but this was rare. Not long after, the bladed loaches smashed the glass tower where the queen resided and licked up the glass crabs inside it with their long tongues.

There wasn't anything that could even be considered as the frontline. All glass towers on the Blue Ocean Planet were being attacked simultaneously.

The fate of the glass crabs, which had survived tenaciously even

when experiencing hellish wars after being assigned as the alliance's Consumables, was flickering precariously like a candle in the wind.

The alliance, which had constantly pulled them into their wars, didn't seem like they would save them from this danger.

"Whioooo~ Whooeee..."

"Whio! Whooee. Whoo..."

The queens, whose roles were to act as the 'brains' of their respective colonies, emitted anguished whistles throughout the Blue Ocean Planet.

A shadow appeared in the yellowish green sky, which was filled with the glass crabs' lament. It was Naro's dimensional fortress.

"How did Armor-Phantom look?"

"He seemed angry? Very angry."

Baek Seoin asked and Choi Hyuk replied. Baek Seoin's eyes narrowed.

Through long experience, Choi Hyuk's close aides knew that Choi Hyuk excelled at reading his opponents' emotions.

Therefore, Baek Seoin couldn't take Choi Hyuk's words lightly. Baek Seoin let out a low grumble before saying,

"Armor-Phantom... Since we've gotten on the bad side of an influential figure like him, we have no choice but to obtain good results."

When Baek Seoin gestured, Naro quickly displayed a hologram of the Blue Ocean Planet.

Blue dots were densely spread throughout the planet, and they could see smoldering black lines between them. The blue dots were glass towers. The black lines indicated the bladed loaches.

"However, the current situation is disadvantageous for us. Of

course, our end goal is to destroy the Kahur Kabkun beyond the planet, but while passing through the planet, we need to save every glass crab we can. Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom can stubbornly ask, 'Why didn't you prevent a lot of losses? Don't you know that the more karmalings die, the stronger the monsters that can cross over are?' However…"

When Baek Seoin paused, Naro followed up on his report.

{As you can see, the bladed loaches are spread throughout the planet. Large battles are impossible. Since it's a dogfight, protecting the glass crabs will be difficult. The only action is to spread our warriors out to clean up the bladed loaches.}

"That's right. The worst part is that you, the greatest force in the Berserkers, can only act in a localized area. While you would be able to sweep them all up if they were gathered together, since they are so scattered and entangled with glass crabs, you have no choice but to fight in close range."

"Hmm…"

While Choi Hyuk pondered, Baek Seoin sighed before staring directly at Choi Hyuk and said,

"So… To be honest, since we can't trust you, we came to get your pledge that you will hold back. You can't go throwing flames around because you're frustrated mid-battle. We need to protect the glass crabs."

Choi Hyuk showed a dissatisfied expression when he heard Baek Seoin's plea.

"But won't it take too long?"

Baek Seoin shook his head.

"No, fight in moderation this time and trust us."

'Trust us.'

For some reason, it seemed those words weighed on his mind as

Choi Hyuk paused. When he subtly nodded his head, Baek Seoin waved his hand. Naro reacted quickly.

{Berserkers, prepare to mobilize. Individual battles. Individual starting points, selection complete.}

Baek Seoin looked at Choi Hyuk, and Choi Hyuk made the final order.

“Our enemies are the bladed loaches. They are monsters at the 2-3-star level. Berserkers… Let’s run amuck to our hearts’ content!”

Whaaaah.

While no sound was actually heard, it seemed like they heard such a sound. Teleportation activated densely throughout the Blue Ocean Planet. There were so many that the Blue Ocean Planet looked like it was bending. Berserkers, Kundle Tribe members, and even the Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir’s followers leaped out from everywhere.

“Let’s kill them!”

Someone shouted loudly.

Even though his subordinates rushed out, like always, Choi Hyuk leisurely stepped down on the ground.

This composure came from the absolute confidence that he could deal with any existence that came at him.

Choi Hyuk’s style was to take leisurely steps and sweep through the monsters targeting him with one slash.

‘Since I’m fighting alone today, I should take it easy, but…’

Although he felt slightly regretful, that was it. He simply had to take a hundred short swings than one big one. To Choi Hyuk, this wasn’t difficult.

However…

Shwaaah.

The moment Choi Hyuk appeared, the bladed loaches in front of him all began to retreat simultaneously. It was to the point where one could see black waves rushing away to reveal a blue ground from Naro's spaceship, which was orbiting the Blue Ocean Planet.

"... Just what is this?"

Choi Hyuk grumbled before he could even take his sword out from his sheath.

**

"..."

Choi Hyuk's eyes were filled with annoyance as he swung his sword and jumped up and down.

"Whoa, whoa, hold it in, leader."

Baek Seoin steadily stuck next to him. After glancing at Baek Seoin, Choi Hyuk swallowed his anger and, with a slightly calmer expression, chased down another bladed loach and cut it in half.

After being cut in two, the black bladed loach squirmed like a worm.

Raising his head after watching it for a moment, Choi Hyuk saw a swarm of bladed loaches retreating away from him like a tide. Choi Hyuk let out a sigh. If it was like this, it would be difficult to even take a hundred short swings.

"They really are like loaches. Haha."

Baek Seoin read Choi Hyuk's expression as he smiled, but Choi Hyuk shook his head. Although he guessed that it would be a frustrating battle after listening to Baek Seoin on Naro's spaceship, it was beyond what he had expected. Choi Hyuk mumbled with a dejected voice,

"For monsters... to only run away."

Monsters were a bunch that blindly revealed killing intent at karmalings. Yet, the bladed loaches were thoroughly avoiding

opponents that were stronger than them. Especially when Choi Hyuk appeared, they would muster up all their strength to retreat off into the horizon. Of course, Choi Hyuk could catch up since he was faster, but hunting down monsters running in every direction was time-consuming and very bothersome.

“It is definitely odd. The bladed loaches are known to be monsters that use their agility and slick skin to collapse the frontlines and cause chaos in the rear… There has never been any reported cases where they simply run away like this.”

Baek Seoin bit his lips as he pondered.

“We can clearly see that they are thoroughly avoiding powerful opponents and trying their best to kill as many as they can… It’s like they are trying to meet a quota.”

The easiest opponents on the Blue Ocean Planet were the blue crabs. The bladed loaches only targeted them. This weighed on Baek Seoin’s mind.

“Why is it…? The glass crabs shouldn’t be a danger to the monsters…”

Flinch!

Baek Seoin, who had been mumbling to himself, suddenly became surprised.

When Choi Hyuk gave him a strange look, Baek Seoin shook his head.

“Ah, no. I thought I felt an ominous feeling for a second… I thought my Intuition had activated… But it looks like I was wrong. I don’t feel anything right now.”

Choi Hyuk tilted his head at Baek Seoin’s words, but he didn’t ask any further when Baek Seoin shook his head again.

“Really? But it looks like the glass crabs will suffer heavy losses like this.”

Although he said it as though it were inevitable, Choi Hyuk was slightly gloomy. While he was confident he could smash everything apart by himself, protecting someone was harder than he thought. Choi Hyuk especially didn't have much he could do in this situation since they slipped away like loaches and only targeted weak glass crabs. With his temper, he wanted to burn everything, but there was no doubt that many allies would die if he erupted flames blindly. Choi Hyuk had never experienced such a frustrating fight since he awakened karma. While he didn't show it, Choi Hyuk even felt a slight sense of shame.

Baek Seoin tapped Choi Hyuk's shoulder.

"Don't worry. Your subordinates aren't weak."

Choi Hyuk blankly stared at Baek Seoin before blinking a few times. Then he nodded his head and rushed out once again. Every bladed loach he killed would be helpful.

Following his path, the bladed loaches ran away to reveal a blue sand desert.

Baek Seoin looked on as Choi Hyuk got further and further away as he quietly wiped the back of his neck. He could feel goosebumps from the sudden dangerous feeling he had felt a moment ago.

"What the… Is there something going on…?"

He frowned, but there really wasn't anything right now. 'No, I'm probably mistaken.' He shook his head and ran towards Choi Hyuk, who was already far off into the distance.

**

The Kundle Tribe members were innocent like newborn babies. Although they resented Choi Hyuk after the recruit training, this resentment didn't reside in their hearts for long. Even if they resented him, they acknowledged that they had no choice but to fight monsters and didn't shy away from war in order to become citizens of the alliance. They willingly fought alongside the

Berserkers. Also, after fighting together, they felt a deep sense of comradery with the Berserkers. They were naïve like that and were as courageous as they were naïve.

“Block them!”

When a Berserker shouted, the Kundle Tribe members rushed towards the ‘bladed loaches’. The two-meter-long bladed loaches launched off the ground, folded their legs into their bodies, and penetrated past the Kundle Tribe members blocking them.

The Kundle Tribe members did whatever they could to block the bladed loaches, but their bodies were so round and slippery that they slipped past the Kundle Tribe members’ arms and hips. Even when they struck with weapons, the weapons slipped off them.

Slash!

The bladed loaches’ sleek scales sliced the Kundle Tribe members as they passed by.

“Aaack!”

“Dundun! My arm! Pass me my arm!”

“Ack! My body? Where is my body?”

As their recovery ability increased after becoming stronger, the Kundle Tribe members no longer died from getting cut in half by the monsters. They resisted the monster’s invading karma, calmly looked for and stuck their bodies back together, and activated their regeneration.

The bladed loaches left the Kundle Tribe members, who were recovering their bodies, behind and kicked off the ground once again to accelerate their dropped speed. They cunningly avoided the Berserkers and only charged towards the Kundle Tribe members and Nasir’s subordinates. Because of this, the Kundle Tribe members and Nasir’s clan members’ duty was to keep bladed loaches from escaping before the Berserkers got there.

“Weapon #3! Tie them down!”

The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir’s subordinates acted once the Kundle Tribe members obstructed the bladed loaches to reduce their momentum.

As expected of Nasir’s subordinates who pursued ‘safe combat’ over victorious combat, they all used ranged weapons instead of melee ones. As soon as they swallowed a green marble, their mouths changed into a particular part of an insect.

Swwit!

Webbing shot out from their mouths and stuck onto the bladed loaches. The webbing momentarily restricted their movements.

Once the bladed loaches were slowed down by the Kundle Tribe members and Nasir’s clan members, the Berserkers caught up to them.

“Nice!”

Crush! Cruush!

Every attack from the Berserkers was so ferocious that they instantly crushed the bladed loaches that weren’t easily slashed with swords due to how slick and resilient they were.

“Wahahaha!”

“Kakakakaka!”

The Berserkers’ laugh erupted here and there.

“Whiik! Whiiii!”

“Whiik! Ppiii-!”

The glass crab queens’ whistle, which had trembled pitifully, gradually became more cheerful.

“...Did we win already?”

The situation with the bladed loaches, where they were at a loss considering they had to kill each one individually, was resolved

faster than expected due to the cooperation of subordinate forces with the Berserkers in the lead. When considering the amount of time that had passed since they joined the battle, the glass crabs' losses were minor.

The Berserkers were strong and competent.

"See."

Looking at Baek Seoin boast, Choi Hyuk smiled.

"Good."

Perhaps, for the first time, even though he didn't play a major role in this battle, an unfamiliar sense of pride tickled his heart.

What awaited Choi Hyuk when he happily returned to Naro's spaceship was the order issued by Armor-Phantom and Dark-Sound.

Chapter 152: Collapse (4)

Stars weren't evenly distributed throughout the universe. Pulled by each other's gravity, galaxies and superclusters created various patterns. Among them, the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters had narrow shapes, scattering countless stars and galaxies like a fountain.

If the large supercluster branches were highways, then the Flame-Wing Alliance's territory was similar to alleys spread throughout this narrow space like a net. Galaxies, quasars, nebulae, dark matter, stars, and planets, the celestial bodies where karmalings were born were connected together like dense alleys. This was the alliance's territory. If one were to draw it on a map, it would look like a net that covered around 60% of the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters. The remaining area was unexplored.

Beyond the alliance's territory and further into the unexplored lands, one would first encounter the 'Rotten Border'. 'Kahur Kabkuns (wormholes)' were concentrated around the exterior of the alliance's territory. Although they were concentrated together, a supercluster consisted of hundreds of local groups of galaxies, a local group consisted of dozens of galaxies, and a galaxy consisted of hundreds of billions of solar systems, so when looking at it on a large map, the 'Rotten Border' looked like a very thin band. However, when seeing it with one's own eyes, it was a vast area beyond one's imagination.

The majority of the alliance's colonizing missions occurred at the entrance of the Rotten Border. They destroyed isolated Kahur Kabkuns and looked for traces of undiscovered karmalings. This entire process progressed very carefully.

This was because the 'Rotten Border' had an unusually large number of Kahur Kabkuns. Among them, over 90% were not fully developed so it wasn't dangerous as long as one didn't personally enter the area, but there were many cases when this was part of

the monsters' plan. The moment they forgot the danger of the 'Rotten Border' and let down their guard, the monsters would suddenly ambush them. The monsters annihilated colonizing troops and used the extorted karma as nourishment to awaken underdeveloped Kahur Kabkuns. In these cases, pointless colonization resulted in bringing in even more monsters.

Because of this danger, the alliance rejected excessive colonization and preferred to slowly gnaw at and advance into the 'Rotten Border'. It was common to assign warriors without any backing or foothold like the earthlings to moderate colonization missions as a political act.

However, the mission Dark-Sound gave the Berserkers was clearly different. What he meant by 'complete colonization' was advancing past the 'Rotten Border' to the end of the supercluster.

It broke the norm.

Also, Armor-Phantom interpreted the meaning in his own way.

"Why drag this on until you pass through the Rotten Border?"

In front of him sat troop leaders mobilized by Choi Hyuk's A-Rank resource transfer right. Those that especially caught his eye among them were the rookies of the top four tribes sent from the center.

'Whirlwind Fire', a man with swaying flames instead of hair, replied with an expression that he would die from boredom.

"That's what I'm saying. Whatever that A-Rank resource transfer right is... Now, really. To have to come to the countryside and take orders from a novice like him...."

A rising star of the Dark Tribe, 'Black Snow', expressed her agreement by nodding subtly at Whirlwind Fire's complaint. They were existences that could be considered as nobles in the alliance. Whirlwind Fire was from a prestigious family in the Flame-Wing Tribe, which was known to be the strongest of the top four tribes,

and like him, Black Snow was a female warrior of the Dark Clan, the pure-blooded of the Dark Tribe. Both led C+ Rank independent troops and were elites whose activities were based in ‘Alliance City’, the capital of the alliance.

They were born and raised in the alliance’s ‘center’, which Choi Hyuk greatly strived for as his goal. Although the years they were active as warriors weren’t very different from Choi Hyuk, their pride exceeded highest-ranked warriors in the boundary regions.

While Keusaero sat next to them with an expression filled with dissatisfaction, he didn’t dare open his mouth. To be weak against the strong and strong against the weak, this was the way of the Keunib species, who were also known as the ‘alliance’s civil servants’.

Armor-Phantom was smiling gently.

“Yeah. That’s why I’m saying this. Just act in moderation. If they want to enter the Rotten Border, they need a ton of reconnaissance first. There’s no need to do that properly. Even if a battle breaks out, retreat moderately. This mission is set to fail anyways considering how incapable that guy is. That’s why it’s better to fail quickly so that you can return to the center faster.”

Even when Armor-Phantom comforted them, Whirlwind Fire let out a sullen noise.

“I know that we need to act without care to end this quickly. However, it’s such a waste of time. There are so many trending missions right now, yet we have to waste our time here on a hopeless mission... No, but that Choi Hyuk or whatever, it’s not like he knows us, why did he want us to be dispatched?”

“Something about wanting to see the ability of the top four tribes.”

“Whaat? Crazy country fool...”

It seemed he was quite angry as flames rose from Whirlwind

Fire's head. Even Black Snow sitting next to him silently ridiculed him. 'Just who is testing who? How arrogant.' They all thought this way.

Black Snow, who had been sitting quietly, stretched drowsily like a cat as she asked in a polite, calm voice,

"Anyways, Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom. Are these all the troops dispatched for this mission? It seems too small considering the mission is about colonizing all of Shapley and Laniakea even if it is a hopeless mission."

Armor-Phantom shook his head.

"Of course, this isn't all. I called those who I felt would be regretful if they suffered losses for such an absurd mission. Besides you all, the rest... While it's regretful, there needs to be a small sacrifice so that the mission can be judged as a failure quicker."

For example, if the people gathered here negligently conducted their reconnaissance mission, the rest who didn't participate in this meeting would have to rely on uncertain information before advancing. It was a situation where they couldn't help but suffer heavy losses from the monsters. Armor-Phantom had called this a 'small sacrifice'.

"Hmm... That's true."

Then, like Whirlwind Fire's reply, the people gathered here sincerely believed that this was a 'small sacrifice'.

**

The colonization began abruptly.

Even when facing this dire situation where he would either soar or break, Choi Hyuk's mind was unexpectedly filled with thoughts of Flame-Rain.

It might have to do with the word 'colonize'.

Flame-Rain was the first in the alliance to cross over to the

monsters' universe. Perhaps she was a colonizer in the truest sense of the word.

She was not only the friendliest warrior but also the most courageous and powerful.

She was of the highest nobility, yet she was forcefully sent to the most intense battlefield and was obligated to make sacrifices.

Even though she was so strong and of such nobility, she was always knocked down.

Then… How much did they look down on people like earthlings?

Perhaps the most basic requirement for his revenge was to reach a level where he could stand shoulder to shoulder with Flame-Rain. First, like Flame-Rain, he needed to grow to a level where the Exalted Wings seriously kept him in check. Going beyond that was the most basic requirement for his revenge.

Coincidentally, Choi Hyuk had a hunch that this abrupt mission would be the greatest foothold for that moment.

At the same time, Choi Hyuk realized how he should use the A-Rank resource transfer right by himself.

Choi Hyuk's hand moved. He quickly completed the list of temporarily dispatched troops.

Choi Hyuk smiled, and Baek Seoin sighed after looking through the list.

"Leader! You know that the resource transfer right now is of a completely different nature compared to Dragonic, right? You can't just dispatch troops because you don't like them and want to screw them over. It was only possible back then because the missions could be completed with just the Berserkers and the big gap between us and those on Dragonic. This time, we need to dispatch trustworthy troops that will be our strength. What I'm saying is that it's impossible to push them to their deaths and make them fight with their lives on the line. There are tons of people

who will be at ease after being forced into a high-ranked Kahur Kabkun… What if they use that to fight slowly?”

Baek Seoin nagged. Yet, he held most of it back. This was apparent considering he almost collapsed when he first saw the list that Choi Hyuk had made. From the Sur, Jangkok, and Keumil Troops, to the young masters and ladies from the center of the alliance that he had never heard of before… Whether looking at the list in terms of friendship or prestige, it was filled with people who looked like they wouldn’t fight diligently.

“So, first of all, you did well in including Commander Mack. From here to here is a bit… First, let’s request some recommendations from Commander Mack… Do we not have any others to ask? Ah, I heard rumors that the Exalted Wing Leviathan looked at us favorably, maybe we should ask for some recommendations from him through Commander Mack…”

When Baek Seoin coaxed Choi Hyuk while pointing out specific parts of the list, still smiling, Choi Hyuk replied,

“It’s okay.”

Baek Seoin suppressed his anger as he tried to persuade Choi Hyuk.

“No, I mean… If we want to colonize, don’t we have to pass the Rotten Border first? Since that place is otherwise known as the universe’s minefield, shouldn’t we conduct a reconnaissance first? Think about it. If we want to explore such a vast region, we need a lot of trustworthy, talented troops… Yet, from here to here, I just can’t-“

“We’re not going to conduct any reconnaissance.”

“Pardon? Are we not? No! We’ll never know when we will be ambushed-!”

Looking at Baek Seoin’s expression as he raised his voice in shock, Choi Hyuk smiled like the devil.

Soon after, Baek Seoin's face couldn't help but pale when he heard Choi Hyuk's explanation.

**

'How lackluster.'

This was Choi Hyuk's thought after looking at the troops gathered for the colonization mission. There were 31 C Rank independent troops like the Berserkers, 102 D Rank ones below them... Such a large army was almost half of Shapley and Laniakea's entire force.

There were close to 40 high-ranked (6-star) warriors, around a thousand middle-ranked (5-star) warriors, and, below them, hundreds of thousands of warriors in each rank following the low-ranked (4-star) warriors. This was the first time such a huge force had been pooled since Dark City was attacked.

Troops were called from the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters as well as other superclusters beyond them, even extending to the center of the alliance. This army was gathered under Choi Hyuk.

'Finally... We're at the starting point.'

It was a new sensation.

A warrior from Earth, who always had to complete missions given to him by the alliance at any time without knowing why, was now, in reverse, giving a mission to warriors from throughout the universe. This was the first opportunity to return what he had received in the past. The first step towards the center of the alliance.

Of course, the A-Rank resource transfer right was a temporary right, and the authority Choi Hyuk possessed was nothing special. The warriors gathered here were glaring at Choi Hyuk with the thought 'How dare someone we've never heard about dispatch us?' The killing intent and hostility they emitted made the entire universe look red. Even when looking through the Eyes of the

Judge, there weren't only one or two people he needed to deal with. Fortunately, a few troops from the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters led by Commander Mack were had some goodwill, but they were such a small minority that they were almost invisible. Still, Choi Hyuk was happy.

'First, I won't let go of the authority that has landed in my hands.'

Choi Hyuk ordered the C Rank troop leaders near him,

"The army will not spread out. We will gather together and break through a single point."

The troop leaders showed dumbfounded expressions when they heard Choi Hyuk's order.

"No... Then we're not going to go on any reconnaissance at all? Also, a single-point breakthrough? If we do that, when in the world will we clean the Rotten Border up completely?"

They didn't use polite, formal speech. Someone pulled the arm of the complainer.

'Hey, hey, he says he's going to ruin himself on his own. Just let him be. The faster he ruins himself, the faster it'll end.'

This plan was simply too absurd. The single-point breakthrough was a tactic used to escape when surrounded by enemies. It wasn't a useful tactic when they needed to erase the minefield known as the Rotten Border. The entire army pushing their way through the Rotten Border in a single group was a serious waste of resources and would undoubtedly result in endlessly dragging the plan on.

'What the hell? Is this bastard a coward?'

This was why Whirlwind Fire came to hate Choi Hyuk even more. To him, this tactic looked like Choi Hyuk was so scared that he planned on surrounding himself with an excessive number of troops to keep him safe.

‘Well… It’s not bad. If our progress is slow despite gathering so many troops, it’ll be a cause for disciplinary action without a doubt, so it’s not bad… But for such a pitiful bastard to dare dispatch me… What a shitty feeling.’

Frowning and turning his gaze away, Whirlwind Fire saw Black Snow also glaring at Choi Hyuk with a similar scornful look.

The colonizing army passing through the Rotten Border as a group soon encountered a high-ranked Kahur Kabkun.

It was quickly dealt with. A single C Rank troop could destroy a high-ranked Kahur Kabkun, yet there were 32 C Rank troops gathered here including the Berserkers. They couldn’t lose even if they tried.

With Choi Hyuk at the lead, the Berserkers rushed in first, and by the time the other troops rushed in afterwards, the situation had already been resolved.

The monsters had already been eradicated, and warriors were crammed inside the Kahur Kabkun. Although the high-ranked Kahur Kabkun was large, there were simply too many warriors in the colonizing army.

“Ah, man… Why is he making all of us come in here?”

“We’re finally all here. But all the monsters are dead? Then do we leave again?”

“Is he joking…?”

The warriors who entered the Kahur Kabkuns with nothing to do could no longer take it and expressed their dissatisfaction.

“A waste of a sword…”

It was the same for Black Snow, who hadn’t personally spoken of her dissatisfaction despite having them. It seemed she really was angry this time as she mumbled while glaring at the Sword of Vow ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’.

However, it was Whirlwind Fire who was silent this time.

‘That bastard… Just what’s with his flames? Is it not… from my species?’

Choi Hyuk revealed his black flames when he rushed into the Kahur Kabkun. Whirlwind Fire was astonished the moment he saw them. At first, he thought Choi Hyuk was imitating the Flame-Wing Tribe’s flames. However, that wasn’t the case. The longer he saw them, the more they made him shudder. They were flames he had never seen before and, at the same time, were more destructive than any other flame.

‘Someone with flames like that is a coward? No way… Then just why is he using an absurd tactic like single-point breakthrough…’

In the Flame-Wing Tribe, flames were a way to clearly reveal one’s personality. After seeing his horrifying, black flames, Whirlwind Fire could no longer believe Choi Hyuk was a coward. The more he thought this, the more overwhelmed he became from confusion.

‘Just why?’

Under Whirlwind Fire’s trembling gaze, Choi Hyuk stood alone at the end of the Kahur Kabkun. The other side of the Kahur Kabkun was like a rippling, black lake. Clear killing intent from the monsters’ universe surged beyond it.

Destroying a Kahur Kabkun usually ended with throwing a dimensional bomb in it. However… Choi Hyuk acted differently this time.

Gulp.

He swallowed something inside him. Whether it was rage, desire, or urgency, one couldn’t tell… At the same time, ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ began to vibrate.

It was at this moment when Choi Hyuk opened his mouth.

“From now on, we will destroy all the Kahur Kabkuns existing in the Rotten Border.”

Up until this moment, the warrior thought, ‘What’s he saying?’ but couldn’t believe Choi Hyuk’s next words.

“Only, not from our side, but from the monsters’.”

‘What?’

Silently, astonishment spread amongst them in an instant.

Blaaze!

‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ cut through the world. When the unheard-of power that could nullify everything cut into the end of the Kahur Kabkun, the dimension was cut through with a rip.

The place now visible beyond the opened Kahur Kabkun was completely different from the karmalings’ universe. It was the monsters’ universe.

“... Just what is this...”

Whirlwind Fire’s mouth was agape. A thought flashed through his mind. ‘Single-point breakthrough.’ A tactic only used when they were hopelessly surrounded by enemies... and the monsters’ universe he was seeing for the first time in his life, the source of death swarming with powerful enemies...

Unknown whether it was fear or excitement, a shiver ran down his body.

“Let’s go.”

Choi Hyuk took his first step towards the monsters’ universe.

**

“Huh?”

Flame-Rain had been struggling with the Net of Fate while her entire body was covered in blood. She felt the Net of Fate, which had been squeezing her, suddenly loosen. A section of the Net of

Fate shook greatly.

“What is this…? Did something arrive? Just who…?”

Although she had no way to know… This was an opportunity. Flame-Rain smiled cheerfully for the first time in a while as she looked towards her subordinates who had survived until now.

“It’s an opportunity! The enemies’ attention is divided! This is our final chance! We’ll use all our strength to break through and leave!”

Blaaze!

Her flame wings, which had been diminishing from exhaustion, grew larger while shining brilliantly. Her loyal subordinates also raised their weapons once again and reignited their battle spirit.

Flame-Rain gave the final order.

“Let’s go! Homeward!”

Chapter 153: Collapse (5)

“This place… looks like shit.”

These were the first words spoken by Lee Jinhee when she stepped into the monsters’ universe.

It was as she said. The entire place looked a stomach with indigestion. A vast space, big enough for a galaxy to fit, was covered in a semi-transparent wall that squirmed like an intestine. Larva-like monsters as large as planets and continents infested the space like parasites. Light grey poja, which gave birth to monsters, were clumped together like nebulae and light crackled amidst, but their appearance looked disgusting, like half-digested vomit.

“… Kaff… Is that the anus?”

Handke said after clearing his throat, seemingly out of embarrassment. While he wanted to find a more elegant comparison, it was difficult. He was referring to the spot where the semi-transparent wall that surrounded them gathered. It was pierced with a darkness that seemed like a blackhole. Hideous lumps of flesh gathered around it… 99 out of 100 people would think of the same body part.

“Hmm…”

However, no one laughed. Instead, they were stiff from nervousness.

Despite their prior worries, they weren’t surrounded and attacked by monsters the moment they arrived. However, the disgusting appearance of the monsters’ universe itself added a strange sense of tension to the colonizing army. Looking at the squirming universe, the infestation of larva-like monsters, and the large, dark hole, everyone’s insides churned with nausea.

{Ha… Hahaha. Why am I here…? Can I go back now?}

Naro’s hologram appeared next to Choi Hyuk. The hologram

looked like a simple human-like doll made carelessly out of dough. Naro grabbed Choi Hyuk's sleeve with its fingerless hands.

"If we slip up, you need to take us and flee. Keep your senses clear."

Choi Hyuk brushed Naro's hands away as though it was a pain.

{Ha, ha, hahaha, but I'm scared...}

"What kind of AI says it's scared? Those smaller than you are more mature."

Aide Leah said, petting Naro's head. Naro glanced behind it to view the hundreds of spaceships brought by various troops, anchored in an imposing manner. Naro's spaceship, which was larger and cruder looking, stood out among them. As expected of the dimensional fortress that housed the final survivors of the Naro species, its scale was eye-catchingly large. However, Naro, who was the spaceship's personality, flinched its shoulders.

{I can't help but be scared...}

An unusually strong sense of survival might have been implemented as it was the dimensional fortress protecting the final fate of a species.

Choi Hyuk tapped Naro's shoulder as he said,

"That's right. You might die since this is the monsters' universe. We have no way of knowing what will come up."

He crouched down and met Naro's gaze.

"But think about it carefully. We didn't come here to die. We came here to kill."

The clear bloodthirst radiating from Choi Hyuk's voice made Naro tremble despite being a hologram.

"The ones who need to tremble and scream are them. So let's quickly do what we came here to do."

It was impossible to discern whether Choi Hyuk's words were an encouragement or a threat from his tone. Naro hurriedly gathered information and reported.

{I-I can sense responses of Kahur Kabkuns from those larva-like monsters!}

"Ah, really...? So those are the true identities of Kahur Kabkuns?"

Indiscernible pieces of meat floated around Choi Hyuk's colonizing army, but looking at them more closely, they seemed to be the same material as those larva-like monsters. It seemed that its body was sliced up when Choi Hyuk ripped open the Kahur Kabkun to enter.

"And?"

At Choi Hyuk's next question, Naro nervously replied.

{An-Analyzing... The marked larvae are for sure connected to the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters!}

The Kahur Kabkuns connected to the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters... There was a high chance that they were Kahur Kabkuns located on the Rotten Border.

"Good. As expected, they are connected in close proximity in the monsters' universe as well."

Like this, his biggest concern was resolved.

He had been worried that, while the Kahur Kabkuns densely packed in the karmalings' universe, they might be extremely far apart in the monsters' universe.

Since the Kahur Kabkuns took strategic actions in cooperation with each other, he guessed that they might also be arranged closely together in the monsters' universe, and it turned out to be true. In fact, the Kahur Kabkuns in the monsters' universe were closer together than in their universe. This made it easier to sweep

through them.

Choi Hyuk opened a communication channel and shouted,

“The monsters don’t know that we’ve arrived yet! Our first targets are those larvae marked with blue lights! Sweep through them before they can pull themselves together!”

**

Baaang!

Shwaaah!

{Kiyeeeh-!}

It was a thrilling start.

“Waah— Hahaha! For there to be this sort of method!”

Whirlwind Fire, who had been very anxious before entering the monsters’ universe, temporarily forgot his worries and immersed himself in the slaughter.

When he twirled his fingers, seed-like flames burrowed in various places of a larva’s body.

Then, when he flicked his fingers, the flame seedlings that burrowed in its body exploded brilliantly with a bang.

{Kiyeeeehhh-!}

The larva monster seemed to possess a dimension-manipulating ability as it was wriggling its massive body while its tail was placed inside an empty void. It writhed its entire body in pain when receiving Whirlwind Fire’s attack.

The smaller larva monsters were the size of continents while larger ones were easily larger than Earth. Though its movements seemed like it was resisting, the monster didn’t possess any fighting ability and its defensive capabilities were terrible as well. High-ranked warriors could kill the monsters on their own as if popping balloons, and middle and low-ranked warriors could stick

to the monsters and dismantle them like army ants capturing and devouring their prey.

{Destruction of Kahur Kabkuns... The monsters inside are also being swept up into the dimensional openings and dying!}

The monsters seemed to have never experienced being attacked in their own universe as they didn't even resist. It seemed they didn't even have an alarm system as the monsters waiting inside the Kahur Kabkuns continued to wait before dying without knowing why.

The exhausting act of destroying Kahur Kabkuns one by one had become as easy as popping balloons at a party. In one word, it was a bonanza.

"Wahaha! So easy! So easy!"

The scene had only looked disgusting at first. However, it was a scene that made cleaning it up fun. Like pulling out blackheads from your nose! Or picking out a gigantic earwax from your ears! The pleasure from removing disgusting things was incredible.

Not only that, there was a lot to obtain as well.

'If it's like this....! I can place the noble 'Dark' in front of my name!'

Adding the name of a species in front of one's name wasn't an honor given to everyone. Even if they were descendants of a prestigious family, if they didn't have the appropriate class and contribution, then they couldn't add the name of their species to their name. Black Snow smiled as she imagined her name becoming 'Dark-Snow'.

When they burst a larva monster, the monsters inside it would automatically die. While killing large quantities of monsters, she was accumulating an incredible amount of karma. If she could change this karma into her own and report her contributions in this battle to the alliance, then it was only a matter of time before

she could add the greatly desired ‘Dark’ to her name.

‘Amazing…’

Black Snow gave Choi Hyuk a profound look. Her attitude of disregarding and looking down on him had already been wiped away. Currently, she simply had thoughts of wanting to give this lucky charm of hers a kiss.

In an instant, a third of the marked larva monsters were killed. This meant that a third of the Kahur Kabkuns in the Rotten Border were destroyed. Their contributions in this short period were unbelievable.

However, this place was still the monsters’ headquarters. Although it was late, the monsters’ counterattack began like a set sequence.

The first sign was a nasty stench.

“Urk… What is this smell…? Ueck… Urrreetttch!”

It wasn’t a normal bad smell. It was so nasty that even low-ranked warriors, who had overcome physical limits, retched at the stench.

“Ureek! Wueeeck!”

Plop, plop.

The lowest-ranked warriors ended up vomiting like a waterfall.

Then the semi-transparent wall that surrounded them churned crazily like an intestine. The light grey poja that had been clustered together like nebulae discharged grey lightning as they began to surge. The larva monsters, which squirmed with their tails in another dimension, wriggled their bodies as though they were salt-sprinkled worms while opening their enormous mouths wide open. Then they vomited.

{Eeuurrk-!}

Graaareuk.

The monsters were regurgitated from inside the larva monsters' stomachs, the Kahur Kabkuns. They poured out like a waterfall or carpet bombing.

"Euack! Dodge them!"

Cruajajak!

"Emergency retreat to the spaceships!"

The warriors' teleportation spread out in waves. The warriors who retreated inside the spaceship activated the ship's barrier and reflected the monsters pouring at them. However, not everyone could retreat in time. Although the alliance's communication and teleportation technology had advanced since the last war, allowing them to overcome the monsters' obstruction to some degree, this place was the monsters' den. Though they were uncertain what the electric shocks discharged by the poja were doing, the properly functioning teleportation function soon went down.

The ones who were unable to teleport out or were swept up by the outpour of monsters before they could teleport fell behind the ranks, and they each began to fight frantically.

It was as though the entire universe was rushing towards them with hostility.

"W-We have to quickly grab the survivors and escape!"

Keusaero, the leader of the Keumil Troop, opened his wide mouth and shouted. He believed that they had accumulated enough contribution. Enough that it wouldn't be a loss as long as they rescued the remaining survivors.

Yet-

"Wahahaha!!"

"Let's go!!"

He saw the Berserkers facing the waterfall of monsters while shouting in high spirits.

“Re-reckless!”

Keusaero became anxious when he saw them.

‘Don’t tell me… Choi Hyuk won’t retreat in a situation like this? Right? No…’

Communications were offline.

Instead, Choi Hyuk sent his message through the black flames erupting in the air.

**

‘This smell…’

Choi Hyuk felt a strange sensation from the bad stench that began to spread. No, it was a familiar feeling.

‘Death…’

The end that would inevitably come for the living. The conclusion that devoured even despair. He heavily sensed the fate of death, which he had realized during the Kundle Tribe’s funeral and had dyed his flames black.

‘But it’s different.’

It was different from the ‘end’ Choi Hyuk had realized. Choi Hyuk’s was a clean, peaceful end. However, the death he was sensing now was somewhat crooked and rotten. Giving off a disgusting stench, this sensation, which was made through the fermentation of rotten death, was changing into something familiar. The monsters’ characteristically distorted karma. It was completely different from karmaling’s karma.

‘Ah… This is…’

Choi Hyuk felt as though if he could find even a small clue, he could figure out the monsters’ secret. He began to examine his surroundings more thoroughly.

The world reflected in his eyes were entirely red and black. The

monsters' universe was filled with killing intent, hostility, and 'those to kill'. Also, within it, there was a place that was giving off an especially disgusting stench. It was so red that it seemed to be painted on his cornea rather than a light. They were the lumps of flesh gathered near the hole Handke had described as an 'anus'.

Shiver.

He didn't feel anything before, but now, just looking at them sent shivers down his spine. They weren't simple lumps. They were very dangerous. Using this vast space and the numerous Kahur Kabkuns, the monsters were planning something with these lumps.

This was why he had to examine it.

As he faced them, Choi Hyuk's mind quickly calculated the strategic merit in identifying them while his heart and blood figured out how powerful those lumps were and were surging with the desire to tear them into shreds and crush them.

An impulse stronger than when he went to watch the battle between Narci and the Steel Battleship seized him.

Choi Hyuk used his flames to write a message in the air.

{We will be starting our mission now. All forces will finish dealing with the marked larva monsters. The Berserkers, and Mack, Whirlwind Fire, and Black Snow's troops will follow me to explore the black hole area. We will retreat once we finished eliminating the larva monsters and exploring the hole area. That is all.}

Choi Hyuk's order brought despair to a certain few, but there was nothing they could do. From the beginning, the only reason they could come here was because of Choi Hyuk's strange ability that could rip the monsters' pathway however he wished and make it into a neutral pathway. This meant that it was impossible for them to return to their universe without Choi Hyuk.

At first, the leaders of each troop expressed their anger at Choi Hyuk for driving them towards their deaths, but facing an intense fight, their various calculations and schemes gradually began to erase from their minds.

The monsters' universe shook as it attempted to turn the colonizing army into mush while the colonizing army even released their despair as karma as they faced it.

Everything else disappeared, leaving only the fight remaining.

Chapter 154: Collapse (6)

When did they have time to resent?

They would rip the monsters' mouths baring teeth dripping with saliva, slash monsters' necks with their blades, and smash their foreheads against the monsters' heads. Or they would be smashed instead and turn into tatters and thrown into the sky by the monsters' curved tails piercing their sides.

Both monsters and warriors burst and were crushed like tomatoes.

"Kuah! Kuaaah!!"

Fear? It wasn't an intact emotion like that. They were simply devoured by the battlefield. As though they were flailing in water, they struggled and shouted. There was no sense of self. Since they had lost themselves, there was no need to talk about emotions. There were only endlessly swelling senses, obsessions, impulses and struggles.

"Ke... Keheck... Kehaa... Uh..."

A monster's hand pierced into Keusaero's chest, a high-ranked warrior. Swept up by a destructive karma, the wound didn't recover. Keusaero flailed his arms as he tried to push the monster away, but his strength was already below that of a child's.

Crunch!

Cruunch!

"Kuah! Kah! Krrr.... Huh..."

The sound of being bitten, his throat being ripped out, blood foaming at his mouth, and his last breath.

As soon as Keusaero lost his strength, other monsters rushed towards him. They bit off Keusaero's fingers, ripped into his wide mouth that followed his jawline, and clawed his neck until all

traces of Keusaero were completely erased from the world.

Strong warriors against strong monsters, weak warriors against weak monsters, they fought and killed each other. There were also instances where they were killed by opponents much weaker than them when they lost their stamina while fighting in this free-for-all.

“Why am I here…? Why am I here…? Just why…?”

Whenever the warriors, who had never experienced such a desperate battle, momentarily regained their senses, they wanted to reject reality. However, this was only momentary. Not long after, they were swallowed by the battlefield again.

Besides a few exceptions, all the troops Choi Hyuk dispatched this time were considered well-off.

There were troops who amassed wealth and influence by profiting immensely under the guise of planet defense like Keusaero. There were also rising stars, like Whirlwind Fire and Black Snow, who were from powerful tribes or family clans and accumulated fame and karma by only fighting winning battles. Either way, they had never experienced a gruesome free-for-all where no one knew who would live or die.

Among them were Nasir and his clan members dispatched by Choi Hyuk.

“Clan Leader Nasir! Clan Leader Nasir! This is different from what you said! You said Choi Hyuk wouldn’t drive us into a corner! But this… Look at this! Oh, my god! That’s Keusaero over there! He’s the high-ranked warrior we saw last time, right? He died!”

The Sovereign of Opportunity Nasir had promised that he would fight whenever Choi Hyuk wanted him to. Only, he added the condition that they couldn’t fight like the Berserkers. Yet, this battle… It was way beyond his expectations, but there was nothing he could do.

He grabbed his subordinate next to him by his hair and shouted,

“Stop whining! Fight! Fight with your eyes wide open! Think about the rest after you live!”

They had no place to retreat to and the only option towards survival was advancing by following the flow of warriors who pushed forward to destroy the Kahur Kabkuns and pushing away the monsters rushing at them from every direction.

“But Clan Leader Nasir! They! They! They are coming at us!”

The monsters that had completely devoured Keusaero were rushing towards them. Although they didn’t know whether the high-ranked monster that had killed Keusaero was amongst them, what was certain was that numerous middle-ranked monsters were in that group. Nasir couldn’t block them on his own.

“Haa…”

Nasir sighed. There was no other way. They could only hope to be saved. He aimed his long spear in front of him and ordered,

“Shield division forward. You take the brunt of the attack and I’ll stab them. Everyone take out your long-ranged weapons. We fire at three. We’ll deal as much damage as we can before they come close. Remember! I want to flee too. But there is nowhere to flee to!”

“Ahh…”

There wasn’t any place that wasn’t pouring with monsters. Middle-ranked monsters were common and high-ranked monsters would appear once in a while. They were lucky to have not encountered any middle-ranked monsters until now. Even if they fled, they would be temporarily mixed in with other troops before being inevitably pushed out in front of a more terrifying monster.

“I didn’t think I’d ever say these words, but… Don’t think about how to survive. Only watch the monsters in front of you.”

With a grim determination he had never possessed before in his life, Nasir tightly grasped his long spear.

“Three, two, one. Fire!”

**

The fragments of teeth were smashed and scattered. Waists were cut. Arms were sliced off. Black and red blood splattered.

Choi Hyuk was forging a path at the very front.

-!

When his sword swung by, it silently sliced the monsters in front of him in two. Like how thunder would roar a few seconds after a lightning flashed, a rumble would be heard a few seconds after his sword flashed by, leaving only monster corpses behind.

Warriors followed behind Choi Hyuk while getting hit by the various limbs falling from above them. Choi Hyuk was making a path in front, and the warriors behind him were to secure the path and protect his back. Their charge was like a comet. They flew towards the black hole while leaving a trail of sliced monster pieces behind them.

It was a fearless comet. However, the closer they got to the black hole, the fiercer the monsters’ resistance became.

Even the enormous larva monsters began targeting the warriors charging towards the black hole rather than the warriors targeting them.

Kwakwakwa!

The monsters they vomited out smashed the side of the charging party.

“Kaaaah! Daaamn it! We can’t go any further!!!”

Whirlwind Fire, who was following Choi Hyuk, cut down a high-ranked monster after an intense battle. However, as soon as he cut the monster down, two more high-ranked monsters attacked him.

The gigantic hand of one of the monsters grabbed his face.

{How laughable. I'll kill you. Invader.}

The high-ranked monster pushed Whirlwind Fire back, maintaining its charging speed. It attempted to burst Whirlwind Fire's head by strengthening its grip.

Baang! Blaaaze!

Whirlwind Fire's flames erupted blindingly. This explosion shook the monster's body, but Whirlwind wasn't able to shake its grip on his face. To make matters worse, the other high-ranked monster grabbed both his arms and attempted to rip them out completely.

Brrrkk!

"Aaaahck!"

Whirlwind Fire almost lost consciousness from the pain of his arms being pulled. He felt that he might burst into tears. If he lost his mind for even the slightest moment, his body would be pitifully ripped apart and his head would be crushed like a watermelon. However, no matter how much he kept his mind intact, he would be ripped and crushed in the end. He didn't have the slightest chance of counterattacking. Even though he crazily resisted by creating explosions, it was only a matter of time before he would be killed.

Not caring for his pride, Whirlwind Fire desperately requested help,

"Help me! Someone help me!"

However, there were only seven high-ranked warriors amongst the Berserkers, Black Snow and Mack's troops. Facing the increasingly fierce counterattack by the monsters, there were no high-ranked warriors who had the leisure to help him. Knowing this, Whirlwind still sorrowfully requested for help.

Bang!

Just then someone jumped at the monster gripping his head. Although the person couldn't completely pull the monster away from him, the monster revealed a momentary opening and Whirlwind Fire didn't miss that opportunity.

Baaang! Blaaze!

Flame wings sprouted from his back. The monster grabbing his face let go due to the abrupt, enormous explosion. However, the other monster endured and still held both his arms. The monster tried to rip his arms out while Whirlwind Fire struggled and his large flame wings flapped violently. The two twisted in the air.

Extremely exhausted, Whirlwind Fire slowly lost his concentration. He couldn't maintain his gaze on the monster in front of him as his gaze kept looking towards the battlefield.

'... They are?'

He saw silhouettes as he was turning in the air. Now that he saw them, the ones who saved him wasn't any of the other high-ranked warriors or his subordinates. Whirlwind Fire jolted to his senses.

'They are reckless...! While they are middle-ranked warriors?'

The middle-ranked warriors following behind Choi Hyuk were the ones who saved him. They were blocking the high-ranked monster that had been pulled away from him. No, they weren't obstructing it to buy time but were rushing at it in order to kill it.

Lee Jinhee ran in front of the monster, bewildering it, and every time her short sword 'Lee Jinhee's Dream' shined, her body became gradually faster and her attacks became sharper. 'Bae Jinman's Harmony', which covered his eyes, boosted her abilities and healed her wounds while 'Handke's Watch', an artillery-style weapon, fired powerful attacks whenever the monster showed an opening. 'Leah's Tuning', which looked like a lunar halo around her, penetrated the monster's karma and reduced its abilities.

‘Zero’s Silence’, a pair of daggers, continuously targeted the back of the monster’s head. Baek Seoin held his shield ‘Baek Seoin’s Premonition’ and protected everyone while reading the monster’s movements and calling out orders.

Weapons of Calling and Weapons of Sentiment. Even though it hadn’t been long since they obtained them, the executives of the Berserkers could already use their weapons as if they were a part of their body. Their close battle continued tensely.

‘Damn it…! I can’t lose!’

Whirlwind Fire, who had been struggling with the other monster due to exhaustion, gritted his teeth.

However, danger came from all directions.

“Aahck!”

This time, it was Black Snow. She had been fighting well against a high-ranked monster but quickly collapsed when another monster started attacking her as well. She was in danger and her subordinates were being slaughtered by a sudden onslaught of middle-ranked monsters.

‘Our formation will be ripped apart if this continues!’

This thought filled everyone’s minds.

“Choi Hyuk! We need to retreat!”

Commander Mack shouted while skillfully fighting against two high-ranked monsters. If Black Snow was taken out, then the formation would collapse uncontrollably. If that happened, then annihilation would be at their doorstep.

Hearing Mack’s voice, Choi Hyuk glanced behind him. Maybe it was because of the excitement of battle, but his eyes flashed with madness. Unsure why, but, while all the other high-ranked warriors were being held back by monsters, he was continuing forward without any decrease in speed.

‘Now that I think about it… What’s going on? How is he so fast by himself? Are high-ranked monsters not attacking him?’

About the time Mack was questioning this, Choi Hyuk’s heated eyes instantly became calm. The madness of battle and even his interest in the black hole seemed to have disappeared somewhere as his eyes became calm.

Gulp.

Blaaaze!

‘… Huh?’

That moment, Mack, Black Snow, Whirlwind Fire and everyone else saw it. They saw Choi Hyuk approach them.

No, it wasn’t that he approached them. Only, the space between him and them had completely disappeared. Like the universe before the Big Bang, everything existing between them crumbled into a single point.

Slice-

‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ swiped past them. The compressed universe was sliced by his blade.

Flutter…

The monsters disappeared like dust in the wind. The approximately 10 high-ranked monsters and the countless monsters invading their formation had been annihilated in an instant.

When they regained their senses, Choi Hyuk was in his original spot at the very front.

“Ha… This is…?”

The high-ranked warriors were at a loss for words.

“This… Isn’t the strength of a high-ranked warrior… Don’t tell me he’s a highest-ranked warrior? No, that’s not it…?”

Black Snow's confused gaze followed Choi Hyuk's back.

{Kyaaah!}

{Gueehhh-!}

Sensing danger from Choi Hyuk's move just now, the larva monsters simultaneously turned their gazes towards him. They vomited monsters towards Choi Hyuk. The monsters shot out by the hundreds of larva monsters all rushed forward, targeting only Choi Hyuk.

'This.. isn't good.'

Choi Hyuk frowned. There was a limit to his stamina. Unless he could use that strike just now limitlessly, it would be dangerous if the monsters' attack focused on him.

'Tsk.'

But what could he do? He prepared another attack. However, the warriors following Choi Hyuk shot out to his left and right.

"Block them!!"

"Protect the leader! We can't get out alive without the leader!!"

The Berserkers, Commander Mack, even Whirlwind Fire and Black Snow, they all madly rushed towards Choi Hyuk and blocked in front of him. They couldn't return without Choi Hyuk. However, this logical judgment wasn't all.

'He's strong!'

'That man is our leader!'

The pure strength Choi Hyuk had displayed in this intense free-for-all moved their hearts.

'As long as he's here, we won't die easily.'

'I want to be of some help!'

Even Whirlwind Fire and Black Snow, who had been wrapped up in their pride, felt an unknown sense of self-esteem and passion

tickle their hearts.

They blocked the monsters pouring at Choi Hyuk with all their might.

‘This… is good.’

A smile appeared on Choi Hyuk’s lips. Since the other warriors were backing him, he could run amok more freely.

After advancing spiritedly, he was soon in front of the black hole.

The enormous black hole and the lumps of flesh around it filled his vision.

He felt a clear sense of hostility, killing intent and unreasonable karma from the lumps of flesh.

Naro, who had analyzed what Choi Hyuk was seeing and feeling through telepathy, reported.

{That hole! It’s a Kahur Kabkun! Oh, my god… This enormous space is, in fact, a single Kahur Kabkun! Although it’s not complete yet… If it was, it’ll be a powerful Kahur Kabkun never recorded before!}

Naro’s report contained pure astonishment.

{It-it seems those lumps of flesh are there to create some sort of monster. A monster strong beyond imagination… So powerful it needs such an enormous Kahur Kabkun to cross over to our universe…}

Choi Hyuk brushed the goosebumps on his arms. He could understand Naro’s report. Even though it had yet to be born, its vigor was powerful enough to make his hair stand on end just by getting close and looking at it… If that monster was born, there was no doubt it would be a catastrophe to their universe.

Choi Hyuk recalled a name.

‘Demise…’

A demise-ranked monster had killed Flame-Sky, Flame-Rain's father. Perhaps one of those was being created.

Chapter 155: Collapse (7)

Didn’t they say the eye of the tornado was calm?

The heat from the battle cooled and the unhesitant advance stopped.

The warriors didn’t have the courage to step forward when faced with the dangerous aura emitted by the monster that had yet to be born.

A distance was created between Choi Hyuk and the warriors. Choi Hyuk faced the enormous lumps of flesh by himself.

“Leader… That is…”

Even Lee Jinhee, who said that she would one day beat Choi Hyuk and didn’t shy away from any challenge, couldn’t advance this time. She was embarrassed that her legs were trembling, but she was also relieved that she couldn’t advance due to them. She was more afraid of standing in front of those lumps of flesh than fighting a high-ranked monster in close quarters.

It wasn’t born yet? What did that matter? Even high-ranked warriors couldn’t destroy this ‘collapse’.

‘No… Perhaps even a highest-ranked warrior can’t…’

Commander Mack could tell because she had seen the highest-rank threshold.

‘It’s impossible, even with the move Choi Hyuk displayed just now.’

Of course, Choi Hyuk’s achievements had always been extraordinary. Last time, he seemed to have reached the level of high-ranked warriors when he was merely a middle-ranked warrior, and now it seemed like he had reached the level of highest-ranked warriors as a high-ranked warrior. If his current level and his Sword of Vow’s limitless power combined, then his

attack power could display the destructiveness of a highest-ranked warrior.

However, he still wouldn't be able to slice that. Although it was a monster of flesh, its nature was that of an inevitable fate, 'collapse'.

Tap. Tap.

Choi Hyuk tapped the sword hanging from his waist. The black karma flowing from his body swayed as it absorbed and analyzed the world around it.

Choi Hyuk always knew how to 'see'.

He possessed his innate skill 'Eyes of Distinction' and his first karma trait was 'Mind's Eye'. His ability to analyze his opponents had continuously grown stronger. He was especially sensitive to fates regarding 'death', which was why he had advanced enough to know the names of the fallen Kundle Tribe members during the funeral.

This was why Choi Hyuk knew.

How that monster known as 'collapse' was being made.

He smirked.

"Ha... Even after doing those things... To think that they were done due to the fear of death?"

Life and death were two sides of the same coin. Those who were born would die. This was true for individuals, species, and even universes. A long-existing universe would inevitably collapse. This monster was being made by gathering and suppressing the fate of collapse. No, perhaps, this was how all monsters were made.

The queen of the monsters gathered and changed this fate. Even though it was changed, collapse still was collapse. By shoving this inevitable fate into other universes, the queen gave her universe eternal life. This was the secret behind the birth of monsters and

the reason why the monsters endlessly invaded other universes.

That was why Choi Hyuk smirked.

“Do you think you can avoid death like that?”

If they avoided the natural fate of death, then he simply had to kill them himself.

Creak.

Choi Hyuk’s hand, which had been tapping on his sword, gripped it so that it seemed like it should shatter.

“We’ll destroy it before leaving. It’ll take a while so block all monsters so that they can’t bother me.”

He ordered the fear-stricken warriors.

“Wait...! Leader!”

Baek Seoin tried to stop Choi Hyuk with a pale face, but it was no use. Baek Seoin’s face turned white. His Intuition was going off crazily.

‘It was this! That ominous feeling!’

He had felt a nervous sensation when seeing the monsters focus only on slaughtering the glass crabs. He felt like he finally knew what it was. The reason why the monsters avoided fighting to slaughter the glass crabs was to try to obtain as much karma as they could. They needed the energy to awaken that ‘collapse’ and send it to the karmalings’ universe. The faint nervous feeling, which he had thought he had mistakenly sensed, had now materialized and was weighing down his heart.

Although he wasn’t certain... This place was dangerous. They had to quickly flee. This thought filled his mind.

“Leader!!”

Baek Seoin attempted to stop Choi Hyuk’s path with his body.

Whoosh.

Yet, his feet wouldn't move. Choi Hyuk raised his sword above his head and observed the sight in front of him. Pin needle-like vigor surrounded him. Baek Seoin couldn't do anything about the feeling that he would be sliced in two if he took a step forward.

Commander Mack pulled Baek Seoin's shoulder.

"Stand back. Even if you approached him now, he won't be able to recognize his allies in his current state... However, after gathering that much strength, he'll be exhausted after a single attack. We can take him and retreat then."

Mack was nervous about this current situation as well. However, she judged that it would be okay to let him be for a while since they weren't being pushed back yet.

'He'll give up after clashing once.'

She didn't believe Choi Hyuk could destroy that unborn monster. The monster who killed the strongest warrior in history, Flame-Sky, who had reached the peak of the transcendence level, was a demise-ranked monster. Even if this monster wasn't born yet, the unborn monster and Choi Hyuk weren't on the same level.

That was why she said to wait a little, but the monsters looked like they didn't plan on waiting.

Five minutes had passed since Choi Hyuk remained silent with his sword raised.

Riip.

The space between Choi Hyuk and the monster of collapse suddenly ripped open. A gigantic arm appeared out from it, and soon, a monster leaned its body out from the void.

"Crrk..."

The warriors seized in fright.

"A highest-ranked monster..."

Mack's sigh nailed into the warriors' hearts.

**

Looking back, Choi Hyuk had never worried about the safety of the Berserkers.

He picked Berserkers based on two conditions: those who didn't seem like they would die easily and those who wouldn't regret dying.

The reason why none of their top executives had died even though they experienced ridiculous battles every time was because of this. It wasn't because Choi Hyuk especially defended his top executives or because he took care of his subordinates so that they didn't die, it was simply because they were strong enough.

However, the top executives of the Berserkers, Ryu Hyunsung and Kim Honghyun, were pushed into a corner.

The frontlines were broadly divided into two parts: the advancing party that rushed towards the black hole, and the party that stayed back to destroy the Kahur Kabkuns. Because Choi Hyuk was in the advancing party, he could lead them as a unified group, but there wasn't anyone who could lead the rear like him. The troops dispatched from throughout the universe were busy fighting on their own than cooperating with each other.

The weaker troops suffered heavy losses while the stronger troops suffered less. The most at risk among them were Nasir's troop, the Kundle Tribe, and the glass crabs, who followed the Berserkers here.

The reason why they hadn't been annihilated yet was because of Ryu Hyunsung and Kim Honghyun's troops, who had remained behind due to Choi Hyuk's consideration.

However, Ryu Hyunsung and Kim Honghyun were only middle-ranked warriors. There wasn't anything they could do when a high-ranked monster rushed at them.

"Huu..."

Kim Honghyun exhaled. Possessing two innate skills related to combat, {Toughness} and {Sharpness}, and so even though he became a middle-ranked warrior later, he was much stronger than Ryu Hyunsung.

However, it wasn't enough against a high-ranked monster.

Kakakang!

When the monster's enormous body bashed into him, it felt like he was colliding with a meteor.

"Keuheuuu."

Yet, Kim Honghyun endured. Raising the karma ax 'Kim Honghyun's Struggle', he blocked the monster's advance. His innate skill {Toughness} and karma trait {Iron Will} greatly increased his Endurance, and he was able to instantly deflect its power thanks to his karma trait {Reflex}. That was how he was able to endure a high-ranked monster's attack while only being a middle-ranked warrior.

But that was all.

Kirrik!

When Kim Honghyun blocked its attack, Ryu Hyunsung launched his attack, but his karma sword 'Ryu Hyunsung's Commemoration' couldn't pierce its outer layer.

Ryu Hyunsung's outstanding sword techniques were of no use, and there was a limit to Kim Honghyun's monstrous physical strength and Endurance.

"Ah, screw off-!"

Kim Honghyun shouted as he pushed the monster back, but the monster charged once again.

"Kaah..."

Kim Honghyun, unable to endure it, flew back while spewing blood.

It was at this moment when Ryu Hyunsung sensed their end.

‘Is this how we die?’

Looking back, the fact that they endured this long was admirable.

Choi Hyuk, their leader, had become stronger at a monstrous rate, and every time he did, the difficulty of their battles would gradually increase. This was an expected conclusion. The moment the Berserkers’ top executives could no longer keep up with Choi Hyuk’s growth rate, that would be their end. Their inevitable downfall had come today.

Ryu Hyunsung didn’t feel any regret when faced with this reality.

He recalled his friends who had died ahead of him. In the end, only the order in which they went was different. When he thought about how he would soon die, he became peaceful.

‘Maybe I… didn’t die when I was supposed to…’

If he died now, he wouldn’t have nightmare anymore. He didn’t have to tremble at the sudden sense of longing.

Ryu Hyunsung’s heart became lighter, and for some reason, his sword felt lighter as well.

‘I’m on my way.’

Smiling, Ryu Hyunsung faced the terrifying teeth rushing at him and rushed towards it.

Piik.

Fortunately, the monster wasn’t that fast and he could deflect its attack. Slipping towards its side, Ryu Hyunsung placed and dragged his sword against the monster’s tough flesh.

Slice.

However, he felt an unexpected sensation. His sword passed through the monster’s outer layer like a ghost and sliced its flesh.

A message suddenly appeared.

{The special ability of ‘Ryu Hyunsung’s Commemoration’ has activated. Ignore the enemy’s defense.}

‘Now?’

Ryu Hyunsung obviously knew that his weapon had the special ability to ignore defenses, but it hadn’t activated once against the high-ranked monster until now. It hadn’t activated because the difference between them was too large.

He wondered why it activated now but quickly stopped thinking about it.

‘What’s the point in wondering if I’m going to die anyways? Still, how fortunate. My last battle. I’ll go after dancing to my heart’s content so I don’t embarrass my friends.’

He didn’t hold onto false hopes. Even if his sword’s special ability activated now, he wouldn’t be able to beat the high-ranked monster.

That was how Ryu Hyunsung lost himself.

From then on, his trance-like sword dance began.

Countless Kundle Tribe members and Nasir’s clan members were devoured and countless glass crabs were smashed around Ryu Hyunsung. A comparable number of monsters were killed by him as well. He occasionally heard Kim Honghyun shout, and his body was gradually turned into a mess by the monster. First was his left ear, then his right wrist, and finally, his left leg was cut off at his thigh.

‘Ah, so this is how I disappear…’ Just as he thought this, the monster stopped moving.

“… Huh?”

Ryu Hyunsung abruptly came to his senses.

{Kiyaah-!}

He saw that the monster was unable to move an inch.

Its mouth was clutched by Kim Honghyun, its body was pressed down by the Kundle Tribe members and Nasir's clan members, and it was surrounded by glass structures built by the glass crabs, which pressured the monster and energized their allies.

"... But how?"

Ryu Hyunsung couldn't understand the current situation. Kim Honghyun, the Kundle Tribe, Nasir, and the glass crabs' alliance was impressive, but it still wasn't at the level where it could stop a high-ranked monster. Something else, a power that could overwhelm the monster was restricting its strength as its power fell to the peak of the middle-ranked level.

'What's happening?'

While perplexed, Ryu Hyunsung heard Naro's voice.

{Now! Now! Quickly slash its neck! I can't endure it for long!!}

'... Naro?'

How did Naro, who was simply an AI, weaken that monster? Various questions crossed his mind, but now wasn't the time to think about them.

Gazing at the Sword of Sentiment 'Ryu Hyunsung's Commemoration', he thought,

'Friends, I don't think it's time for me to go yet.'

When his heart honoring his friends reached an extreme, 'Ryu Hyunsung's Commemoration' emitted a bright light. His sword slashed the monster's neck.

Slice.

An unbelievable victory.

"Haaa..."

The warriors could finally relax and had the time to look around the battlefield. Their surroundings were an utter hell. Killing and

being killed.

“Haaa… Damn it. I can’t tell if we’re winning or losing.”

Kim Honghyun sighed. His appearance was as pitiful as Ryu Hyunsung’s. He too had lost one of his legs, and there were three fist-sized holes in his belly.

“It’ll be difficult to continue fighting like this…”

Kim Honghyun said bitterly.

He kept looking around at his surroundings to figure out whether they were winning or losing. There was only one way for them to survive: their allies’ victory. However, he only saw an intense battle. No one could tell which side held the advantage.

Just then, the space near the black hole ripped open and an enormous monster appeared from within.

“A highest-ranked monster…” Someone spat, stricken with fear.

In this moment, the intense mood instantly leaned towards ‘defeat’.

And it was in this moment when Choi Hyuk, standing straight like a totem pole, swung his arm down, and ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ sliced through the highest-ranked monster’s body.

Chapter 156: Triumphant Return at the Road of Glory

In the middle of the war, where monsters and warriors clashed at full strength, they saw this scene unfold slowly.

{… Shhik?}

Air escaped from the highest-ranked monster that had appeared just now, and it fell as its body was sliced vertically in two. Choi Hyuk's sword strike continued on and ripped into the lumps of flesh behind it. In the opening of the lumps of flesh, a dark reddish-brown miasma surged like steam.

Chiiik!

The reddish-brown miasma covered the highest-ranked monster that had been cut into two parts.

Even split into two parts, the monster waved its large hands and struggled, but as though it was being devoured by an invisible mouth, the reddish-brown miasma melted its body and it disappeared.

However, Choi Hyuk couldn't be happy.

"Damn it… Appearing at that moment…"

His arm slumped down. Although he instantly sliced through a highest-ranked monster, because it acted as a meat shield, he couldn't fully destroy the lumps of flesh behind it. Also, he didn't have any more strength.

Biting his lip, Choi Hyuk sent out an order.

"Advancing party, turn back! We retreat after finishing destroying the marked Kahur Kabkuns."

His voice was filled with regret.

However, their reply was an incredible cheer.

“Woaaaah!!!”

When they first saw the highest-ranked monster, the majority of them assumed they would be defeated and despaired.

As young masters or ladies of the top four tribes, did they not know defeat? Who hadn’t lost someone precious to them in this great war? While there would be a difference of whether most the people they knew had died or if one or two had died, there was no one who didn’t know that defeat meant death and that it was a terrifyingly powerless experience.

Because they knew, they didn’t want to fight a hopeless battle.

They didn’t want to see those close to them dying, and they didn’t want to hurt those close to them with their deaths. The higher their position was in the alliance, the more they avoided dangerous battles, justifying that, by doing this, they were helping the alliance reserve their fighting power.

The highest-ranked monster was an existence that tore down all their efforts.

The moment they faced it, the warriors’ spirits fell. It was an existence that would ridicule their memories and struggles as it destroyed them.

Despair.

And a line was drawn over this despair.

Like a lie, the highest-ranked monster’s existence disappeared. The fear it gave them was annihilated. Their world flipped around twice in this short period of time.

They saw Choi Hyuk who returned after turning things around.

‘Ah…’

Something suddenly surged within them.

The great achievement that unfolded in front of their eyes just now.

A high-ranked warrior slew a highest-ranked monster instantly. That person was their leader. He gathered his army and was rushing towards them.

“Woaahhh!”

The shivers running down their entire body soon turned into cheers, and then a thrilling counterattack began.

The despair weighing down on their bodies was exploded by an even stronger excitement as the warriors lost their reasoning. ‘How did it happen?’ ‘How did a high-ranked warrior kill a highest-ranked monster?’ These questions weren’t important. The warriors gave up on comprehending what had occurred and left their bodies to their boiling blood.

This time, no one cared about their lives. Only victory. They only hoped for victory. They wanted to be a part of something greater.

“Smash them! Smash!”

Crussh!

Emotions could be a weakness, but at times, they would be a catalyst in overcoming one’s limits. The warriors who had been slowly, barely pushing the monsters back began to push the monsters back right away.

Before Choi Hyuk’s advancing party could arrive, monster corpses filled their surroundings like smashed star fragments and their targets, the Kahur Kabkuns, were destroyed.

“We return!”

Along with Choi Hyuk’s shout, the path to the karmalings’ universe, the path to their triumphant return, opened.

**

{… A demise-ranked monster. Do you know the meaning of this?}

“I saw it with my own eyes and failed to destroy it. Its spirit, pardon me, but it exceeded that of Exalted Wing Dark-Sound, who

I had met before.”

{There’s no way Exalted Wing Dark-Sound showed you his full strength...!}

“But the monster wasn’t complete either.”

{Hmm...}

{No, even still, a question remains. A demise-ranked monster was wounded by merely a high-ranked warrior?}

{Exalted Wing Flame-Hell! Choi Hyuk is a high-ranked warrior possessing a Sword of Vow! You clearly understand what that means, right? He annihilated a highest-ranked monster with one sword strike. It’s fine to believe his report.}

{...}

With the God Dragon Leviathan’s support, the ‘Brain’ became silent. The silence indicated the Exalted Wings’ agreement.

Choi Hyuk stood in the middle of the stone plates, which pierced the sky.

{... Then only the reward remains. Since he made such contributions, shouldn’t we allow him to set up a base in Alliance City? It’s also good to expand the military gate system rights for his race, the earthlings, and allow them to enter Alliance City.}

The God Dragon Leviathan continued his momentum and proposed a reward.

‘Alliance City’, this place was the ‘center’ which Choi Hyuk had aimed for since resolving himself on getting revenge at Marronnier Park. The city holding all the power in the alliance. The city where the ‘Brain’ was erected.

Choi Hyuk unconsciously clenched his fist. However, Dark-Sound joined in.

{Let’s discuss his reward later. High-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk has yet to complete the mission I assigned him.}

Choi Hyuk reported the situation regarding the demise-ranked monster as soon as he returned from the monsters' universe. Because of the severity of the matter, it was reported directly to Dark-Sound, and Choi Hyuk was immediately summoned to the 'Brain'.

The mission Dark-Sound was referring to right now was the complete colonization of the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. Choi Hyuk had only toppled the Rotten Border, he had yet to go beyond that.

{That will progress as is, and we should discuss the reward immediately!}

{God Dragon Leviathan, I understand you value High-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk... But please do as I say. Since he is under my jurisdiction.}

{... Khmp. Who's valuing who...}

After grumbling for a while, Leviathan became silent. He accepted Dark-Sound's proposal.

As soon as the Exalted Wings came to a decision, Dark-Sound order Choi Hyuk to leave without any celebratory words.

{Now... It's time to decide her 'treatment'. Since we don't have time, High-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk, you can go now.}

"... For life and freedom."

Choi Hyuk nodded and left the 'Brain'. Although he didn't express it, rage seethed inside.

The reason wasn't as frivolous as feeling hurt by the Exalted Wings' treatment of him considering his contributions.

'They are my final targets. The Exalted Wings...'

Even though they were physically present, he met the Exalted Wings. He stood on the 'Brain, which was known as the heart of the alliance. A day like this had finally come.

So was he moved?

‘No way.’

They were Choi Hyuk’s enemies. Even if they said it was because of the war against the monsters, they were the cause of the inequality and cruelty in the universe. While they said that all life would be annihilated if they lost in the war against the monsters, they were existences who wouldn’t bat an eye when they pushed a planet or a species into hell.

He had just met his enemies.

However, Choi Hyuk stood with his head lowered and reported in proper form. He came and left as told to.

This humiliation… Yet, he couldn’t show any traces of it.

Gulp.

Choi Hyuk swallowed his surging rage. As if he had drunk alcohol, his throat felt hot.

Choi Hyuk left the ‘Brain’. The road that connected the ‘Brain’ to Alliance City was as wide as a plaza and as long as a river. It was called the ‘Road of Glory’, and if one stood there, they wouldn’t be able to see their shadow under the blindly lights pouring around them. It was a place that even made one feel as though they were floating.

Choi Hyuk raised his head and looked towards Alliance City. His black eyes, which had now calmed, looked at the flame swaying in the distance. The flame didn’t lose its original brilliance on the light-filled ‘Road of Glory’.

Choi Hyuk wasn’t taken aback. He already knew because he had heard it from Chu Youngjin.

A smile unknowingly crept up his face.

He placed his hand in his inner pocket.

He received the summons to the ‘Brain’ immediately after

returning. It didn't matter if he rested for a bit before going considering he had just experienced an intense battle, but Choi Hyuk immediately accepted the summons after hearing news from Chu Youngjin.

He wanted to arrive here first.

{It's been a while. Is this the second time?}

Chu Youngjin contacted him through Naro. Since the technology of the fallen narolings was different from the alliance's current technology system, Naro judged that it would be able to prevent anyone from wiretapping their communication.

{That's because there wasn't much to report about. I recently joined a troop that operates in Alliance City. Since I've settled down in the center, I should have news to report to you occasionally.}

{That's good. What kind of troop is it?}

{That is... It's a little odd. What's certain is that they won't blindly comply with the alliance's decisions. Even the dweebs from the top four tribes here say that they were abandoned by their families... Still, seeing as they established a base in Alliance City, it seems they have someone behind them... I can't be certain. Either way, this is all I wanted to report but...}

It seemed the alien lifestyle suited him or perhaps the past and pain regarding Lee Hyejin had been shaken off, but his voice was bright.

He even made a mischievous voice.

{I think you'll like this news.}

{What is it?}

Chu Youngjin lowered his voice.

{The princess has returned. I heard she received a summons just now so she will be summoned in one hour.}

{…}

{Then. Good luck.}

Chu Youngjin hung up after saying in a joking manner.

That was why.

This was the reason why he hurriedly accepted the summons.

Choi Hyuk himself didn’t know why he did it…

But he grabbed something from his inner pocket and took it out. His fist was tightly clenched.

The swaying flame in the distance slowly came closer. Flame-Rain’s hair was incomparably purer and tougher than that Whirlwind Fire or whatever, who had followed him for the colonization.

“… Hmm…”

However, Choi Hyuk murmured.

He didn’t notice from afar, but as Flame-Rain came closer, he saw that her appearance was miserable. Her clothes were still smeared with blood, and her cheeks were densely stained with blood that wouldn’t rub off easily.

Perhaps it was her pride as the Flame Wing Tribe’s princess or her original etiquette, but her hair was desperately blazing, yet it was barely under control. Her hair would blaze up before dying out soon, and whenever it did, her hair, which had turned white, fluttered powerlessly. Her left arm’s movement looked unnatural, and her right arm was propping her left up. She tried her best to keep her slouched shoulders straight.

Flame-Rain bit her lips as she walked. She didn’t want to show her weakened appearance in front of them.

After returning from the intense battlefield, no triumphant return ceremony or break was provided to her. As soon as she returned, examiners, who were outwardly polite but possessed a

stiff attitude, guided her away from her subordinates, and as soon as she entered the examining room, she was interrogated like a suspected criminal under the guise of reporting.

It wasn't like she didn't know this would happen, but their treatment made her realize that 'they were being excessive' once again.

After the examination, she was summoned to the 'Brain' without an attendant.

That was why her appearance was no different from a straggler.

She was already at her limit so she didn't recognize Choi Hyuk. She simply took one step after another, doing her best not to faint.

"Hey."

She was about to pass Choi Hyuk, but she stopped when she heard his voice.

"... Huh?"

She raised her head.

Flutter.

Flower petals fluttered in front of her eyes. Choi Hyuk's hand was above her head and was slowly releasing flower petals.

"Huh?... Huh?"

She followed the flower petals and turned her gaze.

Choi Hyuk grabbed another handful of flower petals from his inner pocket and sprinkled them above her head.

He said,

"Congratulations on your triumphant return."

Flame-Rain held one flower petal in her palm and gave Choi Hyuk a sorrowful look.

"It's not a triumphant return... The number of returning

members is less than one-tenth…”

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“If a reconnaissance troop returned, then it’s a triumphant return.”

Then he stretched his hand and patted her head before passing by.

“You’re going to be punished if you’re late so hurry up and report.”

Choi Hyuk passed by her. Flame-Rain’s eyes followed Choi Hyuk before quickly turning around to observe the ‘Brain’ in front of her.

Looking in front of her, with her gaze fixed, she shouted,

“Do rookies like you come to the ‘Brain’ these days? …You worked hard!”

Choi Hyuk smiled without turning around.

Blaze.

Flame-Rain’s hair, which had been swaying dangerously, blazed in a clean, gentle flame…

As it covered her earlobes…

Then her shoulders.

She straightened her back and walked up the Road of Glory.

Chapter 157: Awl (1)

Flame-Rain stood in front of the thirteen towering stone plates. She did her best to not bend her back and tremble her legs and the tips of her eyes as she raised her head slightly.

Although she looked exhausted, she looked dignified like a queen.

{Did you find the location of the monsters' queen?}

"Although we found a few possible locations-"

{Did you find it?}

"We didn't find it."

{So you failed your mission.}

Flame-Hell spoke coldly.

Only two out of the thirteen Exalted Wings commented, Flame-Hell and Flame-Thorn. The other stone plates remained silent as graves.

{While an incredible number of highest-ranked and high-ranked warriors died in battle... You failed your mission, you say...?}

Flame-Thorn's words followed a rhythm like a song, slowing and popping at certain words, as she criticized Flame-Rain.

Flame-Rain bit her lips.

"... I am strongly aware of this fact."

'Strongly aware.' Flame-Rain was truly pained by it.

This reconnaissance mission was, in reality, a mission leading to death, yet those warriors followed her to that place while smiling. They always considered themselves as her subordinates.

After Flame-Sky died in battle, the Flame Wing Tribe abolished the monarchy.

Flame-Rain was no longer a princess, and following this, she

wasn’t able to have subordinates. Yet, there were still people who followed her. Flame-Rain had avoided them in case they would experience disadvantages because of her… Which was why she didn’t even properly know their names and faces…

‘Fools. Without receiving anything… You all went so far to protect this stupid woman…’

Flame-Rain mumbled inwardly.

The warriors had readily laid down their lives for her, yet only a hundred survived out of a thousand. That was all. The rest had died because she was weak.

She could make an excuse. ‘From the start, the Exalted Wings gave me an impossible mission!’ She could resent them. However, she didn’t.

‘Even if I did… It’s my responsibility for acting within their expectations.’

Yes, it was her fault. However, if she lowered her head in front of them and submitted because of this, it was clear that this would be an even greater fault.

Flame-Rain clenched her fist tightly as she stiffly raised her head.

“But! I cannot accept your words that I failed my mission. During the expedition over a few months, we confirmed the total area of the monsters’ universe, its topography, and three possible locations for the monsters’ queen. Not only that, we confirmed that the monsters’ forces are greater than we expected, including newly discovered ones. Of course, because of my incompetence, countless warriors… died in battle… However, we did not fail our mission. They did not die for a failed mission!”

Blaze. Blaaze!

Each and every time she opened her mouth to speak a word, her hair would blaze white.

Her flames, which usually gave off a bright yellow and orangish light, was gradually turning white. After her hair, her eyebrows, then her eyes, soon even her skin swayed with white flames; they rippled around her like wings.

Looking at her appearance, a stone plate, who had been maintaining his silence, replied.

{... Princess. Was there some progress?}

Before Flame-Rain could reply, Flame-Thorn shouted coldly.

{Exalted Wing Flame-Fog. Whether in the alliance or our tribe, there is no 'princess' position!}

{...}

In reality, everyone called Flame-Rain 'princess', even Flame-Thorn. However, no one could argue if the 'rules' were brought up. Flame-Fog quietly backed down and his stone plate became silent.

Then, another stone plate joined in.

{I too believe that the princess... No, Flame-Rain's mission wasn't a failure.}

{Exalted Wing Flame-Ember!}

Flame-Thorn raised her voice.

Unlike Flame-Fog, Flame-Ember didn't back down and shouted.

{...!}

{...?}

That moment, various indescribable thoughts raged between them. In a single second, vast amounts of information regarding the history of the alliance and the Flame Wing Tribe went back and forth between Flame-Fog and Flame-Thorn's stone plates. An extremely quick dispute created from their transcendent cognitive skills and the alliance's technology.

It was an intense argument.

In the end-

{Enough-!}

Whoosh!

Flame-Hell's stone plate rang loudly and shattered the frantic flood of thoughts. As the chairman of the Brain and the prime minister of the Flame Wing Tribe, when Flame-Hell acted, Flame-Thorn and Flame-Fog tightly shut their mouths.

Even during this commotion, Flame-Rain stood proudly, blazing with white flames.

Flame-Hell spoke.

{Flame-Rain.}

"Yes, Exalted Wing Flame-Hell."

{The mission was finding the precise location of the monsters' location, and you failed to do so. Then is the mission a failure or a success?}

Flame-Hell's voice was courteous yet cold.

"However, we found three possible locations."

When Flame-Rain argued, an enormous hologram appeared above her head. It was the map of the monsters' universe she had brought. There were three red dots on it. They were the possible candidates for the queen's location.

{I acknowledge that. So was it a success?}

"…"

Flame-Rain didn't say a word. She wasn't even taken aback. She simply proudly gazed at Flame-Hell's stone plate.

In the end, Flame-Hell gave up on waiting for her answer and said.

{You were only partly successful. Too many warriors died compared to the results you obtained.}

He was scolding her, pointing out that they died because of her. These words were clearly meant to strike her.

However, Flame-Rain didn't bite her lips. She simply blinked, blazing with white flames as if asking, 'So what is it that you want from me?'

Seeing her like this, Flame-Hell realized that there was no use provoking her anymore. She was tougher than before and more resolute than ever.

'She's definitely changed... I don't know if she's truly advanced further. However... It's too late.'

Yes, her growth had always been swift and surprising, but it was too late. Flame-Hell didn't feel any sense of danger from Flame-Rain. Instead, he pitied her. She had been the more precious girl in the great Flame Wing Tribe. Yet, her fate now rested in his hands. No matter how resolute she became now... It was too late. In fact, because she became so resolute, she might even despair even more from now on.

A long time had passed since Flame-Sky died in battle, and the moment the Flame Wing Tribe abolished the monarchy, the course of the game had already been decided.

Even Flame-Fog, who wanted to maintain his fidelity to Flame-Rain, couldn't do anything in front of him for a long time now. The only one who could protect her was herself. This was also her weakness.

It might have been more of a pain if she gave everything up and clung to him, but she always tried to protect herself with her own strength, making her easier to use.

Wasn't it the case this time? This princess volunteered to walk into hell, and she selected her troop according to the wishes of

those who hoped to be her hands and feet. The more she tried to depend on herself, the more power she would lose.

Flame-Hell decided to make another announcement. While it didn't equate to certain death, he assigned her a mission where it was highly likely she would die. For she wouldn't be able to refuse this time as well.

{Then I will give you the opportunity to fulfill the other half.}

Following Flame-Hell's words, two of the red dots disappeared, leaving only one red dot remaining.

{According to High-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk's information, a Kahur Kabkun creating a demise-ranked monster is near that red dot. Search the red dot region and destroy that unborn demise-ranked monster.}

Blaze!

The moment she heard the words 'demise-ranked monster', Flame-Rain's proudly blazing flames wavered. Seeing this, Flame-Hell said.

{Please avenge His Late Majesty Flame-Sky...}

Choi Hyuk had already wreaked havoc at that Kahur Kabkun. The monsters would obviously be prepared now. Him ordering her to enter that region and destroy the demise-ranked monster was the same as telling her to step on a visible landmine.

However, Flame-Rain didn't become gloomy from this thought. This wasn't the first time anyways.

Only, Flame-Rain vacantly gazed up towards the sky. She might have been thinking about her father. Her eyes soon returned to their unwavering state as she stared at Flame-Hell's stone plate.

She said,

"Please do this for certain. If I return victorious... Please arrange an event commemorating my triumphant return. Don't change

your words after I finish doing everything you asked."

{Your declaration just now could be considered as an insult to the 'Brain'. Why not be careful of what you say?}

Dark-Sound cut in.

Flame-Rain sighed as she turned around.

"I, Flame-Rain, am the 28th ranked transcendental warrior in the alliance. I have only now returned from the war. Since it wasn't a loss or a victory, I plan to redeem my insufficient results. As I will provide the alliance with certain victory this time, I expect a warm reception according to the alliance laws the day I return victorious. Then, due to being exhausted, I will go rest now."

{...}

The Exalted Wings showed their agreement with their silence.

They had been able to push her because she had been cooperative all this time. As the 28th ranked warrior in the alliance, she undoubtedly had the authority to request a break after returning from war. This was especially true considering she would soon step out onto the perilous battlefield again.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

On her way back down the Road of Glory, Flame-Rain discovered the flower petals on the floor. When she spread her hands, the petals gathered on top of her palm. Flame-Rain put them away in her pocket and began walking again.

With slightly lighter steps and clearer eyes, she resolved,

"If I return alive this time...."

**

The colonization of the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters was progressing smoothly. Since they had annihilated the Kahur Kabkuns of the Rotten Border and a large area, the monsters'

obstruction wasn't fierce either.

Only, whenever they found traces of karmalings who had experienced a gruesome extinction, they were momentarily filled with mixed emotions as they thought, 'They all died to be used as nutrition for the demise-ranked monster...'

It progressed smoothly with no hiccups. At this rate, it was only a matter of time before they finished the mission given by Dark-Sound and Choi Hyuk would receive his large reward.

However, Choi Hyuk didn't seem to be very motivated in colonizing. There were many instances when he stared blankly, lost in his thoughts.

"Leader, what are you thinking about?"

When Lee Jinhee asked,

"Huh? Uh... The demise-ranked monster."

Choi Hyuk would either reply like this or mumble to himself,

"... Isn't she going to contact me?"

Looking at him like this, the artillery captain Handke tilted his head, saying, "Hmmm.... If he wasn't the leader, then these definitely are the actions of a boy falling in love for the first time... This would be true if it wasn't the leader..."

Then a day came when Choi Hyuk, who acted like someone with a screw loose, regained his vigor.

It was the day Chu Youngjin contacted him again.

Choi Hyuk abruptly shouted,

"What? A subjugative expedition has already been formed? Without me? Then what about me?"

{Ah... Yes, they already left for battle.}

"Already?"

Facing Choi Hyuk's admonition, Chu Youngjin said as though

there was nothing he could do about it.

{This was originally a secret. The troop that I'm a member of obtained this information because they are very informed for some reason... But I didn't hear about it right away since I'm a new recruit.}

"Ah... But I wanted to slice it..."

As if disheartened, Choi Hyuk stretched his legs and burrowed himself into the sofa. Seeing this, Handke mumbled, 'He's in love alright. In love with fighting.' It seemed like Choi Hyuk couldn't forget the thrilling sensation he felt when he faced the demise-ranked monster.

While Choi Hyuk was wallowing in his disappointment, Chu Youngjin, who had been paused for a moment, added some more information.

{Apparently, the princess is the leader of the subjugative expedition again.}

"... What?"

Choi Hyuk's eyes shined viciously.

Chapter 158: Awl (2)

Flame-Rain didn't remember her father.

She had been too young when Flame-Sky died in battle.

What she remembered was the moment the universe united, using Flame-Sky's sacrifice as an opportunity, a few years later. She remembered how the Flame Wing Alliance had been established with cheers and how all intelligent lifeforms in the universe united under the identity 'karmalings' as they strode down the streets together. 'For life and freedom, love for all.' She spent her childhood wading amidst these heated cheers that swept the streets.

In other words, she was a part of the alliance generation.

While she was a symbol of monarchy and the very person who stimulated the nostalgia of those who grew up in the previous generation, the world she loved and the only one she knew was the alliance.

She grew up receiving the best education. As she was no longer a princess, she was no different from a lonely orphan. However, everyone in the Flame Wing Tribe treated her like their child, and back then, even Flame-Hell treated her well.

This was why she had no reason to wish for the restoration of the monarchy.

What she hoped for was to become an outstanding warrior who could contribute and return the alliance's favor.

So, in one word, she was happy.

'But… How did things become like this?'

Everything became a mess after she began completing missions as a warrior, having gone through childhood and youth.

This was because the true appearance of the alliance and the war

were very different from what she had thought.

The cheer ‘Love for all’ had completely disappeared at some point.

She would scoff whenever she heard the alliance’s salute ‘For life and freedom’.

The alliance’s cause had changed from being victorious in the war against the monsters to safeguarding the key tribes.

If they could reduce the losses of the key tribes, then they could bear the extinction of species living on the outskirts. They even began slaughtering, calling it ‘mining’, and they justified this by saying they weren’t going to give the monsters resources.

Flame-Rain couldn’t adapt to this.

When she endured once, she would soon face more severe instances. She became more and more unhappy as time passed.

From then on, her crimes increased one by one.

Insubordination.

Mutiny.

Overstepping authority.

If it were others, they would have been executed multiple times for this. However, she was released after receiving punishments on the level of probation or serving in the common ranks every time. Only then did she realize the influence she possessed.

The Flame Wing Tribe members always loved her.

Although the number of people who didn’t agree with her cause gradually grew, she was still loved.

‘Why does our princess worry about other species more than her own?’

‘I like the princess. However, I think it’s best to leave politics to Flame-Hell.’

‘My older brother died last time! Because the princess ignored the order to retreat…’

The younger the generation, the greater the number of people who were saddened by Flame-Rain, which in return, strengthened Flame-Hell’s position, but that was all.

The older generation showed their unwavering support for Flame-Rain.

‘Hey! No matter what, you cannot show dissatisfaction at the princess’s actions!’

‘Even if the royal family has disappeared, the uniqueness in her veins hasn’t disappeared. You will know soon enough.’

‘She’s the princess. We’re not at the level where we can judge her actions as right or wrong.’

They had agreed to the abolition of the monarchy only because they were swept up by the whirlpool-like situation after Flame-Sky’s death. If Flame-Rain became sufficiently strong and desired it, they were always willing to stand for the restoration of the monarchy. This fact was what Flame-Hell was most nervous about.

In fact, even Flame-Rain and Flame-Hell’s political aims were largely different.

‘The Flame Wing Tribe is the most exalted species in the entire universe! Why don’t you understand that the life of one of ours is more important than the entirety of another species? If everyone else survives but our tribe becomes extinct, then we have lost that war. But if everyone else dies and even one of our race survives, then that’s victory.’

Flame-Hell attempted to persuade Flame-Rain multiple times, but she didn’t budge. In the end, Flame-Hell resolved himself.

‘I won’t say any more.’

He believed that if Flame-Rain came to power, then their species

would go extinct. He couldn't back down.

Disciplinary actions and appeals continued, and the more he confirmed the influence Flame-Rain possessed and her true intentions, the frostier Flame-Hell's expression became – a dangerous omen.

As she knew this, Flame-Rain resolved herself to be alone.

The fact that there were many people who would die for her because she was Flame-Sky's daughter. The fact that she thought to oppose the alliance's policies. These could be the troublesome seeds that could incite a civil war within the alliance.

If a civil war did break out, Flame-Rain's side would lose. Since this would result in a huge loss in the alliance's forces, this wasn't good for both Flame-Rain herself and the alliance.

From then on, Flame-Rain didn't return to her homeland. She only traveled from one battlefield to another. She went to wars Consumables were participating in and became friends with lowest-ranked warriors. She also saved those who might have died in vain. That was how she minimized her influence within her tribe and followed her own beliefs.

Then Flame-Hell began suggesting her more and more difficult missions, using her warm-heartedness so that she couldn't refuse but also as if telling her to die there.

Flame-Rain endured everything. She believed that Flame-Hell would one day understand her sincerity. She grew stronger silently and persistently so that she could gain Flame-Hell's acknowledgment and become an Exalted Wing. So that she could change the alliance even a little. That was her dream.

'However, I won't live like this any longer.'

During the previous expedition, she realized that Flame-Hell wouldn't change.

Even if she tried to be by herself, she couldn't, and those who

followed her kept dying. Her method had been wrong. If she wanted to prevent them from dying, she shouldn't lower her head to Flame-Hell, but instead, she needed to display enough strength to prevent him from using her as he wished.

'I need to burn everything blocking my path.'

Resolving herself to this, Flame-Rain's body trembled subtly.

**

The monsters' universe was filled with remains from ruined dimensions.

Like the universe karmalings inhabited, there were planets and stars. However, there could be a planet floating on an endless stream of water, perhaps a dead turtle below that water, or even a thin two-dimensional universe hanging over it like a rag. Ripped spaces and objects from various universes were mixed together creating a surreal image.

Flame-Rain collected her breath alone in this space.

Flame-Hell assigned her two missions: checking a possible location of the queen and destroying the unborn demise-ranked monster.

Between the two, she completed searching the queen's potential location first. There wasn't anything there. The enormous power she had felt previously had seemingly been washed away. Although it felt somewhat ominous, she had no choice but to move on.

In front of her was the Kahur Kabkun in which the demise-ranked monster was located. There were no subordinates who came with her. It was because she came alone to covertly search the queen's possible location.

Flame-Rain counted the time as it passed. It was almost time for her subordinates to arrive. Her plan was to launch a surprise attack against the demise-ranked monster when her subordinates arrived and gathered the monsters' attention.

‘I wonder how many gathered.’

As it came closer to the time of the operation, Flame-Rain’s body constantly trembled due to nervousness.

‘I’m past the proficiency stage of the transcendent level. I’m at the peak of the transcendent level. I won’t lose out too much against the Exalted Wings.’

At the ‘Brain’ last time, her flames turned white and her power increased by another level. Still, she was scared.

Even though she resolved herself to no longer avoid things and to face everything with all her strength, she was scared that she would collapse here and that it would end in the deaths of all those who believed in her.

‘I have to win no matter what.’

Flame-Rain got a grip on her trembling body. Then, a strand of excitement permeated her fear.

‘I can win. If I win this time, then I can use this victory as a foothold to change everything.’

Flame-Rain took a deep breath. The light emitting from her body dispersed, leaving only heat behind. In this state, she infiltrated into the mouth of a gigantic, coiled snake that was floating amongst the remains of various universes. This place was the Kahur Kabkun where the demise-ranked monster was growing.

**

“Kuaaah!”

{Kiyeeeeh-!}

It was utter chaos within the Kahur Kabkun. Warriors and monsters tangled amongst each other as they fought intensely.

Seeing this, Flame-Rain was surprised.

‘Wow… There is a lot.’

The number of warriors gathered in the Kahur Kabkun greatly exceeded her expectations. They didn't lose out to the black swarm of monsters.

'So many…'

She felt moved and burdened at the same time.

This plan was different from before in many ways. She, who had always gone around on her own with a passive heart, personally requested for help this time. Flame-Hell? Political position? She decided to ignore them.

She had sent messages to the Flame Wing Tribe households who still followed her and to those whose thoughts aligned with her and whom she was close with, mainly from the top four tribes. She said,

'Help me. To end this tedious war, I will create a new force.'

And they replied.

With numbers larger than she expected.

The time she spent on her own at the lowest places doing the most dangerous missions wasn't for naught. She obtained friends. Those who saw her fight and those who received a favor, they all gathered here.

All Flame-Rain had to do now was win. A great victory where she could preserve her allies.

She saw a black hole in the distance and the large lumps of flesh next to it. In order to face the advancing warriors, the number of guards near them was low.

Blaze!

Still not emitting light, Flame-Rain was hiding in her heat-only state, but her temperature kept rising.

Drip.

Due to the extreme heat, the space around her melted like ice cream. She penetrated into the melting space.

When she reappeared, she was right in front of the lumps.

{Ahh?}

{Something approached.}

{Annihilate.}

While the number of monsters guarding the lumps was low, they were all elites. There were three highest-ranked monsters and numerous high-ranked ones.

However, Flame-Rain felt something was strange.

'Is this all?'

Flame-Rain revealed herself. In her hand was the Weapon of Conclusion 'Flame-Rain's Glory'. A Weapon of Conclusion was the symbol of warriors in the late stages of the transcendent level. It was a weapon that became a fate on its own. A supreme weapon, the most powerful amongst karma weapons.

Blaaaze!

She had only revealed the sword's appearance, yet white flames shot out everywhere like a sudden shower where one couldn't see in front of them.

{Kaaaack!}

A highest-ranked monster melted instantly and disappeared while the other two fled with half-burnt bodies. While their duty was to protect the lumps of flesh, they didn't dare approach the flames pouring out like a waterfall.

"Let's end this quickly and leave."

She took aim and swung 'Flame-Rain's Glory' at the lumps of flesh, making a great arc. The sliced area burned as white flames rushed out. The enormous lumps of flesh were ripped apart by the

flames and turned into ash.

Even the vicious vigor of the demise-ranked monster disappeared as if it was washed away.

‘…Huh?’

But Flame-Rain felt something was odd.

‘Is this really the end?’

Even though she had broken up the enemy forces with a feint operation, it was still too easy.

Just as she tilted her head—

Pshhh…

The white flames that covered her surroundings suddenly went out. A reddish-brown miasma rose out from the place the lumps of flesh had been and completely surrounded Flame-Rain.

She felt like she could faintly hear a voice.

{… Everything… Will… End… Even… Your fate of glory…}

Then the monster’s vigor that had disappeared occupied her surroundings and tensed sharply.

Only then did Flame-Rain realize why the great power she had felt from the queen’s potential location had disappeared.

“With that power, they forcefully completed the monster… It has already awakened.”

All she saw was the reddish-brown miasma surrounding her. Flame-Rain couldn’t measure her opponent.

The tips of her fingers trembled. She asked herself, ‘Flame-Sky, who was known as the strongest warrior in history, died killing a demise-ranked monster. Can I handle a monster like that?’

There was only one answer.

‘I have to. Believing in my fate.’

There wasn’t anyone who could help her anyways. She bit her lips, and ‘Flame-Rain’s Glory’ erupted in white flames once again.

Chapter 159: Awl (2)

She felt cold all of a sudden.

She couldn't feel her toes.

Blaze!

White flames erupted from her feet.

Psssh.

However, they weren't able to endure for long.

She felt ticklish all of a sudden.

Her back started feeling ticklish, then her palms as well. She wanted to rip her flesh out.

Still, Flame-Rain stood with her sword drawn, unmoving.

Blaze.

Instead, flames burned on her hands and down her back.

Psssh.

They soon went out as well.

Flame-Rain couldn't see anything. She only saw the reddish-brown miasma flowing around her. No, she thought she saw it, but when she looked again, it seemed like black dark matter.

She lost her sense of time. She felt like she was only caught moments ago, but thinking about it again, she felt that she might have been here all her life.

She was dizzy.

However, the 'Flame-Rain's Glory' in her hand didn't waver in the slightest. The tip of her sword took aim in front of her, and her unblinking eyes looked forward.

'It's eating away at me.'

The monster was avoiding a direct battle with Flame-Rain and,

instead, chose to slowly kill her. Covering her senses, it suffocated her like a snake constricting the neck of its prey. It was slowly exhausting her and gradually making her fall into despair.

‘But its fangs are weak…’

This was how she figured out that it wasn’t yet complete.

It was probably because they forcefully awakened an underdeveloped monster. At least for now, it was certain that it couldn’t display its full power. If it possessed power befitting a ‘demise-ranked monster’, there was no reason for it to exhaust Flame-Rain to death like this.

Completely hiding its body, it faced Flame-Rain with the safest and most certain method.

‘The problem is that, even knowing that the monster isn’t complete… There’s nothing I can do.’

She smiled bitterly. Suddenly, she couldn’t breathe, as though she was choking. It was the monster’s pressure.

Blaze!

“Haaa…”

Only after breathing in the flames blazing from ‘Flame-Rain’s Glory’ could she breathe again.

She couldn’t relax for an instant. All she could do was endure with all her strength. Without being able to counterattack, she was steadily becoming exhausted.

‘If I could clear away this miasma for a moment… If I could figure out its location…!’

She thought about the conditions required to overcome this situation, but they were all impossible. Her current strength was insufficient, and her subordinates were being pushed back. This might very well be her last battle.

‘No. No.’

Blaze!

Flame-Rain burned away the despair that had covertly entered her heart. Her eyes shined once again.

“I won’t lose.”

Her eyes blazed. Psssck. They blazed again as soon as they were put out.

She stared at the unwavering reddish-brown miasma with her blazing eyes.

**

Drip.

Flame-Rain jolted back to her senses when she felt a cold raindrop seep down her nape.

She suddenly heard the sounds of a rain shower.

‘Wh-What?’

Splash. Splash.

Cold water submerged her feet. The pouring rain flowed down her body. She shivered.

‘Rain? Why rain? …Ah!’

Taken aback by this sudden situation, Flame-Rain jolted to her senses when she attempted to wipe away the rain dripping down to her nose and mouth.

Blaze!

‘Flame-Rain’s Glory’ spewed flames. Against the white flames, the pouring shower was swept away. She was still within the darkness, a world covered with reddish-brown miasma.

“Whew…”

She let out a sigh of a relief. If she had moved her sword for even an instant or if she had taken her hand off her sword to wipe the

rain away, she might have received a fatal blow.

Just then, she heard a voice from somewhere.

{... It's useless... No need to feel... depressed...}

Frowning, Flame Rain was about to stare out into the darkness after coming to her senses when she suddenly let out a suppressed groan.

"Heuk...!"

She desperately hid her agitation as she tried her best to keep her sword in position.

She had noticed something when she was about to stare into the darkness. She couldn't see out of her left eye. The moment she had been dazed by the monster, it had devoured her eye.

Her throat was blocked by a sudden dread.

Blaze. Blaze.

'Flame-Rain's Glory' erupted into flames again, but the monster didn't stay put either.

Pssh. Pshhh.

The flames kept dying out like fire being lit on damp firewood. Only the acrid smoke filled her chest.

"Get it together. Get it together. It's okay."

She tried her best to deny it, but fear devoured ㅗㄷㄱ, gradually growing larger.

How much time had passed? Perhaps the warriors, who had rushed all the way here for her, had already been annihilated. Even if she beat this monster, was her fate to inevitably die?

"No. Get it together."

She wanted to slap her cheeks if she could, but she couldn't show even the slightest opening. Fear permeated her heart, making it heavier.

It was hard.

If this monster was as strong as the demise-ranked monster that had killed her father, then everything would have already ended without her having to suffer so much.

It might have been easier then…

This monster was slightly stronger than her, and because of this small difference, she couldn't overturn her current disadvantageous situation. This made it even more agonizing.

"Ha!"

With a shout, 'Flame-Rain's Glory' cut through the reddish-brown miasma.

Pwaaack!

The flames following her swing ferociously ripped and burned the space around it. However, even beyond it, she was still within the reddish-brown miasma.

While her flames were brilliant, she had taken another loss.

Tsss…

The joint in her left pinky turned into ash and scattered.

It had attacked again using the moment her heart wavered. She was lucky to have noticed it when she did or she might have lost her hand instead of just her left pinky joint.

"Errk…"

Flame-Rain pondered while gritting her teeth. What would be better: calmly and tenaciously fighting like she had been until now or struggling without looking back?

Thinking logically, there was a better chance of winning if she endured persistently. Waiting for an opportunity, enduring until the monster slipped up.

However, what troubled her was that, if she did drag the fight

on, the warriors who had come for her might be annihilated.

A long silence continued in the darkness. Like a revolving lantern, she recalled her past. Her childhood, youthhood, and even the time she was alone after becoming a warrior.

The rookie warrior she had discovered then.

At first, she was sorry for the things the alliance had done to his homeland, and later, his figure overcoming those perilous trials despite being so weak grabbed her attention. When he created a ‘Weapon of Vow’ despite being a middle-ranked warrior, she was unable to sleep. The fact that an outstanding warrior could be born from a weak species that the alliance had disregarded was proven by Choi Hyuk alone.

He had proven that the current alliance was wrong and walked a path to change the alliance. It felt like she had finally gotten a comrade to walk the path she had been walking alone until now.

How… wonderful that was.

When she thought of Choi Hyuk, her heart became stronger for some reason.

She recalled how he habitually fought reckless battles and won. While Choi Hyuk had a ‘Weapon of Vow’, she possessed a ‘Weapon of Conclusion’. While he was talented, she was the daughter of the man known as the strongest warrior in history.

Looking back at her current disadvantageous situation, it was no different from the countless trials he and she had been through.

Blaze. Her flames erupted more violently.

“Haha.’

As she came to a decision, her heart lightened.

“I was soft.”

She had been riding on the tiger’s back since the beginning. She had already cast the dice the moment she dragged other warriors

into this. Although she was scared that they would die due to her failure, from the start, they had gathered here prepared to die. That was also why she had called for them.

To worry knowing this, how absurd.

Her real opponent wasn't this simple monster. It was the alliance, which itself was a monster that had become too bloated. Wasn't her ambition to face off against that?

To be scared in a place like this, it was undoubtedly absurd.

"Do whatever you want...! I'll burn it all."

Blaaze!

Ttss...!

White flames violently surged from her body. The reddish-brown miasma continuously put them out, but Flame-Rain didn't stop and continued to emit flames.

She changed her tactic. She would shave off its flesh even if it meant giving up her bones.

'Flame-Rain's Glory', which had only been keeping the darkness in check until now, acted first.

Slowly at first, then becoming faster and faster, Flame-Rain danced.

Her sword sliced the world horizontally then again vertically.

"My fate is glory. However, my glory has yet to begin!"

Flame-Rain's body blazed with flames.

That moment, as if it had been waiting for this, the monster began devouring her piece by piece.

First, her smooth calf, her round shoulder, soft cheek, then glossy hair. It ate them one after another.

Flame-Rain's body kept disappearing. Her sword didn't even touch the monster.

‘Just once…’

Flame-Rain gave up on thinking. She focused entirely on her sword. As she ripped apart the space around her, she hoped to find its trace!

However, even her hand had disappeared at some point.

The last thing Flame-Rain saw was the darkness.

Then she saw a single sword erasing this darkness.

The reddish-brown miasma, which she couldn’t burn no matter what she did, was erased horizontally as if rubbed by an eraser.

Through the erased miasma, the figures of Choi Hyuk and a monster, which looked like a thirteen-year-old boy, were revealed. The monster was glaring at the new perpetrator, Choi Hyuk. However, Choi Hyuk wasn’t very interested in it.

“Flame-Rain?”

He quickly examined the inside of the reddish-brown miasma, but he couldn’t find Flame-Rain. Instead, he felt a murderous intent that made his heart tighten.

‘… This is troublesome.’

The demise-ranked monster that looked like a boy was targeting Choi Hyuk.

**

“Dark-Sound had ordered the Berserkers to completely colonize the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. However, since the Berserkers are an independent troop, how we go about completing this mission is up to us, right? ‘Knowing that a Kahur Kabkun housing a demise-ranked monster is near us is like an itch at the back of our heads. We can’t proceed without subjugating it. So we determined that we can only complete Dark-Sound’s mission perfectly after we deal with that demise-ranked monster first.’ There you go. Good enough?”

"… Yes."

Choi Hyuk had made up this excuse since Baek Seoin told him he needed at least one to go off and help Flame-Rain before following after her.

The situation on the battlefield wasn't good by the time he arrived there.

The demise-ranked monster, which had yet to be born, had already awakened, and Flame-Rain was trapped in its reddish-brown miasma for two hours.

Due to the unexpected progress of the battle, the warriors who had gathered for Flame-Rain were agitated. Still, they couldn't retreat without knowing whether Flame-Rain was alive or not so they continued to fight nervously.

Choi Hyuk wanted to save Flame-Rain no matter what.

Thinking about how she was assigned to another dangerous mission after barely surviving her last and about how she might truly die this time, his body moved instinctively.

'Again? Again? Will someone die regrettably again?'

Like Richard? Like Jung Minji? Although it wasn't like he directly thought about them, the reason why his chest felt tight was probably because he had experienced their deaths.

Also, since it was Flame-Rain, he couldn't just wait and see.

However, he couldn't help but let out a sigh as soon as he looked around the reddish-brown miasma she was trapped in.

There was nothing he could do.

Even with the accumulation of experience from the previous fight and the wars he partook in afterwards, as a high-ranked warrior, there was nothing he could do. His body stiffened just from looking at it.

'As expected… It's strong.'

He knew that his fate ‘never losing and slashing without fail’ was only starting to be put to the test and was too weak to face the monster known as ‘collapse’.

He was well aware that, even if his nature was to enjoy fights, his outstanding talent allowed him to know the sheer difference between him and his enemy. What Choi Hyuk always possessed was ‘confidence’ not ‘arrogance’. Also, his opponent this time was one he wasn’t ‘confident’ in beating. Despite knowing this, Choi Hyuk still came here.

‘Flame-Rain… At least say something.’

But the reason why he came was because he believed in his sword skill called the ‘First Sword’. While Choi Hyuk didn’t possess the ability to create an opening on his own, if Flame-Rain could create an opportunity, then he might be able to properly assist her.

‘An opportunity… Just a moment’s opportunity.’

From then on, Choi Hyuk didn’t blink.

Even though the Berserkers who had followed him here had joined the other troops and were fighting intensely, Choi Hyuk observed the distant reddish-brown miasma.

Holding ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’, he gulped down the impatience and nervousness that arrived at his heart one by one.

That moment, Flame-Rain changed her mindset and began struggling with all her might, and the reddish-brown miasma, which appeared to be impregnable, began to ripple. Weak points began to appear.

‘Flame-Rain!’

Choi Hyuk, who had been standing still like a rock, waiting for an opening, realized that this was his opportunity.

The nervousness, restlessness, rage, and memories he had swallowed exploded at once. Like a universe being created after a

big bang, it erased everything.

Choi Hyuk called this sword strike the ‘First Sword’.

Even sound disappeared with a deafening boom.

Tu-! ...!

Like its name ‘First Sword’, everything was erased.

The space between Choi Hyuk and the reddish-brown miasma in the distance as well as the reddish-brown miasma itself.

Following the swing of Choi Hyuk’s sword, history itself was erased and only the mark of his sword was recorded as the first and last entry. His sword demolished everything in existence in order to become the first.

Since the space between Choi Hyuk and the miasma had been erased, Choi Hyuk was standing in the middle of the miasma, and because the miasma was erased in a horizontal line, he caught a glimpse of the demise-ranked monster that had been inside.

“Flame-Rain?”

However, he didn’t see Flame-Rain.

Only the ill-tempered demise-ranked monster’s murderous intent tightened powerfully around him.

Since he had put everything into his ‘First Sword’, he didn’t have the strength to avoid its attack.

{... Foolish... Death...}

The monster, whose appearance was that of a thirteen-year-old boy, said unpleasantly as it slowly raised its hand at Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk squeezed all his remaining karma to try to avoid its attack somehow.

Slice.

That moment, something flashed past the monster’s neck.

{... Huh...?}

Before the monster could say anything—

Blaaze!

White flames completely burned its sliced head and body.

The monster's small figure had been revealed due to Choi Hyuk's sword.

And, the moment the monster's attention was focused on Choi Hyuk, what cut its head off was 'Flame-Rain's Glory' which had been waiting for this opportunity.

"...Flame-Rain?"

At first, Choi Hyuk didn't see her. All he was a single sword.

However, soon, her tattered figure appeared from the sword handle.

Although she was missing an eye and her body was cut and ripped in various places, she was alive. She had only fainted.

Karma was shapeless.

Focusing all her concentration on her sword, she had assimilated with it. Then, like how the monster had hidden itself, she too hid her traces within her sword and, supported by Choi Hyuk's intrusion, launched a surprise attack on the monster.

That was how Flame-Rain and Choi Hyuk became 'demise-ranked monster killers'.

The meaning behind this great accomplishment was beyond their expectations.

While she might be known as an eccentric despite being the Flame Wing Tribe's princess, Flame-Rain, who was a transcendental warrior, hadn't been able to obtain military distinction.

While he was a genius who created a Weapon of Vow despite only being a middle-ranked warrior at the time, Choi Hyuk was

undervalued as he was of a weak species from a planet on the border.

In this moment, they had finally come out from the behind the curtains.

Riding on the tiger's back – The moment you got off the tiger's back, it would eat you. Basically, there was no turning back.

Chapter 160: The Fourteenth

By the time Choi Hyuk saw Flame-Rain again in the Speckled-Light Tribe's infirmary, she was uninjured. From her eyes, which shined brighter than the stars, to her round shoulders, she had completely healed from the injuries she incurred when battling the monster.

She was sitting down comfortably and was looking up at the star-filled universe. When Choi Hyuk entered, she became surprised and stiffened blankly. Choi Hyuk saw her eyes tremble.

"You're fine? You were severely injured."

Choi Hyuk had been in a similar state as well back when he was injured by Narci, who had been much stronger than him. He was able to recover quickly because Commander Mack had given him one of her horns. If she hadn't, then it would have normally taken much longer. However, Flame-Rain had completely recovered in two days.

Choi Hyuk found it odd, but Flame-Rain didn't seem to be in the right state of mind to answer this question.

"That was... you?"

Still looking at him with confused eyes, she was barely able to speak those words.

Choi Hyuk firmly stared into her eyes.

"The one who rescued you? Yeah."

"How..."

"I slashed it because I could."

Flame-Rain's expression, which had stiffened at his simple answer, soon relaxed. Then she frowned before shouting,

"Hey! Is that as easy as you say?! You said you're only a high-ranked warrior!"

“Now I’m a highest-ranked warrior.”

He said in a manner as though he was saying his pimples cleared up after a night’s rest. However, it really was like that. It was different from when he needed a special enlightenment and Commander Mack’s assistance to advance into the high rank. After rescuing Flame-Rain and sleeping due to exhaustion, he woke up as a highest-ranked warrior.

It wasn’t all that surprising though. Choi Hyuk possessed a great understanding of his fate, enough that he could slash a highest-ranked monster with a single swing previously. What he lacked was retribution, but since he slashed a demise-ranked monster, though it was incomplete, it would be even weirder if he didn’t advance.

“Eiik…! Ha! Huhu…”

Seeing his attitude, Flame-Rain was at a loss for words before giving up and laughing absentmindedly. While she wanted to shout, ‘Even if you’re one, a highest-ranked warrior can’t slash that reddish-brown miasma!’, but she gave up on it. Since Choi Hyuk wasn’t the type to explain thoughtfully, Flame-Rain decided to explain what she had seen and felt.

“Did you know? Its reddish-brown miasma. Slashing through that was actually more difficult than slicing its actual body. Because it wasn’t fully grown, its own endurance was low. That was why it put all its strength into its reddish-brown miasma to avoid a direct confrontation. I wasn’t able to clear away the miasma and was losing… But your sword slashed through it. Even though my memories of that moment had completely disappeared, strangely, I can vividly remember the pitch-black sword that erased everything and pushed its way through. It was such a strong, fundamental power that it surprised me. But people say that it was your sword.”

Flame-Rain calmly met Choi Hyuk’s gaze. ‘Now you know why I

was surprised, right?' Choi Hyuk felt a bit embarrassed for some reason and scratched his nose once before unsheathing his sword.

Cling.

He stuck 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' in front of her. Its pitch-black blade as well as Choi Hyuk's swaying black karma. Choi Hyuk attempted to explain.

"Is it that surprising? It's because you shook the monster up. If not, then I would have never been able to slash through the miasma."

While it was rare for Choi Hyuk to be bashful, Flame-Rain didn't notice as she was busy examining 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint' and Choi Hyuk's karma on it, seemingly entranced.

"Amazing... A fate no one in the alliance has ever created... Even though it's still weak, it possesses a sharpness that can cut the fate of 'collapse'. A power to deny all things established."

Tap. Tap.

The more she examined it, her hair began to stand on its end one after another. Pure white flames dimly blazed in her eyes like refined silver.

That moment, she looked at Choi Hyuk with a bright expression.

"If it's you... If it's you! You can end this war!"

"...!"

Not suiting the situation, her smile was so brilliant and her skin, on which her flames faintly blazed, was so lovely, that Choi Hyuk had to close his eyes and avoid looking at her.

A peaceful darkness welcomed them.

**

That day was also the day Flame-Rain's triumphant return ceremony was held. Because of the promise Flame-Rain had

received beforehand and since the public's opinion couldn't be covered up because there were quite a few warriors from the top four tribes who participated in the expedition, their triumphant return ceremony was arranged without any problems.

Flame-Rain's subordinates planned a triumphant return march from the infirmary on the edge of Alliance City, cutting through the city and the Road of Glory, to the 'Brain'.

"Let's go. You're going on your triumphant return march."

"Triumphant return march? From where? Ah, will we go back out into space and act as though we've just returned? Eh, you're supposed to march as soon as you return victorious, but because I was injured like a fool..."

Flame-Rain mumbled as she followed behind Choi Hyuk before being surprised in front of the infirmary.

All the warriors who had fought with her had gathered, fully armed, on the not-so-large road. They were so well disciplined that she couldn't even hear a single breath from all of them.

However, when Flame-Rain stepped out, their gazes turned towards her simultaneously.

Thud, thud!

Flinch!

Flame-Rain was taken aback when the countless number of warriors with rigid expressions turned to look at her.

After seeing their expressions relax, she smiled awkwardly.

Gentle smiles were on the warriors' faces, then they opened their mouths wide and cheered.

"Woaaah!"

Their cheer was loud enough of to shake Alliance City, the capital of the alliance.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Completely contrary to their disciplined postures and unable to contain their emotion, the warriors stomped their feet and banged their weapons as they rushed to Flame-Rain and hoisted her up in the air.

“Woaahh!”

She was thrown up in the air, accompanied by their cheers, and their raised arms received her again. Stepping on each other, some even taking to the air, they tangled together to create a tidal wave as tall as a building. At the top, Flame-Rain rode the tidal wave of warriors as she was propelled forward. Beside her was Choi Hyuk, who had been hoisted up alongside her without realizing it.

Choi Hyuk had a bitter expression.

Seeing him like this, Flame-Rain laughed.

The citizens of Alliance City cheered as well as they watched the enormous wave of warriors marching through the city.

-The warriors who defeated demise!

-The biggest military merit in the history of the alliance!

-We hit first and defeated demise!

Multiple cheers mixed together and echoed out. They had beaten a demise-ranked monster that could have brought despair to the alliance with their skill and without relying on a plan. That wasn’t all. They beat the monster in the monsters’ universe, in the middle of the enemy camp! The alliance, that had always defended and taken losses, was now starting its counterattack!

The excitement of the marching warriors and the observing Alliance City citizens was beyond their expectations. To be this happy because they won!

While being propelled forward, Choi Hyuk saw their faces.

Amidst the crowd that had gathered, he saw the commander-in-

chief of the Shapley Supercluster, Armor-Phantom, Night Sovereign Ding, who caused a conflict on Dragonic, and even Hashishi and Manta, who he had clashed against during the recruit training of the Kundle Tribe. He looked down on all of them. He saw their bitter, downcast looks.

At first, Choi Hyuk was dazed but suddenly felt a sharp sword-like emotion jumbling in his stomach. It felt chillingly pleasant. It was now time to kill those who he needed to kill, and there was almost no one left who would block his path. With every step he took, their chains and shackles that sloppily wrapped around to restrain him fell off one after another.

Finally, his shackles, his enemies, were only the Exalted Wings.

His enemies that he didn't even know the faces of were close. If he stretched his hand out a little further... Not one would remain...

'There really isn't a lot left now.'

Swallowing the blades that wanted to slice his stomach open and rush out, Choi Hyuk was barely able to smile.

**

{We didn't know that the demise-ranked monster would be awake. To be able to defeat a monster like that... I express my respect for your military merit. Flame-Rain.}

No matter what he thought inwardly, Flame-Hell respectfully greeted Flame-Rain.

"I didn't accomplish it alone."

Greeting modestly, Flame-Rain shared her merit with Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk lowered his head slightly.

Seeing those two, Flame-Thorn spoke in an unpleasant voice.

{Please don't misunderstand me... But something is odd. It was a demise-ranked monster. A monster like that had awakened, yet is it possible for a warrior of the proficiency stage of the

transcendent level to defeat it? On top of that, a warrior who had just become a highest-ranked warrior was able to provide assistance? If the monster was so weak, then I don't think there's a reason to call it a 'collapse'...}

Flame-Ember immediately cut in at Flame-Thorn's thorny words.

{Considering the testimonies and records, the demise-ranked monster that appeared this time wasn't complete. However, I heard that the nature of its power was undoubtedly that of demise and that its strength wasn't below ours, it might even surpass it.}

{However, since the level of the warriors who participated in the expedition was low... Couldn't the reports have been exaggerated?}

{No, that why I'm saying!}

Flame-Ember and Flame-Thorn were about to argue once again, but Flame-Rain cut them off.

"I would like to request something."

Unlike before, her attitude exuded composure.

{...}

In this strange mood, the Exalted Wings waited for her request in silence.

"I request for a reordering of the alliance ranks."

Immediately after those words, Flame-Rain's skin blazed with chillingly white, transparent flames. It was different from her previous orange flames and even her white flames seen recently.

Her vigor surged out without holding anything back. She was clearly showing off her strength.

{Hmm...}

{Huu...}

There was no meaning in distinguishing who mumbled. Everyone mumbled before swallowing their silence. Flame-Rain

had been at the proficiency stage of the transcendent level. She, who was the 28th warrior in the alliance ranks, had grown tremendously after overcoming this trial. Her flames, which displayed her full strength, proved everything.

She had passed the mid-stages and was completely in the late transcendent level. Her power was now comparable to Flame-Hell and Dark-Sound, who were the strongest of the Exalted Wings.

Even Choi Hyuk widened his eyes in shock.

'I knew her wounds healed too quickly…'

She had obtained much more than she lost. While Choi Hyuk accumulated Retribution from facing the demise-ranked monster, Flame-Rain had accumulated the most. Choi Hyuk shook his head after seeing Flame-Rain, who had already been strong, become even more unbelievably strong. 'So there was another monster here.'

{Ranks… Ranks… Will giving you the 14th rank be sufficient? As you know, it is the greatest rank for a warrior.}

Flame-Thorn's attitude, which had been busy ridiculing Flame-Rain, changed. As long as her ability was confirmed, there was no use trying to lower her contribution.

However, Flame-Rain shook her head.

Rank 14. The reason why this was the greatest rank for a warrior was simple. There were 13 Exalted Wings who were tied for first.

Therefore, what she wanted was one thing.

"No, I want to be a member of the Exalted Wings."

{…}

{… Then won't there be five Exalted Wings from the Flame Wing Tribe?}

{… But she has the qualifications.}

{...}

Silence and murmurs immediately covered the Brain. It was a dilemma. The Exalted Wing couldn't simply agree through silence nor could they clearly oppose it either.

{... I op-oppose.}

Flame-Thorn, who had fallen into a state of shock, jumped to oppose a few moments later.

Following this, Flame-Hell stated.

{Flame-Rain. While the Exalted Wings need to possess a power stronger than anyone, one cannot become an Exalted Wing with just that.}

Flame-Rain was still composed. Cheers chanting her name still rang in her ears. She was already the alliance's hero and was fully justified in her actions. On top of that, she had a measure in dealing with the other Exalted Wings' wariness. Even Flame-Hell would have no choice but to acknowledge her in the end.

"Yes, of course. Exalted Wings are those who lead the fate of the great universe. Each member has to propose a future their fate would reach... But I have already shown you this."

{... What is it?}

"The end of the war."

{...}

"Now is the time to recover what we have lost. I, as the 14th Exalted Wing, will be the commander-in-chief in attacking the monsters' universe."

{... That's dangerous.}

"Staying like this is more dangerous. Like how the monsters avoid getting noticed while capturing our planets and creating Kahur Kabkuns, I too will avoid their notice and establish our base and fortress. I will make preparations so that more warriors can

take part in the attack more safely.”

{...}

A heavy silence settled. A petite lady stood in front of 13 stone plates. The entire universe perked its ears at her words.

“We need to continuously mess up their plans. The more we do so, the tougher our defensive line will become. Didn’t Highest-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk completely colonize two superclusters in the quickest time in the alliance’s history because he swept through the demise-ranked monster’s Kahur Kabkun and the many Kahur Kabkuns affiliated with it in a single action this time? Even though our defensive line expanded rapidly, isn’t it easier to defend than before?”

{...}

The Exalted Wings’ silence continued.

{Eu...!}

Only Flame-Thorn protested. However, sensing that the flow had already been overturned, Flame-Hell stopped her.

{Stop.}

Then, with the following silence, it was decided.

Baaang!

With a bang, the ‘Brain’ shook. The 13 stone plates that were spread an equal distance apart were slightly pushed away, and another stone plate arose from the space created. A white stone plate that reached the sky was engraved with a waterdrop flame symbolizing Flame-Rain.

{Congratulations, princess. When you blazed with flames... It felt like His Late Majesty had returned.}

Flame-Fog, who had always been silent, congratulated her with a trembling voice.

Hence, the 14th Exalted Wing was born.

**

“Wow…”

Choi Hyuk left the ‘Brain’ slightly dazed. Although Choi Hyuk also received some rewards, after seeing Flame-Rain become an Exalted Wing before him, he wasn’t too interested in what he had obtained.

‘An Exalted Wing… If you become an Exalted Wing, then you can probably see other Exalted Wings face-to-face, right? Then should I also aim for that?’

Choi Hyuk had decided that the Exalted Wings would be his final enemies, yet the only one he had seen in person for a moment until now was Dark-Sound. Besides that, he had met them indirectly at the ‘Brain’. If he wanted to get revenge, he had to at least be able to see them. He needed to get closer to their core.

“Flame-Rain is going to set up in the monsters’ universe…? Then do I have to go there too?”

Attacking instead of defending. It was a completely new opportunity. If he took advantage of that, then he would be able to make great contributions, and if he did that, then he could take a step closer to the Exalted Wings. Choi Hyuk was walking while thinking this when his expression suddenly stiffened as he stopped in place.

A shadowy darkness had suddenly enveloped him. He couldn’t see, hear or feel anything.

Choi Hyuk calmly turned his gaze.

“For life and freedom. What is it that you want from me, Exalted Wing Dark-Sound?”

A glint appeared on Dark-Sound’s eyes, who had his arms crossed. It was because he didn’t expect Choi Hyuk to find him so

quickly. However, he didn't show his surprise and said,

"Amazing, isn't she? Flame-Rain... She acted well. To think that she would declare she would go to the monsters' universe instead of staying in ours... With that one move, she silenced all the other Exalted Wings from other tribes who were scared of the increase in the Flame Wing Tribe's influence. On top of that, her flames... charming, aren't they? To the point Flame-Fog returned to her side... It seems that they are moved to tears when they see amazing flames."

"..."

Choi Hyuk didn't know how to reply so he remained silent.

Dark-Sound approached Choi Hyuk without making any sound and said,

"Flame-Rain. She's a good friend. However, don't become so close with her."

"..."

Dark-Sound continued to speak weird things, but his next words were shocking.

"I know it all. You... hate the alliance so much that you want to erase it, right? That's why I'm saying this. Be careful. To your enemies, you can't let them know that you hate them. You need to make them misunderstand you. Only then can you snag an opportunity."

While saying this, Dark-Sound's eyes boiled with hatred for the alliance.

"So don't be close with Flame-Rain. If possible, it's better if it seems like you are hostile towards her. Only then will they not be wary of you."

Choi Hyuk saw a faint white light (goodwill) from Dark-Sound's cold eyes.

However, whether he was someone to kill or keep alive… As if his Eyes of the Judge were covered by something, he only saw a faint shadow. He couldn’t distinguish what it was.

Episode 10 - Calculations of Revenge

Chapter 161: Gathering and Scattering (1)

To Choi Hyuk, the time spent with Flame-Rain was…

He would either have tea with her when she suddenly visited or they would talk for a while, and she would only visit for less than thirty minutes every few months, sometimes even only once a year. That was all, yet… it was weird.

It didn't feel awkward when he met her, and since it felt like they had conversed throughout this entire time, it instead felt like the blood and slaughter that were their daily lives was as faint as a dream.

Choi Hyuk opened his eyes at the 'Tower of Warriors'. The karma that had been sticking next to him dispersed like butterflies. While this place was called the 'Tower of Warriors', its true appearance was like that of an enormous whirlwind of karma. Within this place, where everything was floating as if there wasn't any gravity, Choi Hyuk raised his floating body. Specks of light chaotically flashed by his still fuzzy vision, and when the 'Light of Eternity' emitting from the center of Alliance City reflected on them, they would create all sorts of shadow-like symbols. Swords, shields, crystals… Weapons he could identify, and some he couldn't, flashed before disappearing.

The 'Tower of Warriors' was the tomb of karma weapons.

When warriors died, their karma weapons would slumber in this place. The unfulfilled callings, sentiments, vows, and conclusions of dead warriors gathered together to create a huge flow of fate, and the Exalted Wings used this power to handle the Net of Fate. It was the alliance's symbol along with the 'Brain'. The right to stay here wasn't given to anyone.

Choi Hyuk stretched his hand out to his waist and looked for 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'. When he placed his hand on its handle, only then did it feel complete. The refreshing sensation of morning

overcame him.

When he slowly lowered his body to exit the tower, the silhouettes of the karma weapons that filled the tower would surround his body. When his body lowered to an appropriate level, like elevator doors opening, the silhouettes dispersed on their own.

As soon as he landed on the lowest part of the Tower of Warriors, he heard Lee Jinhee's chatting voice.

"Wow... Then Flame-Rain was on the battlefield in 2002? And that was before they started colonizing the Laniakea Supercluster?"

"Yeah. Since the frequency of discovery in the Laniakea Supercluster was so low, and when I arrived, monsters had already occupied various places... It was really intense that time. I almost died numerous times."

"Do even transcendent warriors get in danger?"

"Of course! Also, I was a highest-ranked warrior that time."

"Then you entered the transcendent level in only ten years?"

Hearing Lee Jinhee's shocked voice, Flame-Rain brushed her hair as she boasted,

"Everyone's surprised by my growth."

Lee Jinhee exaggeratingly lowered her head.

"Yes, yes, of course, Exalted Wing. Wow, anyways, hearing your story feel a bit surreal. In 2002, Earth didn't even have smartphones. I don't even remember that time well. Ah, can I call you unni?"

Flame-Rain smiled as she waved her hand while Baek Seoin mumbled in shock,

"In 2002, Korea was a pot of craziness because of the World Cup. So the alliance was in the middle of war back then too. Well, if we look at the number of years, then the alliance has probably been

fighting since prehistoric times... The alliance wasn't made for nothing I see."

Flame-Rain looked up. Shadows of the karma weapons were cast above randomly. Countless warriors had died, and the Tower of Warriors, which grew larger every time they did, was already as wide as multiple stadiums and so tall that one couldn't see the top.

"Yeah... It wasn't easy. So the earlier and more key members have a stronger compensation mentality."

Flame-Rain's voice lowered.

"2002... The world cup that opened in South Korea and Japan. I saw it too. I studied a lot about Earth. It was a beautiful planet. For Earth to become like that... I'm sorry."

Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee were taken aback by Flame-Rain's words.

"No! There's no need for you to be sorry."

"Yeah. In fact, we're grateful to you, unni."

Flame-Rain smiled weakly.

Dim flames blazed in her eyes. Her voice became even lower, and it rang even deeper.

"I... am going to change the alliance. Starting from the monsters' universe that I am assigned to, I will change the alliance into one that doesn't distinguish between the center and the borders, where all warriors are respected and fight indiscriminately and where no life will be treated as a Consumable! I will create an alliance that is truly for life and freedom. I will endure, no, become stronger in the monsters' universe and return. Starting the change from there, I will change even our universe."

Seeing her tightly shut lips and faintly blazing eyes, Lee Jinhee's mouth became agape. Led by Flame-Rain's passion, she unknowing said,

“Me too. I want to see that world…”

“You will.”

Flame-Rain nodded firmly.

Choi Hyuk, who had been watching them from the back, joined in with a slightly confused voice,

“Just when did you all become so close?”

While they should have seen Flame-Rain with him when she visited, from his knowledge, Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, and the others hadn’t talked with her before.

Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin were startled by Choi Hyuk’s sudden appearance and quickly greeted him. Flame-Rain replied leisurely as though she had already been aware that he was behind her,

“We became close while waiting for you to get up.”

“You were waiting for me?”

Flame-Rain went over and pulled Choi Hyuk’s wrist.

“Let’s go. I’ll show you my homeland this time. While it’s very different from Earth, it probably won’t be bad.”

The cheers and jeers of the Berserkers’ executives, who were out in the plaza, simultaneously rained down on them as Flame-Rain disappeared with Choi Hyuk.

**

Flame-Rain brought Choi Hyuk to the fountain of light, no, the lake of light in the center of Alliance City. This place, called the ‘Light of Eternity’, was like the sun as it shined a light on the entire city, which was as large as the moon.

She grabbed his wrist and pulled him step-by-step towards the Light of Eternity.

“If the Brain and the Tower of Warriors are the symbols of the alliance for all members… This place is the symbol of the Flame

Wing Tribe, who possess absolute influence within the Flame Wing Alliance. It's a place of privileged access."

She said in a slightly bitter tone as she submerged herself completely in the light.

While the 'Light of Eternity' was a device that provided energy to Alliance City, it was also a two-way gate that led to the Flame Wing Tribe's homeland. The moment Choi Hyuk was about to pass through the 'Light of Eternity' while being led by Flame-Rain, Choi Hyuk heard a cold message.

{Other species are prohibited from approaching.}

"He's my guest."

{Ah, pardon me! I welcome your return to our homeland, princess.}

As soon as Flame-Rain cut in, the voice that had been cold towards Choi Hyuk became like a warm breeze.

Immediately after, Choi Hyuk entered the Flame Wing Tribe's homeland, 'End of the Universe'.

At a glance, this place seemed to be within a painting by Van Gogh. Everything he saw was a flame. As though a great painter had paid great care to his every brushstroke to create harmony, all sorts of textures, shapes, and colors of flames meshed together, like Pointillism, to create an incredibly noble scene, from violent flames to smooth flames and from white flames to green, pink, and purple flames.

"... This place is?"

Choi Hyuk opened his mouth without realizing it, and Flame-Rain didn't reply as she took a deep breath.

The flames around her blazed as if blessing her. These flames, which were transparent and white like her own distinct flames, made it feel as though the entire universe was protecting her.

‘Is this what they call a princess?’

Choi Hyuk admired unconsciously.

“It’s a wonderful place, isn’t it?”

Flame-Rain said only after taking deep breaths without a word for a while.

“End of the Universe. Since it hasn’t been long since the big bang when considering the passage of time relative to this place, the Flames of Beginning, which birthed the universe, still remain intact here. The Flame Wing Tribe are the descendants of the Flames of Beginning that conceived the universe. That’s why the diehard nationalist also call us the descendants of the Creator.”

She kept pulling Choi Hyuk’s wrist as she showed him various locations. She collected the most delicious flames and let Choi Hyuk taste them and even introduced him to the artistic flames kindled by the Flame Wing Tribe.

In this place, where everything was made up of flames, there was no need for a city, buildings, or even clothes.

However, each and every flame here had the touch of the Flame Wing Tribe. This was what the Flame Wing Tribe usually did. They consumed and created flames.

The Flame Wing Tribe’s emotions started and ended with flames. The desire they possessed from the beginning was to kindle a more beautiful or a more everlasting flame. There was nothing else besides that.

Visiting her homeland for the first time in a long while, Flame-Rain was sentimental the whole time.

“This place is not only my homeland but my mother as well. Not as in a figure of speech, but literally. Like earthlings, the Flame Wing Tribe members can give birth by mixing flames with each other… But in cases like my father, who possess overwhelmingly powerful flames, they can fuse their flames with this universe’s

flames. Then... a child is born from those flames. That is why I don't have a mother in Earth's traditional sense. This world, these flames are my mother."

Flame-Rain looked happy while saying this. According to her words, this was like returning to her mother after a long while. However, her expression soon darkened.

"That is why... my tribe members can't give up on these flames."

"Give up?"

"Yeah. All things born must die. Our universe isn't an exception, and neither are the Flames of Beginning. After the big bang, the universe has been cooling, and the flames we enjoyed are gradually dying out. We couldn't just watch that happen... Still, my father, Flame-Sky, accepted this change and was looking for a new way of life, but Flame-Hell, who came into power after my father passed away, isn't like that. To maintain these flames for as long as possible, he decided to make the Flame Wing Tribe the greatest existence in the universe. This was why we were able to obtain the special fate as the ruling species of the universe, and using this fate and power, we can allocate the karma necessary to continue maintaining the Flames of Beginning."

She stopped speaking for a moment before having a hard time opening her mouth again.

"While no one talks about it now, the Dark Tribe, Armored Soul Tribe, and Speckled Light Tribe, who are now known as members of the top four tribes, had all gone through what Earth had gone through in the beginning. This happened after my father had passed away. Flame-Hell said that these were inevitable trials and that it was the monsters' doing, not ours, but in fact, these were all things we did to obtain a ruling position for the Flame Wing Tribe. I didn't know this when I was young. Like a fool, I believed that the alliance was free and peaceful by only looking at its outer appearance."

Hearing this, Choi Hyuk recalled the deep hatred Dark-Sound had revealed to him.

Flame-Rain stopped, as if she was fighting back her tears, before changing the mood and hitting Choi Hyuk's shoulder.

"But I saw it. Another universe. I saw how beautiful the universe, which the Flame Wing Tribe members hate and call the 'cold universe', is. The cold air on Earth. The stars in the night sky. The hot coffee I drank while blowing on it. How wonderful all those things were. Wasn't it? How was it? Growing up in a cold universe without knowing anything about the alliance and the war?"

Choi Hyuk's expression momentarily became emotional after listening to her words. Soon, he shook his head and said,

"... It was simple. Without knowing anything about this enormous universe, we simply lived by advancing our feeble science. Since we didn't know anything about karma, we were so weak that we lived solely by wielding the technology we had created. While in fear that the weapons, technology, and artificial intelligences we created could destroy us, we greedily warred against each other. Not everything was good. That was why, when we first saw the alliance, I think we thought that it was illustrious despite being scared and hating it. We thought those of the alliance were different from us since they could manipulate karma since birth. But... looking at it now, I don't think so."

Flame-Rain smiled as she agreed with him.

"Huu, yeah. In the end, we're all foolish. That's why we're all the same karmalings, right? There isn't a truly exalted species. So..."

She stared directly at Choi Hyuk as she continued,

"So I will make one. A new alliance. An alliance that is truly for the prosperity of all karmalings. To do that... I need your help."

She stretched her hand out.

"Let's work together. You will, won't you?"

When he saw her outstretched hand, Choi Hyuk felt a prickling sensation.

He recalled how Jung Minji had stretched out her hand, asking him to work together with her back when he was about to leave the high school after completing the Ring of Rebirth and the Throne Game. That time, Choi Hyuk refused. Then she died.

This situation felt similar.

Of course, a lot had changed since then as well.

While he himself had changed a lot, the biggest change was Flame-Rain. She was someone who warmed others' hearts by being next to them.

It was the same right now.

She stretched her hand out while saying that she would abandon this universe where various colored flames blazed around them like a great masterpiece. She was small yet stronger than him. Despite this, she was easily hurt. However, she had the qualifications of an empress as she could recover from it and establish her own vision.

She was frighteningly beautiful.

This was why Choi Hyuk couldn't smile or hold her hand and wish her the fortune of war.

Instead, he took a step back. He didn't avoid her gaze. Only, while hiding his emotions as best as he could, he shook his head.

"No, I won't."

He said in the end.

Then again.

Flame-Rain's hand, which she had stretched out like a flower with a fluttering heart, flinched as though it was met with a cold breeze.

what a younger woman calls an older woman.

Chapter 162: Gathering and Dispersing (2)

The Light of Eternity, which surged from the center of Alliance City, hit the various gravity fields and different atmospheres in the sky, scattering intricately. It looked like a patchwork stitched from various types of skies, such as a sunset, blue autumn sky, shining light, and darkness. No matter how long one looked at it, they wouldn't get tired of it.

"It's finally peaceful..."

In a place not far from the Tower of Warriors, Alexei stood leisurely as he drank a soda. The soda, which was called 'One Sky', was connected to Alliance City's sky and karma. No matter where or when you drank it, its rippling liquid reflected the various skies. When drunken, the sky-blue liquid would wet one's tongue and throat as it soaked into one's cells, and the faint scent of an autumn or spring breeze would linger in one's nose. It felt like one's mouth and stomach was being soaked by the sky.

Alexei let out a breath in satisfaction.

However, Lee Jinhee didn't seem to be in a good mood.

"Lyosha, what's peaceful? Can't you see everyone's busy wracking their brains?"

Without a doubt, the Alliance City citizens were huddling together and discussing something with serious faces. Alexei wasn't aware of this.

"It's because of the princess, right? Establishing a fortress in the monsters' universe or something... Well, I guess these announcements that always pop up are shocking in Alliance City?"

Alexei said as though it didn't concern him and smiled brightly at Lee Jinhee.

"But director, it's only shocking to those living here. To people like us from the borders, isn't this news welcoming? Dropping

privileges and competing solely on skill... And there's no ridiculous treatment like making the less skilled Consumables. To be honest, this is like a dream to us!"

Seeing Alexei's somewhat excited expression, Lee Jinhee's face became even darker. Lee Jinhee stared at the boy's face, who always followed her like a puppy while saying that he liked her. He smiled timidly as if saying that he was happy just meeting her eyes.

While he had lost a bit of his baby fat and his face had become more mature, he was still young. Her heart ached a little more.

"Lyosha."

"Yes! Director!"

"You entered the middle rank, right?"

"I entered it! I am ashamed for reaching it so late."

While completing the mission this time, the majority of warriors at the team leader rank were able to step into the middle rank. Among them, Alexei, who was the top team leader in Lee Jinhee's troop, had already passed the early stages and was heading for the proficiency stage. While he said he was ashamed for reaching it so late, his expression revealed an uncontainable pride.

Lee Jinhee patted Alexei's head as she said,

"Good job. You worked hard. However... We really were late. Both you and me."

"Pardon?"

Alexei, who had been happy from hearing he did well and that he had worked hard, was surprised at Lee Jinhee's self-deprecating words.

"We're late. Too late. Didn't you realize anything this time? The Berserkers couldn't follow leader. We're supposed to support him from behind when he pushes forward... But we couldn't. The gap between leader and us is gradually increasing."

She wrapped her hand around her forehead as she said,

“Leader won’t wait for us since he’s someone with clear goals. So us Berserkers need to match his goals on our own. That’s why he picked us. Yet, he reached the highest rank this time… While none of the directors directly below him have even become high-ranked warriors yet. Even the team leaders below the directors have only now reached the middle rank… Late. Too late. If we want to cover the leader, then, at the very least, the directors need to be high-ranked warriors and the team leaders need to have reached the proficiency or peak stage of the middle rank. But even I, a director, am still only a middle-ranked warrior.”

“That’s… because the higher rank you are, the more difficult it is to increase your rank. On top of that, I heard that, starting from the high rank, you need enlightenment regarding your fate, since you’re transcending the system…”

“Yeah. But that’s our problem… At least, during the next mission, we need to reach the high rank. Only then can we follow the leader, even if we’re insufficient.”

“Euu. It’s already hard enough. I heard that once the base is created, it’ll be safe for a while… Can’t we work hard to find enlightenment then? While saying these words may be me overstepping my position… You can’t be too hasty.”

Alexei said everything he had to say even while reading Lee Jinhee’s mood.

Lee Jinhee looked up at the complex sky filled with various colors.

“Yeah… But we probably won’t go to Flame-Rain unni’s base.”

“Pardon? Isn’t it obvious we’ll be going there? She’s close friends with our leader. Their goals are similar.”

Lee Jinhee smiled bitterly.

“You still don’t know the leader? No… He’s not interested in

improving the alliance.”

Saying this, Lee Jinhee saw the Berserkers focused on training around the Tower of Warriors.

Sweating heavily, Ryu Hyunsung wielded his sword with his eyes closed. Baek Seoin, on the other hand, had set up automatic weapons around him and was, whilst standing in the middle of them, avoiding the barrage of swords and bullets. Kim Honghyun was sparring with Zero, and Leah was meditating on her own.

While the Berserkers always fought with their lives on the line, Choi Hyuk didn’t promise them a glorious future. Choi Hyuk’s path was simply more destruction and slaughter. He wasn’t interested in a better future.

Then what were the Berserkers fighting for?

Revenge, agony towards the past, and ambition to be stronger than anyone else. While there were multiple reasons, all of them were related to one thing – the intense pleasure experienced from the fights led by Choi Hyuk and the sense of accomplishment gained from defeating a difficult opponent. No drug could provide them with that sharp, abundant sensation. Whether it was to forget their pain or for a better future, they couldn’t help but be led by him.

However, there was a possibility that this case wouldn’t last forever, especially for those warriors who strove for certain goals rather than indulging themselves in battles to forget their pain.

“Whaat? Then what kind of mission are we going on? How scary... Isn’t it time for us to establish our foothold? And I am curious about the new base that’s being established...”

Listening to Alexei’s dispirited voice, Lee Jinhee shook her head.

“Yeah... I don’t know how things will be in the future either. What kind of mission the leader will be assigned to is unknown...”

**

Choi Hyuk recalled his conversation with Dark-Sound.

“However… I want to quickly grow stronger. Is there another path besides standing next to Flame-Rain and invading the monsters’ universe?”

“There is. She’s going to cautiously begin her activities from the border, trying not to be noticed. However, the alliance needs a more aggressive plan than that.”

“What is it?”

“The whereabouts of the queen of monsters. There are now two possible locations remaining. We need to find out which of the two the queen is at and what the best route to invade that place is. And if we attract the monsters’ attention while doing this, it’ll help hid Flame-Rain’s stronghold, so it’s not all bad. While there are those within the Exalted Wings who hate Flame-Rain, there isn’t a single one who hopes that the stronghold, which we spent a large number of resources on, will collapse. Since everyone will be doomed if we mess up.”

“So you’re saying to invade the center. That’s a dangerous mission.”

It seemed he liked the sound of ‘dangerous mission’ as he rolled the word on his tongue once more while smiling. Dark-Sound nodded his head.

“Yeah. Flame-Hell and I will suggest you for the position so do your best. Also… I’ll give you a present.”

“I’ll accept it gratefully.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t refuse any presents. Smiling faintly, Choi Hyuk bowed and Dark-Sound, seeing this, grinned.

Dark-Sound’s pale lips spat a few words and Choi Hyuk’s face became stiff.

“The ones in charge of Earth’s recruit training.”

"..."

Blaze.

A small black flame blazed. It even burned on the tips of Dark-Sound's fingers.

'Haa... As expected.'

Of course, he wasn't injured in the slightest, the fact that Choi Hyuk's flames could even burn the tips of his fingers was surprising on its own. This flame didn't use any skill, materializing purely from his burning rage. Choi Hyuk's eyes were blazing black as he looked at Dark-Sound without a reply.

That was why Choi Hyuk didn't care about his executives' reactions.

"Ah... Leader. Are we fighting again? We have a lot to do. We need to reorganize Dragonic and we have to research new technologies... No, no, fighting is good. However, what reason is there for not going to Exalted Wing Flame-Rain's stronghold? We can fight as much as we want and reorganize there."

The Artillery Captain Handke made a gloomy expression. Aide Leah continued after,

"There have been rumors that all the El Tribe members and earthlings on Dragonic will be transferred to that stronghold. That place is no different from a new colonized land. The ones who go first will obtain a bigger proportion. Aren't we at the time where we need to make humanity stronger by going at a slower pace? We can obtain sufficient military merit there as well."

These were the suggestion of the administrative and education representatives of the Berserkers. Guardian Bae Jinman didn't say anything and kept his eyes closed.

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

Normally, he would go along with whatever his subordinates

wanted, but not this time.

In this moment where he couldn't back down and his leadership was tested, he settled the situation with a single sentence.

"I found out who were in charge of Earth's recruit training."

The ones in charge of Earth's recruit training. At first, they all tilted their heads, uncertain of what he meant, but the moment they understood, shivers ran down their spines.

Choi Hyuk's words stabbed at them like daggers.

"Let's deal with them first."

Within this chilling silence, someone opened his mouth.

"... Earth's... Recruit training. You're talking about the ones who created... The Ring of Rebirth and the Throne Game, right?"

It was Guardian Bae Jinman, who had his eyes closed until now. His eyes were bloodshot.

**

Flitch of the Speckled Light Tribe was a strategist who recently came to fame.

While he was from one of the top four tribes, as could be inferred by his name, he was of low birth within the Speckled Light Tribe. In his tribe, names like 'Fragment Light' and 'Fingernail Light' were common, and those who were respected had 'Light-' in front of their names. Yet, he didn't have 'Light' in his name.

In the Speckled Light Tribe, millet-sized lights gathered in a group to form a collective intelligence, which was then given a name, but, the lights that composed Flitch were all weak and indecisive losers.

However, Flitch didn't give up. Maybe it was because he was a gathering of the weak and cowardly, but he always worked harder than anyone else. Since he didn't hold any expectations for himself, he didn't become overconfident, and when people

criticized him, he didn't lash out in anger but rather endured and made efforts to improve. After continuing like this, he had completed a few large missions, and using the 'hit' results from a recent mission as a basis, he was even able to advance into the alliance's capital, Alliance City.

He was a strategist active in Alliance City's tactic market. His story of making his own fortune through strictly his own efforts was quite famous, and many people respected and admired him.

Flitch was really happy about that.

Whenever he went to the tactic market early to examine the newly proposed tactics and discussed with other strategists about which ones had potential and which ones were trash, the thought 'I succeeded' always sunk into his mind.

It was the same today.

"Hey, Flitch! This is a new tactic, what do you think about it?"

"Management of reconnaissance troops to figure out the monster queen's exact location and invasion route... Are you interested in it? I'm not."

"Woah, woah, it's still quite a hot-button issue. And it's essential information in order to end this war."

"The war ending...? I don't know, I can't believe it. While Exalted Wing Flame-Rain may have had some fun with her victory, do you think we'll be able to see the war end in her generation? In our generation, the best we can do is maintain the current situation. There's a higher chance that the war will end with our loss. It's all just hot air. It's just a diversion to gain more power. All higher ups are like that."

"So... The reconnaissance is like a show?"

"Yeah. Since Exalted Wing Flame-Rain is gaining popularity with tribes outside Alliance City with her determination to end the war, to combat this, the original Exalted Wings planned a 'show' tactic.

However, real investments will be focused on Exalted Wing Flame-Rain's stronghold construction. It's better to get on that. When there's such a great alternative, there's no need to waste precious points on a show like that."

"Flitch, I understand what you're saying... But shouldn't you of all people be interested in it? I hear the person in charge of this tactic is someone from 'there'?"

They were both his colleagues and competitors, and facing their banter, Flitch expressionlessly turned his gaze towards the tactic information board.

'Person in charge. The Leader of the Berserkers, a B rank independent troop, Choi Hyuk.'

Flitch smiled bitterly as he shook his head.

"Hey, take it easy."

In principle, who was in charge of which tribe's recruit training was a secret. However, when looking at the circumstances, guessing who did what mission was too easy. While everyone didn't personally say it out loud, since they knew Flitch had made a great profit from leading Earth's recruit training, they indirectly teased him.

Just as Flitch shook his head and was about to look for an investment-worthy tactic, someone tapped his shoulder. He also heard an energetic voice say, "Hello, Mr. Flitch. It is an honor to meet a strategist with such high prestige like you."

When he turned around, a familiar earthling man was standing in front of him. While he was inwardly taken aback, he calmly asked,

"Who are you?"

The man lightly smiled as he gave a reply unrelated to his question.

“While it is sudden, the reconnaissance mission… will be a success. How about investing in it?”

He had a bright smile. Flitch avoided his gaze and said while walking elsewhere,

“Haha, I’ll think about it. I’m busy now so…”

Thud.

However, the earthling grabbed his shoulder.

“Ah, it doesn’t matter whether you invest or not, but you’ll still be participating. I came here to tell you this.”

The man’s constant disrespectful attitude made Flitch’s expression go stiff as he asked,

“… What are you saying?”

The man smiled brightly as he replied directly,

“The Leader of the Berserkers, Choi Hyuk, is dispatching the strategist, Flitch.”

The surrounding strategists were shocked at his reply as they retreated back. Now that they thought about it, the vigor released by the black sword at his waist wasn’t normal. They murmured, ‘Ah… That must be the famous Sword of Vow.’

“Dis… Dispatch?”

Choi Hyuk’s black eyes came in front of Flitch’s eyes, who still couldn’t believe the situation. He was still smiling brightly, but his eyes were cold as ice.

“You are being dispatched by an A+ rank resource transfer right. The meeting time is… Huh? It’s right now?”

“Rid-ridiculous!”

Flame-Rain received a S+ rank resource transfer right this time. As an A+ rank, it was no different from the highest rank. Before Flitch, who couldn’t believe his situation, could even finish

protesting, the space around him crumpled and swallowed him up.

Choi Hyuk motionlessly stared at the space Flitch had disappeared from. Then he smiled widely as he brushed his hands.

“It’ll be thrilling, huh?”

He leisurely walked past the frozen strategists and left.

Chapter 163: Gathering and Scattering (3)

Chiii.

It was raining on the field, and a single flame was getting soaked. While steam rose up in the air, she looked up at the sky. Though the rain was falling constantly, the moon and stars shined as there were no clouds.

“As expected, this was where you were.”

The voice was as deep as a large brass instrument.

Flame-Rain, who had been crouched on the field, getting soaked, turned her head slightly, indicating she was aware of his presence. Then she absentmindedly looked back up at the sky.

He kept walking towards her while talking to her. On the surface of his body, metal moved delicately like a puma’s muscles, and he placed his long arms on the ground to assist his walking. His face resembled a Moai, he was Mechas of the Armored Soul Tribe.

“The environment setting... is Earth. As expected of a place where lifeforms depended heavily on the circulation of water... The environment is quite delicate. Weak, low energy level.”

When Mechas acted as though he knew, Flame-Rain, who had been sitting blankly, replied as though she appreciated that he knew.

“Right? It’s strange. The planet is as weak as a glass egg, and it’s too cold for the Flame Wing Tribe. However... I like this delicate coldness.”

Flame-Rain gently scooped up rainwater with her hands. Chii... Steam rose up. Flame-Rain’s eyes followed the rising steam in a trance.

“The reason why the Flame Wing Tribe is special is because they were born from and grew up in the Flames of Beginning. They will

get weaker if they get accustomed to places like this.”

Hearing Mechas’s whining voice, Flame-Rain’s blank eyes focused and she asked confidently,

“Will that really be the case?”

“…”

Mechas couldn’t reply for a while but acquiesced in an acknowledging tone in the end,

“Isn’t Choi Hyuk an exception…? Well, still, I’ll acknowledge it. The earthlings’ growth rate is surprising for now. While I don’t know when they’ll reach their limit, even their current potential is high enough to be considered elites.”

As if saying, ‘See?’ Flame-Rain turned her shoulders and said,

“If a fate ends, then you simply need to accept another fate. It’s not the environment that decides whether one becomes stronger or weaker, but one’s own actions.”

Mechas, who had been listening to Flame-Rain’s words while saying, “Yes, yes, princess,” abruptly shook his head as he said,

“In fact, I still can’t believe it. For Choi Hyuk to be a highest-ranked warrior already… It seems like it was only yesterday when he was just a snotty-nosed brat in the lowest-ranked supply store.”

Mechas recalled when he had guided Choi Hyuk and taught him how to use the lowest-ranked supply store.

“You’ve only met him once, yet you act like you brought him up?”

“It’s just a figure of speech. Wahaha.”

Mechas’s laughter rang out from his entire body. After seeing him laugh, Flame-Rain lowered her head. She swept her hand over the grass that grew on the field, black burnt marks trailing her hand.

Mechas's voice became deeper and it rang out for even longer.

"Choi Hyuk... is apparently in charge of a reconnaissance mission. It was announced today."

"... Really?"

Flame-Rain grabbed a handful of burnt grass and dirt before letting it wash off in the rain.

"What might be his reason?"

She mumbled to herself after a long silence. Since Mechas didn't really have anything to say, he simply stood there silently. Did she offend him? Was it burdensome? What was he planning on doing... Revenge? While swallowing these various thoughts flowing from her mind, Flame-Rain brushed herself off and stood up.

"... Nothing we can do."

"Are you okay?"

Flame-Rain grinned at Mechas's question.

"I have to be. I am responsible for a ton of people!"

Then she added quietly,

"... Well, we don't know if he'll change his mind later."

She energetically moved her arms around in a circle. Seeing her like this, Mechas's voice became gentle,

"I'll take the lead, princess."

"Now really, how many times do I have to tell you? There isn't a position called 'princess'! Also, you're not from the Flame Wing Tribe anyways!"

"No, the tribe doesn't matter. I am calling you that because you are you. It's not because you are someone's daughter... Or, should I call you 'queen'?"

At Mechas's joking words, Flame-Rain showed an unpleasant

expression.

“On Earth, there’s the expression ‘as bold as brass’. You have no shame… Don’t you cringe when saying stuff like that?”

“Well, as you can see, I really do have brass skin.”

Mechas gestured at his Moai-like face as he took the lead.

**

“What is this? Are you trying to get revenge?”

Flitch shouted as soon as he saw Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk didn’t reply and closely examined Flitch like a predator considering whether to eat or leave a small animal alone.

“While I don’t know what you’re thinking, you can’t get revenge for a mission that was conducted justly. It is a violation of alliance laws!”

However, Choi Hyuk still didn’t say anything. He simply slowly walked around Flitch and closely observed him. Flitch gradually became more nervous. The speckled lights that made up his body trembled in panic. Flitch’s mind became unruly, divided between speckled lights that were panicking and lights that tried to hold them back and regain order.

“Just what is it that you want? What do you hope to gain from doing this?”

Choi Hyuk still didn’t reply. Flitch did his best to persuade and unite the speckled lights that had fallen into a state of panic. ‘Everyone! Please calm down! We need to calmly grasp this situation! The more panicked we become, the more dangerous it becomes!’ It seemed that his persuasion worked, as the unruly speckled lights recovered their calm, and his chaotic thoughts were swept away.

“Haa… Just what are you playing at?”

As his mind cleared up a little, Flitch decided to behave more

actively to release his anxiety and check Choi Hyuk's reaction. He looked around the room and took out a drink 'Glacier Tears' from an absolute zero space.

"Since you aren't talking after bringing in a guest... I'll drink this first. I'm thirsty."

Just as he was about to open the cap, Choi Hyuk snatched the bottle away. The speckled lights suddenly flew up, indicating Flitch's surprise. Choi Hyuk poured the Glacier Tears into a glass. It was a dense liquid that pooled together like liquid mercury.

In a calm manner, Choi Hyuk said with a smile,

"Didn't I tell you? You have been dispatched for a reconnaissance mission. Please help us."

Faced with his unexpected attitude, an intense discussion broke out between the speckled lights that made up Flitch.

'No! There's no way that's the reason! There's no doubt this has something to do with Earth's recruit training!'

'Why are you always so pessimistic? Just now, we only needed to stay calm, but instead topics of 'revenge' started popping up after you became uneasy. In fact, we might have made Choi Hyuk feel even more suspicious towards us!'

'That's right. Even if Choi Hyuk came to us after knowing everything, he might not have any harsh feelings towards us. Choi Hyuk has also been in charge of recruit training before. Was it the Kundle Tribe? I heard that he killed a number comparable to us. Since Choi Hyuk is experienced enough to know what kind of alliance this is, I'm sure he understands.'

'If it really is for revenge, then there isn't any reason to act like this, right?'

Discussions like this quickly broke out amongst the speckled lights before coming to an agreement and reforming as the group intelligence 'Flitch'. Flitch quickly regained his composure.

“I don’t know why it has to be me. I’m a strategist. I no longer have any troops! My fighting strength isn’t amazing either.”

Shiver.

That moment, Choi Hyuk didn’t reply, but Flitch felt a killing intent that sent chills down his spine. It was only for a moment.

‘What was that? Did I sense wrong?’

‘No, I felt it too.’

Each of the speckled lights quickly reported their state. There was a single conclusion.

‘While it was short… A few felt it. It was killing intent. Choi Hyuk knows. Though we don’t know what he’s going to do….”

The speckled lights began to feel agitated, but Flitch tried to his best to look dignified as he drank Glacier Tears. Due to the drink, the unruly speckled lights froze all at once before defrosting, giving them a calming sensation.

Flitch talked slowly,

“While I don’t know what you’re thinking… This mission will fail… Don’t tell me you’re planning on starting a losing war because of a reason like that? While turning your back on your limitless potential?”

When Flitch said, ‘because of a reason like that’, he was referring to Earth’s recruit training. Amongst the speckled lights, a suspicion had been proposed that Choi Hyuk was purposely dragging him into a losing war to get revenge on him.

However, unsure whether Choi Hyuk understood his meaning, Choi Hyuk, who had been staring at Flitch with clear eyes, suddenly asked,

“A losing war?”

“Of course.”

“What’s the reason?”

“… Are you asking because you really don’t know?”

“Yes.”

“… There is one reason. Because you aren’t a transcendent warrior. Because you aren’t, you can’t meddle with the Net of Fate. You don’t have a method of hiding yourself when the monsters notice your invasion and begin chasing you down. Also, think about it. You are supposed to find the queen’s nest. Even if the monsters’ universe’s defenses are lax because they haven’t been invaded before… There’s no way that’s the case for the queen’s nest. There will definitely be monsters close to the demise rank near the queen. Even if you want to get close, you undoubtedly need to be at the transcendent level. Also, you need powerful troops composed of highest and high-ranked warriors. Only then can you use them as bait and retreat if the monsters come at you from behind. It was the tactic used by Exalted Wing Flame-Rain during the previous reconnaissance mission. However, it is impossible for you. So this mission will have no choice but to fail.”

Choi Hyuk smiled brightly at Flitch,

Ptch.

Choi Hyuk’s hand quickly pierced through Filtch’s chest. The speckled lights which made up his chest burned and turned into ash.

“Euack!”

The speckled lights scattered like sand and fled before gathering on the other side of the room. The speckled lights were in a fuss. ‘Euack! That bastard killed my friend!’ ‘Calm down! If we fight him now, we’ll all die!’ A minority of the speckled lights struggled, unable to endure their rage and sorrow, while the rest tried to hold them back.

“Just what are you…”

Taken aback, Flitch asked while trembling.

Choi Hyuk revealed his white teeth as he said in an aggressive manner,

“Ha? What do you know? I’m too pissed off by how you act like a know-it-all, be it in the past or even now. But you, do you know what kind of ability I possess? Why do you think the Exalted Wings assigned me, who isn’t even a transcendent warrior, to this reconnaissance mission?”

“That is…”

Flitch couldn’t reply because he assumed that this mission was purely a political show. However, Choi Hyuk looked serious and angry.

Choi Hyuk came closer and said,

“Get a hold of yourself. There’s no place to escape to anyways. If you want to live, work harder for the success of the mission. You need to prove your usefulness, right? Or die on the frontlines as a meat shield. Why? It’s what you like, isn’t it? Kill. Only then can you kill. Right?”

The speckled lights that made up Flitch’s entire body began to tremble. While they wanted to scatter and flee right now, it was impossible as they were suppressed by Choi Hyuk’s spirit.

While comforting those that had fallen into a state of chaos, Flitch was barely able to speak.

“Th… en will you let me live?”

“Did I say that I was going to kill you?”

Seeing Choi Hyuk reply so naturally, Flitch nodded his head with difficulty.

The tips of Choi Hyuk’s lips curled up as he tapped Flitch’s shoulder and walked past him. He saw the clearly visible blue shield symbol above Flitch’s head.

‘He’s someone to keep alive? Does that mean he’ll be of use when I face the Exalted Wings later?’

Choi Hyuk grinned. The skill he had inherited from Richard had been quite useful until now…

‘This time, it’s truly trash.’

Choi Hyuk’s steps hurried. He wanted to go to the monsters’ universe quickly.

‘And there…’

Thump, thump. His heart thumped and his black karma became flames as they blazed in his eyes.

The statues on Easter Island.

Mechas was the Armored Soul Tribe member showed Choi Hyuk around the lowest-ranked supply store at Flame-Rain’s request.

Chapter 164: Gathering and Scattering (4)

Flitch, who was putting on airs, brought a tool called the ‘World of Nothingness.’

“You should know that, in order to develop this device quickly, I spent my entire wealth. While it could be the key to the success of this mission… Haa, I feel like swearing. To be honest, even though I invested everything into this mission, I still don’t think it’ll be possible. I’ve never made such a risky investment before… Either way, now that I’ve done everything I could, the rest is up to you.”

While clearly showing a distressed appearance, Flitch handed a black, brick-shaped whetstone to Choi Hyuk.

Its appearance was ordinary, almost primitive, but the moment Choi Hyuk received it, he felt a powerful karma inside it.

Its vigor didn’t lose out to Weapons of Sentiment, which highest-ranked warriors wielded.

Seeing Choi Hyuk’s surprised face, Flitch smiled faintly as he explained,

“It is a tool named ‘World of Nothingness’. By referencing to alliance reports, I created it with Leader Choi Hyuk’s special skill, ‘First Sword’ in mind… Well, rather than explaining it to you, it’ll probably be better if you try using it. Please grind your sword on the ‘World of Nothingness’.”

Choi Hyuk took out his sword and ground it on the whetstone-like ‘World of Nothingness’.

Sereung, sereung.

The third time he ground it—

Ssereung!!

The sound became deeper and pulled the space around it. All matter stretched towards Choi Hyuk, looking ridiculous. When

Choi Hyuk pushed his sword on the whetstone, matter was pulled towards him, and when he drew his sword back, it returned back to normal.

Unsure of whether he noticed it or not, Choi Hyuk kept grinding. Every time the space distorted, the surface of the whetstone would cover his sword, and every time it did, the whetstone would become slightly smaller.

“I think that’s enough since we’re only testing it.”

“Ah…”

When Flitch stopped him, Choi Hyuk, who had been grinding his sword as if in a trance, raised his head with slightly blank eyes.

“Even though it’s ridiculously expensive, it’s a consumable. You have to use it sparingly. Using this much is sufficient for testing purposes.”

Choi Hyuk nodded at Flitch’s reasoning.

“Now, the method of using it… You already know, right? Since we purposely came out to this remote location, try slashing once to your heart’s content.”

Flitch said while looking around at the desolate planet that no one lived on. Since there was no atmosphere, the sky was black. When looking around, there were only stones and sand. The only thing that caught their eye was the tall mountain range in the distance. A dim light shined from the peak of the tallest mountain.

Choi Hyuk aimed his sword towards that peak. The karma that was tightly wrapped around his sword cried out, pleading him to do something. There was no way he wouldn’t know how to use the ‘World of Nothingness’, even if he didn’t want to.

“First Sword.”

Ping—

Choi Hyuk’s sword made an arc, and following its path,

everything was erased, even time and space, as though they were never present. Due to the disappearance of space, the peak of the distant mountain came towards him.

Normally, this would be the end of the First Sword's effect. However, it was different this time. The 'World of Nothingness', which covered his sword, was released, vibrating as it filled the erased space-time.

Flitch, who was somewhat excited, said,

"I observed that the principle of your skill is similar to that of the big bang. The 'First Sword' has the power to create universes, and it uses this ability to push and erase the pre-existing universe. However, it ends there, without actually being able to create a universe. The 'World of Nothingness' was developed this time to assist the 'First Sword' in taking it a step further. It increases the possibility of creating a pseudo universe. Like this."

Flaash!

A brilliant light emitted from within the space-time, which had disappeared.

When they came to their senses, Choi Hyuk and Flitch were standing above a completely white hall.

"Huu..."

Flitch let out a sigh of relief. He looked around at his surroundings as he spread his arms.

"Welcome to the World of Nothingness. To be honest, because I was in a hurry to make this, I didn't have the time to test it, but it works better than I thought. How lucky."

"... Definitely."

Choi Hyuk faintly exclaimed. All sides of the hall were smooth and white. It was a dimension created in this moment. Unlike a real universe, which could give birth to life, it was no different

from a dead universe... But it was still a universe and Choi Hyuk was the creator of this world.

He was moved by an indescribable emotion.

Choi Hyuk walked to the end of the hall. When he reached the end, there was a large window instead of a wall. Beyond the window, he saw the dimly shining mountain peak.

"... Is it a hidden dimension?"

"Yes. While it's a completely new dimension, it is simultaneously a place right next to the pre-existing dimension. While you can call it a hidden dimension... More intuitively, it's an underground tunnel. It is the best way to explore without the monsters noticing. Though I can't say we won't be caught, the likelihood of getting caught is reduced drastically... Do you like it?"

Seeing Flitch cautiously read his mood, Choi Hyuk smiled slightly and replied,

"Very."

"Whew... I feel like I've come back from death's door. Then can I go now?"

Before he said that 'he had done everything he could', and now he asked if 'he could go now'. Meaning, he didn't want to involve himself in the mission any longer.

'No way. There's still a lot left.'

Choi Hyuk hid his feeling of contempt and placed his hand on Flitch's shoulder.

"Yeah. You did well. Now let's start the mission. Let's work well together. We'll probably survive if we do well."

Flitch's face distorted when he heard Choi Hyuk's words, which gave him no room to leave.

**

‘No! No! We’re as good as dead the moment we enter the monsters’ universe!’

‘This is crazy! Do you know how many people Choi Hyuk dispatched for this mission? He didn’t dispatch any! Excluding the Berserkers, he only dispatched the three people who participated in Earth’s recruit training! Isn’t it obvious then? He’s just going to kill us!’

‘So what are you going to do about it? Stop whining. It’s checkmate!’

‘Let’s escape. Let’s escape somehow and sue him in the alliance.’

‘Sue…? Can’t you tell from the fact Choi Hyuk figured out all three of our identities, instead of just one? Someone from the Exalted Wings sold us out! Though we won’t be able to escape anyways. Haa… To think that he would wipe his mouth clean after receiving the ‘World of Nothingness’…’

The speckled lights that made up Flitch were in a complete mess. Like congressmen in a fight, they were pushing and being pushed. However, there was only one conclusion – ‘There’s nothing that we can do.’

Flitch of the Speckled Light Tribe, Demaetsu of the Keunib species, and Sino of the Seo Tribe. These three, who were in charge of Earth’s recruit training, felt like they were going to the slaughterhouse as they were pushed into the monsters’ universe by Choi Hyuk.

As soon as they crossed over to the monsters’ universe, Demaetsu of the Keunib species opened his mouth wide open, revealing his teeth, and said,

“This is good enough, right? Since we’ve crossed over to a completely different dimension, there won’t be any evidence remaining. Since everyone’s a Berserker, there won’t be any witnesses either, right? If you’re going to kill us, then kill us quick,

you narrow-minded earthling.”

Demaetsu gave Choi Hyuk a ridiculing look. On the other hand, Flitch and Sino couldn’t hide their nervous expressions.

Choi Hyuk smirked at Demaetsu.

“Did I ever say anything?”

Demaetsu snorted.

“Are you trying to act otherwise now? You never planned on completing this mission from the start, right? If you wanted to complete it, then you wouldn’t have only brought over the Berserkers, a C+ rank independent troop.”

“A smaller group is better when hiding from the monsters. Also, the Berserkers work well with me and they are stronger than you think. They grow stronger quickly too.”

“Ha! Is that so? To hide from the monsters? You, a mere highest-ranked warrior? When you can’t even access the Net of Fate?”

The Net of Fate. It had the power to tune the entire universe. If Choi Hyuk didn’t access and wreak havoc on it, then his location would be fully revealed to the monsters. Because of this, no one believed in him.

{Kiiyyeek!}

{Kuoooh!}

To make matters worse, maybe it was because they had suffered on multiple occasions, but the monsters reacted quickly. Unlike before, when they were slow to notice their invasion and send support, this time, the monsters reacted almost as soon as they crossed over.

The monsters, who had been resting while devouring a planet they had plundered from another dimension, rushed out all at once. They even felt a spine-chilling killing intent coming from far off into the distance.

While he couldn't be certain because they were so far away, Choi Hyuk thought that they might perhaps be transcendent monsters or even demise-ranked monsters rather than highest-ranked ones. Their vigor was simply that terrifying.

It seemed even Demaetsu, who had been aggressively talking back to Choi Hyuk, was shaking in fear as he retreated while drenched in cold sweat. With his lips trembling, he said,

"Do-don't tell me you're planning on leaving it to the monsters? If-if you are a warrior, no, if you are trying to get revenge, then you should do it with your own hands, right?"

It seemed that he never considered that Choi Hyuk could overcome this crisis.

However, there was a reason the Exalted Wings had assigned Choi Hyuk, who was only a highest-ranked warrior, to this mission. With his sword that could reset everything, they judged that he would be able to keep his location hidden from the monster universe's Net of Fate. On top of that, he had received an unexpected present from Flitch. Choi Hyuk believed that the mission was doable.

"How pathetic... Do you think you'll be able to survive acting like that?"

While mocking Demaetsu, Choi Hyuk slowly unsheathed his sword. Demaetsu flinched backwards.

From what Dark-Sound had told him, it was this damn keunib who had selected the monsters and scattered them throughout Earth. The Shadow Teeth that Lee Jinhee had difficulty with, the Wyvern of Death that had killed Baek Seoin's parents, and the Flaming Devil that had killed his mother were all personally selected by Demaetsu.

'Demaetsu... Demaetsu... Huu.'

Even though he wanted to kill him right now, he did his best to

ignore it and turned around.

Choi Hyuk 'swallowed' his rage.

Even his hatred for Flitch, who personally planned out the Ring of Rebirth and the Throne Game, among others, as well as his loathing for Sino, who created various supplies and provided them to the humans, encouraging them to struggle against each other... He swallowed and returned them all to his heart.

The 'First Sword' would activate the moment his emotions, which had been accumulated, exploded.

Choi Hyuk saw beyond the monsters gathering around him and towards the 'mission region' as he slashed out.

At the same time, the 'World of Nothingness' activated. It was a world created by grinding almost half the whetstone.

With the 'First Sword', the monsters that filled their vision disappeared. In fact, a corner of the monsters' universe was being ripped up as it disappeared. A bright light poured down from above Demaetsu's face, who had been looking at this scene while lost in thought.

Then an enormous white hall appeared. The hall was so large one could call it a plaza. The pre-existing universe disappeared and a new one was made.

"Wow... What is this? Our leader is insane..."

Like how Lee Jinhee mumbled this, the Berserkers were shocked at this scene as well.

However, the ones who knew the details were even more shocked.

"This...! Crazy! A device that creates dimensions? But that hasn't been developed yet! It was concluded that, because there was no way to obtain the power to create a universe, it was impossible for the time being... Ah! Though I did hear that Choi Hyuk's new

sword skill ‘First Sword’ did have that sort of power…”

Sino, whose tribe was well-known for their technology, was crazily mumbling to herself.

“… It was to this degree?”

When Demaetsu, whose tribe had the trait of being weak to the strong and strong to the weak, personally saw Choi Hyuk’s move, he felt himself becoming endless smaller compared to Choi Hyuk.

Finally, Flitch, whose body was trembling, possibly due to the speckled lights clamoring, was barely able to ask Choi Hyuk,

“U-umm, Leader Choi Hyuk? How far does this path go?”

“Huu… Huu… To the first location suspected to be the queen’s nest.”

Choi Hyuk seemed exhausted as he replied. When Flitch heard this, his body trembled as though it had been hit by lightning.

‘No way! The location suspected to be the queen’s nest? The distance is quite significant, yet he opened a path all the way there? A mere highest-ranked warrior can output this much power?’

‘As expected… He was always like this. Even from the recruit training, Choi Hyuk was an exception to the norm.’

‘There’s a limit to being an exception. This is…’

‘Yeah… This… He might really complete this mission perfectly. I thought it was impossible… I was thinking about what he could do by only bringing the Berserkers… But now that I see this, he probably won’t even need the Berserkers. He’s just that strong.’

That moment, Sino, Demaetsu, and Flitch cleanly forgot about the danger they were in. They were completely entranced by the feat displayed in front of them.

To be sublime…

Was making others forget about themselves. It made others realize how small they were in comparison and made them completely surrender.

The feat Choi Hyuk showed them was precisely this.

‘This… is truly amazing.’

‘Whether or not he’s our enemy… Amazing. Beautiful…’

The number of speckled lights that possessed goodwill towards Choi Hyuk increased, irrelevant to the danger he brought. Sino and Demaetsu also couldn’t help but sense their feelings change.

Their hearts began to submit to Choi Hyuk.

Just as Choi Hyuk wanted them to.

Chapter 165: Gathering and Scattering (5)

It was cold and there was no wind or scent. There was only a white tunnel that extended endlessly.

In fear that they could make the ‘World of Nothingness’ unstable, the Berserkers, over a few days, slowly passed through this long tunnel.

The white walls occasionally rippled and became transparent, reflecting the strange scenes of the universe the monsters lived in.

Initially, the monsters were bustling due to Choi Hyuk’s attack, working in groups to search for the intruders. Finally, however, the commotion gradually died down after they couldn’t find anything.

The Berserkers murmured,

“It’ll be really thrilling this time.”

Whenever monsters as large as spacecrafts brushed past the tunnel, the Berserkers would lower their voices.

“So we’re searching these bastards’ homeland…”

As earthlings, their animosity towards the monsters couldn’t help but be greater than their hostility towards the alliance, since they were the ones that actually invaded their homeland and killed those precious to them. At times, these monsters felt like such uncontrollable calamities that they made them feel powerless. Thinking about how they were now invading the core of the monsters, naturally, their hearts raced and their minds were resolute.

“But who are those three? No troops were dispatched for this mission, only them.”

“Maybe they are incredibly strong? Or those three are better than dispatching B rank troops?”

“They don’t look that strong…”

There were Berserkers who started talking to Flitch, Demaetsu, and Sino out of curiosity. The tension from the monsters that they occasionally saw outside the tunnel, the sense of mysteriousness from the white ‘World of Nothingness’, and the sense of solidarity from going to the core of the monsters with each other mixed together, making their hearts both silent and more open.

“What are your names?” quickly turned into, “If we survive, give us a tour of Alliance City.” Formal replies such as “I welcome getting closer to the Berserkers” soon became candid like “I’m a bit tense, do you have anything to eat? I was suddenly dispatched so…” Finally, they began giving detailed introductions to each other.

“Don’t you guys have families? The majority of us Berserkers don’t, but I don’t know about you who live in Alliance City.”

“I have a lot. Keunibs can have polyandrous or polygamous relationships as long as they have the ability. I’m considered quite capable, so… Hehe, I want to see my third wife.”

Demaetsu purposely made a wicked expression.

“I am going to get married to a man called Mino next month… I had a tough time in Alliance City, and I was comforted a lot by him.”

Sino, whose tribe was famous for only having one lover their entire life, had an affectionate look as she thought of her fiancé.

“The Speckled Light Tribe has no gender classification. Well, we do, but it’s only for individual members. The consciousness ‘Flitch’ is a group intelligence… If the population of speckled lights inside increases or if there is a growing conflict between members, then we separate, but I guess you can call it a type of reproduction.”

Flitch simply shrugged his shoulders.

“Then, excluding Flitch who doesn’t have a family, why did you guys, who have families, come to this dangerous place?”

When a Berserker asked, Demaetsu raged, shouting, “Do you think I wanted to come?!” and Sino made a bitter expression while she answered, “We were… dispatched. We didn’t have a choice.” Flitch protested, “Hey! Why are you excluding me?!” However, they soon glanced at Choi Hyuk and said,

“However… It might not be as bad as we thought…”

Unexpectedly, Choi Hyuk wasn’t hostile towards them and they were impressed by his remarkable abilities. As long as they could return alive, this might be an amazing opportunity to gain great military merits. The expressions they looked at Choi Hyuk with contained goodwill and were full of expectations.

After spending a few days together within this tense yet friendly atmosphere, the outside scenes they occasionally saw changed. The grey viscous poja densely covered their surroundings like a fog, and the monsters inside it bubbled. Every time a bubble popped, it resounded like thunder and the bodies of the monsters inside would either get smaller, change color, or split apart.

“…”

They couldn’t tell if various monsters were being born or remodeled. Disregarding everything else, the Berserkers were overwhelmed by the poja’s scale, which was easily larger than a galaxy.

“… Is this really the queen’s nest?”

The Aide Leah mumbled, but they couldn’t be sure yet.

“Sino.”

Choi Hyuk called Sino of the Seo Tribe. Sino quickly went in front of him.

“I ask for your analysis. What kind of place this is and is it the

queen’s nest we are looking for?”

Sino, the alliance’s technician, looked around with an objective gaze before shaking her head.

“Sorry. There isn’t enough information. I think we need to go a little deeper to know for sure.”

A little deeper. The warriors felt somewhat uneasy as they heard her words.

It was completely different from before when they had lightly joked with each other as they traveled. While it was still the same white tunnel, each step they took was filled with extreme alertness.

“… Killing intent.”

Like Ryu Hyunsung mumbled, the monsters’ characteristic killing intent was invading the empty tunnel.

{Grr}

{Kireuk?}

{Huh? Something’s?}

The monsters around them, which could easily be discerned as being at the highest rank, seemed to have sensed something as they kept loitering around the tunnel. It was to the point that the Berserkers could even hear their growls and mumbles. The killing intent invading the tunnel gradually thickened, and as they traveled deeper, they were no longer within the ‘safe zone’ of the ‘World of Nothingness’.

“Sino, still not enough? Isn’t this the queen’s nest?”

Demaetsu, who was clearly nervous, kept urging Sino.

“Ah, jeez!”

Sino, who was concentrating the best she could, became irritated at Demaetsu, who kept bothering her. Then she glanced at Choi

Hyuk as she said,

“I’m still not sure if this is just a key facility for the monsters or if it’s the queen’s nest. We need to go deeper if we want to know for sure.”

Formally, she was reporting to Choi Hyuk, but in reality, she was also trying to explain their situation to the nervous warriors.

Then Sino quickly added,

“However, if we go any further, we might be found out. How about we stop here for now and come back with reinforcements? The enemy forces are beyond our expectations.”

Listening to her words, which sought safety, Choi Hyuk calmly shook his head.

“No. We’ll go further. We can’t do this twice since the monsters possess learning capabilities. Also, we don’t know if we can get this far next time.”

Sino’s eyelashes trembled at Choi Hyuk’s reply, but she resigned herself to her fate and instead concentrated on analyzing as she stepped forward. With nervous looks, Flitch and Demaetsu stuck next to her.

“Let’s go.”

When they took a few more steps, the scene outside changed once more. The poja, which had covered their surroundings like a fog, faded away, and monsters the size of continents and planets were now floating around them, anchored to various locations. This sight, at a glance, was alarming.

With cold sweat on his face from the thickening killing intent, Demaetsu urged Sino once more.

“Sino, still no-“

Sino glared at Demaetsu without replying.

“Demaetsu, act moderately. Sino’s trying her best…”

Fed up with Demaetsu, Flitch said while taking Sino's side, but—

Bang!

The sky collapsed.

No, the ceiling of the 'World of Nothingness' buckled.

"Haah!"

"What is that!!?"

A monster had suddenly appeared and was stepping on the ceiling. It was similar to the Punisher that Choi Hyuk had captured previously. Its outer appearance was similar to a human's. It also possessed weapons and armor composed of a monster's body.

{...}

The monster didn't give them the chance to comprehend the situation. It silently narrowed its black eyes and swung a hammer, created from a monster's head, down at them.

Kwaaah! Kwaah!

Swaah!

Space rippled and they heard the sound of a tide going out. The white tunnel suddenly became dark like a basement with a blinking emergency light.

"A demi... Demise-ranked monster!!"

Sino screamed with a pale face.

Choi Hyuk replied,

"Strictly speaking, it's different. It doesn't have the fate of collapse... However, it's as strong as them."

The monster felt different when compared to a monster created by suppressing the fate of a universe's collapse into it. Its original strength was probably similar to Flame-Rain before she became an Exalted Wing – the proficiency stage of the transcendental level. However, after wearing monster armor that was based on karma

weapons, the monster's current strength seemed to exceed that of Exalted Wings'.

This monster noticed the 'World of Nothingness' and was attempting to break into it. Following it, the numerous high and highest-ranked monsters in the area began attacking the 'World of Nothingness'. The large tunnel became dented like an aluminum can and ripped in various places.

Swish.

Choi Hyuk unsheathed his sword and shouted,

"Sino, keep going! Check if this place is the queen's nest!"

Faced with this dangerous situation, Choi Hyuk, who had talked to her politely until now, began ordering her informally.

"Demaetsu! Flitch! Escort Sino! The Berserkers will block the other monsters from breaking in! I'll be the one to face that one!"

Choi Hyuk glared at the expressionless monster with black eyes. Unlike original demise-ranked monsters, which were powerful due to inheriting the fate of collapse but were difficult to control, this monster seemed like something the queen of monsters created on her own. It might even be the queen's bodyguard.

"The World of Nothingness is undoubtedly a universe in another dimension! On top of that, it's a universe I personally created! I can't use my full strength until they completely break in! So push them back! Don't let a single one in!"

Choi Hyuk's order resounded like thunder.

Bang! Baang!

With that, the fight between the monsters, who were trying to rip the tunnel in various places and break in, and the Berserkers, who were trying to push them back, began.

"It's a demise rank! A demise rank! We're going to die! Run away!"

Demaetsu fell into a state of panic, unfitting of a high-ranked warrior. Flitch shook his body.

“If we flee, then we’ll really die! Snap out of it! Just believe in Choi Hyuk! We need to believe in him and do our job! Sino! You get a hold of yourself too!”

“Ye-yes!”

Darting down the tunnel, which seemed like it could collapse at any moment, Sino hurriedly analyzed with her trembling eyes.

‘Mino… Mino…’

Inwardly, she kept calling her fiancé’s name. If she didn’t, she felt like her heart would burst from fear.

She didn’t know how much time had passed. The tunnel was almost completely dark now.

Sino cried out,

“It is! It’s here! This is the queen’s nest!”

At the same time, a light flashed.

Sino lost her memory.

**

“Thi… This is?”

When she first opened her eyes, Sino couldn’t remember where she was. As her strength hadn’t completely recovered yet, she looked around with a cloudy vision, and only after blinking a few times did she realize where she was.

It was a place where objects from various other universes were piled on top of each other like a garbage dump. It was the monsters’ universe. They were currently sitting on a branch of an enormous tree that was floating in the outer region of the universe.

Choi Hyuk was panting while sitting on a mushroom the size of a

bed.

“We… survived? How?”

Flitch, who only now came to his senses like Sino, asked Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk friendlily replied while panting heavily.

“Huu… Hu… We endured as long as we could and retreated as soon as I heard Sino’s report.”

“Retreating… must not have been easy. On top of that, even us high-ranked warriors lost our memory. How…”

Flitch’s questions continued. Choi Hyuk opened his mouth to explain, but it seemed it was difficult to explain as he frowned and tilted his head.

Sino, who absentmindedly stared at him, answered instead.

“You cut… time, right? Or should I say, you reset it?”

Choi Hyuk nodded his head, indicating she was right. However, Flitch’s reaction was more intense.

“No way! Reset time? You reset the time of this vast universe? No one can do that!”

However, unlike Flitch, who was taken aback, Sino stared directly at Choi Hyuk and said,

“Of course, he didn’t reset the time of this entire universe… He only reset the time of the small, dead universe, the ‘World of Nothingness’. Isn’t that right? So the tunnel disappeared immediately and we returned to the start of the tunnel. While the time in the monsters’ universe flowed regularly!”

Satisfied by Sino’s clever explanation, Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

That moment, Sino’s eyes sparkled.

“Amazing!”

She staggered to a stand and jumped up and down.

“While it’s possible in theory, for it to actually happen! Wow… If I tell Mino, he’ll be completely surprised!”

Demaetsu, who seemed to have been awoken by her happy voice, gently got up and said,

“So loud… But you really are amazing! Leader Choi Hyuk, you are stronger than any other highest-ranked warrior I’ve ever seen.”

With his mouth, which stretched along his jaw, open, Demaetsu staggered over to Choi Hyuk, got down on one knee and placed his hand out. Then in an embarrassed tone, he continued,

“I heard that… Earth had this sort of culture in the past, but I don’t know if I’m doing it right.”

He cleared his throat and, in a serious tone, said,

“Leader Choi Hyuk. I am in awe. I realized that the path you walk only contains victory and glory. While I do have my previous sins, if you forgive me and hold my hand, I will dedicate my life to you. As you know, our Keunib species is famous for being rude, but aren’t we also renown for our loyalty?”

Demaetsu’s attitude changed suddenly.

It was enough to be cringe-worthy, but Sino, who was deeply impressed by Choi Hyuk, jumped up and joined in.

“Huh? Then, me too! Me too!”

Not losing out, Flitch joined in as well.

“Ah… Really, so embarrassing… But! I also feel the same. I have always admired how you became stronger faster than anyone else. While it might have angered you, I have always done my best for your growth. Whether it was the King without Subjects, sovereign qualifications, or the Flame Wing Tribe’s Karma Heart Discipline… Everything passed through me. Also, I was the one who requested the alliance to grant you citizenship. While it might have been an unforgivable method… I did my best to make you stronger. Please

give me another chance. I want to repent for my sins under your command."

The three looked at Choi Hyuk in a serious manner.

Their misgivings towards Choi Hyuk had already mostly disappeared. They judged that he would have killed them already if he had truly wanted to. They thought that, since he dispatched them and they went on a mission together, he was thinking of the bigger picture rather than simple revenge. No, they hoped that this was the case as they already felt a deep sense of closeness with Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers after experiencing a mission of life or death together. Also, they were certain that they could advance even higher up in the alliance if they were with Choi Hyuk.

"What the heck? What's going on?'

Only then did the Berserkers gather, mumbling about this unusual mood.

Choi Hyuk grinned and looked up at the tree branch that went so high up that he couldn't see the end.

They were successful in determining the monster queen's location in the monsters' universe.

This feat could be considered the greatest contribution since the start of the war. The moment he accomplished this, his enemies kneeled in front of him and promised him their loyalty.

He naturally began grinning.

He couldn't be any more satisfied.

With a joking expression, Choi Hyuk said,

"Darn... But I don't need all three of you? Maybe only one?"

"Pardon?"

Seeing their perplexed looks, Choi Hyuk kept smiling as he handed them each a drink.

“Don’t be so awkward and first drink. You all worked hard.”

Only then did they realize he was joking and they drank their drinks with a smile. The moment their throats were revealed—

Pit-

Choi Hyuk’s sword instantly cut their throats.

“Keuh… Kuak…”

They were taken aback by the sudden attack, however, it wasn’t fatal and they only felt pain.

Staring down at them as they rolled on the ground while holding their throats, Choi Hyuk spoke. His speech had, at some point, become cold and impolite.

“In the past… My friend died like that. I heard her throat was stabbed by a trusted friend while she was drinking water.”

Swish.

His sword twirled in his hand. Choi Hyuk’s gaze was frighteningly cold.

“You three, who were in charge of Earth’s recruit training… I tried using you, but I don’t think you’ll be useful any longer. Three is too much, I’ll only let one of you live.”

As Choi Hyuk continued to speak, now understanding the situation, the Berserkers’ faces turned cold as ice. It didn’t matter if they had laughed and chatted with each other not long ago. Didn’t he say they were the very people in charge of Earth’s recruit training?

A chilling killing intent flooded out, and in the middle of it, Choi Hyuk, who possessed a malice thicker than anyone else, said,

“You know the method very well, right?”

As if singing, he said,

“Kill.”

Then all the Berserkers followed after him as though they were a choir.

“Kill.”

“Only then can you kill.”

Flitch, Demaetsu, and Sino’s complexions turned pale. Being suddenly faced with this situation when they had been relaxed drove them further into a state of panic.

While looking down at them, Choi Hyuk made a final declaration.

“It’s judgment day, bastards.”

Chapter 166: Gathering and Scattering (6)

Choi Hyuk was very satisfied as he looked at the scene in front of him. The white light (goodwill) emitted by Sino and Demaetsu, who had sworn loyalty to him, wavered as they turned dark. The rare yellow light (sacrificial will) wavered as the speckled lights that made up Flitch fell into a state of chaos.

Sino despaired,

“I can’t believe it!”

However, Choi Hyuk’s eyes were so dark they didn’t seem to reflect light.

“Believe what?”

Sino, who was at a loss for words, protested while prattling on randomly,

“That…! We are high-ranked warriors of the alliance! You can’t deal with us like this!”

“Didn’t you do it too? To us?”

“That…! That…! That was because earthlings were awfully weak…!!”

“You guys are awfully weak right now. In my eyes.”

“No! No! Do you think the alliance will allow this sort of crime?”

Events that took place in the monsters’ universe… While there might be suspicions, there wouldn’t be any evidence remaining. Although she knew this, like a child’s tantrum, Sino desperately made arguments that even she didn’t believe. Seeing her like this, Choi Hyuk felt that she wasn’t even worth sympathizing with. Instead, feeling a thick sense of boredom, he turned to Flitch and Demaetsu. While thinking, ‘Do you guys think so too? Then I guess I don’t have a choice,’ Choi Hyuk fiddled with his sword. Demaetsu’s expression changed.

“So! We are high-ranked warriors of the alliance-Kack!”

Sino had been repeating the same words when a thick, saw-edged sword sliced into the back of her neck. With a ‘Rip!’, it tore into her neck.

“Is this what you want?”

Demaetsu asked with a tense expression after slashing Sino’s neck.

Bang!

Sino tried to push Demaetsu away with her karma, but it was too late. The fatal injury she received while her guard was down wasn’t something she could recover from on her own. Her eyes trembled. She looked at Demaetsu and then at Choi Hyuk, and was on the verge of tears.

“Must… Must you do this…?”

Then Choi Hyuk smiled brightly, like a spectator who had finally seen the mind-blowing scene of a movie that had been teased for the past hour.

While smiling, he said with a slightly regretful face,

“Must I? I know, right? I’m sort of regretting it. Was his name… Mino? If I knew you had a fiancé, I would have brought him here and killed him in front of you. What a shame. But don’t worry. You’ll meet him soon enough.”

“No… Please… Please…”

Her crying face—

Rip!

Rolled on the floor while spurting blood. Demaetsu shook his saw-edge sword once. Blood splattered, and with her head separated from her body, Sino’s lips mouthed, ‘Mino…’ before becoming forever still.

“Ha… Ha… This is…”

With a dispirited expression, Flitch’s gaze alternated between Choi Hyuk and Demaetsu. Choi Hyuk simply smiled and Demaetsu said, “Sorry, Flitch,” as he raised his sword and took aim.

Kikikik.

Joyful chuckles erupted from the Berserkers surrounding them and rang out like echoes.

Just now, Flitch had been picturing a sweet future.

A completely new life. In the mission he underwent with Choi Hyuk, he found himself standing in awe at ‘greatness’ for the first time in his life.

In the beginning, he didn’t want to be disregarded by others. Then, because he wanted to be envied by others and to satisfy his ego, he moved to Alliance City and chose the path of a strategist. However, since becoming a strategist, he hadn’t ever felt such a thrilling sense of satisfaction as he had from his mission with Choi Hyuk.

What Flitch saw this time wasn’t a normal life, such as being well-off and having a good death. In Choi Hyuk, he saw the making of a truly great achievement that would leave an everlasting mark on this vast universe. He also had a hunch that if he worked together with him, then he would be able to live his life while making and becoming a part of history – a completely different story when compared to his life until now. He had a feeling that he might be able to find something worth devoting his life to.

Even the speckled lights he was composed of, which worked together for survival and had a sense of superiority, seemed almost entranced as they resolved that they would submit to Choi Hyuk’s greatness and devote their lives to him. ‘No! Did you forget what that bastard did?!’ The speckled lights who had lost their close friends from Choi Hyuk’s attack, burned with hostility, but they

were a minority. Many speckled lights were dyed with a golden light (sacrificial will).

That was why, when he swore loyalty to Choi Hyuk, which was before he had made a judgment in which he calculated the pros and cons, he was being ‘sincere’. It might perhaps be the first time Flitch had shown his true self to someone.

However, his sincerity was ripped to shreds as soon as it was born.

Right now, Demaetsu, who was holding his sword smeared with Sino’s blood, was standing in front of him.

“I’m sorry.”

He swung his sword, but Flitch couldn’t even move a finger.

As a coalition of speckled lights, Flitch was usually someone who would make decisions objectively, but, when the majority of the speckled lights that had supported Choi Hyuk fell into a state of panic, he fell into a greater state of confusion than other species.

Even now, inside Flitch, speckled lights that couldn’t believe their current situation were despairing. In the end, the groups who revolted were those who were hostile towards Choi Hyuk. ‘Damn it! I knew this would happen! Knock them down!’ As if undergoing a coup d’état, they took charge of the body, and only then could they react to Demaetsu’s attack.

While it was very late, it was enough.

Jjong!

“Keuk!”

Demaetsu screamed. Wedges made of light stabbed into his every joint. While faltering because he wasn’t in his complete state, Flitch arrogantly said,

“Huu… Demaetsu. Did you think it would be easy because I was disturbed? Did you look down on me because the Speckled Light

Tribe has the weakest fighting capabilities among the top four tribes? As an insignificant keunib... You dare bare your teeth at me?”

However, Demaetsu didn’t give up easily.

Grit, grit.

Demaetsu ground his teeth as he broke and pulled out the wedges of light, which had stabbed into his body.

“You do look easy. I mean, would the geek of the Speckled Light Tribe have experienced fights before?”

“Just die.”

As a minority of speckled lights had overturned the base system and became a dictatorship in this situation of emergency, it was as though Flitch’s personality had changed.

Demaetsu attacked violently and, despite faltering, Flitch displayed refined fighting techniques overflowing with killing intent. The fight went back and forth for a while, and Demaetsu, who had launched a ferocious attack on Flitch, trembled suddenly before falling down face-first. Lights bloomed from his body like flowers and hovered over Demaetsu’s corpse.

“...I, I am going to die like this...?”

The keunib, who prioritized surviving, squirmed miserably as he died.

A short period of silence passed.

“Whew... Whew....”

Flitch glared at Choi Hyuk while the speckled lights trembled.

“It’s done, right? It’s fine if you use me as a slave. Just let me live like you promised.”

Choi Hyuk looked at Flitch with an entertained expression.

Reflected by his Eyes of Distinction, the speckled lights emitted a

spectrum of different colored lights. His head was red with killing intent, his chest area was a murky yellow color (sacrificial will), trembling with uneasiness, and the rest was a mix of black and white, making a dirty grey color. The ones who were currently in charge of Flitch were the minority emitting the red light. They were itching to kill Choi Hyuk. However, it seemed like they wanted to live as the tone in which they spoke to Choi Hyuk was respectful.

Choi Hyuk grinned.

"No, I clearly told you that there should only be one remaining."

Flitch quickly looked back at Demaetsu and Sino when he heard Choi Hyuk's words. However, they were undoubtedly dead. The black light (hostility) from Flitch's body became thicker.

"... I am clearly the only one left. Please keep your promise."

Yet, Choi Hyuk grinned as he shook his head and pointed at Flitch with his finger.

"No? There are still a ton left, right?"

Flitch, who didn't understand what he was talking about initially, showed a dumbfounded expression before his body trembled as though it had been struck by lightning.

"You... You bastard, just what are you saying?"

Choi Hyuk didn't hesitate at all as he declared,

"Decide, Flitch. No, you guys. Whether only one of you will survive or if all of you will die as Flitch."

Choi Hyuk was talking to each of the speckled lights that made up Flitch.

**

"Crazy bastard!!"

Unable to bear it any longer, Flitch shouted. To tell the countless

speckled lights that made up a single individual to struggle against each other… It was unimaginable. This had never happened before since the birth of the universe and the formulation of Speckled Light Tribe.

Flitch was overwhelmed by the rage from all the speckled lights. There was no longer a single white or yellow light coming from his body. Much to Choi Hyuk's satisfaction, Flitch's body was filled with deep red and black lights.

"Are you doing this because we were in charge of Earth's recruit training? Aren't you a psychotic bastard? No. Are we the only ones that did stuff like that? It's pretty much the alliance's handbook! At least you earthlings weren't mined! To be honest, do you think we couldn't have mined you if we wanted to? We're the ones who gave you opportunities! Now it's not enough to just get revenge, but you're telling us to fight with each other? Are you mad?!"

Having lost his reasoning, Flitch began swearing a ton.

{Bastard, you should be ripped apart by a monster's jaws.}

{A species perfect for mining.}

{Lowly bastards that began fighting with each other only after a little encouragement.}

{Should have crushed you all with your planet and shoved it up a monster's ass.}

It wasn't only Flitch, all the speckled lights that made up his body swore noisily. While their voices were too quiet to hear properly, a few of them were discernable.

Choi Hyuk nodded his head.

"Good. Keep talking."

Flitch became even more furious.

"You crazy bastard. Also, is it really our fault that you guys killed each other? Guardian Bae Jinman? Don't you remember how he

awakened? We made escape routes like that for all of you. If you had stronger cooperative mindsets, then no one would have died during the Ring of Rebirth. What do you think would have happened if you had just joined hands? There are species that underwent the same training and survived with no one dying. Why are you blaming us when you guys were the ones that were so lowly that you killed each other?"

Choi Hyuk looked at Sino and Demaetsu's corpses.

"Hmm, I wonder. At least, you don't seem to be different from us."

"Euck!! That's! That's because! You!"

Flitch was so mad that he wasn't able to speak properly. In the end, the speckled lights exploded forward and shouted at the same time.

{How is that our fault?!}

{You ordered us!}

{Yeah, if you have a problem with that, then why don't you get rid of the entire alliance?!}

{Are we simply pushovers?! You split-personality bastard who's strong against the weak and weak against the strong!}

{Why? Scared of the alliance?}

{Yeah! Isn't everyone like that?! You also acted that way to the Kundle Tribe! Why don't you get rid of the alliance and commit suicide?!}

While hearing them swear simultaneously, Choi Hyuk's eyes curved into crescent moons. The Berserkers were surprised to see him like this. It was because they had never seen Choi Hyuk smile so brightly that his eyes curved into crescent moons.

Choi Hyuk joyfully said in a tone that seemed like he couldn't take it any longer,

“Yeah. That’s exactly right. Heh. The alliance…”

Flitch, who had been running amok, stiffened like a rock after hearing Choi Hyuk’s short but completely screwed-up laugh.

“You… Don’t tell me you… You’re crazy! Completely insane! Aaack! Aaahck!!!”

Flitch trembled from shock and fear. Still smiling with crescent-moon-shaped eyes, Choi Hyuk walked to him with surefooted steps and began stabbing his body repeatedly. “Now, only one, only one will remain. If you don’t move fast, then you might be next.”

Choi Hyuk began to grab and crush Flitch’s body with his bare hands. Those who were unlucky turned to mush and dripped down.

“Euaaack!”

{Kyak! No! I want to live!}

{Run away!}

{Don’t push me! Don’t push me!}

The speckled lights scattered and ran away. However, as they were connected to each other by a powerful force, they couldn’t go far and were killed while pulling and pushing each other.

Then-

{Ha… Ho-how could you…}

{I want to live! I want to live!}

In order to make room to run from Choi Hyuk’s hands or perhaps to be the last one remaining, the struggle between the speckled lights began.

Perhaps the fight broke out more quickly because the speckled lights that made up Flitch were especially cowardly.

As soon as the fight began, everything afterwards proceeded naturally. The speckled lights that had lived their entire lives as

the group intelligence known as ‘Flitch’ began distrusting and killing each other to survive.

Choi Hyuk didn’t make any more moves. He simply observed the speckled lights kill each other.

With a smile, Choi Hyuk said,

“Yeah, that’s exactly what you did to us.”

**

{This is different from what you promised! It’s different I tell you! Come back! Come baaack!}

A pale speckled light shouted after being abandoned in the monsters’ universe. However, as he was so small and weak on his own, his voice couldn’t be properly heard.

Like promised, leaving only one speckled light alive, the Berserkers left the monsters’ universe.

The shouting and despairing speckled light couldn’t endure the extremely cold and foreign environment for long and soon turned into grey dust.

This was how the first revenge came to a close.

Chapter 167: Gathering and Scattering (7)

The brilliant smile on Choi Hyuk's face faded the moment he exited the monsters' universe after completing his revenge against Flitch, Demaetsu, and Sino. His lips were tightly shut, and his eyes were narrowed. While he didn't know whether his surging emotions were that of sorrow or futility, his expression seemed to be suppressed by something.

"I have a place I want to visit before we return."

Following Choi Hyuk's request, Naro's spaceship didn't move towards Alliance City, but rather towards a secluded stellar system within a remote galaxy. Within this stellar system was a solar system with a sun at its center. The planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn orbited around this sun. In the past, Earth had been situated between Venus and Mars. Currently, however, no traces of Earth remained.

The Berserkers each had different expressions. Some looked mournful, others happy, and a few had sad yet relieved expressions.

Whether they were recalling their pasts or the thrill of revenge, it looked like everyone was feeling something as they looked at the empty spot, but it was a little different for Choi Hyuk.

To Choi Hyuk, this place was cold and completely void of anything. There wasn't even a scrap of Earth remaining.

Thinking that he came here for no reason, Choi Hyuk regretted his decision.

'There already isn't anything left…'

Since everything precious to him had already disappeared and all that remained was revenge, he wondered what emotions he expected to feel by coming here. While the Berserkers felt various emotions, Choi Hyuk didn't feel anything as he gazed at the place

Earth used to be. It simply felt like a waste of time.

‘Let’s go back.’

While swallowing his saliva bitterly, Choi Hyuk was about to return when he felt a celestial body approaching from beyond the Sun. The celestial body possessed the faint karma of living beings.

‘There was a celestial body with life besides Earth in this solar system?’

Naro seemed to have felt it a little later than Choi Hyuk as he said.

{Huh? I think I sense the karma of living beings?}

Choi Hyuk gave Naro a strange look.

‘… When did he?’

He inwardly even felt a little admiration towards him.

{Eheh, why are you looking at me like that?}

Naro felt uncomfortable when Choi Hyuk began staring at him for no reason. Choi Hyuk glossed over it with a grin and turned his gaze away.

Just then, the sensed celestial body started to appear from behind the Sun.

“Whoa!”

Shouts similar to a cheer erupted from the Berserkers.

“Earth?”

“Dumbass, how can that be?”

It was much smaller than Earth and it wasn’t blue either. However, there undoubtedly was a blue area.

“What is that?”

While everyone was talking, Choi Hyuk flung his body towards that planet. Just as he was about to pass the planet, its gravity

pulled him in.

Thud!

He stepped on the ground. He had pretty much free fallen from a high altitude. If there was something strange about the planet, it was that, while its force of gravity was overall weaker than Earth's, at least in the blue area, it possessed a force of gravity similar to that of Earth. Because of this, the moment Choi Hyuk landed on the ground, the sound of impact rang out quite loudly.

Thud! Thud!

Following him, the top executives of the Berserkers and Naro's hologram landed on the ground.

"This is..."

Kim Honghyun became at a loss for words as he looked around at the surroundings. This was the same for everyone.

In this place, they saw an enormous lake and green trees from Earth growing around this lake. Elephants and giraffes were eating the vegetation, and leopards were hunting rabbits and boars. Because an atmosphere like Earth's existed around the lake, they could breathe in the air that they had yearned for. When they looked up in the place, they could see a blue sky.

"... Paradise?"

Lee Jinhee absentmindedly said.

"An environment control system..."

Baek Seoin's voice trembled slightly. When his gaze landed on the island at the center of the lake, which was floating 5 meters in the air, and he read the words which were written like a memorial on the border of the island, Baek Seoin teared up.

"This place... is the moon. It's also a cemetery... The Sovereign of Paradise Camilla..."

These were the words written on the border of the floating

island.

{X Month X Day. This is a tribute to our homeland, Earth, which is forever gone from this universe. We also hope that the various species that were regretfully faced with extinction on the day of the calamity find eternal rest here.

We recovered the moon, which had been flung into the distance after Earth's collapse, and placed it in Earth's previous spot. This is because this moon might perhaps be Earth's only legacy. Like this restored area, Earth was a place filled with blue skies, blue oceans, and green lifeforms.

We hope that those who are still living and those who have died can all be at peace in this paradise.

The Sovereign of Paradise, Overseer of Dragonic, Leader of the Valkyries, Camilla.}

On the floating island in the middle of the lake, stones engraved with the names of the dead were paved into a plaza. It seemed like they had created this after collecting as many names of the dead as they could. Amidst these stones, no, in a more special place on the middle of the floating island, Choi Hyuk discovered his mother's name 'Choi Miyeon' and silently stood in front of it for a long time.

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After a solemn yet touching moment, the Berserkers, having relaxed a little, began chatting once again.

"Camilla, that lady, is quite good."

"The timing was incredible... To see this after we had just returned from getting revenge really made me tear up."

Since they could return and report immediately through the military gate system, they used this opportunity to enjoy some leisure time.

The top executives of the Berserkers gathered around Choi Hyuk,

who had become somewhat more tranquil. They all couldn't hide the emotional turbulence they were experiencing.

Having used to be the leader of Richard's assassination organization, Zero's eyes were filled with excitement, and Aide Leah went beyond simply being excited as her eyes shined with ambition.

The Artillery Captain Handke seemed somewhat proud, and Kim Honghyun, who was Chu Youngjin's successor, stood arrogantly even though his eyes were red from crying.

It seemed that everyone was proud of the achievements they have accomplished as Berserkers.

However, the emotions of the top executives who had been with Choi Hyuk since the early days were a bit different.

Bae Jinman's closed eyes trembled nervously.

Ryu Hyunsung looked anxious and powerless like a lost child.

Lee Jinhee looked at Choi Hyuk with eyes containing slight expectation, and Baek Seoin stared at Choi Hyuk as though he was leaving it all up to him.

While an unknown tension hung in the air, Choi Hyuk nonchalantly said,

"Congrats on becoming high-ranked warriors."

While fighting monsters that were a few ranks higher than themselves, the top executives had naturally become high-ranked warriors. Everyone was embarrassed by his compliment.

"Anyways... It's good that we won't be holding you back, leader."

Kim Honghyun said as though he was relieved of a burden.

Aide Leah joined in,

"It's not just as simple as becoming high-ranked warriors. While I don't know why, when we finished getting revenge on Flitch,

Sino, and Demaetsu, our karma increased greatly. Our current level is around the proficiency stage instead of the early stages of the high rank."

Choi Hyuk slowly nodded.

"I too... became strong enough to be considered to be at the proficiency stage of the highest rank."

Leah cautiously asked,

"As expected, it's because we got revenge, right?"

Choi Hyuk nodded.

"It's the same as having overcome an important inflection point of our fates."

An important inflection point of their fates... Choi Hyuk rolled those words in his mouth. Rather than an inflection point, it might be more precise to call it a turning point.

Choi Hyuk suddenly raised his head and called out to Naro, who was sitting on a hill and humming to himself. The white hologram with a simple appearance cheerfully skipped towards them.

"Did you call me, leader?"

Choi Hyuk purposely said in a more cheerful tone,

"Yeah, congrats to you too."

"Pardon?"

"You awakened, right? Just looking at you, you're a high-ranked warrior... No, if you properly settle down, you might even be a highest-ranked warrior, right? Congrats! Then are you now an Armored Soul Tribe member?"

A few executives were shocked at Choi Hyuk's words while others nodded their heads in realization.

On the other hand, Naro's body stiffened from nervousness. Without bending his elbows, he waved his arms around and said,

“Ah, no. To say I’m an Armored Soul Tribe member so suddenly…”

Ryu Hyunsung, who seemed slightly uneasy, abruptly cut in,

“Definitely… When we were fighting the demise-ranked monster last time, Naro did save me. I wasn’t sure… But, as expected, was it truly Naro?”

Rather than being thankful, his voice sounded somewhat sad.

Naro became even more taken aback than before as he flailed around.

“No. While it is true that I can use karma now… To say that I’ve become a member of the Armored Soul Tribe…!”

“While born as artificial intelligences, they are existences that have become a part of the universe after awakening their own fates. Isn’t that the definition of the Armored Soul Tribe? I think Naro would know more…”

As Naro was speaking gibberish because he was so taken aback, Aide Leah joined in and settled the situation.

Naro lowered his marshmallow-like head.

In a faint voice, Naro was barely able to squeeze out,

“But… Leader hates the top four tribes. No… You all do. Also, when an artificial intelligence awakens as an Armored Soul Tribe member, they have to go to Machine City and undergo training… And that means we have to be apart during that time…”

“Eh? Leader Choi Hyuk hates the top four tribes? You’re saying that after seeing Flame-Rain unni?”

Lee Jinhee said in a mischievous voice. Naro’s bent shoulders relaxed slightly.

“Is that true?”

“Yeah. While there are plenty of jerks amongst the top four

tribes, there are also a lot of people who work hard for a better universe, like Flame-Rain unni and her comrades…"

While she was talking to Naro, Lee Jinhee kept glancing at Choi Hyuk, reading his mood.

"Also, since we've completed our revenge now, won't we work together with Flame-Rain unni? Now that we're on a roll, it's not like we'll be disregarded by the top four tribes either… Also, we can always wait for you."

She glanced at Choi Hyuk again. Choi Hyuk simply revealed a bitter smile.

'Completed our revenge… you say."

Positive responses erupted regarding Lee Jinhee's words. They were all the top executives who had joined later.

"As expected, are we going to Exalted Wing Flame-Rain's camp?"

"The revival of humanity! If Overseer Richard had seen this, he would have truly been happy…"

Handke brightened and Leah seemed moved.

Yes, this was normal.

Since the ones in charge of Earth's recruit training had died, it was normal to think they had completed their revenge. Since they had accomplished a satisfying revenge, they no longer wanted to ruin themselves with rage and now wanted to think about safety and the restoration of humanity.

While they knew Choi Hyuk's goal was revenge, they didn't know the scale or the destination. In case there were observing eyes, Choi Hyuk had never rashly brought up the topic of the Exalted Wings. The Berserkers believed that Choi Hyuk's targets of revenge were confined to the ones in charge of Earth's recruit training.

'However…'

Choi Hyuk was different. Since the moment he realized his mother had passed away, the hole in his heart had gradually become larger. Within it raged black flames, flames that wanted to devour the entire universe and even himself in the end.

Choi Hyuk couldn't stop.

Lee Jinhee probably examined Choi Hyuk's mood because she was somewhat aware of this.

So it was time to come clean.

Choi Hyuk raised his shoulders up high before dropping them as he said,

"No, we won't go to Flame-Rain. There is no such thing as safety for the Berserkers. I don't promise success, fame, or prosperity. I can only promise one thing. If you stay with me, you will be able to kill a lot more. Enough to forget everything."

"Ah..."

Lee Jinhee's eyes trembled.

"Pardon?"

Leah, Kim Honghyun, Handke, and others were taken aback.

"..."

Baek Seoin and Bae Jinman nodded their heads as though they already knew.

"Ah-"

Ryu Hyunsung, who seemed somewhat depressed, raised his head suddenly.

Choi Hyuk clearly told them,

"That's why, if you are satisfied and no longer want to fight, leave the Berserkers."

Whoosh.

Suddenly, a strangely heavy spring breeze blew past those who were suddenly at a loss for words.

Chapter 168: Each's Calculations (1)

The 'Dream of the Great Universe', located in Alliance City, the alliance's capital, was an enormous hall the size of a palace. All the alliance's most important events and gatherings were held here.

The inauguration and war ceremony for the fourteenth Exalted Wing, Flame-Rain, was held here not so long ago, and the Berserker's triumph party for discovering the monsters' queen's location was held here as well.

The atmosphere of the party was rowdy. Whether one was envious or jealous of the newly born hero, the mood couldn't help but be heated and there hadn't been a single boring moment since the start of the party. Whether one wanted to praise or mock them, no one could wait to talk to the Berserkers. At this moment, the most popular group in the entire universe was the Berserkers.

However, the Berserkers couldn't enjoy the party and were all making distracted expressions.

Lee Jinhee was sitting, blankly looking up at the ceiling. She didn't show any reaction when someone tried to talk to her. The ceiling she was staring at was created by stacking cubes of crafted silver metals covered in dark matter together. Because the dark matter, which made up the cubes' frames, was transparent, the silver metals seemed to be floating in the air.

The ceiling Lee Jinhee was staring at gradually curved into a wall before becoming the floor. Perhaps it was because of the gravitational force of dark matter, but the warriors enjoyed the party while walking on the ceiling, walls, and pillars. The special decorative flames of the Flame Wing Tribe spread out everywhere and bloomed like fireworks. A stream of light from the Speckled Light Tribe flowed in mid-air in the center of the hall and served food from all over the universe to the warriors.

As expected of a hall that represented the alliance, the 'Dream of

the Great Universe' was built by integrating the unique architectural styles of the top four tribes. Even while she examined each corner of this beautiful place, Lee Jinhee's eyes didn't show any interest.

"Director Lee Jinhee."

The Artillery Captain Handke took out a nuclear bomb candy and a glass of 'Phoenix Blood' and handed them over to Lee Jinhee. However, Lee Jinhee simply raised her head with a blank expression, almost as if she didn't hear him. Handke called out to her again.

"Director Lee Jinhee, let's talk. I've decided to leave the Berserkers."

Only after hearing that Handke would 'leave' did Lee Jinhee's head move. Yet, her gaze still couldn't focus as she looked at Handke.

"Eat."

Lee Jinhee absentmindedly swallowed the candy Handke had handed her and was shocked by the extremely small-scale nuclear explosion that went off in her stomach with a bang.

"What... What is this?!"

"Puhaha! Thrilling, isn't it? That is the nuclear bomb candy that is banned for earthlings below the high rank to consume. Since our bodies aren't made up of flames or dark matter, even a middle-ranked warrior could take quite the blow from it. Now, drink this."

With a frown, Lee Jinhee instantly downed the glass of Phoenix Blood.

Blaze!

The moment the Phoenix Blood went down her throat, it turned into flames and was absorbed into her bloodstream, circulating

once before exiting through her nose and hair.

“Hwaa…”

It seemed to be quite refreshing as Lee Jinhee’s eyes began to shine like normal.

“Ah, thanks. Because of you, I’m finally coming back to my senses. But what did you say just now? You’re leaving?”

When Lee Jinhee, who had now pulled herself together, asked, Handke intentionally nodded cheerfully.

“Right.”

Hearing this, Lee Jinhee’s expression turned serious. She carefully asked,

“… Can I ask why?”

“Well, there isn’t some sort of grand reason… Just, I want to be happy now.”

Handke’s eyes dimmed slightly.

“At first, I was also a lunatic. At the sudden change, I lost my daughter and my wife… When I heard that this was all because we were weak, I was so angry that I felt like I would die. So I enjoyed going around with Leader Choi Hyuk. I could forget my pain and guilt while fighting a ton, but you know? Looking back, I felt like I was entranced by something. ‘I need to kill more.’ ‘I need to get stronger.’ I pushed myself even harder with those thoughts… But, after thinking about how we completed our revenge this time, I jolted to my senses. I felt like I had just awoken from a dream. Having suddenly thought about it… I felt like I could now live while enjoying myself. The position of earthlings is much better than before, and my own position accumulated from being a Berserker is especially great. As a high-ranked warrior, I can spend my time in the center of the alliance, Alliance City, while being respected as a decent warrior, right?”

Then he smiled.

“Ha, so I want to let go of my past and live in the present. I’m also tired of fighting every day. Now I want to meet a nice woman, have a beautiful child, and live nicely. While I’ll have to continue to fight as a warrior… Raising a family becomes impossible if I stay with the leader. You also never know when you’ll die, in fact, I actually thought I’d die this time.”

Lee Jinhee slowly nodded her head.

Seeing Lee Jinhee like this, Handke asked in a polite voice,

“So, what does Director Lee Jinhee think? Are you planning on staying?”

Lee Jinhee’s shoulders flinched and trembled. Handke patted her shoulder.

“I’ve thought about this for a while. That if there was any person that didn’t fit the Berserkers, it was Director Lee Jinhee.”

Lee Jinhee’s head drooped.

She could hear the crackling of the decorative fireworks set up everywhere and the sounds of people’s conversations reverberating against the silver metal.

Within these sounds, she could even hear a warrior approaching Choi Hyuk while shouting, “Leader Choi Hyuk! Congratulations!” Lee Jinhee’s gaze turned towards that direction. She saw Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster and other warriors of the Dragon race gathering around him and leading him elsewhere.

‘The warriors of the Dark Tribe led him somewhere before also…’

There was an unwritten rule that Exalted Wings normally didn’t attend these parties. She thought that each camp was trying to win Choi Hyuk over instead of them.

‘What is everyone trying to do? What will happen in the future?

And the Exalted Wings? The alliance? The Berserkers? Earthlings? …Me?”

The more she thought about it, the gloomier she became.

In a quiet voice, she asked Handke,

“Did you talk with the others?”

Handke scratched his head.

“I did. Leah and Kim Honghyun are leaving. From the beginning, Kim Honghyun was planning on using the Berserkers as a foothold for his success… Leah decided to interpret Richard’s will more broadly and is going to work towards the revival of the earthlings.”

Lee Jinhee asked with a slightly stifled tone,

“And what… about the others?”

“I don’t know… Unlike Leah, Zero said he’d follow Leader Choi Hyuk as written in Richard’s will… Baek Seoin was stern, saying that he owed Choi Hyuk a life debt. Bae Jinman, that man surprised me. He simply smiled and shook his head. Knowing him, I thought he would leave…”

“And Hyunsung oppa?”

When Lee Jinhee asked about Ryu Hyunsung, Handke frowned.

“Haa… That guy is too headstrong. He said he’ll remain and fight until he dies. He has no thoughts on making new relationships or on living a better life. So I asked him why he was acting this way. Considering how young he is and his seven years of loyalty, hasn’t he done enough? Shouldn’t he forget about those who he has lost and move on with his life? Then he answered, ‘No, I have no thoughts of forgetting them until I die. If I also forget my friends, then their deaths would really have been for nothing. I need to suffer; only then can their resentment remain without disappearing. I can’t forget them until I die. The world won’t continue to go around as though my friends’ deaths were nothing.

At least, in front of my eyes, until I die.' ...Really now. His friends definitely hope for that."

Handke grumbled, but Lee Jinhee looked sad. She listlessly looked out into space and said,

"Is that so...? I... don't know. Really."

**

'Event Horizon Troop', also known as the Horizon Troop, was an independent troop where the problem children in Alliance City gathered. It was common for independent troops to be composed around a specific tribe, but this troop was diverse, composed of many of the tribes existing in the alliance. Unlike other troops that took safer actions as they grew stronger, this troop was famous for not refusing dangerous adventures. That didn't mean they fought every day like the Berserkers. They became renown for taking on dangerous missions and then taking a long break, spending the Mission Points from the missions like water in Alliance City. Also, the troop ranks were decided solely on skill so the arrogant young masters and ladies from the top four tribes had to obediently follow orders from the commanders from minor tribes. Because of this, there had been instances where naïve geeks from the top four tribes called Horizon Troop team leaders 'bumpkins' and were beaten half to death by their team members, who were also from the top four tribes.

This Horizon Troop was precisely the one Chu Youngjin settled in after leaving the Berserkers.

Always taking on dangerous missions, this time, the Horizon Troop was dispatched to the monsters' universe as the first task force in support of Flame-Rain. Their mission was to help Flame-Rain build her fortress by invading the heart of the enemy camp and throwing them into confusion. They weren't affiliated to Flame-Rain and were simply her temporary support in order to earn a big haul of Mission Points.

“Okay! Collection of the ancient dragon corpse is complete! Now we run until Exalted Wing Flame-Rain can hide us! Break through their encirclement!”

The leader of the first task force shouted.

At the same time, he saw glimpses of a mountainous dragon in a dense red and blue fog that surrounded as its bones melted and disappeared.

In a good mood, the leader of the first task force mumbled,

“We’re lucky, lucky. To think that the dwelling of an ancient dragon that devoured monsters in the past would be here.”

The monsters’ universe, which had already come to the end of its lifespan, changed its fate of collapse into monsters and sent them to other universes, and by absorbing and combining with the living fates of conquered universes, the monsters’ universe maintained its existence.

Fortunately, the first task force came across the dwelling of an ancient dragon that had been integrated into the monsters’ universe.

“The important aspect of fighting against monsters is maintaining a karma surplus. Since we recovered the karma of an ancient dragon that had been snatched away, we gained and they lost. The fruits of our labor this time is great. We just need to get out.”

The leader of the first task force was truly in a good mood. While he didn’t say it, the fruits this time didn’t simply end with the completion of a mission.

‘In the grand scheme of things, I heard that that person works hard to obtain dragon races… The corpse of an ancient dragon should be a great present.’

The leader of the first task force smiled. It felt like things were going well recently.

‘That guy’s the same. The more I see him, the greater he is.’

His gaze was directed at the warrior who had joined recently. Unlike the Horizon Troop’s model of fighting hard when fighting and playing hard when playing, he was a freak who kept switching between task forces and was constantly taking on dangerous missions. While he fought like he would die at any moment, his skills grew just as fast. He had been a middle-ranked warrior when he joined, but currently, he had grown strong enough to be at the peak of high-ranked warriors. When he saw him fight, he felt inexplicably different.

The leader revealed a satisfied smile.

‘Even when considering the fate he awakened when he became a high-ranked warrior, he’ll truly be a useful military power later. Though I am worried he might die early from fighting with no regard… Since I placed ‘Puppet Shiro’ next to him, it won’t be too dangerous.’

After thinking to that point, the leader turned his gaze towards a different direction. The monsters swarmed densely towards them. While they had obtained great results already, this only mattered if they actually came out of this alive. Until Flame-Rain moved the Net of Fate to conceal them, they had to break through the encirclement and run. It would be an intense fight.

**

Puppet Shiro was a battle doll created by a now extinct species. She possessed the standard appearance of a beautiful woman that resembled earthlings, Flame Wing Tribe members, fairies, and others. However, her skin was created with a special metal that made it strong and cold.

The species that created her were incredible cowards. When they had to fight against the monsters, they would link their karma to battle dolls like her to fight instead of fighting personally. They did this despite the efficiency of karma not being that great.

She fought while receiving her masters' karma in her 'gear heart'. However, after losing a war, her masters were all killed. At the time of their demise, she accepted her masters' karma, which filled her gear heart, and their resentment towards the monsters had succeeded into a new fate. Now, after an immeasurable passage of time, she had become the battle doll 'Puppet Shiro', a highest-ranked warrior of the Armored Soul Tribe.

She blocked Chu Youngjin, who was rushing towards the heart of the enemy camp. With a chilling voice, she warned,

"Are you crazy? You're deep enough already. You'll die if you go in any further."

Chu Youngjin, the rookie warrior she was parenting, was an excessively rash person. Even now, he had gone out of the formation and was about to charge into the enemy camp alone. While this wasn't the first time he had done this, this time, even Shiro couldn't bear letting him go.

"There. Don't you see it? It's a highest-ranked monster. You won't last 10 seconds against it. Death."

Shiro calmly explained in order to save him, but Chu Younjin's eyes simply filled with irritation and fatigue. As if explaining was a pain, he spat while unaware of what he was saying,

"I won't die."

"You will."

Chu Youngjin pushed her away and argued,

"Hey! I won't die! I already died! I won't die!"

"...? You're alive."

"I'm dead here! Here! Crazy! Move aside!"

Thumping his chest, Chu Youngjin's eyes rolled like a crazy person's. Rather than Shiro, who was trying to stop him, he cared more about the monsters behind her.

“I don’t understand.”

Shiro declared with her cold, pretty face.

Tick, tick, tick. She heard her gear heart churning regularly like a mechanical clock. Besides the feeling of danger she felt her life was at risk or satisfaction from killing monsters, born as a battle doll, she wasn’t really emotional about other things.

“Shiro, you’re really tiresome…”

Since Shiro continued to not let him go, Chu Youngjin eventually gave up going any further and began clearing the monsters near him. Rumble! Rumble! Every time his karma rang out explosively, monsters’ bodies exploded and the nearby monsters lost their strength.

Even though he had slaughtered a sufficient number of monsters, Chu Youngjin still felt unsatisfied.

‘More… More… I want to fight more intensely.’

Chu Youngjin had no regrets if he died right now since there was nothing he had to live for.

While he did think he had to help Choi Hyuk, this thought was no more than a habit.

Currently, there was nothing he wanted to do besides futility risking his life fighting and growing stronger to develop ‘Chu Youngjin’s Guardian’, which his lover Lee Hyejin had left behind. His life consisted of fighting like he would die and looking after Choi Hyuk whenever he came to his senses.

If life was a game, Chu Youngjin thought that the real game had ended and that he was simply playing a bonus game.

The Horizon Troop broke through the monsters’ encirclement and advanced. Chu Youngjin stood at the very front. Becoming more agitated as he fought repeatedly, Chu Youngjin forgot Shiro’s dissuasion and charged forward once again. Leaving the formation

on his own, he became isolated in the midst of the monsters.

However, for some reason, Shiro didn't stop him this time.

'Reckless human. His big weakness is that he cannot calculate capability. If he dies here, that is it. Possible to consider him unnecessary in the grand scheme.'

Not only was she assigned to protect Chu Youngjin, she was also tasked to judge whether he was a suitable person to pull into their grand scheme. This time, Shiro decided to leave him alone. She also thought he would die soon.

Chu Youngjin, he was undoubtedly an amazing warrior.

The fate 'Futility' that he awakened when he became a high-ranked warrior even infected the karma of monsters, weakening them. Every time a rumble erupted out, the monsters within 500 meters of him would stagger as though their chests had been pierced by a stake. On the other hand, his sword strikes were destructive enough to exceed his current level. He could easily slaughter high-ranked monsters, which were of the same rank as him.

However, that was the limit of his strength. It was useless when facing a highest-ranked monster.

'Farewell.'

Seeing the highest-ranked monster, who she had been constantly observing, attack Chu Youngjin, Shiro inwardly sent him an emotionless farewell. As long as his fate of 'Futility' wasn't effective, Chu Youngjin would be ripped to shreds within ten seconds.

That was what would happen, yet...

Ruumble!

A thunderous rumble rang out, different from before. A light flashed, and this rumble shook the monsters' universe. All the

monsters within sight faltered at the same time.

‘…?’

Shiro couldn’t comprehend the current situation. She saw the highest-ranked monster falter. It was clearly weakened by Chu Youngjin’s ‘Futility’. Then, with a flash, she witnessed Chu Youngjin’s sword smash through the monster’s body. The monster split in two, never to reattach again. This was something Shiro hadn’t calculated. Faced with this utterly unexpected situation, Shiro’s way of thinking had taken a shock.

Tick, tick, tick, TICK, TICK! TICK! TI-TI-TI-TI-TI!

Her gear heart, which had been operating normally, began to churn crazily.

As if entranced, she approached Chu Youngjin. She brought Chu Youngjin, who had completely passed out in front of the highest-ranked monster’s corpse, into her embrace.

As though he was sleep-talking, Chu Youngjin said,

“See? I still didn’t die… Fuck…”

Chu Youngjin frowned, seemingly distressed. Passed out, a single teardrop hung from the edge of his eye.

Shiro felt her always cold forehead become hot.

‘?’

Noticing an abnormality within her body, Shiro quickly searched for the problem.

Kiiing!

Only then did she realize her gear heart had overheated and was spinning in place. She had never experienced this before.

“… Broken?”

While agitated and holding Chu Youngjin, Shiro frowned.

Chapter 169: Each's Calculations (2)

On the endlessly expanding blue sand desert of the Blue Ocean Planet, which was the homeland of the glass crabs, Choi Hyuk reunited with Chu Youngjin.

"Uhh, leader. I heard you're doing well these days."

Smiling blandly, Chu Youngjin raised his hand up.

Because he was happier to see him than he expected, Choi Hyuk felt a little embarrassed.

"Nice to see you, Chu hyung! But what's this whole 'leader' thing...? You aren't an official member of my troop anymore."

"Really? Then I'll talk casually. If we think about it, weren't you my junior at school?"

Chu Youngjin spoke casually as though he had been waiting for those words. Choi Hyuk's eyes widened before he laughed out loud. A peaceful smile hung on Chu Youngjin's lips as well. As he also felt happier to see Choi Hyuk than he thought, his heart beat faster.

'Is he the only person who remembers Lee Hyejin and was present at that moment...?'

While they didn't know each other during school, still, Choi Hyuk was the only person who he shared memories of that time with.

The slaughter in high school. The students who survived that had scattered. At least, those Chu Youngjin was close with had all died the day Jung Minji had died, and there was no way to know how many besides them were still alive. Perhaps they had all been annihilated since the lives the earthlings lived since then weren't easy.

Yeah. That was why Choi Hyuk was the only one. The only one

who knew and witnessed her final moment. This was meaningful to him. Especially now, when he was living amongst aliens without any connections.

‘Proof that there was such a time.’

Chu Youngjin stretched out his hand and firmly held Choi Hyuk’s. Choi Hyuk also firmly held onto his.

“Congrats. You’re already a highest-ranked warrior?”

Chu Youngjin smiled bitterly at Choi Hyuk’s congratulations.

“It’s funny hearing the word ‘already’ from you. The places you used to beat me still ache when it rains, bastard.”

“If you don’t like it, why don’t you get stronger and hit me.”

“You monstrous bastard.”

They separated soon after chatting and laughing.

Choi Hyuk stared directly into Chu Youngjin’s eyes and asked, “How are things going? Have you successfully infiltrated the enemy camp?”

“It’s shit... Still, because I became a highest-ranked warrior, I think I can now see the true nature of this troop. There is definitely something going on. Though we’ll have to wait and see if it’s an opportunity or not.”

“Really? Since you can’t see anything yet... Hmm, did you make any new friends?”

At Choi Hyuk’s question, Chu Youngjin recalled Shiro, who he had gotten quite close to lately. She was a highest-ranked warrior of the Armored Soul Tribe. While she possessed a cold gear heart, she occasionally became flustered when dealing with him.

After thinking about her for a bit, Chu Youngjin smiled bitterly.

“Not a lot, just a few. Well... Will there be a time when those relationships are useful?”

“We have to do everything we can right now.”

‘Have to do everything we can.’ These words contained Choi Hyuk’s frustrations.

They were finally almost there. The true nature of the alliance, which had toyed with Earth, had come to light, and their targets for revenge were decided. Now, they might be able to successfully get their revenge if they took one more step. However, they didn’t know where to take this one step.

“Do everything we can… Yeah, now that you’ve brought it up, let’s be clear. I wanted to ask you before. What is your revenge and what is mine? To be honest, we’ve never discussed it in detail before. Since we don’t know when we’ll meet again, why don’t you tell me today.”

Determined, Chu Youngjin asked with calm eyes.

Choi Hyuk looked around at his surroundings. Endlessly expanding blue sand. There was no one who could hear their conversation. On top of that, Choi Hyuk’s strength, which had erased the monsters’ universe’s Net of Fate, could be used here as well. Even Exalted Wings shouldn’t be able to know what they discussed here. He also met with Chu Youngjin here because he was confident in this.

Choi Hyuk stared directly at Chu Youngjin and replied in a snappy tone, “All.”

“All? Does that mean all 13 Exalted Wings?”

“Yeah.”

“… The troop I’m in is famous for being hostile towards the Exalted Wings’ policies, but there could be an Exalted Wing behind them. There should other people who can assist our cause besides them since we can’t ignore the competitiveness between the Exalted Wings… Even still, all 13, you’re not going to change your mind?”

Choi Hyuk didn’t nod and firmly answered,

“Yeah. Will you join me?”

Why was it? That moment, even though it was only for a moment, Chu Youngjin thought of Shiro. However, that was it.

Chu Youngjin quickly forgot about her and nodded his head.

“I’ll join you since I don’t really have anything else to do.”

Chu Youngjin thought that Choi Hyuk’s plan wasn’t bad. His own world had collapsed with Lee Hyejin’s death… Yet the world still continued on as though nothing happened. Under the logic that those who survived needed to live…

So…

If all 13 Exalted Wings died and the alliance collapsed… Maybe then, people would realize how frightening their actions were. That it was something they shouldn’t have glossed over and forgotten… With regret. It wasn’t a bad thought.

Choi Hyuk didn’t go out of his way to thank Chu Youngjin. He simply patted his shoulder once and requested, “Then… Work hard. I can’t think of a way to have them all gather in one place. There hasn’t been any recorded instance of them gathering in one place since the founding of the alliance. Since it’ll be too difficult to take them out one by one, we need to gather them in one place. We also need to become strong enough to kill them… I’ll work hard, so you as well.”

This was, in fact, the real reason why he called Chu Youngjin here. No matter how much he thought about it, he was stuck on this final step. Because he thought that they could come up with a method if they worked together, he took the risk to call him here.

Fortunately, Chu Youngjin nodded.

“If I learn something about my troop and gain some influence… I might be able to help you out with your plan.”

While it was only a supposition, right now, he earnestly held onto even this uncertain hope.

Choi Hyuk shook Chu Youngjin's hand.

After their handshake, Choi Hyuk took a step back. While he was happy to see him and wanted to stay longer, their meetings were best kept short since Chu Youngjin could be Choi Hyuk's hidden sword.

'It'll be best to refrain from contacting him.'

He was about to say goodbye when Chu Youngjin quickly asked him, "What did the others say?"

Choi Hyuk momentarily flinched at those words before calmly turning around and saying, "Leah, Handke, Kim Honghyun are leaving... Jinhee nuna is still thinking about it."

"Lee Jinhee... I hope she can be happy..."

"My thoughts are the same. Half my mind wishes she leaves the Berserkers and finds happiness..."

Choi Hyuk didn't mention the other half.

"Then let's meet next time when we're more certain of things. Also, let's not contact each other unless there is a drastic change."

Choi Hyuk left after waving his hand. Chu Youngjin raised his hand once as a send-off.

Then he later realized,

'Now that I think about it... There aren't 13 Exalted Wings anymore, but 14... What is he planning on doing about Flame-Rain?'

Chu Youngjin temporarily observed the place Choi Hyuk had left before shaking his head and returning to his troop.

**

"You grew stronger... Did you enjoy your revenge?"

Wherever he met Dark-Sound, he was always covered in a pitch-black darkness. His senses lost their sense of direction, and he felt like he was in a dream when he was in reality.

If he didn't want to lose himself in this darkness, he had no choice but to erect a sharp sword in his heart.

Erecting a sword in his heart, Choi Hyuk gave a short bow.

"... Thanks to you."

Dark-Sound asked while laughing,

"Of course, that isn't all?"

Choi Hyuk silently looked at Dark-Sound.

'Of course, that's not all.'

While he didn't know if Dark-Sound read something from his eyes, he seemed satisfied.

"You need to plot a bigger revenge scheme! For example... Flame-Hell! The main culprit who created the current unfair and cruel system! An elitist to his bones! I've flattered him for a long time which is why I can stand next to him. Now it's your turn. It'll be easier for you since I've made a path. However, you need proof. Proof that will make Flame-Hell trust you. If you do well... It won't be long before you can take out the person who stands at the top of the alliance."

Dark-Sound's voice was excessively sweet as he knew very well what Choi Hyuk wanted.

Before, when Dark-Sound met Choi Hyuk for the first time, he could see that he had a grudge on some 'ambiguous target'. While he possessed uncontrollable rage, at that time, Choi Hyuk didn't know how and to whom he should vent his rage on. While he kept thinking about getting revenge, his target and plan were uncertain.

That was why Dark-Sound was confident that, if he provided this

pitiful warrior with a certain target and plan, he would be able to control him.

What he had overlooked was simply the amount of rage Choi Hyuk possessed.

However, hiding the sword in his heart, Choi Hyuk asked in a clear manner, “What is it that I need to do?”

“You need to give Flame-Hell what he wants. What he wants are the circumstances to spread his wings.”

Flame-Hell was suddenly in competition with Flame-Rain.

He wasn’t pleased with Flame-Rain becoming the symbol of victory nor could he identify with how she indiscriminately appointed warriors.

While there wouldn’t be any immediate clashes as Flame-Rain had gone to the monsters’ universe, if she returned after a hundred or even a thousand years, he might have to hand his power over to her without a single fight.

Because of this, Flame-Hell also needed victory and a way to appeal to the youths. He needed a leader that could assemble young warriors around him.

“That’s why I recommended you. The Kundle Tribe that you trained recently and the glass crabs you saved. That was decisive. They all follow you, right? That’s something amazing. Warriors gather around you without reward, drunk on your victories... Of course, there are people who’ve left you recently, but seeing as there are still many left, you possess a certain charisma. Flame-Hell wants that. He hopes that you will go out to war with the young warriors of the top four tribes and the new generation of rookies. He wants you to make them stronger and entrance them to embed a strong image of Flame-Hell in their minds.”

Dark-Sound suddenly grabbed Choi Hyuk’s two shoulders. His touch was so cold that it felt like his shoulders were freezing.

“Take this to heart. On the outside, you need to make it seem like all your victories and glory is because of Flame-Hell’s decisions and wisdom. However… You understand, right? For the grand plan, it’s not bad to keep a few on your side. You also need to quickly reach the transcendent stage.”

Dark-Sound smirked.

When Choi Hyuk came to his senses, Dark-Sound was nowhere in sight. The darkness that covered his surroundings was gone as well. He was at his residence in the Tower of Warriors, where illusions of karma weapons swayed.

**

Dark-Sound hummed after his conversation with Choi Hyuk.

Flame-Rain grabbed his shoulder.

Blaaze!

Chiiii!

The suddenly surging darkness and flames fought each other, creating a whirlwind, before dying down.

Dark-Sound didn’t seem surprised as he craftily asked,

“Woah, woah, princess. Why are you so angry? What about the monsters’ universe?”

“There’s no problem if I leave for a bit… But… Are you really going to push Choi Hyuk into this?”

Unlike Flame-Rain’s serious expression, Dark-Sound’s expression was calm.

“What reason is there not to? You would have done the same if he joined you.”

“Don’t make me laugh. I’m different from you. While I’m cooperating with you right now, this doesn’t mean I’m your comrade.”

“Wow, how hurtful.”

Dark-Sound dryly rubbed his chest.

Flame-Rain gritted her teeth and growled,

“Remember this. It’ll be best if you don’t think about using Choi Hyuk for a bit before throwing him away. This is a warning.”

“Yes, yes, princess. I understand. Don’t worry and go back to the monsters’ universe. While it’s okay for a bit… That ‘bit’ shouldn’t be more than a minute.”

Dark-Sound replied as he leisurely met her gaze. Even as her blazing eyes disappeared while staring at him, she warned, “Don’t misjudge my ability.”

“…”

Flame-Rain disappeared, and Dark-Sound glanced at his shoulder. The place Flame-Rain grabbed had burnt up and become transparent.

Dark-Sound chuckled as he mumbled,

“What a charming princess. For a Flame Wing bitch, that is.”

Chapter 170: Each's Calculations (3)

"It is an honor to work with you again! And on a mission to punish the damn mutts of the universe-!"

A man with flames blazing in a whirlwind spoke, seemingly moved. He was Whirlwind Fire of the Flame Wing Tribe. He had, among others, participated in the mission colonizing the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. Beside him stood Black Snow, a high-ranked warrior of the Dark Tribe, who had pitch-black, transparent hair that floated in the air, greatly contrasting with her pale face. Seeing as how darkness sneakily covered her pale face, it seemed she was shy.

Warriors who were recommended by Flame-Hell had gathered in the square on the lowest level of the Tower of Warriors to greet Choi Hyuk. In other words, a formal meeting was held before the expedition. Whirlwind Fire and Black Snow were the two warriors who had arrived first. As soon as they met Choi Hyuk, they emitted a blinding white light, not hiding their goodwill.

However, a phrase caught Choi Hyuk's attention.

"The mutts... of the universe?"

Of course, the expression had been automatically translated by the Net of Fate, but Choi Hyuk became interested as the swear suited Korean sentiments very well.

"Isn't the 'Blue Mane Tribe' the name of the species we received the killing order for?"

Whirlwind Fire became more excited at his question that he said,

"Yes! So the mutts of the universe!"

Yet, as he didn't know the circumstances, Choi Hyuk gave a questioning look.

Finally realizing that Choi Hyuk didn't know much about the

universe's history, Whirlwind Fire showed a flustered expression. As he wasn't sure of how to go about it, Black Snow, who had been standing by docilely, acted.

Darkness softly flowed from her hair and created a dark space akin to the universe in front of Choi Hyuk. A few lights shined like stars inside it before creating a 3D shape like a hologram.

The shape formed by this mystical process was familiar to Choi Hyuk.

"… A dog?"

Like tribesmen, he had fancy ornaments hanging from his neck and head and his teeth and claws were dyed, but no matter how much he looked at him, the Blue Mane looked like a dog or a wolf.

Black Snow explained in a slightly excited voice,

"Yes! They are the 'Blue Manes'. Now that I think about it, I heard that there were animals similar to them on Earth. It's common in the universe. Species created resembling species that possess a great fate."

Saying this, Black Snow's gaze alternated between Whirlwind Fire and Choi Hyuk. This was a silent explanation of how the dogs and wolves on Earth resembled the 'Blue Mane' Tribe like how earthlings' faces and bodies resembled the Flame Wing and Dark Tribes.

Choi Hyuk slowly nodded.

At a glance, the wolf-like 'Blue Mane' looked lofty and strong, enough to incite a vague sense of curiosity for him by looking at his appearance. Yet, the mission Choi Hyuk received was to 'annihilate' them.

'Why?'

They were in the middle of a war against monsters, yet to annihilate a karma species? It was more dubious as he had

suddenly received this mission without a word of explanation. But now, it seemed this species was infamous enough to be called the ‘mutts of the universe’.

Hearing her explanation, the reason why they were called ‘mutts’ and were excluded from the alliance went way back. Before the alliance was founded, contact between other species was rare and many weren’t aware of the existence of other species. This was before the concept of ‘karmalings’, grouping all species into one.

Back then, the ‘Blue Manes’ were as famous as the Flame Wing Tribe, which had awakened karma. If the Flame Wing Tribe was famous for their incredible military strength, the ‘Blue Manes’ were famous for their nomadic lifestyle, going around the universe, and their loyalty, paying back any goodwill they received. The Blue Manes were quite popular.

It was around this time when species from a different dimension invaded. Unlike the massive invasion of the monsters currently, their actions were similar to seeking refuge, but either way, this was the karmalings’ first encounter with species from another dimension.

They were powerful, possessed reason, and they had set up tactics in order to dominate this new universe. The ones who first submitted, wagged their tails at their technology, and swore allegiance were the ‘Blue Manes’.

The ‘Blue Manes’ provided them with the information they had obtained while traveling throughout the universe and used the trust they had accumulated to cause the collapse of other species.

Before the Flame Wing Tribe eventually annihilated those from the other dimension, numerous species suffered as their slaves.

Black Snow seemed angry, her body trembling, as she continued,

“But even after that, they were brazen-faced, not reflecting on their actions. When the monsters invaded, they rejected the

alliance's proposal to join them, forgiving their past actions, and hid even further. They hid beneath the alliance's shadow and focused on their own safety. On top of that, there were rumors that they attempted to cooperate with the monsters. They can't be forgiven."

Choi Hyuk unconsciously mumbled,

"They are traitors like Ye Wanyong..."

"Ye Wanyong? I don't know what that is... But they are mutts."

Seeing Black Snow grinding her teeth and Whirlwind chiming in while nodding his head, he could tell that the hostility toward the Blue Mane Tribe was universally great.

A question arose from listening to them.

"Why hasn't the alliance subjugated them yet?"

When Choi Hyuk asked, Black Snow and Whirlwind Fire looked at Choi Hyuk with eyes shining with respect.

Whirlwind Fire said,

"Before the foundation of the alliance, we didn't dare to. While we did kill them whenever we saw them, because they were fundamentally nomads, they fled from planet to planet and from galaxy to galaxy. Only after founding the alliance did we truly have the capability to subjugate them... But we didn't have the capacity to because of the war against the monsters. While the Blue Manes weren't an incredibly powerful species, they couldn't be ignored. To completely subjugate them would require a large army, but the alliance didn't have the capacity. But the one who reversed this situation is you, leader!"

"... Me?"

"Yes, of course, after the massive invasion last time, the monsters' activities reduced drastically, but it wasn't like we had spare reserves since we had to recover lost territory and keep the

monsters in check. However, didn't you completely capture the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters by crossing over to the monsters' universe, taking out a demise-ranked monster and by destroying all the Kahur Kabkuns that were densely packed together? Thanks to that, the monsters' strength in our universe has reduced significantly and the alliance has leftover defensive resources. Only now do we have the time and resources to subjugate the mutts of the universe!"

"… Is that so?"

While his evaluation had strangely mixed Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain's achievements, Choi Hyuk didn't consider it a problem.

Rather, others mocked them. While they murmured to each other, he could hear them all.

"Haa… Whirlwind Fire. You really got to acknowledge his ability to boast."

Someone plainly remarked. When Choi Hyuk turned around, that person turned around towards them. There weren't just one or two. The warriors who had begun to fill the Tower of Warriors were looking at Choi Hyuk, Black Snow, and Whirlwind Fire.

A significant number of them were from the Flame Wing Tribe. The plaza surged with flames as though torches had been lit throughout.

They were the next generation elite warriors that Flame-Hell had selected. Flame-Hell wanted to develop them into a force that supported him. Since he included this many Flame Wing Tribe warriors when developing the next generation of alliance warriors, it clearly showed his intentions of wanting to keep the Flame Wing Tribe at the center of the alliance.

Either way, Choi Hyuk predicted that there wouldn't be any trivial clashed since Flame-Hell wanted his help by sending them, but there seemed to be a few warriors within the plaza who didn't

look upon him favorably.

Their murmurs, which they didn't try to hide, were picked up by Choi Hyuk's ears.

"Highest-ranked Warrior Choi Hyuk... Of course, he's amazing, but isn't his ability too low to lead a troop like this?"

"My words exactly. They should have brought at least a transcendent warrior in the rankings."

"Did you hear what they were saying before? He didn't even know who the mutts of the universe were. While I know he's talented and has contributed a lot... Will he be able to command properly like this?"

"There are rumors that the head of the Blue Mane Tribe is at the transcendent level..."

They were blunt.

During the first meeting with their troop leader, the man who would be commanding all of them, they slandered him without any hesitation with attitudes of 'your capacity is only this much if you can't even handle this,' and looks of 'what are you going to do about it?'

Choi Hyuk found this interesting rather than being taken aback.

'The Flame Wing Tribe's evaluation of me is stingier than I expected. Then... Does Flame-Hell trust my abilities so much that he risked opposition? Or is this also a test...?'

Revealing an amused expression, Choi Hyuk pointed to a warrior. He was the warrior who had mocked Whirlwind Fire.

"You."

The warrior who mocked Whirlwind Fire came forward.

"Yes, I am a high-ranked warrior of the Flame Wing Tribe, Sand Fire."

While his attitude was polite, he gave him a challenging look.

Choi Hyuk asked,

“It seems everyone is doubtful of this mission and my abilities, what about you?”

Then Sand Fire replied without a moment’s hesitation,

“I think... that we should just act like we are completing this mission before giving up.”

“Sand Fire!”

Whirlwind Fire shouted, seemingly unable to control his rage.

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn’t pay him any mind and asked again, filled with curiosity,

“Why?”

Sand Fire stood confidently and replied freely,

“First, while the head of the Blue Manes is a coward, his ability to command is outstanding. Unlike what is known publicly, this isn’t the first time we are attempting to subjugate the Blue Mane Tribe. Previously, they dragged the war on with their unique guerilla tactics, and in the end, the alliance, which prioritized the war against the monsters, had no choice but to retreat. I wonder if Leader Choi Hyuk will be any different. Second, it has been confirmed that the head of the Blue Mane Tribe is at the transcendent level. Compared to him, you are a highest-ranked warrior. I don’t think any further explanation is necessary. Third, you can’t obtain our loyalty. Look at your troops first. You only have eight high-ranked warriors... No, since three left recently, five. Only you and Naro of the Armored Soul Tribe, who can’t even control his own strength yet, are highest-ranked warriors. Compare that to the hundreds of high-ranked warriors and seven highest-ranked warriors dispatched this time. This is a type of allied force so it isn’t fair for Leader Choi Hyuk, whose force is the smallest, to be the commander-in-chief. There won’t be anyone

who truly follows you.”

In the end, he was saying that he couldn’t acknowledge him because his commanding ability was doubtful, he lacked military power, and he seemed to have been appointed by pulling strings.

Having witnessed Choi Hyuk kill a highest-ranked monster with a single slash when he was only a high-ranked warrior, Whirlwind Fire and Black Snow wanted to retort, but since Choi Hyuk’s reaction was so calm, they didn’t know what to do, only reading Choi Hyuk’s mood.

After listening to Sand Fire talk in high spirits, Choi Hyuk nodded as though he understood.

Then he said,

“Okay, we go to battle tomorrow at this time. Gather here.”

Sand Fire was the one who was taken aback.

“… Pardon?”

Yet Choi Hyuk didn’t say it again.

He simply announced while turning around,

“You all know my face, right? It seems Exalted Wing Flame-Hell has prepared some refreshments, so eat and drink moderately and then gather here tomorrow.”

Choi Hyuk raised two fingers.

“Listening to you, it seems like the key point is to end the war before it drags on. Two months. I will end this war in two months so look forward to it when you arrive tomorrow.”

After saying this, Choi Hyuk smiled unsuitably before leaving with light steps.

“Ah! Leader!”

Black Snow and Whirlwind Fire followed after him as though they were his attendants.

"..."

A silence hung in the plaza where the rest of the warriors remained.

A portion of them, who came here ready for a fight, were taken aback by Choi Hyuk, who didn't play along, and the rest seemed to find this situation fresh as they began to enjoy it. Soon, someone erupted into laughter.

"Puahaha! He's quite intense!"

"Two months? Can he do it? If he does, he's a hero!"

"Kekeke, I bet he's bluffing."

"Woah... Our leader is charismatic."

Choi Hyuk was working hard to capture the hearts of these young warriors like Dark-Sound requested.

Known as one of the 'Five Eulsa Traitors', who signed the Eulsa Treaty making Korea a protectorate of Japan in defiance of Korean Emporer Gojong.

Chapter 171: Each's Calculations (4)

There were two groups who flipped out when they heard that they would be marching off to war the next day.

The first group was comprised of the highest-ranked warriors participating in the subjugation. The seven highest-ranked warriors, who were rushing to meet Choi Hyuk, complained incessantly about the sudden schedule, demanding the specifics of his plan.

In response, Choi Hyuk used Flame-Hell's name.

'I understand you are uneasy. However, there is a reason why Exalted Wing Flame-Hell trusts me. You should trust me too. You will know tomorrow.'

He simply said what he wanted and dismissed them.

The one who came to see him next was a bit unexpected. He was Armor-Phantom, the commander-in-chief of the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. It was different from when he had arrived in his small, secondary body last time. Choi Hyuk was suppressed by the vigor of Armor-Phantom's real body. Metallic pieces fluttered like feathers as they reflected light to form Armor-Phantom's outline. Spreading wings made of metal and light, his splendor made him look like an angel judging the world. At a glance, he seemed to be at the early stages of the transcendent level, similar in strength to Flame-Rain before she grew stronger.

Now that their relationship had gone awry, he gave Choi Hyuk an indifferent look.

"While I don't really want to see your face... I came because the elders of my tribe sent me."

Hearing this, Choi Hyuk's expression couldn't help but stiffen. Only Exalted Wings were individuals that Armor-Phantom, who was a transcendent warrior and the commander-in-chief of two

superclusters, would refer to as ‘elders’. This was the first point of contact he had with other Exalted Wings besides Flame-Hell and Dark-Sound.

Yet, he couldn’t predict the reason for Armor-Phantom’s visit.

“Why is that you are imprisoning a warrior who has awakened as an Armor Soul Tribe member?”

There was no doubt he was referring to Naro when he said ‘a warrior who has awakened as an Armor Soul Tribe member’, but to claim he was imprisoning him?

Choi Hyuk frowned.

“I have never imprisoned Naro.”

“Then why isn’t he answering to his tribe’s calls?”

Releasing the aura of a transcendent warrior without restraint, Armor-Phantom pressured Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk decided to call Naro over and ask him.

After arriving, Naro didn’t know what to do when he saw Armor-Phantom. Seeing his reaction, it seemed Naro did receive a summons from the Armor Soul Tribe.

[No… That… I never thought you would come personally.]

To the flustered Naro, Armor-Phantom gently, yet firmly said in an attitude overflowing with affection for Naro,

“Naro, a highest-ranked warrior of the Armor Soul Tribe, it’s great to see you. I came because I was worried. If you’re in a situation against your will, just say it. There’s no need to worry. There is no one who can imprison an Armor Soul Tribe member in this entire universe.”

His voice was filled with pride for his tribe.

Naro flipped out.

[That’s not it!]

“Then?”

[That’s… I don’t want to leave the Berserkers.]

Armor-Phantom seemed shocked as he was momentarily at a loss for words. He barely managed to speak again.

“Think about it again. It’s not like you’re leaving forever. Those who have awakened as members of the Armor Soul Tribe have to receive our education. Only then can you be a true member of the Armor Soul Tribe. You also have to recreate your body! How long are you going to dwell in that large, heavy spaceship? You can become much stronger than you are now!”

[… I like the spaceship.]

Naro avoided Armor-Phantom’s gaze.

Choi Hyuk looked at Naro, and Naro also glanced at Choi Hyuk, telepathically sending the emotions he was feeling right now. Naro didn’t use telepathy much since he learned to speak. However, like the first time they had met, Naro only used telepathy to communicate with him.

Choi Hyuk understood what emotions he was feeling right now.

‘I don’t… want to leave.’

If he helped Armor-Phantom persuade Naro right now, he could probably leave a good impression on the Armor Soul Tribe. He might even be able to get closer to other Exalted Wings faster.

Despite this, Choi Hyuk closed his eyes. He suddenly thought of the executives who had decided to leave, Handke, Leah, and Kim Honghyun, and especially Lee Jinhee, who was still undecided.

Speculation was simply speculation. He didn’t know what path would be best, however, Choi Hyuk decided to walk the path his heart chose. He had already lying to himself enough.

Choi Hyuk used Flame-Hell’s name once again.

“You don’t have to worry about Naro’s education. The expedition

this time is being personally supervised by Exalted Wing Flame-Hell. I am certain it'll be better than any other experience in the world. I think it's best if you broadened your mind. Aren't we all members of the alliance either way? I don't think there's a need to be educated by one's own tribe. Like this, Naro will be able to become a great warrior of the 'alliance'. I will support Naro's decision."

Something he said seemed to have rubbed Armor-Phantom the wrong way as his metallic feathers simultaneous stood on end and emitted a 'Ting!' sound. While he clearly looked angry, it didn't seem like he could act out since Flame-Hell was mentioned. He simply glared at Choi Hyuk before leaving.

[You don't even like the alliance much.]

Naro said in a playful voice. The warm feelings Naro felt were transmitted to Choi Hyuk's heart.

**

Choi Hyuk couldn't help but feel sorry for the Berserkers.

This was, in reality, someone else's war. A war started because Flame-Hell wanted to keep his other competitors in check and strengthen his authority.

While it was for his revenge, Choi Hyuk was pushed into this situation as a puppet, and the Berserkers would die for his ultimate enemy, Flame-Hell.

All this happened because he was powerless.

Choi Hyuk resolved himself.

'This is the last play.'

The next time... The next time he unsheathed his sword would be for his final revenge. Gritting his teeth, Choi Hyuk swallowed his surging sorrow and rage. These were the sufferings he had to endure and accumulate in order to open the way for a new

universe.

Choi Hyuk gathered these sufferings and aimed them at the Blue Manes. His Karma Heart thumped. After he had dealt with those who were in charge of Earth's recruit training, his Karma Heart kept beating nonstop as though it was sick. It beat nonstop as it squeezed out all of Choi Hyuk's power and fate. Choi Hyuk already knew that the end was near and that he wouldn't lose to anything.

"Charge! We target the head of the Blue Manes in the shortest distance possible! We leave behind those who can't keep up!"

The warriors, who followed Choi Hyuk while wondering what his strategy was, were shocked at his declaration. To suddenly tell them to break through at a single point... this strategy should never be chosen against the Blue Manes, who possessed excellent maneuverability and specialized in guerilla tactics.

Yet, while they were shocked, Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers were rushing towards the Blue Mane Tribe's border army that had appeared in front of them.

Their charge, which wasn't even in proper formation, looked unsteady as though they would quickly be blocked by their enemies.

If the other warriors didn't follow behind them, then the Berserkers would suffer heavy losses. If things progressed like this, it was clear that those who didn't follow quickly would be reprimanded.

Even if they didn't follow his order of charging towards the head of the Blue Manes, they had to support his charge first.

"That crazy! Follow after them for now! Once we catch up, we drag that bastard back and retreat!"

The highest-ranked warriors swore at Choi Hyuk as they led their troops and followed after Choi Hyuk.

A war they had never experienced before began.

Bang! Bang!

Grrr!

[Filthy alliance scum!]

The Blue Manes barked, cursing them. Their claws swung out. A wolf at the front seemed to disappear, and when he reappeared, his jaws were already on a Berserker's neck.

However, the Berserkers were skilled as well.

Lee Jinhee grabbed a Blue Mane who was targeting the back of her neck, and keeping a firm grip on his neck, she dragged him along. Lee Jinhee stabbed the wolf's stomach and side before shoving his face into the jaws of another wolf.

Her subordinates followed her example and trampled on the onrushing wolves. Still, their charging speed didn't drop at all.

While the Blue Manes' outer appearances were that of wolves, their colorful dyes and tribal ornaments showed that they were somewhat civilized and possessed reason. Yet, the Berserkers killed them indiscriminately one after another as though they were killing beasts.

These scenes exceeded the predictions of the other warriors following after them.

'The Berserkers and the Blue Manes' levels aren't that different? Yet how is it so one-sided?'

Their first prediction of the clash, that it would be even or that the Berserkers would be pushed back, was wrong.

'Still, I bet it'll be difficult to break through since the Blue Manes' maneuverability is excellent. Huh?'

The prediction that the Berserkers would be held back by the Blue Manes and lose to their maneuverability was also proven wrong.

Instead, the ones who lost their maneuverability were the Blue

Manes. They tried their best to slow the Berserkers down, but the more they tried, the more pitifully they were slaughtered and thrown back.

[Grrr!!]

Along with a fierce roar, a highest-ranked Blue Mane warrior ambushed Choi Hyuk, but by that time, Choi Hyuk's sword was already passing through the top of his head.

[Rrrr...]

While thinking that he was biting Choi Hyuk, the highest-ranked Blue Mane warrior became a corpse.

Shudder.

A crushing force.

Without the slightest delay, the Berserkers pushed through the Blue Mane border army. The other troops, who wanted to save the Berserkers and drag the recklessly charging Choi Hyuk away, simply followed behind them. They couldn't even catch up to the Berserkers.

"Unbelievable!"

Someone shouted, almost screaming. His voice sounded as though he had taken a heavy blow to his pride.

**

Like how Choi Hyuk's Karma Heart was beating furiously, the Berserkers' karma was boiling violently. As their karma, which had grown greatly since their first revenge, still didn't satiate the Berserkers, it boiled even more violently, swelling in size whenever the Berserkers felt unsatisfied. The Berserkers didn't suppress their surging karma and simply left their bodies to the flow.

At this moment, even Lee Jinhee, who was withholding her decision on whether or not to continue to follow Choi Hyuk,

fought with cruelty and without hesitation, fitting the typical characteristics of a Berserker.

However, her actions couldn't compare to Ryu Hyunsung's.

If there was another warrior who shined on this battlefield other than Choi Hyuk, it would be Ryu Hyunsung. The seven highest-ranked warriors following from behind and even Naro, who was assisting the fight, couldn't match the powerful aura Ryu Hyunsung gave off.

'Haha! I can kill them! I can kill more!'

Ryu Hyunsung had already cleanly forgotten that the Blue Manes weren't monsters but a karma species that possessed reason.

His mind was filled with the thought that he could kill to his heart's content.

The day he awakened was an eternal nightmare imprinted on Ryu Hyunsung's mind. He felt like the misery he felt when all he could do was watch his friends die powerlessly that day was being erased every time he killed a wolf.

Ryu Hyunsung's body shivered in ecstasy.

He had always fought dreaming of a better future and, when he was tired of fighting, taught new Berserkers in preparation for the future. Yet, no matter how much he struggled, he would have nightmares at night, and the emptiness in his heart gradually grew. It was only then when he realized,

'Ah, I already died.'

Only then did Ryu Hyunsung understand Chu Youngjin's fighting style. The extreme combativeness of someone whose heart had already died. On the other hand, during the recruit training, he had refused to acknowledge that his heart had already died and stubbornly used the sword techniques he had mastered in the past.

Ryu Hyunsung decided to throw away this shell.

‘I’ll entrust the future… to others.’

Ryu Hyunsung thought of Handke, Leah, and Kim Honghyun, who had left the Berserkers. Yes, he just needed to leave the future to them. It was a problem for someone who was already dead to think about those things.

What he had to do now was-

‘Kill and kill!’

Whether it was his enemies or himself.

He felt free.

Shouting, Ryu Hyunsung swung his sword, splitting a Blue Mane’s head and then smashing his eyes with the handle.

“I’ll die! When I die! Let’s see how strong… Huh?!”

As though possessed, he shouted nonsense from his mouth.

His karma weirdly kept swelling, and he could easily kill Blue Mane warriors who were similar or stronger than him.

His heart shuddered.

Ryu Hyunsung was always considered to be half a step to a step lower than Chu Youngjin, but the vigor he was showing right now didn’t lose out to the Chu Youngjin of the past.

Rather than a Berserker, he seemed like a demon.

“How could he fight like that?! … Ah…”

The warriors who couldn’t hide their shock at the Berserkers’ splendor were at a loss for words when they saw Ryu Hyunsung.

He purposefully stretched his neck out to bait the wolves. Then he killed those who approached to chew his neck with a single stab.

He even fought whilst being surrounded by the wolves, inducing them to launch pincer attacks. However, whenever the wolves launched the pincer attacks, they would die in the blink of an eye.

It seemed like nothing could harm him.

Glossing over Choi Hyuk's contributions as he was rumored to be an exceptional highest-ranked warrior, they were especially shocked seeing Ryu Hyunsung, who they thought was at or below their level, show off his splendor.

The weight of the name 'Berserkers' clutched their hearts.

The punitive expedition, which broke through the border army in one go, quickly pushed forward toward the center of the Blue Manes' territory rather than taking action against the Blue Manes.

Even the troop leaders, who didn't agree with Choi Hyuk's strategy of killing the head of the Blue Manes in one go, were currently frantically following the Berserkers as though they were entranced by something.

At the same time, Handke, Leah, and Kim Honghyun, who had left the Berserkers, were meeting with the Sovereign of Paradise Camilla.

Camilla was worried about the Berserkers.

"Overseer Choi Hyuk... wasn't satisfied with the first revenge? Then where is his revenge directed? If the alliance falls into danger, then we cannot win in the war against the monsters. It's a problem even if Choi Hyuk fails. All earthlings might be branded as traitors."

Handke gently shook his head.

"That would only be the case if Leader Choi Hyuk ever lost. However, I can't imagine the leader losing. Whether it's against the alliance or the monsters. It's the same for the Berserkers who follow him. What moves them isn't logic or reasoning, but their wounded pride and collapsed happiness. The deeper their wounds, the more they can't stop. Nor will they lose. Of course, those who only rage with revenge can't be our future. However, after they have flipped the world on its head... No one will be able to look

down on earthlings. That is our future."

Handke grinned before adding,

"Well, to be honest, the reason doesn't matter. While I left the Berserkers, I have no thoughts on obstructing their path. I feel sorry for and really like them."

After saying this, Handke looked up at the milk-white skies of Dragonic. Looking for Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers who were fighting nonstop somewhere beyond it, he gave a short prayer for their fortune in battle.

Chapter 172: Each's Calculations (5)

After piercing through the Blue Manes' border defense, they were quickly advancing to the center of their territory when they heard something howl.

While they didn't know what it was, the fact that it was howling was certain. In response, the warriors' weapons vibrated like brass instruments, their hearts thumped like drums, and the planets rang out like bells. Even space itself shook like a reed.

'Ahwooooo!'

This sound wasn't heard by their ears. It was a resonance created by the vibration of everything, including the world around them.

The warriors, who advanced following Choi Hyuk and his Berserkers in a trance, stopped in place. Their ears perked up at the sound escaping from their hearts. It was a chilling sense of dread.

Countless stars appeared in the darkness of outer space.

Whether they were there since the beginning or had only now been born from the darkness, each pair of eyes shined brightly and dark shadows with fluttering lush manes made their appearance.

"Chasing Manes..."

One of the warriors following the Berserkers made a stifled cry.

The most elite troop of the Blue Manes. It was an attack troop personally led by their leader. Even while the Blue Manes were publicly suppressed, they had raised their name in infamy by ruining countless troops and species.

They could sufficiently guess that they were strong with the information they had gathered until now.

However, the punitive force assembled this time was composed of the top elites of the alliance. They didn't lose out to them at all.

Yet, for some reason, they felt a suffocating pressure.

“Look over there.”

Someone mumbled.

The appearances of the wolves were slightly strange. Their front paws were larger and more ferocious looking, and there were small eyes stuck on their excessively long manes. Each wolf had an unknown skull of a beast on their heads.

No, they were monster skulls. The warriors unconsciously looked at Choi Hyuk.

The monsters’ new weapon that warrior Choi Hyuk first reported to the alliance. A method where a monster could fuse with another by equipping itself with it. They were new weapons that had the possibility of even surpassing the alliance’s karma weapons. The wolves had fused with living monsters and were using them as weapons and armor.

“Crazy… Does this mean they really came to an agreement with the monsters?”

“How? The monsters aren’t existences that can be communicated with!”

Murmurs began to spread.

The wolves were watching them with overwhelming numbers and overwhelming vigor.

They were only confronting each other, yet the warriors were already becoming exhausted and restless. Wherever they looked, they saw strange wolves staring at them like statues. Like claustrophobia, emotions of fear and suffocation flared up in the warriors.

The mood seemed like they had lost before even fighting.

Choi Hyuk acted in order to cut this flow.

Kririring, kang!!

The moment ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ rang out while twisting its body, Choi Hyuk was already in front of the ‘Chasing Manes’. Just as they were about to exclaim, ‘As expected of Choi Hyuk...!’, Choi Hyuk shot backwards with a bang. Without being able to maintain a steady posture, he was pushed back.

A large shadow was cast in the place Choi Hyuk had attacked. While emitting a cold darkness that ached one’s bones, the head wolf revealed his teeth.

“I can’t believe it. Is this really all? Have only feathers gathered without a single wing?”

The moment the head wolf appeared, everyone held their breath. Their karma was suppressed. They couldn’t move their bodies. It felt like the fates they had grasped since they had become high-ranked warriors were being shredded apart like tissues.

At this moment, even Lee Jinhee was stricken with fear.

She had grasped the fate ‘Challenge’ when she became a high-ranked warrior. However, the head wolf seemed like the peak of challenges. A limit she could never overcome. A despair that she could never challenge again. She couldn’t even move a finger. Her karma, which proudly flowed through her body, stiffened and became as heavy as a rock.

Just then, she heard a rough pant next to her.

Grit. She heard someone grit their teeth.

When she looked around, it was Ryu Hyunsung. His eyes were so red that they seemed like they would cry tears of blood at any moment.

“Ry-Ryu hyung?”

Lee Jinhee became uneasy from the beast-like sounds Ryu Hyunsung was making.

“Ryu hyung! Don’t do it!”

Despite Lee Jinhee's attempt at holding him back, blood dripped from Ryu Hyunsung's eyes. It seemed he even bit his lips too hard as blood also flowed from his lips.

While everyone was being dominated by the head wolf's vigor, Ryu Hyunsung's body trembled before he shot forward with a bang.

"Hey! Ryu Hyunsung!!!"

Lee Jinhee screamed. The head wolf, who had instantly shot Choi Hyuk backwards, was still there, yet...

Without knowing, Lee Jinhee shot after Ryu Hyunsung.

At the same time,

"Get up!"

Bae Jinman's shout shook the warriors. A golden brilliance spread out endlessly with Bae Jinman at its center. The golden brilliance reduced negative emotions and increased positive ones as it connected the warriors' fighting spirit.

When numerous warriors' hearts interconnected and they began to depend on each other, the fighting spirit they had lost slowly recovered.

"Damn it!"

Baek Seoin, who could only now move his body, swore as he saw Ryu Hyunsung and Lee Jinhee shoot forward. The worst-case scenario crossed his mind.

-!

Then sound disappeared. No, the howl that made their bodies and the planets tremble disappeared suddenly.

The head wolf, who had been looking at Ryu Hyunsung and Lee Jinhee as though they were laughable, turned his gaze.

His large paw clashed with 'Choi Hyuk's Imprint'.

Choi Hyuk, who had been flung away, had returned. While the ‘First Sword’ he used was calmly blocked by the head wolf, it brought the result of sweeping away the pressure the warriors were under.

The head wolf growled as he admired,

“You have a strange skill.”

Choi Hyuk didn’t reply. As if to engrave that he was his opponent, he shot forward and slashed again and again.

Every time Choi Hyuk and the head wolf clashed, dark, blazing flames clashed with a cold darkness and made waves. A wave of heat rushed over them, followed by a cold wave, and then another wave of heat.

These waves had the effect of waking the warriors, who had fallen into a trance. As they came to their senses, the warriors, who had been suppressed by the fear of death, indiscriminately reacted temperamentally.

“Damn it! Fight! Pierce through them!”

The warriors pushed forward. The wolves calmly moved their formation back before attacking the warriors, who had broken their formation while recklessly charging at them.

Dogfights broke out everywhere.

**

“Damn it… Berserkers! Move with your teams! Alexei! You go around and organize the Berserkers’ formation!”

Baek Seoin shouted in a mad mood. However, Alexei, who heard the order, didn’t even look at Baek Seoin.

“… Sorry. Everyone, follow me! Let’s go rescue the director!”

Alexei ignored Baek Seoin’s order and led his subordinates to Ryu Hyunsung and Lee Jinhee, who were isolated at the very front.

“Hey! Hey! You crazy…! Naro! We are going to cooperate with the highest-ranked warriors of the other troops! Ask them to help recover our formation! We’re going to be crushed at this rate!”

{Understood!}

Baek Seoin moved urgently. While they seemed to be dogfights, the wolves were actually pulling the punitive force members into their formation and dispersing and attacking them in groups of twos and threes. Clearly a disadvantageous fight for the punitive force.

Baek Seoin tried his best to recover from this situation, but his efforts were soon faced with another obstruction.

“Alliance scum. I was going to kill you soon anyways, yet you crawled here on your own.”

A highest-ranked wolf, along with other wolves who followed him, rushed towards Baek Seoin knowing he was the commander.

“I am Meteor-Chasing Mane. You won’t be able to grab my tail even in your dying moment.”

His silver fur that was hidden in the darkness revealed itself. It seemed ‘Meteor-Chasing Mane’ prided himself on the color of his fur as his ornaments, monster armor and claws were all silver as well.

Whoosh.

He disappeared after spouting self-indulging remarks.

Crassh!

Baek Seoin’s shield was torn away. Blood splattered.

There were similar scenes everywhere. It seemed they obtained information about the punitive force’s advance by observing them as they precisely intercepted key warriors. The seven highest-ranked warriors were all held back by powerful wolves, and Naro and the top executives of the Berserkers had to face the wolves that

came to fight them.

It seemed a few among them were given ‘must kill’ orders as they were faced with wolves beyond their level.

Like how a highest-ranked wolf approached Baek Seoin, another one faced off against Ryu Hyunsung.

“Hey! Ryu Hyunsung! Get back! Go back to the formation!”

Ryu Hyunsung ignored the shouting Lee Jinhee and pushed forward.

“Why are you like this?! Do you want to die?!”

As he brushed off Lee Jinhee’s hand, which grabbed his shoulder, Ryu Hyunsung growled like a beast as he spoke nonsense.

“Again! Again! You want to lose?! Again?! You want me to stand still? You want me to see everyone die?!”

It seemed Ryu Hyunsung recalled the disaster that occurred when he awakened after experiencing the sense of despair the head wolf gave him.

Ryu Hyunsung’s eyes were filled with killing intent as though Lee Jinhee had become a great enemy of life and death.

At that moment, two wolves charged at them.

Among them, the highest-ranked wolf targeted Ryu Hyunsung while the wolf at the peak of high rank targeted Lee Jinhee. Both were ferocious. Rather than ripping them apart while wielding their claws, they charged at them like rhinos. Still, their flesh ripped apart and blood splattered as though saws slashed past them.

**

The head wolf sneered in ridicule.

“While we hid our power during this time... I didn’t think that they would send a fellow that hasn’t even reached the

transcendent level.”

Choi Hyuk attacked with gritted teeth, yet the head wolf was overflowing with composure.

“Well... You are strong considering you are a highest-ranked warrior, but...”

The distrustful head wolf leisurely faced Choi Hyuk as he once again looked around at his surroundings. Then he confirmed that this was all there was to the punitive force. There was no way there was a hidden trap set up by the alliance.

The large wolf laughed as his fur stood on their end.

“It truly is a wonderful appetizer.”

He would have the main dish when he advanced towards Alliance City with the monsters. He had a hunch that he would finally be able to repay the humiliation he had endured while hiding all this time.

‘Ahwwwoooo!!!’

The head wolf howled again, and this time, time stopped.

The countless eyes of the monster’s body that was equipped to the head wolf simultaneous opened and vibrated along with his howl.

All order collapsed. The swords of the warriors who aimed at the wolves’ bones and flesh, became soft as feathers, and the steps of a passing wolf became claws that slashed at the warriors’ hearts. Attacks that should have hit missed, and attacks that should have missed hit. It seemed that a portion of the universe’s fate had reversed.

The ones who first noticed this change were the Exalted Wings.

The stone plates, which were covered in darkness in the ‘Brain’ of Alliance City, all lit up at once.

{We have lost control over the Net of Fate at the Blue Manes’

coordinates.}

{Did the head of the Blue Manes do this? His strength is close to ours?}

{We'll help so let's immediate recover our control!}

Controlling the Net of Fate was the most important tactic in the war. If the Net of Fate was taken by someone else, the order of the universe would become disadvantageous to them.

However, the Exalted Wings couldn't quickly regain control over the Net of Fate.

{No! You can't! Invasion! It's an invasion! An extensive one from the monsters! This... This is the largest scale ever. It's multiple times bigger than when King Flame-Sky died in battle!!}

An Exalted Wing of the Speckled Light Tribe screamed. Even without his scream, the Exalted Wings felt the power of the monsters that encroached on the Net of Fate, which they maintained, throughout the universe. If the situation was like this, then they didn't have the capacity to focus their strength on the wolves.

{Oh my god... The rookies of the alliance will all die! Flame-Hell!}

An Exalted Wing of the Armored Soul Tribe shouted roughly. The majority of the rookies that were participating in subjugating the Blue Manes were either Flame Wing Tribe members or those close to the Flame Wing Tribe. Those who disliked how Flame-Hell openly tried to increase the Flame Wing Tribe's power couldn't help but strongly express their discontent.

While those who would die were pro-Flame Wing Tribe, when an all-out war broke out against the monsters, each and every one of them were precious military resources. They couldn't contain their rage when thinking about how a disadvantageous war began because of Flame-Hell's greed.

{...}

Flame-Hell was silent. From the intelligence provided by the reconnaissance troops and Flame-Rain, who had left for the monsters' universe, he had judged that there would be more time before the monsters launched an extensive attack, yet this situation was as if he was hit on the back of the head.

A precipitous situation where he couldn't see ahead.

Just then, the Exalted Wing of the dragon race, Leviathan, made a doubtful report.

{Huh? The head wolf's command over the relevant area's Net of Fate... No! The Net of Fate itself has been destroyed...?}

{This is...?}

While everyone was shocked, Flame-Hell and Dark-Sound let out a sigh and managed to squeeze out a smile.

**

The moment the head wolf howled, Choi Hyuk felt a thrill surging from his heart.

The fully transcendent level vigor emitted by the wolf. The power to decide the fate of the universe. The fate the wolf created – 'Second Coming'. The power he declared to return to the alliance that chased them out as terror.

Facing this overwhelming power, his karma, which seethed at the cusp of bursting and tickled at his heart, finally exploded.

The fate Choi Hyuk possessed, 'Never losing' and 'Slash without fail' grew explosively at a timing that seemed almost preplanned.

However, Choi Hyuk wasn't surprised. He already knew, though he couldn't explain it.

Even when he learned that the head wolf was assumed to have reached the transcendent level, he didn't tremble at all. He felt like he could win. It wasn't simply a prediction, he was confident.

Perhaps even Dark-Sound and Flame-Hell knew as well. The fact

that, when he concluded his first revenge, he had already arrived at the proximity of the transcendent level. The fact that he could awaken if the right opportunity presented itself.

‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ transformed from a ‘Weapon of Vow’ to a ‘Weapon of Conclusion’.

Following this, its name also changed from ‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ to ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’. His vow to ‘slash without fail’ and to ‘never lose’ was finally complete and became a power that could deny all power.

He no longer had to gather his strength and swallow various emotions to use the ‘First Sword’. As soon as he stretched out his sword, the existing powers were, as though natural, denied and obliterated into nothingness. Even the ‘Second Coming’ the head wolf declared and the Net of Fate which the alliance had lost control over were no exception.

While the head wolf was still stronger, it was a difference in nature. Choi Hyuk’s unique karma, which could interfere with the Net of Fate when he was only a highest-ranked warrior, was enough to throw away the head wolf’s dominating fate even though he had only just reached the transcendent level.

“You… What did you…?”

Frozen as if taken aback, the head wolf glared at Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk mocked.

“Round two, doggy.”

Chapter 173: Each's Calculations (6)

As the clash between Choi Hyuk and the head wolf became increasingly serious, the universe began to squirm. It was a fight between transcendent warriors that was rare even throughout the history of the universe.

To the point where powerful warriors even felt nauseous, space-time, as well as all order and laws, shook violently.

"Damn it! Gather! Maintain our formation!!"

{What? What are you saying?!}

Due to the completely erased Net of Fate, the species couldn't communicate with each other.

It was a pandemonium of pandemoniums.

Stars and planets that couldn't endure the constant clash of power and changes in laws exploded.

Boooom-!

An enormous explosion. Their surroundings vibrated, and a sun, which hadn't been there, appeared. Day suddenly arrived for this dark space, and all sorts of fragments and gas formed a tidal wave that swallowed the space whole.

Baaang!!

Like lightning, day and night switched, and the warriors cursed as they were hit by the broken fragments and died one after another.

Under the torrential rain of fragments, Baek Seoin felt an unease crawl down his spine.

"Hieh!"

With a strange shout, Baek Seoin flung his body away, and the silver 'Meteor-Chasing Wolf' dropped down on his previous spot.

{Grrrrr… How did you dodge?}

“What are you saying? All I hear is you barking.”

Baek Seoin grumbled while awakening his senses to their limits.

Vring! His Sword of Sentiment ‘Baek Seoin’s Premonition’ rang out as he held it up. When Premonition rang, the part of his body that his enemy would attack would ache.

This was the reason why Baek Seoin, who was only a high-ranked warrior, could endure against a highest-ranked wolf. With his innate skill ‘Intuition’ and his Sword of Sentiment ‘Baek Seoin’s Premonition’, he could narrowly avoid his enemy’s attacks due to the unease and pain he felt beforehand.

However, this also meant that all of Meteor-Chasing Wolf’s attacks were savage enough to put his life in danger. Baek Seoin could die at any moment because of a slight misjudgment.

The angle he held his sword, the distribution of karma in his body, his gaze… nothing was easy. Every trivial decision was followed by a life-threatening unease, and Baek Seoin had to analyze them all in detail before moving. He needed to find a place where he didn’t feel uneasy or ache.

{I can help you.}

Though Naro showed his intent in helping him, Baek Seoin refused.

“No, Naro. If you’re exposed now, your life might be in danger. Hold your breath until we at least set up a defensive line.”

While Naro had awakened as a highest-ranked warrior, his body was still that of the enormous spaceship. Because he would be at an absolute disadvantage in a close combat fight against the wolves that excelled in maneuverability, Baek Seoin decided not to expose Naro at the risk of his own life.

{You’ll die! It’s not even certain if you’ll be able to set up a

defensive line or not!}

“If you act now, you’ll die immediately! Hieh! I have to concentrate so don’t talk to me! Look after Lee Jinhee and Ryu Hyunsung instead of me!”

The silver wolf followed after Baek Seoin like a meteor. Narrowly, as though he could die at any moment, Baek Seoin dodged his attacks and survived.

Everyone was in a similar situation. While they endured for now, they would soon collapse. The formation where they were scattered and killed off one by one changed again. The warriors were pushed into groups and crushed. Due to the lack of space, it was common for allies to be wounded by other allies. While they did their best to push their enemies back and regain some space, what returned was death. The corpses of warriors mixed together with the fragments of smashed stars and drifted away.

The fear of ‘defeat’ and ‘death’ permeated them.

Everyone was clearly fighting desperately.

Choi Hyuk, who had only been a highest-ranked warrior, fought evenly against the head wolf, and the seven highest-ranked warriors and five Berserker executives had yet to die whilst facing opponents stronger than them. However, they didn’t have the strength to reverse the situation because the Blue Manes had become stronger than they had imagined after cooperating with the monsters. All Choi Hyuk could do was not be one-sidedly pushed back by the head wolf. The rest couldn’t even do that.

“We were too rash…”

“What was I entranced by to come here…”

The young warriors of the top four tribes let out sighs. Flames dimmed dangerously, and metal creaked. Darkness paled, and the light became faint.

Ryu Hyunsung endured the planet wreckage that was

powerlessly falling on him as he looked at the situation.

Lee Jinhee was wounded all over her body as she took on two high-ranked wolves, and Lee Jinhee's unit, which went to save her, was surrounded by other wolves and couldn't move. Ryu Hyunsung couldn't even see his own troop members.

As Ryu Hyunsung didn't have a special skill like Baek Seoin, he couldn't face off against the highest-ranked wolf, 'Crushing Mane', with his strangely increased ability. The wolf had turned Ryu Hyunsung's body into tatters in 20 passes.

The reason why Ryu Hyunsung was still alive was because the wolf considered him already dead and was slaughtering others around him.

Ryu Hyunsung's head, which had surged with rage and curses, finally cooled.

'I'm really going to die now.'

As he thought this, the madness that filled his mind disappeared, and like a kaleidoscope, his surroundings clearly entered his vision.

'So this was my final battle.'

As soon as he thought this, a lofty feeling and a wronged emotion surged within him.

Baang!

Somewhere, another planet exploded, and his vision brightened like it was daytime. As though he had suddenly awakened from his sleep, everything looked clear.

It was a strange feeling. His mind was cool, yet his heart was sharper than ever. Ryu Hyunsung clearly felt this situation.

An encircled situation.

The enemies blocked the front and they didn't have anywhere to retreat to.

The fear-stricken rookies of the alliance kept being pushed back when there was nowhere to retreat to.

Ryu Hyunsung ridiculed them.

If there was a path, it was in front of them. Even if it was as small as the eye of a needle, they had to find it. Without madness or fear, with all their concentration and strength, they had to defeat enemies stronger than them.

His reasoning and emotions became one as they proposed a path. To push past the enemies in front of them.

‘However… I can’t even move the tips of my fingers.’

Suddenly, he felt like he knew what to do and could succeed, yet he couldn’t even move his own fingers.

‘Is this really the end?’

While he had always inwardly hoped to die, he didn’t want this sort of death.

He didn’t hope for a death so vain and weak.

The moment he thought this-

“Director Ryu Hyunsung!! Run!!”

He heard Guardian Bae Jinman’s voice. He had approached under Zero’s covert escort and was squeezing his karma to heal Ryu Hyunsung.

When Bae Jinman’s golden karma permeated his body, his body, which had been ripped to shreds to the point of being unrecoverable, began to regenerate like a miracle. That moment, what Ryu Hyunsung felt wasn’t relief like ‘I’m alive…’

‘Ah, I can fight again.’

He held expectations that he could fight properly this time.

A mysterious phenomenon. Ryu Hyunsung’s body didn’t simply stop at being healed.

The karma that made up his body was redistributed and was being replaced with different properties.

His eyes shined blue.

A genius. While this word was most suitable for Choi Hyuk, Ryu Hyunsung had, in fact, grown up while hearing he was a genius.

A genius swordsman. Since he was young, he received attention as a rising sabre star of Korea and was selected as the youngest national representative ever. There were even big talks of him defeating the top-ranked swordsman in the world during his practice games. Yet, that was all. Ryu Hyunsung didn't win a single medal throughout his four years at Korea National Sport University. 'Training-purpose' was the label given to him. During friendly matches and practice, he was a genius swordsman stronger than anyone, yet he lost powerlessly in real matches.

The length of two finger joints. That distance was always the problem. He lacked the determination to pierce through his opponent's malice that wanted to kill him and stretch his sword out first.

He believed that he had overcome this weak point after the recruit training began and he joined the Berserkers, killing people and monsters.

'That wasn't it.'

Ryu Hyunsung finally realized that he was still running away. He was in an ambiguous state where it was too painful to live yet he couldn't die. Perhaps this was why he couldn't leave the Berserkers since, if he stayed with Choi Hyuk, they would always have a goal. Whether it was right or wrong, whether he liked it or not.

He had always been in this ambiguous state. It was no different from his past days as a 'training-purpose swordsman'.

'Advance.'

Ryu Hyunsung finally realized the true meaning of the fate given

to him when he became a high-ranked warrior.

At first, he was confused. ‘Advance’? To be honest, how he clung to his life while living and fighting was closer to ‘evasion’ than ‘advancing’. He constantly evaded to his past. He also evaded his past. He fought to forget about his memories and fought while thinking of his memories. To call that ‘advance’?

However, now that he thought about it, it was a desperate manifestation of his subconscious. A warning that he was fated to disappear if he didn’t ‘advance’.

Ryu Hyunsung finally realized this meaning and wholly accepted it.

My path is in front of me.

Now was the time to move forward.

If he didn’t, he would die. He didn’t have the energy to think about victory or defeat, only to find the path. It was time to open a path with his cold reasoning and wild nature.

At some point, his tattered body had completely recovered.

Ryu Hyunsung turned his back on Bae Jinman, who held his hand out towards him, and Zero and shouted towards all the fear-stricken warriors,

“Open your eyes properly, you dimwits! Break through them!”

Unlike his ragged beast-like voice before, his voice rang out clearly this time. His voice, containing his enlightenment, was clearly transmitted to the warriors who couldn’t understand Korean.

Everyone’s gaze momentarily fell on Ryu Hyunsung.

Ryu Hyunsung stretched his leg out. He turned his waist like a top and flung his arm forward like a fishing pole. His karma, which explosively surged in his body, was pushed forward like a river without any hesitation. He passed through the length of the two

finger joints that he had always lacked.

Crash!

Slash!

‘Crushing Mane’ charged at him like a cannonball as soon as he heard Ryu Hyunsung’s voice. His body passed by Ryu Hyunsung’s chest, and Ryu Hyunsung’s sword slashed his mouth.

{Kyaah!}

The first attack Ryu Hyunsung landed on ‘Crushing Mane’ was a fatal blow. While three streams of blood flowed from Ryu Hyunsung’s chest after the wolf passed by him, he didn’t bat an eye.

He only saw a clear sword path to kill the unpleasant wolves. A thread-like path. Nonetheless, a clearly existing path.

A beautiful sword path was drawn with his hand.

Ryu Hyunsung easily caught up to the wolf that was shaking his head and retreating from him. He pushed his claws down and slashed his neck before the wolf could dodge it.

Slash—

The highest-ranked wolf, ‘Crushing Wolf’, couldn’t even yip before his deeply slashed head was thrown into space.

Slash!

Ryu Hyunsung’s sword slash left a trailing afterimage as it slashed through a corner of the battlefield. The wolves in its path were simultaneously split in two, and a canyon was drawn on a small natural satellite that was in its path.

His sword slash seemed like the work of a sword god.

“Ryu hyung? Wh-what is this?”

Despite being pushed towards the defensive, Lee Jinhee was at a loss for words. It was the same for the two wolves that had

attacked her. While their mouths were agape, Ryu Hyunsung passed through the wolves and sliced the heads of the two wolves off their bodies.

“Did you reach the highest rank…?”

Lee Jinhee said blankly.

Yet, Ryu Hyunsung didn’t reply, only shooting out after patting her head. This time, to help the seven highest-ranked warriors who were struggling.

**

Due to Ryu Hyunsung, the mood of the battlefield changed. With his help, the strongest warriors of the alliance could defeat the wolves that were holding them back, and the freed highest-ranked warriors went out to help others. It was now time for the deeply infiltrated wolves to be pushed back.

The front lines were formed, and their defensive line stabilized.

Seeing this, Baek Seoin shouted in an almost singing voice,

“Now’s the time! Naro! Restrict them!”

{I’ve been waiting for this!}

The wave of karma that spread from Naro’s spaceship snared the wolf that targeted Baek Seoin and the wolves that infiltrated around them. ‘Meteor-Chasing Mane’s highest-ranked karma was instantly degraded to that of a high-ranked warrior. The wolves that noticed this change targeted Naro, but the flow had already been reversed. A threefold defensive line had already been set up in front of Naro.

“That’s it! It’s working! We can fight!”

The fight between ‘Meteor-Chasing Mane’ and Baek Seoin, in which Baek Seoin was one-sidedly on the defensive, had turned into a close fight. Recovering his composure, Baek Seoin glanced in Choi Hyuk’s direction.

“Now… If the leader wins…!”

While the situation had improved, that didn’t mean they were winning. If Choi Hyuk quickly won, then, no matter how large the losses were, it would be the alliance’s victory. However, if Choi Hyuk couldn’t in time, then the inferior punitive force would face the chance of being annihilated.

For some reason, it currently seemed like Choi Hyuk was being pushed back.

Just then, Baek Seoin saw Ryu Hyunsung.

He, who had created balance in the battlefield, was charging towards Choi Hyuk and the head wolf, who were fighting over there.

“Hey! Ryu Hyunsung! Are you crazy?! Where do you think you’re going?!”

Baek Seoin heard her scream.

Bang, bang, bang!

Another star exploded brilliantly. His surroundings brightened as though it was daytime.

Chapter 174: Each's Calculations (7)

In reality, the fight between Choi Hyuk and the head wolf was impossible to perceive. It was beyond just being too fast, it was literally on another level.

When spectating this fight, the head wolf's enormous paw would suddenly appear and rip their heads, and the moment their gaze met Choi Hyuk's black eyes, their hearts would be pierced. They were clearly dead, yet when they came to their senses, they were fine.

All that remained was a fear that made their bodies tremble from head to toe, a warning not to peep at the transcendent realm before them.

Warriors of higher levels could overcome this fear and observe the fight, but the fact that they still couldn't perceive anything was the same.

When looking at the fight, they might feel like they saw something, but the memories remaining in their minds were a mess. They simultaneously saw Choi Hyuk leap up and pierce the head wolf's head and the head wolf instantly breaking Choi Hyuk's neck. One time, the head wolf howled after killing Choi Hyuk. Another time, Choi Hyuk sat on the head wolf's head after killing him. At times, the two looked like triangles, straight lines, round spheres, and other shapes as they flew around and dizzily entangled together.

"A fight between transcendent warriors isn't a fight that properly follows laws, but a fight that creates their own laws and reality."

Someone explained, but they couldn't figure anything out in the end. All they knew was that they were fighting.

The place Choi Hyuk and the head wolf were fighting was

somewhere completely different from here, in other words, a place blocked by the ‘wall of laws’.

As these were the circumstances, even highest-ranked warriors didn’t dare join the fight, let alone high-ranked ones.

Since Ryu Hyunsung, who just reached the highest rank, flew towards that fight, those around him couldn’t help but cry out in astonishment.

“Euaack!”

Lee Jinhee tried to follow him, but Alexei stopped her.

“Director! You can’t!”

“Let go!”

Lee Jinhee struggled, but she couldn’t move forward when the other members of her troop also joined in to hold her back.

“Euaaaah!”

Lee Jinhee screamed in despair.

Having bitten her lips to the point of bleeding, she seemed determined as she glared in Ryu Hyunsung’s direction.

Lee Jinhee tightly gripped her Sword of Sentiment ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ and poured all her karma into it before throwing it.

‘Protect Ryu Hyunsung.’

With this earnest wish.

Bang!

From the tips of her fingers, which had burst with blood due to being overloaded, ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ shot out with a bright silver trail.

Lee Jinhee shouted,

“Baek hyung, what are you doing?! Cover Ryu Hyunsung!”

At her shout, Baek Seoin, who had been vacantly staring at Ryu

Hyunsung, jolted to his senses.

If there was no way to stop Ryu Hyunsung, then it would be better to find a way to support him.

“Guardian! Support Ryu Hyunsungwith your karma! Naro! It’s fine if it’s only slightly, but reduce the aura of hostility! Zero, follow behind Ryu Hyunsung!”

While he personally couldn’t do anything, he found others who could help.

“Warriors at the highest rank! No, anyone! Support Ryu Hyunsung with your karma! Or at the sword Lee Jinhee threw!!”

It wasn’t easy. Ryu Hyunsung, who was now a highest-ranked warrior, was charging quickly, and ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ was following behind him. Even if the warriors in the distance pooled their strength together, there was a concern their strengths would clash.

Baek Seoin shouted,

“It’s okay! Lee Jinhee’s Sword of Sentiment is special! Just send your support!”

{... Are you certain?}

“I don’t know. If we don’t send our support, then it’ll certainly fail.”

Baek Seoin brushed Naro’s question aside.

In the end, Baek Seoin was correct.

Boom!

Supported by other warriors’ strength, ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ accelerated like lightning. As though it would cover the entire world, and while blazing a trail of silver light, it passed Ryu Hyunsung and opened a path for him.

Ryu Hyunsung’s body was also filled with karma sent by Bae

Jinman and other warriors. Those who could send their strength further sent it to Ryu Hyunsung while those who couldn't supported 'Lee Jinhee's Dream'.

Seeing 'Lee Jinhee's Dream' pass him, Ryu Hyunsung tightly gripped his sword.

**

A fight between transcendent warriors was fundamentally different from all the fights he had experienced until now.

Transcendent warriors were those who had completed and declared their fate to the universe.

Like how a flap of a butterfly's wings in Beijing could become a typhoon in New York, fate was created through the accumulation of very trivial actions.

Each fluttering strand of the head wolf's mane, each breath the wolf let out from his long mouth, and the karma that acted as his bones and heart steadily drove Choi Hyuk into a corner like on a chess board.

It wasn't a traditional fight where they simply aimed their sword or teeth at their opponent's neck. When the wolf moved his head, he crumbled or expanded the space Choi Hyuk was standing in. Each fluttering strand very slightly dispersed Choi Hyuk's surroundings. Even after it seemed like the head wolf had swung his paw, as though on repeat, his paw swung out yet again. Every time the wolf did so, Choi Hyuk's breathing would stagger. With these as his groundwork, the wolf would ensnare Choi Hyuk and tear his limbs off with his paws, making Choi Hyuk a sacrificial lamb in declaring the second coming of the 'Blue Manes'.

The head wolf leisurely and diligently pushed Choi Hyuk into a corner.

However, Choi Hyuk had a cheat-like trait.

"Whoo..."

After catching his breath…

Shik!

Accompanied by the sound of air escaping, when ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’ cut through the air, it would cleanly erase all the groundwork the head wolf had laid down. The distorted space would return to normal and the wolf’s tricks in dispersing Choi Hyuk’s surroundings would immediately stop. Rather, it was the wolf who lost his breath.

The head wolf laid the groundwork to kill Choi Hyuk, and Choi Hyuk laid the groundwork to find and negate the wolf’s groundwork. It looked like a dance as they approached while glaring at each other before separating, repeatedly laying down and erasing groundwork.

The head wolf was irritated by this situation.

If this was chess, this was the same as his opponent clearing the board whenever he gained an advantage. There was no way he wouldn’t become annoyed.

Still, the head wolf barely managed to hide his irritation as he disguised his composure.

{How long are you going to do this? Until all your subordinates are dead?}

At the head wolf who was trying to provoke him, Choi Hyuk simply replied,

“Yeah, bark, bark.”

He meant to cut the crap.

Because the Net of Fate had already disappeared, he really sounded like he was barking.

{Grrr…!}

On the other hand, the head wolf, who was more skilled at using his power than Choi Hyuk, could understand what Choi Hyuk was

saying. He became provoked even though he was the one that attempted to provoke Choi Hyuk.

Like an unending fight, the two tangled and separated again. Even though Choi Hyuk was in a disadvantageous situation, he wasn't impatient, calmly nullifying the head wolf's attacks again and again.

While waiting for a new variable to appear,

While waiting to discover an opportunity to attack,

However, the variable that arrived was much different to what Choi Hyuk expected.

Choi Hyuk and the head wolf sensed that Ryu Hyunsung was approaching them at the same time.

Their judgments differed.

'Hmm?'

The head wolf glanced at him before ignoring him. A mere highest-ranked warrior, there was a qualitative difference in strength between them. The head wolf was certain that Ryu Hyunsung wouldn't even be able to get close.

'Ryu Hyunsung...'

On the other hand, Choi Hyuk's gaze deepened.

He saw Ryu Hyunsung's clear eyes. Determined to risk his life... No, rather, his eyes looked like they weren't determined to do anything. Rather than being determined, his eyes were filled with the tenacity and will to inflict even the slightest wound on the head wolf. As though his entire life was for this moment, a sword strike containing his own self.

Choi Hyuk was moved by those eyes.

'Either way, it's difficult to reverse the situation like this.'

The head wolf, who had combined with a monster, was stronger

than he imagined, and if things continued like this, the punitive force would be the one who would eventually face defeat.

Still, since there was no other way, he thought to find the wolf's weakness while enduring, but Ryu Hyunsung was a better alternative at this moment.

Choi Hyuk resolved himself to bet on Ryu Hyunsung.

The air changed.

{Grrr...}

The head wolf's howl rang out longer and spread wider than before.

{... Something's changed? Did you decide to halt your futile attempts in resetting the playing field?}

Up until now, Choi Hyuk had always been on the defensive. When the head wolf laid down the groundwork to end Choi Hyuk's life, Choi Hyuk focused all his power in breaking that groundwork. However, Choi Hyuk began to prepare for an attack.

Not acting to break the wolf's groundwork, he moved in order to slice the wolf's neck the moment he slipped up.

The start of the true fight.

Choi Hyuk no longer reset the playing field and began moving his pieces one after the other.

This was the moment the head wolf was eagerly waiting for.

He even became suspicious because things went so smoothly.

'Perhaps there's something special about the approaching warrior?'

However, there really wasn't anything special about him after a second glance. He was simply a reckless warrior. No matter how much he thought about it, the wolf believed that there was no chance that a weak highest-ranked warrior could approach and

land an effective blow on him.

‘How foolish. Does he even see me?’

While ridiculing Ryu Hyunsung, the head wolf’s lips widened.

{Good thinking. It’s a very foolish decision.}

Grrrr. An unpleasant laughter rang out.

Choi Hyuk reacted indifferently to the wolf’s laugh.

“Yeah. Bark, bark.”

However, unlike his confident attitude, Choi Hyuk’s situation instantly became disadvantageous.

Since Choi Hyuk wasn’t his opponent in terms of level or strength, Choi Hyuk wouldn’t be able to last long in a head-on fight without his power to ‘deny’.

It only took an instant.

A metallic scent wafted in the air, and the wolf’s body looked like it split in two.

Thinking he could avoid it, Choi Hyuk dodged, but the wolf’s enormous paw was swinging down at him. He had to move more in order to avoid the wolf’s attack.

Everything became a mess. The wolf’s breath which he thought he heard from his right was actually coming from his left. His foot tripped over empty space, and he faltered. He saw the wolf’s fluttering mane yet he couldn’t see the actual wolf. The wolf that had clearly moved in that direction was standing in place.

Space and time, order and law, all of these were moving in a direction advantageous for the head wolf. If he still didn’t ‘deny’ soon, then Choi Hyuk really wouldn’t last long.

“Huu.”

Yet, Choi Hyuk took a deep breath.

He poured karma into his sword and waited for the right

opportunity.

{Krrrauuuh!}

Chapter 175: An Impeded Sky

Woong—

At first, it was a low reverberation.

Naro's karma reached the 'wall of laws'.

While it was only slight, the wall vibrated, and a tiny crack appeared, enough for a needle to pass through.

Crash!

'Lee Jinhee's Dream' burrowed into this crack. Then, the brilliant silver trail, which followed behind it, permeated the crack.

Yet, it was fruitless.

While its vigor in trying to burrow through was intense, it burrowed in at the pace of a turtle.

{I unknowing sent my strength as well because Naro's telepathy was so desperate... But I feel like it was a waste of strength.}

The warriors of the punitive force shook their heads as they saw 'Lee Jinhee's Dream' gradually slow down, unable to completely pierce through the wall of laws.

From the beginning, it was a logically impossible task.

Completely different laws applied in the space the transcendent warriors were fighting. No matter how much strength they gathered, it was no use if the laws changed.

'Lee Jinhee's Dream' looked like it had almost stopped.

Everyone thought,

'This is the end.'

However, this was the beginning.

Riip!

They heard the sound of something ripping.

The Weapon of Sentiment ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’, which contained her earnest wish to protect Ryu Hyunsung, was born from Lee Jinhee’s dream that hoped people would live smiling and cry seldom.

‘Choi Hyuk’s Imprint’ could slash anything in accordance with Choi Hyuk’s vow, and ‘Baek Seoin’s Premonition’ could sense all danger in accordance with his intuition. ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ was a sword that was created to fulfil Lee Jinhee’s wish.

Following her wish, ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ gathered the nearly overflowing power within it into a single point and exploded.

Crack, crack!

Web-like cracks spread from the sword.

Ting!

With the weakest piece of the blade flying off as the signal, ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’ exploded brilliantly.

Whooong!

The wall of laws was gradually erased from the outside.

It was a phenomenon similar to Choi Hyuk’s ‘First Sword’.

As the condensed power exploded all at once, all the order and laws were erased. A new sky opened up.

This wasn’t an explosion made of flames.

Earth’s blue sky with cirrus clouds spread out from the smashed ‘Lee Jinhee’s Dream’. An autumn sky opened up in the dark, vast universe.

It was a sky Ryu Hyunsung could fly through. The figures of the head wolf and Choi Hyuk could be clearly seen in this sky.

{Grr…}

The head wolf growled, thinking this was unexpected. However,

he still disregarded Ryu Hyunsung.

The wolf's decision was the same. While it was surprising that they had pierced through the wall of laws, the wolf still thought that Ryu Hyunsung couldn't inflict a wound on him. Being able to inflict a wound on him, the key individual of this fight, was a completely different matter from being able to overcome the wall of laws, which was a by-product of their fight.

The wolf simply focused on Choi Hyuk, the one who was incomparably more dangerous than that mayfly. The wolf opened his mouth with the intention of ending this fight. It was the first time his canines were exposed during the fight. The moment he opened his mouth, Choi Hyuk was already in it. The wolf's black throat rushed forward while devouring even space itself. Chilling canines.

"Good job."

Choi Hyuk smiled as he gazed at this despairing scene. The head wolf's maw shut on Choi Hyuk, devouring him headfirst.

Twing!

It was at this moment when the wolf felt a stinging sensation run down his spine. At first, it only stung a little, almost like a mosquito bite, but soon, a cold blade ripped into his flesh.

'Advance'. Ryu Hyunsung's sword, which contained the fate 'Advance', pierced into the wolf's skin and embedded itself in his flesh.

An effective attack.

However, it wasn't fatal. It was to the point where the wolf could ignore it and finish crushing Choi Hyuk.

Rather than being in pain, the wolf was thoroughly shocked. The wolf had believed so strongly that it was impossible for Ryu Hyunsung to inflict an injury on him that he momentarily thought that a third-party, another transcendent warrior, had joined the

fight.

Flinch.

The wolf was so shocked that his body trembled. The wolf unconsciously moved his karma and flung Ryu Hyunsung, who was clinging on his back, away.

This was the opportunity Choi Hyuk had been waiting for.

The karma gathered in the wolf's canines to chew Choi Hyuk had suddenly dispersed and the muscles in the wolf's jaw relaxed slightly.

Choi Hyuk swung 'Choi Hyuk's Denial', which had simply been in his hand, with a ripping sound.

Goong!

Just then, the warriors of the punitive force and the Blue Manes heard a skull-splitting sound. They were so surprised that they patted their heads. However, what was split was the head wolf's skull, not their own.

The wall of laws that obstructed their view of Choi Hyuk and the head wolf's battle closed widthwise like a TV turning off.

The single horizontal line was Choi Hyuk's sword strike.

...

It was as dark as a powered-off TV. They couldn't see anything as though everything had disappeared.

Splash!

The head wolf's blood endlessly flowed from the gap in space. Like ink dropped in water, the wolf's blood spread out and created a nebula.

Defeating the wolf's fate known as the 'Second Coming of the Blue Manes', which he had declared to the universe, the nebula made of blood was the only trace that remained. It was the birth of

a celestial body known as ‘Wolf’s Head’.

“Huu…”

Choi Hyuk, who appeared in space completely soaked in wolf’s blood, let out a sigh. The dead wolf’s karma and fate permeated into him. His fate known as ‘Never losing, Slashing without Fail, and Denial’ proved itself once more and became stronger.

{Grrr… Was I too conceited…?}

Even though the wolf had his skull split in two and blood endlessly flowed out from it, for some reason, he could still hear his voice. Perhaps the Net of Fate had been restored at some point, but he could understand his words without issue. Not only that, he also could also sense the wolf’s memories and emotions that shined like a kaleidoscope.

In the beginning, when foreign existences invaded, the Blue Manes faced them. However, while the Blue Manes were fighting with their lives on the line, the other species ignored their pleas for help as though it wasn’t their problem. In the end, faced with the risk of extinction, the previous head wolf chose to be taken to do forced labor under the foreign existences. The previous head wolf took responsibility for his decision and committed suicide. After burying his death in his heart, the wolf became the new head. The other species, who had ignored their pleas for help, now fervently charged at them when they defected. Their previous days in which they had to do whatever they could to survive…

{How regretful… Yet, I lost. I was simply weak. So this is the end… Oh warrior, I have one request.}

As though he wasn’t paying attention, Choi Hyuk showed no reaction to the head wolf’s heartbroken will. Still, the wolf couldn’t help but speak.

{It’s fine if you only take one. It’s fine if it’s a newborn pup. It’s fine if it grows up brainwashed by the alliance and lives for the

alliance. It's fine if our species is disgraced for generations. Only... Only, please don't let my species die out... I request you, oh warrior.}

Choi Hyuk didn't speak for a moment.

Then, turning his back on the completely dead head wolf, he gave a short reply.

'Sorry, but if it's revenge, I'll do it for you."

{Ah...}

The head wolf no longer had the strength to continue speaking. Leaving only a bitter sigh, the wolf disappeared forever.

Choi Hyuk raised his voice and ordered the punitive force,

"The Net of Fate has been restored! I will access the Net of Fate and make the laws in this place advantageous for us. Don't leave a single mutt and kill them all!"

"Woaaaah!!!"

It was a slaughter. It was a complete reversal from when the head wolf first appeared. The wolves' teeth didn't reach the punitive force no matter what they did, and the punitive force could wield their weapons however they wished and they would still slash the wolves' flesh.

The young wolves that fled elsewhere lost their way and ended up facing the punitive force.

"Yelp!"

"Yip!"

"Grruah! You cursed bastards of the alliance!"

"Please! Please! Just this child! Euaaah! Grrrrk!!! Ahhh!!"

None of their curses, threats, or pleading worked.

That day, the Blue Manes faced extinction. The blood flowing from their bodies mixed with the head wolf's blood to create the

enormous Wolf's Head nebula.

**

"Ryu hyung! Ryu hyung! Hey! Ryu Hyunsung! Come to your senses, huh?"

Zero, who followed after Ryu Hyunsung, was successful in recovering Ryu Hyunsung, who was flung far away after being hit by the head wolf. After avoiding Choi Hyuk's fierce attack that didn't care for Ryu Hyunsung's safety, he was barely able to drag him outside.

Lee Jinhee came rushing towards them as soon as they got out.

Her hands trembled, her shoulders shivered, and her eyes fluttered.

Like someone out of her mind, she grabbed Ryu Hyunsung and cried.

"Wake up!!!"

Held and shook by Lee Jinhee, Ryu Hyunsung opened his eyes.

However, his eyes weren't focused.

"Ah... Nice to see you..."

Whether he was seeing Lee Jinhee or something else, the tears that pooled his eyes dripped.

"When we see each other again, let's spar and then go have some chicken skewers. Heu... You know that I like fast food."

Ryu Hyunsung smiled while licking his lips. It seemed his eyes saw his past college friends who he had trained with.

"Guardian! Guardian! Quickly do something!"

Lee Jinhee's face was soaked with tears.

Bae Jinman placed his hand on Ryu Hyunsung's forehead before gravely shaking his head.

Even a healer of the Speckled Light Tribe in the punitive force, upon examining Ryu Hyunsung's condition, dimmed sullenly.

{I don't know how he did it, but... He used a power he shouldn't have been able to... Already the karma in his body is dispersing like sand, and his fate has been wiped clean as though it has completed its duty.}

Hearing what the healer of the Speckled Light Tribe said, Lee Jinhee furiously shook her head.

"There's no way. No! Ryu Hyunsung! Look at me! Do you see me?!"

Ryu Hyunsung's eyes were still not in focus as he mumbled to his friends who had already died.

Sadly, the words he was saying in his comatose state weren't of his dying wish. Instead, they were his determination to live on.

"I... will live diligently. Even if I look back, I'll move forward. When we see each other again... Heu, I'll probably be a bigsho...t."

Ryu Hyunsung's last words weren't audible. Starting from the tips of his fingers, his body turned into ash as it collapsed and spread out into the universe.

"Ha... Ha! Ah..."

Almost convulsing, Lee Jinhee snorted in short bursts of deranged laughter before trembling and then fainting.

Bae Jinman quickly approached her. His face was serious.

Lee Jinhee's karma weapon, which was no different from a companion to one's soul, had shattered. Her body was a mess as well. It wouldn't be odd if she died right now. The only reason why she was awake until now was purely because of her concern for Ryu Hyunsung.

"I will evacuate Director Lee Jinhee. Please settle the matters regarding Ryu Hyunsung."

Bae Jinman lifted Lee Jinhee and left.

Yip, yip!

Yelp!

The universe was filled with sounds of wolves being slaughtered.

Bae Seoin blankly observed Ryu Hyunsung's death and Lee Jinhee fainting.

With hollow eyes, he saw Ryu Hyunsung turn into specks and disappear.

'Huu... Let's first collect his body.'

Baek Seoin decided to gather the dispersing specks when Choi Hyuk leaned his forehead on his shoulder.

Choi Hyuk, who looked completely exhausted, didn't even raise his head as he asked,

"... Did Ryu hyung die?"

"... Yes."

Choi Hyuk wordlessly raised his head slightly before ordering,

"Leave... his already dispersed body... Let's use this."

Because collecting the body that had already dispersed as specks seemed like it was disturbing the deceased's rest, Choi Hyuk proposed an alternative.

In the hand he stretched out were fragments of the Sword of Calling 'Ryu Hyunsung's Commemoration'.

"Let's hold a funeral at the Tower of Warriors."

After handing the sword fragments to Baek Seoin, Choi Hyuk turned his back.

Looking at his back, which seemed awfully small, Baek Seoin bit his lips. His eyes shined with resolve.

"Leader."

A sharp voice. When Choi Hyuk turned around, Baek Seoin's eyes were filled with extreme resentment as he said,

"I think I found a way."

"… What?"

"A way to gather all the Exalted Wings in one place."

Black flames ignited deep within Choi Hyuk's bitter eyes.

Episode 11 - The Grand Scheme

Chapter 176: Lee Jinhee's Vow (1)

"How far are you going to go?"

"..."

"Including Flame-Rain unni, everyone besides earthlings?"

"No."

As he said this, Choi Hyuk gestured to his head.

Then, after thinking for a little, he said,

"Flame-Rain..."

Unable to speak anymore, as though hesitating, he slowly shook his head.

While he hadn't spoken in detail, Lee Jinhee could figure it out with that.

Gesturing to his head meant his target was limited to the Exalted Wings, and him shaking his head meant that he didn't want to kill Flame-Rain. She could also immediately tell that he was being cautious with his words in case someone was eavesdropping.

Lee Jinhee made no response as she turned her gaze towards the window.

The hospital room and the scene outside its window were reminiscent of a comfy family home in the Swiss Alps. This was done under the healer's recommendation, indicating that she needed complete rest.

Following her gaze and watching the herd of sheep grazing on the grass outside, Choi Hyuk took out a glass bottle from his inner pocket. The glass bottle sloshed with a night sky as though it had been filled with the universe.

"It's the dark ocean. Other rare resources are mixed in as well. You only have one chance. 20% chance of success. If you can't

restore your sword, then apparently, it'll take an exorbitant period of time to recover your retribution, which has fallen to the level of a low-ranked warrior."

Chio Hyuk's gaze fell onto the fragments of 'Lee Jinhee's Dream', which were placed next to Lee Jinhee's bed.

Tap.

Even as he placed the glass bottle next the fragments, Lee Jinhee remained silent.

"I hope you can repair it. Also, if you can repair it... Don't return to the Berserkers."

At his words, Lee Jinhee shot her gaze towards Choi Hyuk. Her eyes widened and started to tremble. However, Choi Hyuk didn't meet her gaze this time. His gaze turned towards the door he had entered through as he slowly turned his back.

He raised and waved his hand.

"Be happy, nuna."

**

The punitive force Choi Hyuk returned with flipped the alliance on its head.

People went wild at the 'Wolf's Head Nebula' that remained after the annihilation of the Blue Manes.

The alliance members, who grew up hearing about stories of the 'mutts of the universe' since they were young, couldn't believe that those Blue Manes were now extinct, yet the 'Wolf's Head Nebula', as evidence, swathed them with a thrilling sensation of realization.

The species they had only heard of in stories became extinct and had turned into a nebula... At this news, which was like a legend or a myth, the alliance warriors felt an indescribable emotion.

And eventually, the topic would turn to Choi Hyuk.

“The mood of the alliance wasn’t good since the monsters launched a massive invasion… But isn’t it amazing? Because of Leader Choi Hyuk, a worry of ours has completely disappeared!”

“Leader Choi Hyuk is creating a completely new legend in the alliance! I heard he became a transcendent warrior this time? I also want to fight under his command!”

Riding on this mood, Flame-Hell’s support base expanded.

“If he was powerful from the beginning, then he wouldn’t have fought a direct battle against the Blue Manes. A warrior whose strength goes beyond his low rank. Exalted Wing Flame-Hell’s insight in sending Choi Hyuk is surprising.”

“Is that how it is?”

“Yeah. To be honest, it’s amazing. While everyone knows Choi Hyuk’s amazing, who would have thought that he could take down the head wolf?”

“Wow! Exalted Wing Flame-Hell is really amazing! Ah, did you know? It wasn’t just Choi Hyuk, everyone in the punitive force grew immensely stronger! There were only eight highest-ranked warriors besides Choi Hyuk when they left, but there were 17 of them when they returned!”

Those who were prompted by Flame-Hell beforehand moved all topics towards Flame-Hell.

“That’s also amazing. I heard that the top four tribes’ rookies only went to safe battlefields until now, yet Exalted Wing Flame-Hell sent them to a ferocious battlefield. Apparently, the opposition was intense in the beginning. But the result? As you can see, there was a huge improvement. Normally, you gain more Retribution if you win against opponents stronger than yourself.”

Even the fact that Flame-Hell selected members of the expedition around members of his own tribe because he wanted to increase his tribe’s influence was glamorized as ‘him having no choice but

to push his own tribe members into a corner because the opposition of other tribes was too fierce'.

Flame-Hell's popularity surged, and on the other hand, the approval ratings for other Exalted Wings in opposition to Flame-Hell dropped.

"I heard Exalted Wing Armor-Desert severely criticized Exalted Wing Flame-Hell this time. How can he show his face now after that embarrassment? In the end, Exalted Wing Flame-Hell was right, and Exalted Wing Armor-Desert was wrong, right?"

"And what about Exalted Wing Light-Step?"

"Hey! Is that their fault? Who could have known that Leader Choi Hyuk would be so great? Only Choi Hyuk and Exalted Wing Flame-Hell could have known. Those two are amazing."

From the highest-ranked warrior to the lowest-ranked warrior, they all seemed to be uniting under Choi Hyuk and Flame-Hell.

Even the timing was perfect. The warriors, who needed a mental anchor when facing against the monsters' largest attack yet, consciously and unconsciously supported Choi Hyuk and Flame-Hell even more.

Because of this mood, Ryu Hyunsung's funeral, which the Berserkers wanted to handle quietly, became a great event.

Flame-Hell personally declared,

"It's the death of a great warrior. It is only right to send him off with the honor he deserves."

Then it was exposed that he would personally attend the funeral.

Choi Hyuk's position on this was 'I feel like vomiting'.

It meant that his enemy, Flame-Hell, would use Ryu Hyunsung's death as propaganda... There was no way his stomach wouldn't be upset.

However, Choi Hyuk endured it.

Since it wasn't time yet.

Yet this wasn't the only thing that irritated him.

"Send Naro."

After returning from his expedition, Armor-Phantom came every day to negotiate sending Naro to the Armored Soul Tribe.

As if he didn't remember how he left in anger last time, he approached Choi Hyuk deceitfully and tried to persuade him, saying things like how Naro could become an outstanding warrior once he possessed a proper body rather than playing a supporting role in battle as a spaceship, how they would install a top-of-the-line A.I. in Naro's spaceship and even upgrade it, provide comforts to the Berserkers in various missions, give them Mission Points, or how there was nothing good about becoming enemies with the Armored Soul Tribe.

Since Armor-Phantom came across so polite, at first, Choi Hyuk asked Naro for his opinion again. However, Naro's position was always the same. He didn't want to leave the narolings' spaceship and the Berserkers.

So Choi Hyuk rejected Armor-Phantom's proposal as politely as possible.

However, today, he was surging with irritation.

It was the day of Ryu Hyunsung's funeral so he couldn't help but become irritated when Armor-Phantom brought up sending Naro to the Armored Soul Tribe again.

Choi Hyuk glared at Armor-Phantom.

But Armor-Phantom's mood was also different from usual.

Unlike how he had suddenly started acting politely and friendlily during the past few days, today, Armor-Phantom was cold and high-handed like when their relationship twisted in the past. On top of that, it seemed he was angry for some reason as well.

Armor-Phantom flapped his large wings that were made up of metal and light as he stared at Choi Hyuk, fully releasing the vigor of a transcendent warrior.

Not long ago, Choi Hyuk had felt strained under his vigor, but Choi Hyuk no longer showed a trace of shyness.

Whether Armor-Phantom flapped his wings or emitted his vigor, Choi Hyuk didn't care in the slightest. Instead, he growled while taking a step towards Armor-Phantom.

"Armor-Phantom. I've told you multiple times. I respect Naro's decision. As his kin, you should also respect Naro's decision. I'm telling you once more, but what he learns while completing missions with me doesn't lose out to what he would learn from the Armored Soul Tribe. So, whether it's concern for him or meddling, stop it. Finally... If you don't have any intentions of cherishing Ryu Hyunsung, then leave."

It seemed he was displeased by Choi Hyuk's sudden impolite and provocative tone as Armor-Phantom flapped his wings.

However, that was all he could do. This was because Choi Hyuk was no longer below him in terms of strength or position.

'... He grew this much through one battle?'

While he knew that Choi Hyuk reached the transcendent level, he had only now entered it. Armor-Phantom believed that he would still be able to pressure him with his vigor. Unfortunately, he was wrong.

When he thought about this, he felt frustrated due to the blow to his pride, but there was nothing he could do right now. He became even more pissed as a result.

Shimmer.

After throwing off his frustration by crashing the metallic fragments that made up his body together once, Armor-Phantom took a step back and said, as if spitting,

“Yeah, this was the last. I won’t come anymore.”

He turned his back without hesitation and left the Square of Warriors.

Choi Hyuk, who suspected it but didn’t think that he would really leave without looking at the funeral, clicked his tongue in astonishment.

Baek Seoin, who had been watching from the side, said,

“You did it in the end.”

Choi Hyuk shook his head as though thinking about how it would be a pain and asked,

“Will it be a problem?”

“While we can’t know for sure… It might be helpful in gaining more of Exalted Wing Flame-Hell’s trust.”

“Then it’s fine.”

If he obtained Flame-Hell’s trust, then it wasn’t a loss even if he was hated by the Armored Soul Tribe since his immediate goal was getting close to Flame-Hell.

Choi Hyuk brushed off these thoughts and looked up at the Tower of Warriors. A tower created by gathering the karma weapons of all the warriors who had passed. While looking at the karma weapons’ swaying silhouettes, he suddenly asked,

“Soon… Ryu hyung’s weapon will enter there.”

“Yes… Soon.”

Then Baek Seoin, who was silent for a moment, cautiously asked,

“Anyways, how is… Jinhee?”

“I told her what I wanted to do. But it seems… She still needs to recuperate.”

Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin thought about Lee Jinhee, who had yet to arrive at the Square of Warriors.

‘She might not come.’

As soon as he thought this, Choi Hyuk unconsciously mumbled,

“It’s probably better if she didn’t…”

Yeah, not coming would be better.

Flame-Hell would appear soon and the ceremony would begin. Then by mourning Ryu Hyunsung’s death extravagantly, it would be used to raise Flame-Hell’s popularity. Choi Hyuk thought that it was better to not come, using having to recuperate as an excuse rather than to see that.

Beside him, Baek Seoin subtly nodded his head.

“… That’s right. It’s not like we won’t see her ever again.”

**

‘The calculations of revenge.’

Lee Jinhee mumbled.

Revenge was revenge, nothing more.

It wasn’t wishing for the repentance of one’s enemies or searching for one’s happiness.

It wasn’t a trial nor was it a realization of justice.

It was simply inflicting someone else with the same or more pain that one had received. In order to show them the depth of their pain.

That was all. It wasn’t for anything.

Since it was ruined.

All those crazy for revenge had left was the world that made them go crazy in the first place, there wasn’t a reason.

“That’s why it’s fruitless.”

Lee Jinhee repeated,

“Fruitless…”

Her gaze landed on the fragments of her shattered sword.

Her shattered dream.

Her dream, which was to fight so that they could live happily together, was currently in pieces.

Yet, she smiled. She brushed her fingertips against the shattered sword fragments.

Having fallen to the level of a low-ranked warrior after her karma sword, which was like a soul companion, shattered, her fingers couldn't bear the energy of the fragments of the Sword of Sentiment and were soon soaked in blood.

She received the dripping blood with her other hand. It was warm.

"Still, since I'm still alive, I can get revenge."

A single teardrop fell from her smiling face.

After lowering her head for a while, she stood up with a resolved face, and then took her shattered sword and the glass bottle Choi Hyuk left behind and left.

Chapter 177: Lee Jinhee's Vow (2)

That day was the first time Choi Hyuk saw Flame-Hell's true figure.

While everyone was gathered for Ryu Hyunsung's funeral, night fell on Alliance City.

The Light of Eternity, which surged from the center of Alliance City 365 days a year, suddenly went out, and even Alliance City's unique sky, which was a gathering of skies from other species, was erased for a moment.

All that remained was the dark universe and the stars that slowly shined within it.

Just as the conversations between the warriors died down, a flame ignited with a blaze.

A flame the size of a candlelight ignited in front of each warrior gathered in the square.

"Today, we send off a great warrior."

They heard a voice.

At some point, Flame-Hell was floating in the middle of the Tower of Warriors. Though he looked old, in some ways, he simply looked like a handsome man with a few years of experience. His hair wasn't composed of flames. However, his exposed skin and eyes blazed with hazy flames.

"While he is gone, his will and fate will continue to remain here and lead the universe we live in. Leader Choi Hyuk, come forward."

He didn't introduce himself in detail or ramble on, but instead quickly began the ceremony.

Choi Hyuk stepped forward while holding the shattered Sword of Sentiment 'Ryu Hyunsung's Commemoration' with both hands.

Flame-Hell's gaze remained on Choi Hyuk.

"Leader Choi Hyuk. You worked hard."

Flame-Hell gave him some words of solace.

Flame-Hell maintained his modesty and was overflowing with self-restraint. He didn't impose himself in this ceremony.

Just the fact that he was personally supervising this funeral was enough for others to confirm his friendship with Choi Hyuk, and that the glory from Choi Hyuk's feat would ultimately return to him. More stories glamorizing him were spreading on their own, and there was no need for Flame-Hell to personally supplement them from here.

That was why he used this moment to move the warriors' hearts and strengthen their bonds.

Flame-Hell seriously led the funeral.

"Highest-ranked Warrior Ryu Hyunsung. He played a key role in obtaining victory in the battle against the Blue Manes. If not for him, there would be many warriors who wouldn't be able to attend his funeral today."

Flame-Hell looked around the Square of Warriors. Since a small flame was in front of everyone, it seemed like the sky and the ground were filled with stars.

"Highest-rank Warrior Ryu Hyunsung, with his sacrifice, we were able to become victorious in one war, but there still remains another. It is against the monsters, who are currently launching the largest-scale invasion ever seen."

Warriors nodded.

While examining their sympathy, Flame-Hell skillfully ended his commemorative speech.

"Like how he did his best to fulfill his duties as a warrior for us, it is now time for us to fulfill our duties as warriors for him. The

flames in front of you right now were flames I created by extracting a tiny amount of karma from you. By gathering these flames, we will restore the will and fate Highest-Ranked Warrior Ryu Hyunsung left behind and combine them into the Tower of Warriors. His will shall mix with our will and remain forever, and we will be victorious together in this war.”

When Flame-Hell ended his speech, the flames in front of everyone’s eyes shook. Then, as though they were floating on a river, one by one, they flowed into the fragments of ‘Ryu Hyunsung’s Commemoration’, which Choi Hyuk was holding.

The more the flames flowed into them, the more transparent and brighter the fragments became before floating up and permeating into the Tower of Warriors.

In its final moment of permeating the tower, the fragments formed an intact sword shadow before disappearing with a metallic ring.

Flame-Hell said,

“For life and freedom.”

Everyone else followed,

“For life and freedom!”

Their voice rang throughout Alliance City.

Like the break of day, the Light of Eternity slowly brightened, and the sky of various lights that had been erased slowly returned.

The dawn of Alliance City comforted the warriors’ souls. Having concluded the ceremony, Flame-Hell disappeared without a trace, and the warriors gathered in the square began conversing with each other with brighter voices than before.

Spending time together until the Light of Eternity brightened completely and the day arrived was Alliance City’s funeral custom.

“... It ended.”

Now that the ceremony ended, they had carried out all the big tasks. Having somewhat mixed feelings, Choi Hyuk placed his hands in his pockets and blankly looked up at the Tower of Warriors.

Even Baek Seoin beside him didn't speak.

Just then, a commotion broke out in the square.

"What the heck? A low-ranked warrior? Why is a low-ranked warrior in Alliance City?"

"Well... Maybe she's here under the probationary qualifications of a troop. But why is she here in the Square of Warriors? Since there is a whirlwind of karma here, it must have been difficult for a low-ranked warrior like her to enter."

"No, no. She's Director Lee Jinhee of the Berserkers."

"She's one of them? But why is her rank so low?"

"Apparently, her karma weapon was smashed this time."

"Oh my. It's admirable that she's still alive."

Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin's gazes were fixated in the direction of the commotion. There, Lee Jinhee was strenuously taking steps forward. The Tower of Warriors was created by a whirlwind of karma. Of course, winds of karma always swept through the Square of Warriors, which was in its front yard. While there wasn't a significant effect on middle-ranked warriors and above, it seemed it was difficult for Lee Jinhee, who had just fallen to the level of a low-ranked warrior. Each step was difficult for her.

"Ah... I didn't think of this."

Baek Seoin blamed himself as he went to help Lee Jinhee.

However, Lee Jinhee stretched her hands out as she stopped him. She didn't receive help from anyone as she walked with her own strength and stood in front of the Tower of Warriors.

"Haa... How sad. For someone who was a high-ranked warrior

not too long ago.”

“Won’t she recover?”

“Who knows…? The possibility of success is so low.”

The warriors murmured to each other as they looked at Lee Jinhee with sympathetic eyes.

Yet, Lee Jinhee paid them no mind. She simply lowered her head in silence in front of the tower.

Rather it was Baek Seoin and Choi Hyuk who flew into a rage, but they bit their lips and kept silent, thinking that taking action could deal a blow to Lee Jinhee’s pride.

After concluding her moment of silence, she arduously walked towards Choi Hyuk while dripping with cold sweat. Unable to do this or that, Choi Hyuk simply stared at Lee Jinhee. Seeing her right now, his emotions were in disarray.

While she had beads of sweat, her lips were slightly curved upwards, and above all, her eyes shined like stars.

‘What… does she want to say?’

Just then, Lee Jinhee arrived in front of Choi Hyuk.

She took out the shattered sword fragments and the glass bottle from her pocket.

Choi Hyuk, whose lips had been tightly shut, unconsciously opened his mouth.

“That’s-“

Lee Jinhee cut him off. She wiped the smile from her face and strengthened her gaze.

“I decidedly to cleanly give it up.”

While she didn’t say what she gave up, Choi Hyuk could tell for some reason.

Her dream. Living in happiness. It seemed that that was what she

gave up…

"…"

Choi Hyuk didn't know what to say.

No, how could a woman, who said she had given up on her dream, be so filled with willpower and overflowing with vigor?

"Instead, I can't see someone among us die again."

Then, before he could say anything, she uncorked the stopper and poured the liquid, which seemed like the dark night sky, onto the shattered sword fragments. Even though the glass bottle was only the size of one's palm, the black liquid poured out endlessly from it. Like water in zero gravity, it pooled together and grew larger without dropping to the ground. It covered all of the sword fragments, her hand, her forearm, and finally, her shoulder.

The warriors murmured to each other.

"Is that… the dark ocean?"

"Don't tell me she plans on repairing her shattered weapon here?"

Without knowing, Choi Hyuk raised his voice.

"What are you doing?! How could you open that here?!"

Even though the best materials were used, the success rate was already less than 20%. If she failed even once, she couldn't try it again. Then Lee Jinhee would remain as a low-ranked warrior. That was why it was proper to attempt repairing her weapon only after recovering to her best state and choosing the best place and weather for it. It wasn't something to do while sweating and in this noisy outside environment.

However, Lee Jinhee's eyes didn't waver in the slightest.

"Believe in me. Doing it here in front of you is for the best."

She stared into Choi Hyuk's eyes while she spat each word.

“Before I die, I will absolutely not see you die. Even if you die, I will die before you.”

Then she ended her words with a sigh,

“I vow.”

Whooosh!

At the same time as she closed her eyes, the dark ocean, which had submerged up to her shoulder, expanded and swallowed her entire body.

Bang! Bang!

Sounds of thunder rumbled in the darkness.

**

‘Ah?’

Lee Jinhee opened her eyes.

Shwaaaah.

It was raining outside. The pungent scent of humid wooden floorboards permeated her nose.

This place was a classroom. A classroom that no one studied in anymore. Lively people sat on the desks and chairs. It hadn’t been long since she met them, and although they didn’t meet under great circumstances, they seemed to be good people. To be precise, they seemed to be people she felt she would like.

While the present was foggy and the future was gloomy, it had been a while since she had such a leisurely night. Lee Jinhee examined the people sitting in various positions here and there before saying, “The mood is perfect! Let’s tell scary stories!”

At her words, Baek Seoin revealed an astonished expression.

“What scary story. The present is scarier.”

Lee Jinhee still wasn’t discouraged.

“Why? Why?! No matter how scary the Wyvern of Destruction is, it can still be hit. What’s actually scary are ghosts!”

“Haha!”

Baek Seoin burst into laughter. Beside him, Choi Hyuk, who sat on a desk with his hands in his pockets, simply watched the rain outside the window. It seemed he was worried about his mom again.

“I don’t like ghost stories.”

Ryu Hyunsung, who always acted like a model student yet had somewhat of a depressed expression, retreated backwards.

“I don’t know. If it’s a really scary story, tell it. Since there are so many scary things in reality right now, it might even be a change of pace?”

The always businesslike Crazy Knight King Jung Minji gave a subtle smile for some reason as she took Lee Jinhee’s side.

Lee Jinhee became excited.

“Right? That’s what I’m saying. Leader! Look over here!”

Choi Hyuk slowly turned his gaze as though it was troublesome.

Lee Jinhee revealed a satisfied smile before her expression became serious.

Lowering her voice, she began her story.

“So a person was driving on a dark mountain road with no streetlights at night…”

Just then, the world flashed before thunder rumbled.

Kaboom!

“Oh my god!”

Lee Jinhee stopped talking and jumped into the air in fright.

Bang!

Due to her enhanced physical abilities, she jumped to the ceiling and slammed her head into it. The cement-finished ceiling was smashed and fell while Lee Jinhee disgracefully flopped on the floor.

“Puahahaa!”

Baek Seoin roared with laughter at this sight.

Jung Minji grinned, and Chu Younjin’s lips, who stood expressionlessly behind her, wriggled. The laughter continued to spread, and soon, everyone in the classroom was laughing. Even Choi Hyuk smiled as he shook his head.

Even while she patted her head in embarrassment, Lee Jinhee seemed happy that they were laughing and followed suit.

Maybe it was because they laughed, but they talked more than usual that day.

Within this slight warmth, Lee Jinhee thought that it would be nice if they could gather around and laugh like this after their battles. While eating something good.

“Yeah, I thought that.”

Lee Jinhee’s face, which smiled like an idiot amongst them, gradually became bitter. When she raised her head again, like a scene in a picture, the world’s time stopped, and everyone paused while smiling and looking at each other.

Choi Hyuk, Baek Seoin, Ryu Hyunsung, Bae Jinman, and Jung Minji… They were people who could have lived a different future together. However, Lee Jinhee completely realized that she couldn’t dream this dream any longer and that she couldn’t stay in this memory any longer.

Lee Jinhee stood up.

She opened the window. She saw raindrops that stopped in mid-fall. She stopped in front of the windowsill.

“While it would have been nice if I could… I no longer have any lingering attachments. They are all dead or are probably going to die.”

Saying this lightly, she took deep breaths.

“I don’t want to be the only one to leave from this. Only… Only, I won’t see someone die before me. I’d rather die.”

She glanced behind her before throwing herself out the window.

“Especially Choi Hyuk, that bastard. That bastard who thinks he’s the only unhappy person in the world. I can’t watch that bastard die.”

Thud. Her falling body instantly impacted the ground. She opened her eyes.

The dark ocean, which she was submerged in, instantly hid its trace.

Her gaze met Choi Hyuk’s.

“… Right now…”

This was the first time she saw Choi Hyuk’s eyes tremble.

‘No? I think he was like this at his mother’s funeral.’

While smiling, Lee Jinhee said,

“This is my vow.”

Just then, the moment the dark ocean cleared, Choi Hyuk saw a brilliantly shining golden light emitting from Lee Jinhee. The color of ‘sacrificial will’, which he had almost never seen since he obtained his Eyes of Distinction.

What she raised while saying, “This is my vow,” was a single short sword shining with white light.

The Sword of Vow ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’.

Alliance City’s dawn ended, and a glistening, brilliant world began to brighten once again.

Chapter 178: Frontlines (1)

An extensive construction began on Naro's spaceship. The construction was to help Naro, who had awakened as a highest-ranked warrior, use his abilities more effectively. Complying with Naro's will, they would maintain the basic frame the narolings had built and would only upgrade the outer armor and circuitry.

This was a very special case.

While it wasn't like there weren't any Armored Soul Tribe members in the shape of spaceships like the 'Steel Battleship', they were rare. As long as the total amount of karma a warrior could handle was limited, a smaller body would always be more economical and powerful than a larger body in battle. That was why the majority of battleship-type Armored Soul Tribe members were born through the alliance's request to the tribe for a special mission or to meet a quota.

Cases like Naro's, where one could maintain their spaceship body and even decide upon the remodeling process, were those of incredible privilege.

In the deepest core of Naro's spaceship, in the square where the narolings were buried, which Naro absolutely wouldn't let anyone lay a finger on despite the massive construction this time, Baek Seoin, Lee Jinhee, Naro, and Choi Hyuk held a meeting. After combining Naro and Choi Hyuk's power to prevent anyone from eavesdropping, they discussed their plans for the future.

Baek Seoin began the discussion with a light topic suggestion.

"Flame-Hell seems to have really liked leader's declaration."

It was as he said.

The costs of remodeling Naro's body were wholly paid for by the alliance. Despite the fact that the expenses would be astronomical considering the size of his body, they provided only the very best

resources, so much so that a rumor saying they had spent more than a hundred times that of what an average Armored Soul Tribe warrior would spend on creating their own bodies began to spread. This would have been impossible if it wasn't for Flame-Hell's wholehearted support.

Of course, the Berserkers were overflowing with reasons why Flame-Hell should give them preferential treatment.

Successfully subjugated the Blue Manes.

A well-conducted funeral.

Especially at the end of the funeral.

Where Lee Jinhee completed her Sword of Vow and went beyond just recovering her strength that had fallen to the low rank, stepping into the highest rank.

As according to Flame-Hell's plans, all of this gave hope to the alliance and made people consider Flame-Hell as the symbol of this hope.

However, there was another incident that made Flame-Hell determined to wholeheartedly invest in Naro.

The 'declaration' Baek Seoin mentioned was the declaration that popped up in Choi Hyuk and Armor-Phantom's conversation before the funeral.

'I'll telling you once more, but what he learns while completing missions with me doesn't lose out to what he would learn from the Armored Soul Tribe.'

It turned out that these words had scratched an itch for Flame-Hell.

He wanted to weaken the Armored Soul Tribe's unity and strengthen not only the alliance's influence but the influence of his own Flame Wing Tribe. To accomplish this, he wanted to transfer the Armored Soul Tribe's special member training to the alliance.

In this situation, Naro's refusal for training and Choi Hyuk's declaration were perfect opportunities for Flame-Hell.

This was the reason why Naro was given the best resources.

"On the other hand, we'll probably be hated by the Armored Soul Tribe."

Lee Jinhee said, wondering if it was okay, and Baek Seoin shrugged his shoulders.

"It's actually better this way since we need to earn Flame-Hell's trust."

Then he turned his gaze towards Choi Hyuk.

He swept away the slightly easygoing mood and fixed his gaze.

"As I said before, there are two tasks we must prioritize. First, obtaining Flame-Hell's complete trust. Therefore, garnering hate from the Armored Soul Tribe, who are Flame-Hell's competitors, is actually welcome. Second is for Chu Youngjin to figure out the mastermind behind the 'Event Horizon Troop' and to obtain the mastermind's wholehearted trust. To be honest, this part is... very uncertain. First, the mastermind needs to be an Exalted Wing, and above all, that person needs to be able to trust Chu Youngjin."

"Hmmm..."

Lee Jinhee groaned.

There was no one present that didn't like Chu Youngjin. However, liking someone and trusting someone were completely different matters. Chu Youngjin was an uncontrollable person. They had already confirmed this back during the doppelganger incident. It was also the reason why Lee Jinhee didn't say anything.

While there was probably no way he would purposely betray Choi Hyuk, they couldn't ignore the possibility that he wouldn't do the things he had to.

Still, Choi Hyuk resolutely shook his head.

“We don’t have time to be concerned about that. We’re absolutely weaker than them. If we start to doubt and prepare for various things, then it’ll be too slow. We can’t slash them with a slow sword. Let’s just leave that part to Chu hyung.”

“... Understood. Then if we assume that everything goes well, then like I said before, the Exalted Wings will gather in one place. There’s a likely chance that... Exalted Wing Flame-Rain won’t be able to attend. Then only one task remains. Finding a method to defeat the Exalted Wings, who have all gathered in one place... While I am researching all sorts of poisons and weapons, I don’t have anything yet.”

Choi Hyuk nodded.

“Yeah, then let’s focus on that.”

**

“Focus on Earth’s culture...”

Puppet Shiro was in the Shapley Supercluster’s archive. An immeasurable amount of data was being downloaded into her electronic brain.

Even as she was performing incredible calculations with her mind, Shiro mumbled to herself without realizing.

“The friendship of earthlings... Earthlings provide food or eat together to express friendship. Earthlings enjoy eating.”

With her arms crossed, Shiro’s fingers fidgeted.

“The taste of food is made up of a variety of elements. Textures of food can be smooth, chewy, crispy...”

Because she was looking through various data at once, her mumbling jumped from topic to topic.

“Among earthlings, those known as Koreans prefer a chewier texture compared to other cultures...”

“When eating, they don’t only pay attention to the taste of the food, but also the scent, temperature, comfort of their chair, the mood, and others…”

She suddenly stopped speaking.

Her hands tightly clenched her crossed arms. Kiing! Kiiing! The sound of her gear heart turning rapidly broke the silence.

In a startled voice, she started saying,

“What am I doing…? I came to investigate the monsters that appeared around the Shapley Supercluster on my day off…”

She closed her eyes and did her best to calm her gear heart. Only after trying for a while did she finally succeed. Tik, tok, tik, tok. It returned to its normal sound.

Now that she had calmed down, she began avidly reading information regarding monsters like she had originally planned.

Not much time had passed before her ‘tik-toking’ gear heart began to churn without traction and she started mumbling again.

“When developing relationships, earthlings prefer smaller presents as opposed to bigger ones as they feel less burdened by them…”

**

The Event Horizon’s First Battle Unit Captain ordered Shiro,

“Shiro, carefully check if we can bring Chu Youngjin into our grand scheme. It’s become more sensitive now because the Berserkers confirmed their friendly relationship with Flame-Hell this time. While I know Chu Youngjin was exiled, he might still have a connection we’re not aware of. Gain Chu Youngjin’s trust. Also, figure out what Chu Youngjin thinks about the Berserkers.”

Shiro replied with her signature emotionless face,

“Understood.”

Therefore, her ‘only doing her mission’ was the excuse she gave herself. Though, she didn’t think about why she needed an excuse in the first place.

The ‘Event Horizon Troop’ fought hard to protect the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters.

It hadn’t been long since Choi Hyuk had completely erased the Kahur Kabkuns within these superclusters and fully colonized them. That was why the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters were the only two outer superclusters that didn’t suffer an internal invasion when the monsters launched their large-scale invasion, and because of this safety, they were set up as a stronghold and logistics base.

However, because their defensive line wasn’t completely intact yet, it didn’t take long for the superclusters to become the monsters’ number one target. The border of the two superclusters became the most intense battlefield in this war.

Also, there were two heroes rising in prominence on these frontlines.

Puppet Shiro and Insane Sword Chu Youngjin.

Kiiing-!

The output of Shiro’s gear heart became better recently. While its accuracy was lower than before, her karma increased and her instantaneous explosiveness became so powerful that people evaluated that her fighting strength had increased.

“Charge in, I’ll cover your back.”

Her tone was stiff as always, but the way she treated Chu Youngjin had changed drastically. It was different from when she used to constantly intervene whenever he tried to charge forward explosively to prevent him from dying and when she used to watch idly, unconcerned whether he died or not, if he didn’t listen to her.

She actively took the lead and devoted herself so that Chu

Youngjin could go berserk to his heart's content while still being safe.

It was the case right now. Chu Youngjin wanted to defeat a highest-ranked monster on the other side.

The highest-ranked monster, which looked like a self-propelled gun composed of lumps of flesh, fired ranged attacks at the Event Horizon Troop, causing significant damage.

However, it wasn't easy intercepting the monster as it was surrounded by high-ranked monsters and above. Unless they advanced steadily, they would be killed after being isolated from the rest of the group even if they managed to kill the monster.

In a situation where even Chu Youngjin was hesitating, it was Shiro who urged him.

"You don't need to worry about your return route. Trust me."

Chu Youngjin smiled at her when she spoke in such a reliable manner. Then, without turning back, he rushed forward. It seemed he was squeezing out all his strength as monsters were scattered in a bloody mess accompanied by the sounds of thunder. In an instant, Chu Younjin pierced his way, creating a long, narrow path, to the highest-ranked monster. Shiro followed closely behind him.

With his characteristic style of squeezing out all his power, he slashed through the monster. As if preplanned, he then immediately fell into a state of exhaustion. Chu Youngjin fell into a situation where he could be skewered by any monster's teeth or claws. The one who saved him was Shiro, who had followed closely behind him.

She took a deep breath and hugged Chu Youngjin.

Her vision was flooded with monsters, dripping fluids from their bodies.

'Can I do it?'

In the past, she wouldn't have even attempted it, but as she gazed at Chu Younjin, who was in her arms,

Kiiing-!

When she saw his face, her gear heart would churn explosively. Her strength surged instantly. While incomprehensible, it was a fact. Shiro, who objectively calculated her own capacity, knew that, if she was with Chu Youngjin, they would be able to pull through any disadvantageous situation. That was why she could attempt a reckless technique that she wouldn't have attempted in the past without fear.

"Full-speed Escape."

Her two feet transformed into what looked to be large rocket boosters.

Hugging Chu Youngjin, Shiro's body became flat, starting from her head. As soon as her body flattened like a crushed can—

Booom-!

She disappeared from her spot while hugging Chu Youngjin. All the numerous monsters that obstructed their path were simultaneously turned into a bloody haze. Many monsters died powerlessly, unable to counterattack even once.

After returning to a safe location, Chu Youngjin sincerely admired,

"Wow... How did you do that?"

"It was a skill I learned from an elder when I first became an Armored Soul Tribe member..."

"Really? Amazing."

"Since there are many differences between Armored Soul Tribe members and other lifeforms... A few skills can achieve an effect greater than one's level by using remodeled bodies."

After saying this, Shiro glanced at Chu Youngjin. After cautiously

examining his slightly flushed face, which seemed to indicate his sincere admiration, she turned her gaze and mumbled,

“In this respect, Naro, who recently became a highest-ranked warrior and yet refused to receive their education, is truly foolish. Same for Choi Hyuk, who encouraged him. Armored Soul Tribe members need to receive teachings from the elders of their tribe.”

Shiro covertly tested Chu Youngjin’s heart. Hearing her words, Chu Youngjin frowned.

“Choi Hyuk, that bastard…”

Then he shook his head as if he didn’t care or perhaps he didn’t even want to talk about it.

Shiro felt slightly relieved when she saw that he was hostile towards Choi Hyuk. When she turned around, while relieved, the battle seemed to be wrapping up. It was thanks to Shiro and Chu Youngjin flipping the situation around.

‘Is it ending soon? Then…”

After reading the mood, Shiro carefully took out two items she had stored at a cold temperature in her body and then handed one to Chu Youngjin. She raised hers.

“Good job.”

“… This is?”

Chu Youngjin was surprised at what Shiro took out. They were cans of beer from Earth.

“I heard earthlings like this. Since you did a good job in battle today, just think of it as a reward given by your superior.”

Shiro said coolly. Yet, her gear heart had been churning rapidly for a while now.

Chu Youngjin gave Shiro an odd look before grinning, cracking open the beer and gulping it down.

When he lowered his can, Shiro had her hand stretched out, handing him something.

It was a white, chewy cheese stick.

“I heard that you had to have something to eat while drinking where you lived. It’s not like I looked it up. My electronic brain contains all the knowledge in the world.”

After finished her excuse-explanation, Shiro handed him the cheese stick and proceeded to gulp down her own beer.

“Woah! Victory!”

The cheers of warriors erupted at that moment. Monster corpses floated in space, scattering and disappearing, and whenever they did, the starlight, which was covered by them, became more distinct.

‘The mood’s good too…’

Shiro mumbled to herself without being aware of what she was saying.

Chapter 179: Frontlines (2)

‘My target is all 13 Exalted Wings.’

Chu Youngjin mulled over those words. This was what Choi Hyuk had said when they met on the Blue Ocean Planet, and Chu Youngjin had accepted his plans since he didn’t really have anything else to do and detested the world.

‘Event Horizon Troop. There must be at least one Wing behind them. That Wing… if it isn’ Flame-Rain, then they’ll end up as my enemy.’

The Event Horizon Troop was the troop Chu Youngjin was a member of, and it had made significant contributions to the defensive battle in the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. Chu Youngjin looked around at the warriors who were in formation, ready for another battle.

While he was used to it now, they were clearly different from other troops. This elite troop was indiscriminately made up of young masters and ladies from the top four tribes and people from the borders like Chu Youngjin. Be it from aliens with outer appearances similar to humans to furry ones that looked like beasts, or aliens that floated in space like a fish or a jellyfish to aliens that squirmed like snakes or worms and aliens that were composed of liquid or gas, these aliens, these warriors of the alliance, were so diverse in appearances that they were indistinguishable from monsters from a human’s perspective.

Chu Youngjin had become used to this strange sight. Now, when he looked around, he saw many familiar faces, many of whom he could put a name to. Even though he had only been here for a short period of time, they had already gone through a countless number of life-or-death situations together.

Filling his vision with their faces, Chu Youngjin calmly thought,

‘So I’ll betray them eventually.’

He was to figure out who was behind them, obtain and use their trust before killing them all. That was Choi Hyuk’s goal. As long as he planned on walking this path, Chu Youngjin couldn’t avoid his inevitable betrayal.

“It’s reasonable.”

Shiro had, at some point, arrived. She stood next to Chu Youngjin and looked at their troop members while saying,

“While I don’t know how much you knew before joining, but this place is different from the alliance. We don’t discriminate warriors by where they came from. Since we only prioritize skill, we always achieve the greatest results.”

For some reason, it seemed her expressionless face was shining with pride.

With his gaze still on the troop members, Chu Youngjin asked,

“Is it similar to Exalted Wing Flame-Rain’s aim?”

He was answered with a sharp reply.

“No. Exalted Wing Flame-Rain is too much of an idealist. She wants harmony amongst species and gives opportunities to the weaker species. It’s not effective.”

‘So Flame-Rain isn’t behind them?’

While thinking this, Chu Youngjin mulled over Shiro’s words.

“What I’m saying is, rather than vague concepts like harmony and risky investments, we prefer concrete battles and warriors who are useful right away.”

Shiro nodded her head. A subtle, almost indiscernible smile spread on her lips.

Chu Youngjin met her gaze and asked,

“Is that the world you want?”

At his question, her cold, hard eyes melted like thin ice and wavered. She seemed to be reminiscing.

“No. What I want is simply war… I am the creation of a species that became extinct due to the monsters. I was a battle puppet that fought against monsters in my masters’ stead. However, I couldn’t complete my mission. My masters were all slaughtered by the monsters, and because of that, I was reborn by succeeding their fate. While my present self is a completely different existence from the past… Still, my heart is engraved with resentment towards the monsters. I… I don’t know what kind of world I want. Only, I know what kind of war I want very well.”

He looked into her eyes, which seemed to shimmer with light, looking almost tearful, before turning away and mumbling,

“… Sounds lonely.”

Shiro’s eyes rippled.

“What did you say?”

When she said that, Chu Youngjin met her gaze once more and simply said,

“I mean if that’s the kind of war you want, then that’s also the kind of war I want.”

“…”

Shiro’s frozen eyes shook. She turned her back towards him and said,

“Just what are you…? No, so that’s it. I’ll keep that in mind.”

While Shiro’s electronic brain was calculating at incredible speeds, all her thoughts ended up as errors and she couldn’t calculate anything.

‘What does he mean? Is he agreeing with me? If that’s the case, then won’t it be fine to bring him into our grand scheme? No, no. Then what did he mean by ‘sounds lonely’? And what about, ‘if

that's the kind of war you want'? Rather than agreeing with me about our cause, maybe he-No, what am I saying? Me? What does that mean? Anyways, why is my gear heart overheating? But did I just say that 'I'll keep that in mind'? What did I mean by 'keep that in mind'? As expected, the great cause? No, Chu Youngjin's... feelings. No, just what are his feelings?!'

When she tried to come to a rational conclusion, she didn't like it for some reason, and when she tried to come to a conclusion emotionally, she couldn't comprehend her emotions.

Shiro disappeared after saying that 'she would keep that in mind' without another word.

Chu Youngjin watched her leave before smiling bitterly and mumbling,

"Those words came out easily."

Feeling awkward, he looked out at the troop members again as he recalled a word again.

'... Betrayal.'

**

War was glorious and full of hope.

While the frontlines receded and there were superclusters that were completely subjugated by the monsters due to their sudden invasion, there was still hope because of the actions of heroes in various places.

Transcendent warriors, who raised their names onto the alliance's ranking, quickly emerged, and the names of heroes who had won consecutive victories spread rapidly.

As the war waged longer, warriors, either knowingly or not, became nervous.

'No matter how much I think about it, I don't think the monsters are using their full strength. How will it look when the monsters

invade us at full strength?'

When this discussion broke out, people concluded that 'they could take them on'.

While the monsters were strong, the warriors of the alliance didn't lose out to them. They achieved as many consecutive defeats as they did victories.

This gave hope to the warriors.

And the one who gave the biggest hope among them was Choi Hyuk and his 'Flame Army'.

The Flame Army fought on the most intense battlefield, the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters, and their performance made them quickly exceed the Event Horizon Troop, which Chu Youngjin was a member of, in fame.

The obvious name 'Flame Army' was of course assigned to them by Flame-Hell. He strengthened their military power with the Blue Manes punitive force as their core, and they became a leading troop in terms of power.

The 'Flame Army', which was filled with many promising rookies of the top four tribes, especially those of the Flame Wing Tribe who were the leading power in the alliance, gave a new hope to alliance members.

Of course, the war was cruel.

It was especially cruel to species that possessed the 'Consumables' fate.

However, to those who had already become alliance members, this didn't concern them much.

"Ahhhck!!"

"Heuuuuk! I... I can't die like this!"

Screams filled a distant area in the universe.

A wall made of blood and flesh to block the pouring monster army. The Consumables fulfilled their duty by being horribly crushed. These lives, who had endured the hardship of the alliance as Consumables and had, at times, betrayed their own family and friends to survive, were dying powerlessly.

Choi Hyuk and the Flame Army motionlessly watched the mass of deaths. During this time, an endless number of new Consumables poured out onto the monsters' formation through the military gate system, and the monsters became drunk from the amount of karma and blood they had consumed.

"Now."

Choi Hyuk, who had been coldly watching this scene, finally opened his mouth.

The technique, officially known as 'monster armor', where two monsters combined into one, with one of them becoming a weapon, was created in order to resist karma weapons and was very effective. Because of this technique, various galaxy clusters collapsed, and multiple galaxies were subjugated. However, it wasn't like the alliance was standing still since Choi Hyuk first reported the existence of this 'monster armor'.

The method the alliance found in nullifying 'monster armor' was throwing Consumables as bait. Since monster armor was made up of two different monsters fighting as one body, it became easier to face them once they broke their cooperation. As they continued to easily slaughter their prey, the monster that had transformed into the armor and weapons began to become immersed in the slaughter, tossing its command to cooperate to the side. Then the 'monster armor' effect of '1+1=2.5' became '1+1=1.7', making it worse than fighting separately.

So sacrificing Consumables was the simplest and most effective tactic in dealing with monster armors.

Of course, there were drawbacks.

Those with monster armors were normally elites, therefore, if they slipped up, the battle could end in their loss, rendering the consumption of Consumables useless. They couldn't use this tactic if they weren't certain of their victory. However, Choi Hyuk's Flame Army always used this tactic to slaughter elite monster armies. It would be the same this time as well.

The moment Choi Hyuk said, 'Now', flames erupted to devour the universe. The Consumables, who were groaning as they were being ripped apart by the monsters, and the monsters, who were drunk on blood as they devoured the Consumables, were both erased by the flames.

The flames the countless Flame Wing Tribe warriors spewed made the battlefield feel like their homeland, which was now blazing with the Flames of Beginning, flames that had never ceased to burn since the Big Bang.

The most eye-catching thing in those flames was Choi Hyuk's dangerously surging black flames.

The battle, which waged in the flames, ended in half a day and would be added as another victory for the alliance.

Even though they were exhausted from fighting, the warriors were happy at their consecutive victories.

"Wow... To be honest, while the other top four tribes are amazing, as expected, aren't the warriors from the Flame Wing Tribe the best?"

"Of course! They're fiery! While the Dark Tribe warriors, who are skilled in one-on-one fights, and the Armored Soul Tribe warriors, who lead the battle with their diverse set of skills, are amazing, it's so refreshing to see the Flame Wing Tribe warriors push forward with their strength!"

"Amongst them, Leader Choi Hyuk's black flames are... Wow, I'm at a loss for words. Whether they were highest-ranked

monsters or whatever, they would all become ash in one second."

"But Choi Hyuk isn't a member of the Flame Wing Tribe, right?"

"Hey, hey. While I can't say for much else, those flames are clearly more like the Flame Wing Tribe's than anyone else's."

The Flame Army's fame became Choi Hyuk's fame, and Choi Hyuk's fame became the Flame Wing Tribe's fame.

Even the young Flame Wing Tribe warriors, who arrogantly said things like, 'The best we can do is act like we're fighting before retreating,' during the Blue Manes expedition, underwent a drastic change and now praised Choi Hyuk ahead of anyone else. It was to the point where there were even some who called him 'Flame-Hyuk'.

While he could be considered as a sweet hope for some, to others, he was also a source of frustration.

"What? You want me to back off after providing you with Consumables again? Look here... I am the commander-in-chief of this place and the operational authority lies with me! Are you ignoring the chain of command?"

Armor-Phantom, who was the commander-in-chief of both the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters as well as a transcendent warrior who ranked 71st in the alliance ranking, didn't hide his displeasure. Rather, he intentionally vented his anger.

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn't give him the opportunity to vent.

"Then what? Are you going to block the monsters with your newly recruited Armored Soul Tribe novices? Don't embarrass yourself and just send Consumables as you've been doing."

After saying this without even the slightest change to his expression, Choi Hyuk left the meeting room. Yet, there was nothing Armor-Phantom could say since Choi Hyuk and his Flame Army were achieving consecutive victories that no one else could. If not for him, they couldn't hope for the safety of the Shapley and

Laniakea Superclusters.

Creeeeak!

While emitting a piercing sound as the metallic pieces of his body rubbed against each other, Armor-Phantom could do nothing else but glare at Choi Hyuk's disappearing figure.

**

"It seems Choi Hyuk is doing well..."

Dark-Sound had a smile on his face as he gathered the reports brought up from various parts of the universe. As planned, Choi Hyuk obtained Flame-Hell's trust while accumulating the malice of the other top four tribes.

The sword known as Choi Hyuk was almost complete.

"It's really close now..."

He felt like he could finally see the fruits of the humiliation and shame he had endured while smiling all this time.

"We will complete the grand scheme before this war ends. To do that... I need another hero who can replace Choi Hyuk..."

Tapping his fingers, Dark-Sound became immersed in his thoughts. Quiet footsteps suddenly resounded in the dark, dreary space in which he was alone. The footsteps became quicker, and at some point, they were in front of him.

"Exalted Wing Dark-Sound."

It was a voice without any big deviations in pitch. However, he could tell that she was very happy to see him by her slightly higher tone.

Dark-Sound friendlily greeted the woman, who was his trusted, reliable subordinate and was like his child as he had taken care of her since young.

"You're here? I guess you're doing your job well, Shiro?"

One of the rising heroes of the Event Horizon Troop, Shiro. Her eyebrows, which looked like they had been drawn on, slightly rose, indicating her delight.

Chapter 180: Frontlines (3)

Unlike normal, Dark-Sound was standing leisurely with a smile on his face.

“It’s almost time for our grand scheme.”

A dense happiness seeped from his voice. His happiness was fully transmitted to Shiro, who was standing in front of him.

“Finally.”

Shiro’s voice was quiet and monotonous, but happiness also subtly trembled in her voice.

As if planned, Dark-Sound said to Shiro,

“If our grand scheme succeeds, it’ll be chaotic for a while... But, in the end, the alliance will be stronger because of it. We will be able to slaughter the monsters. Then the heavy resentment in your heart might also become slightly lighter.”

At Dark-Sound’s kind words, Shiro slightly lowered her head and clearly replied, “I hope for Exalted Wing Dark-Sound’s resentment to lighten a little as well. I still remember your expression when you rescued me that day. I was helplessly surrounded by monsters since the moment I was born and had learned of rage, sorrow, and resentment that remained in those who had lost their homeland. These emotions pained my heart, yet, for some reason, when I saw your expression, I remember becoming a bit calmer. I hope that your heart will also become peaceful after this battle.”

Shiro met his gaze with her cold, honest eyes.

Dark-Sound ruffled her hair with a smile.

For revenge, he had lived his entire life hiding his true feelings, which felt like he was eating gall bladders and sleeping on prickly hay.

Having survived while trembling alone in the universe after

every one of her people had died, Shiro was one of only few close to him. She was someone whom he could reveal his true feelings to, as she was someone who could sympathize with his feelings.

That was why Dark-Sound cautiously said,

“So… Shiro, I hear you are quite taken by Chu Youngjin these days?”

“… Pardon?”

Shiro replied calmly as though it was her first time hearing of this, but Dark-Sound could hear her gear heart churning rapidly.

With a bitter smile, Dark-Sound looked into Shiro’s eyes and seriously said, “Shiro, I’ll be honest. Our grand scheme needs people like Chu Youngjin.”

“Yes, I agree.”

“But, you know, right? The moment we explain our grand scheme to Chu Youngjin, we can’t go back. At that time, he has two choices: To sincerely participate in our grand scheme or… to die.”

‘Or to die.’ When he said that, Dark-Sound’s voice became emotionless. The friendliness and ease he showed up until now had disappeared without a trace, and it seemed like the air around her had turned into knives that could pierce her skin at any moment. She felt dizzy and cold as though she was standing barefoot on ice.

While enduring the sensation of her throat choking up, Shiro barely managed to say, “Yes, I know.”

However, Dark-Sound still didn’t smile. He rigidly said, “That’s why you have to understand him properly. Whether he’s someone worth participating in our grand scheme or not, I will completely trust your judgment. Of course, it would be better if he decides to work with us and though I personally think we need him… Still, if you think otherwise, I won’t approach him since he has his worth as an outstanding warrior of the Event Horizon Troop.”

The more he spoke, the more Dark-Sound's voice gradually returned to normal. By the time he stopped speaking, his voice had become kind and full of concern.

"I'm saying this because I don't want to kill someone you like by chance."

At his never-lacking consideration, Shiro lowered her head and said, "Thank you."

However, the stuffy feeling in her chest didn't recede in the slightest.

Errors.

All her calculations ended in errors again. It felt like there wouldn't be any results even if she calculated hundreds of millions of times.

The grand scheme was something she had constantly dreamed of. It was a great cause she decided to dedicate her life to. Of course, she wanted to work on this with Chu Youngjin. Also, there was no doubt he would be useful in making the grand scheme a success.

However, currently, she wanted to distance Chu Youngjin from the grand scheme entirely. Dark-Sound's words stabbed at her heart like a dagger. '... Or to die.' That cold voice. If there was even a 0.1% possibility of that happening, Shiro didn't want to bring Chu Youngjin into the grand scheme.

'However, the grand scheme needs him? Still... But if you do, then won't you be able to be close with Chu Youngjin like now? Still... Can I...? What's that supposed to mean? What is Chu Youngjin to me?'

Shiro abhorred these errors and confusion.

However, this also precisely represented how much she liked him.

Her heart still unsettled, Shiro walked out after her consultation

with Dark-Sound. She mumbled, unable to bear it any longer, “Just what am I supposed to do…? You… monster… butthole!”

That was the first curse Shiro ever swore.

Monster butthole.

**

Thanks to the Event Horizon Troop and the Flame Army, the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters’ frontlines had come to a lull – a temporary peace. The monsters hadn’t completely given up yet. There were reports that a shocking number of monsters were assembling along the frontlines as though they were gathering strength for a single strike.

It was literally the calm before the storm. During this time, the warriors got a precious break while also busily reinforcing and examining defense facilities in preparation for the monsters’ more aggressive attack.

The Flame Army moved their post to a planet located near the center of the Laniakea Supercluster during this period, which made it easier to advance in different directions.

It was a place that had sufficient supplies and facilities for war and comfort as karmalings inhabited the planet.

At the same time, it was a foothold that needed a powerful army to protect its inhabiting species and ancient relics against the monsters’ invasion.

This place was precisely Dragonic, the earthling’s second homeland.

“Here is…?”

Choi Hyuk, who instantly arrived on Dragonic thanks to the military gate system, looked around with round eyes.

It was simply too different.

In the middle of Dragonic’s characteristically swirling milk-white

sky was a round, blue sky that hadn't existed before. It looked like the blue pupil of a god looking down at the world.

However, looking at it again, it wasn't simply a sky. Blue water was filling the sky. Rippling blue water pooled in the middle of Dragonic's milk-white sky like an island to form a different sky.

Lights from outer space hit the blue, round sky and scattered in various colors of the rainbow. Everything on Dragonic shined like pebbles in rapids.

"Where is this place?"

Lee Jinhee said in disbelief.

It was fully understandable.

Dragonic's characteristically desolate landscape had long since disappeared. Even the red sandy Barhaloleun Hill was now covered with glistening green plants and moist moss.

The Dragonic the Berserkers remembered and the current Dragonic seemed to bear no similarities.

Kiruruk!

"Huh?!"

While everyone was mesmerized, they heard a loud roar.

A shadow covered Barhaloleun Hill. Something was quickly flying over it.

Splash!

The thing that surged up into the sky happily dived into the sky-water a few times before flying away. It seemed to consider the mystical water pooled in the sky as its personal swimming pool.

"It's a real... dragon."

Lee Jinhee blankly mumbled. It wasn't a dragon that looked like Commander Mack, but a true dragon. It really was a dragon, like the ones from Western movies, with enormous wings and shining

scales covering its entire body. Its wings and scales glistened radiantly in the water.

Kiiirururuk!

The dragon roared loudly.

Then it suddenly shot towards Choi Hyuk like an arrow.

“Huh?”

Surprised, Lee Jinhee unsheathed her sword and stood in front of Choi Hyuk.

However, Choi Hyuk pulled her shoulder back. Wrapping his left arm around her shoulder, Choi Hyuk stretched his right arm forward. He opened for an embrace and a boy, who looked to be around ten years old, hugged him. The charging dragon had transformed into a human boy.

The boy shouted in a happy voice,

“Hyuk hyung! You’re Hyuk hyung, right...?!”

Successfully receiving the charging boy while taking precaution so he wasn’t hurt, Choi Hyuk awkwardly looked down at the boy in his embrace.

While it was his first time seeing his face, he could tell who he was. The young dragon’s karma felt familiar. Choi Hyuk’s karma rippled. He clearly remembered him. He was one of the baby dragons that was born in the El Tribe’s sanctum back during the monster tidal wave. It seemed that the dragon, which had wriggled like a puppy back then, could now transform into a human and even talk.

‘Didn’t dragons need a hundred years or two before growing?’

It seemed that wasn’t always the case.

Choi Hyuk looked around at the familiar yet unfamiliar Dragonic once again before mumbling, “It seems like it really is Dragonic.”

**

The location assigned as their base was the Holy Land, the El Tribe's sanctum. Holding the chatty young dragon's hand as he headed for the sanctum, the sights he saw were so beyond his expectations that it felt like a fun dream rather than reality.

First of all, he barely saw any earthlings. Instead, the Kundle Tribe and glass crabs, who Choi Hyuk had brought around for a while, were peacefully walking around in the earthlings' colonized cities, such as Barhaloleun, Zhiyu, New Washington, and others.

"This is all thanks to Exalted Wing Flame-Rain."

According to Baek Seoin's explanation, back when Flame-Rain was constructing a stronghold in the monsters' universe, all the overseers and sovereigns of Earth left Dragonic on her request. On top of that, thanks to her actively promoting it, the remaining earthlings left Dragonic along with others. In the end, those that remained on Dragonic were the El Tribe who needed to protect their sanctum, the Kundle Tribe and glass crabs that migrated here following the Berserkers, and a small group of earthlings.

'It feels weird.'

It didn't seem like a lot of time had passed, but a lot had changed.

Now that he thought about it, every day was intense without rest. After colonizing the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters and defeating the demise-ranked monster with Flame-Rain, he had swiftly taken revenge on the three people responsible for Earth's recruit training, and then investigated the monster queen's location.

In fact, he was currently in the middle of an intense war as well.

A large-scale invasion of monsters.

However, like a stream below a ridge that avoided the sudden shower, Dragonic was peaceful for a bit, and because of this peace, Choi Hyuk had the opportunity to look back for a moment.

The people around Choi Hyuk had changed a lot as well. Artillery Captain Handke, Kim Honghyun, and Aide Leah, who had been executives, had left with the Berserkers they led. When they left, Choi Hyuk told them to take the administrative organization under the Berserkers on Dragonic along with them.

In the end, all that remained were the 5,000 elites who gave up on everything and followed Choi Hyuk.

Nothing else remained for Choi Hyuk besides them. Even the vast colonized land the Berserkers had taken on Dragonic and his influence over earthlings, he had let them all go.

While it was partly because his battles weren't so trifling that they could be fought while dealing with each and every detail on Dragonic, it was also because Choi Hyuk's rate of advancement was so beyond the rest of the earthlings' that they were useless to be concerned about.

Choi Hyuk, who had walked steadfastly, followed by his 5,000 elites who would follow him until the end, gradually slowed down as the memories of Dragonic suddenly overwhelmed him.

It wasn't on purpose, but many thoughts crossed his mind during this short period of time.

Was there something he could have done better?

Was he doing things right?

Would he be able to get revenge like this?

Should he have taken things into deeper consideration? Should he have been harsher?

Choi Hyuk's mind became entangled in these thoughts that suddenly crossed his mind.

"…!"

"…! … Hyuk!"

Choi Hyuk, who had been walking absentmindedly, raised his

head at the sudden loud voice.

He had arrived at the Holy Land at some point and was walking towards the El Tribe's sanctum.

Crowds of earthlings, El Tribe members, Kundle Tribe members, and glass crabs filled his vision.

"Waaah! Choi Hyuk! Congratulations on your return!"

"Whiiik! Whiiik!"

"Leader of the Flame Army, Choi Hyuk!!!"

"Hero of the alliance!"

"Savior of the glass crabs!"

"Liberator of the Kundle Tribe!"

"Guardian of the Holy Land!"

To be honest, the 'Guardian of the Holy Land' should have been for Richard, but people called him that, perhaps because Choi Hyuk had succeeded his fate.

'But the Kundle Tribe members and the glass crabs shouldn't even know what happened then…'

He laughed when he saw the Kundle Tribe members and the glass crabs, who he didn't even know at that time, shouting, "Guardian of the Holy Land!"

Though he didn't know why, people were welcoming him.

Though he didn't know why, to them, it seemed he was a hero.

Cheers filled the air, and those carrying baskets of flowers appeared and scattered flower petals. The young dragon, who had been walking alongside him, seemed excited as he once again transformed into a dragon and flew up towards the sky. Kiruruk! He heard the dragon's roar from high up in the air when the dragon's flames dyed the sky like fireworks.

Cheers erupted again.

To be honest… It wasn’t a bad feeling.

However… As expected, it was awkward.

Choi Hyuk didn’t know where to look so he spread his hands open and looked down at them.

His hands were empty.

“What are you doing?”

Lee Jinhee gently grabbed his empty hand.

When he looked at her, she smiled before holding his hand tightly and raising it up into the air.

Waaaah!!!

As though his raised hand was a signal, a cheer incomparably louder than the previous ones shook Dragonic.

Choi Hyuk wasn’t aware of this, but he was no longer just a warrior. His existence had become a symbol, a moving force and he was the idol of others. Even though his fate was to reject and slash everything, the number of people who survived and continued to live thanks to his fate wasn’t small.

The fate of the great universe was slowly, little by little, leaning in Choi Hyuk’s direction.

Chapter 181: Frontlines (4)

The Flame Wing Tribe's recent rise to prominence became an opportunity for the neutral members of the Armored Soul, Speckled Light, and Dark Tribes to unite.

Their position was simple. Although they could acknowledge the Flame Wing Tribe's dominance, it was difficult for them to accept Flame-Hell's recent indiscrete expansion of power.

Even those who were originally close to the Flame Wing Tribe or maintained neutrality began to turn away.

Still, it wasn't enough. With no less than four members of the Exalted Wings from their tribe, the Flame Wing Tribe was creating a 'Pro-Flame Wing Faction' among all species. In fact, if they included Flame-Rain, a newly ascended Exalted Wing, they would have five Exalted Wings. More than half the alliance's forces were under the Flame Wing Tribe's authority. The 'Pro-Flame Wing Faction' was made up of 45% of the alliance, and if they included Flame-Rain, the enormous organization reached 60% of the alliance. On the other hand, the 'Anti-Flame Wing Faction', which expanded this time, barely managed to hold 25%. The remaining 15% were minor, neutral forces that didn't belong to either side. They didn't have a lot of power.

Even now, the Flame Wing Tribe's influence was gradually expanding thanks to Flame-Hell's ambitious actions. If things continued as is, there was no doubt that all the tribes would be under the Flame Wing Tribe's command in the end as a nice-sounding 'One Alliance'.

The ones who were most opposed to this were, as expected, the Armored Soul Tribe.

They reacted strongly to Naro's refusal to accept their education and Flame-Hell's 'One Alliance' chant, which had Choi Hyuk's cooperation.

{Flame-Hell is trying to erase our identity!}

{We can no longer sit watching idly. We need to stop him.}

There were two Exalted Wings of the Armored Soul Tribe. Between the two, Armor-Song was categorized as someone well disposed towards the Flame Wing Tribe and Armor-Desert was considered neutral. However, the two had become extremely opposed to them now.

{To do that… As expected, we need to stop Choi Hyuk.}

Light-Walk, who was also in the ‘Anti-Flame Wing Faction’ within the Speckled Light Tribe, responded.

However, Dark-Resentment, who had been silent, cautiously proposed an opposing opinion.

{I think… Dark-Sound has some sort of plan.}

Immediately, Armor-Desert opposed.

{Isn’t Dark-Sound Flame-Hell’s yes man?! Last time, you even stirred trouble by proposing inviting Dark-Sound into this meeting… Seriously, why are you like this? Dark-Sound’s the one who fostered Choi Hyuk, and Choi Hyuk’s currently Flame-Hell’s most loyal informant. It’s no different even if he has a plan. Though we don’t know when his plan will bear fruit or whether he has one or not, it’s already too late. We need to get rid of Choi Hyuk as quickly as we can. You should know what educating new tribe members means to our Armored Soul Tribe, correct? We call this education process ‘Birth’!}

The Armored Soul Tribe’s birth process was very unique. Intelligent lifeforms who had the opportunity to advance over long periods of time would eventually create robots and artificial intelligence, and an extreme minority would be granted a fate and awaken as an Armored Soul Tribe member. They weren’t born possessing blood relations or an environmental affinity like the other tribes. Instead, they were an assembly of independently

arising individuals. That was the Armored Soul Tribe.

That was why their education was important to them. They obtained bonds with each other through their special education system. That was why it was called ‘birth’. Plainly speaking, those who didn’t undergo their education, like Naro, couldn’t identify as a member of the Armored Soul Tribe.

That was why the ‘One Alliance’ Flame-Hell was pushing through Choi Hyuk and Naro was, in fact, a policy eradicating the Armored Soul Tribe’s identity. This was an urgent issue that couldn’t be delayed for the Armored Soul Tribe.

Because he knew this, Dark-Resentment couldn’t say anything opposed to it.

{However, Dark-Sound… Haaa, never mind.}

Dark-Resentment clearly knew how Dark-Sound grew up and how deeply he resented the Flame Wing Alliance, but it was difficult to prove this to others. While they were close when they were young, he hadn’t had a private conversation with Dark-Sound since they became Exalted Wings.

In the end, Dark-Resentment gave up and asked.

{And your plan is?}

Only then did Armor-Desert calmly explain.

{If we want to take the flow from Flame-Hell… We also need to propose a solution to this endless war.}

Dark-Resentment’s voice became serious.

{Have you had any results?}

Armor-Song replied.

{We have. Exchanging technology with the dragon race was of especially big help.}

{… And the achievement rate?}

{It’s still far off. We haven’t fully understood the monster queen’s strength. We can only assume that it is stronger than a demise-ranked monster. Since it will probably be stronger than Flame-Sky, who was the strongest warriors in the history of the alliance, the question is still whether it’ll work or not. Another problem is deploying the equipment to the monsters’ universe. So…}

Armor-Song paused for a moment. His quiet and calm tone possessed an odd liveliness. As if singing, he said.

{Isn’t that why we need to test it?}

This was the secret conversation held between Exalted Wings on a relay base located in the dark universe that was created by the Armored Soul Tribe.

**

“For life and freedom!”

Commander Mack of the Virgo Cluster and the Great Warrior Lantz saluted in booming voices in front of the El Tribe’s sanctum.

Soon, young dragons rushed out.

“It’s Hyuk oppa!”

“It’s Hyuk hyung!”

He hadn’t seen them often, yet the dragons excessively welcomed him. When Choi Hyuk looked awkward because of the dragons who were tugging at his pant legs, Commander Mack smiled calmly.

“It seems Overseer Richard’s aura is completely imprinted in the children’s minds. They recognized Army Leader Choi Hyuk at a glance. They were such a handful, wanting to see you…”

This time, Choi Hyuk, who didn’t know what to do because of the young dragons, calmly looked at Mack, who used polite, respectful speech naturally. She had recovered her level that had dropped

after giving him her horn and had even improved as it seemed she was on the brink of reaching the highest rank.

Nonetheless, her polite speech still sounded awkward to him. Wasn't she the first commander he served after joining the alliance?

As if she noticed Choi Hyuk's thoughts, Mack smiled subtly as she said,

"Leader of the Flame Army, an S-rank division troop. Leader Choi Hyuk is my superior by a large margin."

Choi Hyuk simply smiled once.

Smiling as well, Mack led Choi Hyuk and his group into the sanctum.

"Then I will guide you to the Flame Army's headquarters."

**

"Wow..."

"Huh..."

As soon as they entered the headquarters, Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin exclaimed. Choi Hyuk wasn't much different.

Rather than a room, this place was more like outer space.

Within an endless darkness, there were two branches of light made up of an endless number of shining galaxies, the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters.

The headquarters was a place where they downscaled the nearby universe.

Blue and red dots were distributed throughout the vast space. Blue dots were allies, and red dots were enemies. When their gaze rested on one, detailed information regarding it would appear in their vision.

Mack boastfully explained,

“You can check the current war situation in real-time here. Not only that, but simply by looking at one and thinking about it, you can communicate with that commander on the battlefield.”

{Amazing! To downscale the entire supercluster region into this system…}

Naro, who followed behind them, couldn’t contain his amazement as he looked here and there.

Mack watched Naro while saying,

“That’s not all.”

Mach twirled her hand. Then the surrounding, shining galaxies disappeared to be replaced by thin lines that spread everywhere like a spider web. It was a net that shined in a white light with rotten, black light in some places.

Choi Hyuk gasped,

“This is… the Net of Fate.”

“Yes. This is the Net of Fate the Exalted Wings are managing. In this place, while limited, you are able to access the Net of Fate and increase its effects. As an army leader at the transcendent level, you should be able to grant your allies with fortune and your enemies with misfortune. If you stay here, you will feel like you’ve become a god.”

The one who reacted to her explanation filled with confidence was Naro, rather than Choi Hyuk.

{Amazing! I didn’t see this system in the alliance records thought?!}

As if she had been waiting for this, Mack boastfully answered,

“Of course. This is a system created using the dragon race’s own technology.”

{All of this?}

“Yes. To be honest, this is also one of the reasons why Dragonic was chosen as the Flame Army’s base. This is the holy land of cutting-edge dragon technology recently.”

Mack’s voice was filled with pride. Still, she glanced at Choi Hyuk.

“This is all because of you and Overseer Richard. We were able to protect the ancient dragons’ sanctum and obtain their knowledge thanks to you two. While the knowledge is old, it has been of great assistance in recovering real combat technologies. With this knowledge and technology traded with the Armored Soul Tribe, the dragon race was able to a major step forward.”

{Hee….}

Naro admired while twirling in place.

Mack’s gaze was fixed on him before turning away. With a slightly cautious expression, she said to Choi Hyuk,

“And speaking of which, Army Leader Choi Hyuk, from what we learned while trading with them, the Armored Soul Tribe’s mood seemed quite serious. I think it’s best if you are careful. While I want to help you if possible, as the dragon race has decided to maintain its neutral stance, there’s no way for me to help.”

Mack’s curved eyes were filled with concern.

Choi Hyuk simply smiled.

After the introduction of the headquarters, next was the welcome party.

“Wow! Our leader is 17th in the alliance ranking?”

“If we exclude the Exalted Wings, he’s third on the warrior ranking. This much is obvious considering he’s proved his skill by eradicating the Blue Manes and leading countless battles to victory.”

Lee Jinhee and Mack hit it off.

“Third in reality… He’s really high up there!”

“This much is nothing… There are rumors he’s going to be the 15th Exalted Wing and even rumors that he’s the warrior who will bring the ‘Spring of the Universe’.”

“The Spring of the Universe?”

“It’s like a legend in the alliance. The first and last warrior who brought the ‘Spring of the Universe’ was King Flame-Sky. That he might bring the ‘Spring of the Universe’ means he might become the strongest warrior in the alliance.”

“Could he really?”

“I don’t know… It’s about time for his growth to halt, but we don’t know for sure.”

The two chatted endlessly as they ate. The welcome party food was comprised of dishes from Earth for the Berserkers.

Sausages were grilling on the table, and the cheesy scent of pizza in the stone oven spread as it cooked. A blue-skinned alien put amazingly fried chicken into a large vat filled with Korean-style sauce. Holding the vat with both hands, the alien mixed the chicken and sauce with a sifting action. Crispy chicken and spicy sauce were tossed in the air, spreading a spicy fragrance.

Craving beer while watching this, Lee Jinhee downed a beer. It was refreshing, yet slightly disappointing.

Mack quietly asked,

“You can’t get drunk, right?”

“Yes. Well, since awakening, the fun of drinking has disappeared.”

Smiling, Mack poured her a blue drink. It emitted a cold chill. Lee Jinhee chuckled when she saw it.

“Glacier Tears? Heh. I used to drink this instead of alcohol since

it makes you feel drunk as your karma freezes. But since I'm at the highest rank, it doesn't work anymore."

With a strange smile on her face, Mack pushed the wine glass with Glacier Tears towards Lee Jinhee.

"Try it."

Lee Jinhee downed the glass in one go.

"Huh...?"

She staggered before widening her eyes.

"It's effective? Even though it was only for a moment, my karma froze!"

The triumphant smile Mack had on the entire day returned.

"This is also a drink improved by the dragon race's new technology. To be honest, we developed it to use as a poison, but that turned out to be too difficult."

"Yes. If I come to my senses and resist it, I can resist its effect at any time."

Mack shrugged.

"That's what I mean."

Choi Hyuk drank a glass of Glacier Tears while listening to their conversation.

When he released as much resistance as he could and calmed his karma before drinking, the cold drink that poured down his throat permeated every corner of his body.

While it was subtle, he felt an intoxicating sensation.

It felt good.

That was how their leisurely and enjoyable day, which they hadn't had in a while, came to an end.

The next morning, the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters that

materialized in the headquarters was densely surrounded by red dots.

Chapter 182: Fate (1)

Spring of the Great Universe.

The day Flame-Sky passed away after killing the demise-ranked monster, white and red flames dyed the dark universe like fluttering cherry blossoms. The desolate universe, which had cooled to the point of almost reaching absolute zero, was filled with warmth like in the distant past.

The Spring of the Universe arrived for everyone indiscriminately. Even the earthlings had seen how the sky had been dyed with light that day, though there weren't any records of it as characters hadn't been invented yet. The light touched their souls. Even birds and frogs that hadn't cried a tear in their entire lives wailed under this light.

It only lasted an hour.

It was magical.

Planets, stars, nebulas, galaxies, dark matter, and Flames of the Beginning. Each and every karma species was as unique as the vastness that separated their homelands. Even though they treated each other with indifference or hostility, they experienced a sense of kinship for the first time that day. In fact, they instinctively realized that they were a part of a single fate, and their hearts broadened.

Because there was spring, the alliance was founded.

Some said that spring had come because they had defeated the fate of demise from a different dimension.

Which was why they inferred that, if another great warrior overcame demise, the universe would experience another spring.

Others said that, since the Spring of the Universe was the symbol of a new fate and unity, those that watched the spring together would be tied by a deep bond.

They said that those who held hands or met gazes when the dark universe turned transparent, where red and white flames fluttered like feathers, would experience love or friendship stronger than ever.

**

“Euaack! Hah! Hah!”

The day started with Baek Seoin’s scream.

Soaked in cold sweat, Baek Seoin came looking for Choi Hyuk.

“Something, something is wrong. Heu….”

Baek Seoin’s body trembled as he spoke. His Intuition was warning him that a threat to his life was approaching.

Immediately, Choi Hyuk and Baek Seoin rushed to the headquarters. The headquarters itself was a map of the battlefield. Nearby galaxies were shrunken and displayed in this dark space.

The Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters shined and so did the red dots surrounding them.

“It’s not different from yesterday?”

Choi Hyuk tilted his head.

Unlike Baek Seoin’s reaction, there was no change to the frontlines.

“No, there’s definitely something wrong.”

Baek Seoin quickly shook his head. His body trembled like someone suffering from a severe cold.

It seemed serious. There was no doubt that Baek Seoin’s Intuition activated. However, there didn’t seem to be any problem in the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters.

Then the problem might lie beyond them.

“Naro, contact Alliance City.”

Naro's hologram appeared in the headquarters the instant Choi Hyuk commanded. He shook his head.

"Huh...? I can't get in contact with them."

At this ominous premonition, Choi Hyuk furrowed his brows.

"Military gate system! We leave for Alliance City right now!"

[...]

However, there was no response from the military gate system as well.

The alliance's system only went down when the monsters launched large-scale invasions.

They currently weren't in the middle of fighting, yet the system was down?

"This...?"

Choi Hyuk's expression became grave.

"What's going on?"

Even Mack, who was called urgently, was agitated. For all their connections to Alliance City to be cut? She acted quickly to figure out what was going on.

"I will try to contact Armor-Phantom!"

Fortunately, there were no problems with the internal communication network within the superclusters.

However, Commander-in-chief Armor-Phantom was of no help.

[What are you saying?]

He too didn't know what was going on.

His face became stiff once he attempted to contact other superclusters after listening to Mack's explanation.

[... Immediately contact all troops in the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters and tell them to be on emergency standby!]

Emergency standby... While it was a standard command, it was also a frustrating one.

Choi Hyuk, who had been observing the situation, shook his head.

“I will personally patrol the area. Assemble the Flame Army.”

Just as Choi Hyuk turned around to leave, a static sound shook the headquarters.

“Huh?”

“Ah...!”

Choi Hyuk and Mack exclaimed simultaneously.

It was a message from the alliance sent to all troop leaders!

It wasn’t in the form of a communication but was reminiscent of the previous game system – a message floating in front of their eyes.

————————-

[Preserve your military strength as much as possible and retreat!]

Connect with other troops and preserve the alliance’s military power.

Currently, the Hercules, Coma, and Perseus-Pisces Superclusters have all been annihilated!

Lania$ea....%%$%&%$ surrounde-... #$%#%#$##^&&$#...

————————-

They couldn’t read anything besides the first two lines because of the interference.

“This is...”

The moment Choi Hyuk frowned and raised his head, the battlefield map of the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters changed.

The red dots, signifying the monsters' forces, were already densely clustered around the frontlines. The lights were so overwhelming that the headquarters became dyed in a red light.

"Just what is this all of a sudden? While we were resting so well... I thought we'd still have a few more days..."

Lee Jinhee said dispiritedly after having been woken up. It seemed she was so taken aback that she couldn't believe the current situation.

On the other hand, Baek Seoin, who knew and understood the current situation better than anyone else thanks to his Intuition, barely managed to squeeze a few words out.

"The Hercules, Coma, and Perseus-Pisces Superclusters... Those are all supercluster near the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters."

The fact that three superclusters nearby were annihilated meant that they were isolated. This might have been the reason why they couldn't contact anyone.

The headquarters quickly became chaotic.

Everything was uncertain.

It would still be a problem if they tried to retreat as ordered. They couldn't move recklessly when they didn't know the exact military strength of their enemies, an advantageous retreat route, or the support of allies.

First, they needed more information.

While he would prefer not to, Choi Hyuk decided to personally talk with Armor-Phantom.

"Connect me with Armor-Phantom. We need to share info-No, wait!"

Choi Hyuk hastily stopped talking.

He received another message.

In front of him was a separate message given by Flame-Hell.

————————-

[Prioritize preserving the Flame Army's troops!]

This order is the highest prior-%$#$#!

#$#^$...

————————-

The interference this time seemed worse than before. Still, he understood the gist of it. Flame-Hell wanted to preserve the military strength of the Flame Army over the alliance's military strength in general.

Just as he frowned, he heard Mack's voice peak.

"Exalted Wing Leviathan?!"

It seemed Mack had also received a separate order from Leviathan, who was an Exalted Wing of the dragon race. It seemed the message wasn't fully intact as she looked around, pitifully calling out his name until she eventually sighed and faltered. Her face was as white as a sheet.

It was a mess.

While he didn't know how they did it, the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters were surrounded in a single day. Even communications were severed as a precaution. It was to the point that the messages, which barely arrived, seemed like miracles.

However, these messages were a problem on their own.

The orders conflicted.

The alliance hoped for the preservation of the alliance's military strength as a whole by cooperating systematically, while Flame-Hell prioritized the Flame Army's survival.

The bigger problem was that that might not be all.

Mack most likely also received a separate order from Leviathan,

and Armor-Phantom might have received one from the Armored Soul Tribe as well.

‘How irritating…’

They stressed cooperation to the earthlings, yet Choi Hyuk felt disgusted by their true faces, which became clearer the more he saw them.

“…Leader Choi Hyuk.”

Just then, Mack talked to Choi Hyuk. His gaze met hers.

She had almost been in a panic moments ago, yet she strangely seemed to have calmed down. No, it seemed she had resolved herself.

“I beg you.”

Her spirit enwrapped the headquarters. Though she was only at the early stages of the highest rank, for some reason, her spirit was powerful enough to burrow into Choi Hyuk, who was approaching the peak of the transcendent level.

‘Prepared to die…’

Choi Hyuk could sense her desperate will.

Slowly bowing her head, she said,

“Please protect Dragonic.”

‘…!’

This was completely unexpected.

He had thought that Leviathan’s command would be something like ‘preserve the military strength of the dragon race’ like Flame-Hell’s, but her request was completely different.

“Is there a reason?”

When he asked, Mack raised her lowered head. He saw her tightly clenched lips.

“Knowledge of the ancient dragon race that has yet to be fully deciphered lies in this planet. However, the real issue is the young dragons. The reason why they could be born after such a long time since their extinction was purely because of the El Tribe’s sanctum. You most likely saw the sky made of water on your way here. The sanctum changed Dragonic’s environment like this so that the young dragons could survive. Even if we somehow succeeded in retreating after losing Dragonic, the children would gradually become weaker. They would eventually die soon…”

She seemed quite agitated as her golden horns, which followed behind her blue hair, trembled subtly.

However, Baek Seoin, who was soaked in cold sweat, could only perceive her words as joint suicide.

“What nonsense…! We’ll die!”

Mack calmly and firmly stared at Baek Seoin.

“If I could protect the children through my death, I would readily die multiple times.”

Her blue hair fluttered to reveal glimpses of her Crystal of Sentiment ‘Mack’s Desire’, which contained white lighting.

‘Ahh, so that’s it…’

Seeing her like this, Choi Hyuk felt like he could suddenly understand the division in the alliance.

In the end, the alliance couldn’t unite as a single entity.

While it would be nice if they could fight as effectively as possible against their common foe, the monsters, this was impossible.

In the end, they each prioritized their own species, and they each had something they had to protect.

The great cause known as the ‘victory of karmalings’? That was good, but what good was it if you and your species had all died?

While there would be species that risked their lives for the great

cause, if that was true, they would probably already be extinct. Those that survived in the end were those who could weigh profit and losses.

It was this sort of fight, this sort of world.

It was a world where, within this long, tiresome war, those who were fated to die would die and only those who had a reason to live survived.

'In the end, the reason why they emphasized cooperation and unity during the earthlings' recruit training... was because they couldn't.'

Someone had to act for the great cause. Someone had to follow the alliance's orders while giving up what was more important than their lives.

That was why the recruit training was so brutal.

Choi Hyuk laughed.

What Mack was trying to protect was worth more than her life. Choi Hyuk knew this feeling very well. He was trying to enact revenge on the alliance because he had lost it.

If some other person in the alliance had said this, then he might have ridiculed them to his heart's content.

However, it was Mack. Even now, the horn Mack had cut was somewhere in his body.

Yet, behind Mack was his enemy, Leviathan. There was no way his current emotions wouldn't be complicated.

Entangled in his evaluation, Choi Hyuk said in a cynical voice, "And if we all die? What if we all die a dog's death trying to protect Dragonic?"

To be honest, this was highly likely since the most outstanding existences in the alliance were confident in their loss and ordered them to retreat.

Nonetheless, Mack affirmed,

“No, support will come. Exalted Wing Leviathan promised this. Support will definitely arrive. Please help us. Then the dragon race will never forget this favor.”

‘That damn Leviathan.’

Whenever he heard his name, Choi Hyuk’s evaluation became more twisted. At the same time, there were faces he recalled.

‘Hyung!’

‘Oppa!’

The young dragons who clung to him.

‘How troublesome.’

Choi Hyuk swallowed his groan.

Maybe it was because he believed he owed Mack a debt, because he unknowing came to like the young dragons, or because of Mack’s promise that the dragon race would never forget this favor, while he didn’t know the exact reason, it weighed on his mind.

The problem was the fact that it weighed on his mind since Choi Hyuk’s fate started with ‘never losing’.

If he backed out like this, it would be a loss. There wouldn’t be a problem if this didn’t weigh on his mind…

Fate wasn’t decided but was rather carried out. After having never comprised, Choi Hyuk’s fate might stop here today.

‘If that happens, my growth might halt as well.’

It wasn’t that Dragonic weighed on his mind. Even though he would lose Flame-Hell’s trust that he had arduously accumulated if he messed up, even though he could die, unable to fulfill his revenge, and even though he felt vexed thinking about Leviathan, this still weighed on his mind. Also, Choi Hyuk couldn’t choose to lose.

Seeing Choi Hyuk, who was deep in thought, Mack stressed once more, “Support will arrive. We will win.”

She said, ‘We will win,’ rather than ‘We can win.’

These words moved Choi Hyuk.

Chapter 183: Fate (2)

‘Victory.’

For some reason, this word nailed into his heart.

Choi Hyuk’s mother, Choi Miyeon, had taught him.

‘Just get hit.’

Lose. That was winning.

However, his inborn talent whispered,

‘You can win. They are nothing.’

It was the truth.

Choi Hyuk had always won in fights against many people who were physically superior to him at once.

Only, as he was physically inferior, his fights always ended with extreme results and he had even killed someone during a fight before.

‘See? You won. Why are they picking a fight?’

What halted young Choi Hyuk’s immature thoughts was his mother’s sobs.

Choi Hyuk wasn’t a psychopath who lost his sense of sympathy, but was simply a genius whose skill was higher than his already sky-high pride. He felt bored with the weak and was interested in defeating those who looked like they were proud of their strength.

The reason why someone like him decided to live his entire life while losing was because of his mother’s desperate plea.

Though bullying irritated him, it was fine because it didn’t hurt much when they hit him. He would graduate from school eventually.

This was also part of Choi Hyuk’s pride. Since he promised his mother he wouldn’t fight, he didn’t. This was his pride.

However, when the moment of awakening arrived, his mother died, and nothing remained to bind him. What gripped Choi Hyuk wasn't simply his endless thirst for revenge and rage but also his true nature, which burned for victory and to prove himself.

"Victory…"

Choi Hyuk mulled over this word. The more he did, the more the word filled his mind.

Why was it that Choi Hyuk decided to kill all 13 of the Exalted Wings without distinguishing between friend or foe?

Of course, this was how he calculated his revenge since revenge wasn't a one-to-one trade.

However, what Choi Hyuk wasn't aware of was the competitive spirit budding from his heart. The Exalted Wings prided themselves as the strongest in the universe. To them, who believed that they could use the fates of other species however they liked because they were strong, he wanted to ask, 'Are you really that strong?' His competitive spirit budded beneath his thirst for revenge.

That was why his fate wasn't simply 'revenge' or 'destruction' but 'never losing' and 'denial'.

At this moment, Choi Hyuk felt his competitive spirit rising as he could participate in a fight that everyone predicted would end in defeat and one where they had ordered them to retreat. This was his fate. He liked Dragonic, and this made him want to test if they really had to hand over Dragonic to the monsters.

Perhaps his reasoning that he didn't want his fate to weaken was simply a justification his mind had come up with.

Even though this wasn't the time to offend Flame-Hell, what if he did?

Since earthlings were sacrificed because 'there was nothing they could do', he planned on smashing everything because 'there was

nothing they could do' as well. This was the case now and also applied to the alliance's order which orbited around the 13 Exalted Wings.

The word 'victory' had now engulfed his body. They had to retreat?

He rejected this.

"Baek hyung, I'm sorry. Plan out a strategy. We will protect Dragonic."

"Eeehhh?!"

Baek Seoin's eyes, which looked into Choi Hyuk's unwavering ones, trembled greatly.

In his heart, Baek Seoin had vowed that he would devote his remaining life to Choi Hyuk, to become Choi Hyuk's hands and feet, after he had rescued him and killed the Wyvern of Destruction that had killed his parents.

If Choi Hyuk came to a decision, that was it. Baek Seoin gulped.

"Ah, understood."

Fighting with his instincts which told him to flee, he began thinking about how they should fight.

"First... Please check the Net of Fate."

At Baek Seoin's request, Choi Hyuk waved his hand and changed the battlefield map in the headquarters.

The surrounding red dots disappeared and were replaced with thin lines covering the universe.

"Ermm...."

Everyone groaned.

The Net of Fate had turned black. It looked like over 80% was occupied by the monsters.

Seeing this and looking like he was about to cry, Baek Seoin told

Choi Hyuk, “Err… Do we really have to fight?”

**

{Just what are you doing right now?! We should be gathering our strength to break through the encirclement! Are you saying that you’re going to survive by yourself?! Did Flame-Hell order this?!}

Armor-Phantom shouted.

After overcoming his shock, he summoned everyone within the galaxy and was preparing to retreat. Choi Hyuk defied his order, and Armor-Phantom believed that the Flame Army was acting in order to survive by themselves.

{Do you not know how severe the current situation is? It’s so bad it won’t be enough even if we gather everyone. Even if you prioritize the Flame Army’s safety, we still should gather first! If not-!}

Armor-Phantom was shouting and coaxing Choi Hyuk simultaneously.

“Naro. End the communication.”

Choi Hyuk ended the call and stood up. ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’, which hung at his waist, rang out.

“Baek hyung, do what you’re doing. I’ll go greet them.”

Baek Seoin, who was constantly contacting people, still didn’t seem to have calmed down. Soaked in cold sweat after fighting his instincts to flee, Baek Seoin told him, “You need to fight well. Only then will warriors gather.”

Choi Hyuk shrugged and left. Beside him were Lee Jinhee and Mack.

Baek Seoin called out to Choi Hyuk once more.

“Leader!”

When Choi Hyuk turned around, Baek Seoin winced one of his

eyes as he grumbled, “If we survive… Let’s start our plan quickly.”

They still weren’t fully prepared. While he was confident in a one-on-one fight against an Exalted Wing, he didn’t have the strength to defeat all 13 at once.

However, Choi Hyuk grinned as he understood what Baek Seoin meant.

With a tone that sounded like ‘I’m aging quickly because of you’, Baek Seoin added, “If we survive this, the 13 Exalted Wings won’t be a big deal. Ah, if things go as planned, then it’ll be 12 instead of 13 since Chu Youngjin has to deal with one… This is, of course, if both of you survive.”

Baek Seoin said, exhausted. Choi Hyuk laughed as he replied, “Yeah, I’ll return after a good job.”

Choi Hyuk walked out to greet the pouring monsters that seemingly covered the entire universe.

**

The frontlines were chaotic.

At the suddenly rushing monster army, the countless troops that stood on the frontlines retreated.

Then they received the order to retreat.

This was the start of a retreat, no, an escape, regardless of whether one was on the frontlines or at the back.

The blue dots on the battlefield map were retreating like a receding tide. The warriors soared past Dragonic like a meteor shower. The universe gradually became empty, and the monsters took their place.

Only a few blue dots were standing by in isolation, and those at the very front were already held down by the monsters and they were being smashed apart before they could even flee.

At this time, a blue dot that left Dragonic was shooting towards

the frontlines.

“Huh… The monsters?”

Choi Hyuk exclaimed when he saw the monster army.

Rather than a ‘monster army’, this huge mass looked more like a ‘destroying machine’.

The monsters were connected with each other.

With metallic skin that looked cold and hard, limps as sharp of blades, and distorted eyes as bright as neon signs, they formed a long, thin, dark, pointy battle line like the one that appeared in the old Japanese animation with Sadola carrying living weapons on its back.

While their exteriors looked similar, they varied in size, from ones that looked like they could eat spaceships to ones that were the size of fillet knives.

They were connected to each other through threads that came out from their backs.

No, they were like tactile tentacles. When one monster died, the tentacle would wriggle and connect with other nearby monsters. From a thick one of a large monster to a thin one, from a vicious one that looked like a hacksaw to a thinner one, they were densely connected to each other. Their charging appearance looked like an enormous net.

The net of monsters scattered the alliance warriors as they killed each one without fail.

“Euaaah!”

Even warriors who looked to be at the highest level were powerless.

Whether they launched a powerful attack, exploded, or used fire or ice, the connected monsters either absorbed the damage by uniting their strength or avoided the attack and continued to rush

forward. Still, there were monsters that died, but facing the net of monsters that only rippled momentarily, all their struggles seemed meaningless.

The large, powerful monsters rushed first to hold the overall shape of the net, and the large and small monsters rushed after them in order. They killed warriors that were easy to kill, or they otherwise simply skipped them. Nonetheless, it was still a massacre. The spaceships that were destroyed by their thick, pointy tentacles broke apart into smaller fragments before disappearing. A warrior was mashed into paste while flailing in their net without being able to swing his sword even once. No matter how many tentacles they severed, there would always be another. No matter how powerful the attacks they launched, they were constantly nullified by the thick, tough tentacles at the back. The monsters acting as the net's spindles were resilient and sharp.

The warriors' fighting spirits were cut like straws.

Crush! Smash!

"No... No... I didn't come all this way to..."

Those who were born as members of the alliance and devoted their entire lives to it were powerlessly met with their end.

This scene left a strong impression on Choi Hyuk. The monsters were clearly evolving.

Last time, they imitated karma weapons, and now they took it another step further and made an army into a slaughtering machine. Surely they weren't the same monsters that barely began to use tactics to try to 'cooperate' with the Blue Manes, right?

"Leader, doesn't that look like it?"

Lee Jinhee mumbled next to him. It seemed she was trying hard to calm down.

"What?"

“That. The chain-link strategy used by Cao Cao.”

It appeared in the Battle of the Red Cliffs in Romance of the Three Kingdoms. It was a stratagem where they connected their battleships with iron chains to reduce the chances of seasickness.

While the difference between that and the current situation, where the linked chains themselves were powerful weapons, was large, they did look similar.

Choi Hyuk flatly said,

“Then will this also be similar?”

Blaaze.

Black flames sprouted from his back. They weren’t wings like the Flame Wing Tribe members’, but rather, the flames distorted on their own. Against the bright flames ignited by the Flame Army behind him, Choi Hyuk’s flames were like shadows.

“That the answer to the chain-link strategy is flames.”

As soon as he said this, Choi Hyuk disappeared.

Kwaooooh!!

A section of the monsters’ net exploded and collapsed.

I am assuming this scene is from Ultraman. I have never seen Ultraman and am sorry if I messed up here.

From Romance of the Three Kingdoms

Chapter 184: Fate (3)

{Ahh, there's no need to be nervous. I'm also on your side. I wanted to bring Flame-Hell to ruin long before you did. That is why... I'm thinking about conducting our grand schemebefore this war ends.}

Dark-Sound's voice was exaggerated like a musical actor's. He seemed excited.

On the other hand, the others were silent. This wasn't a silence of agreement. The Exalted Wings, who possessed the most outstanding minds in the universe, were momentarily at a loss for words.

After a long silence, Armor-Desert spat with a suppressed voice.

{Exalted Wing Dark-Resentment, what is the meaning of this?}

Armor-Desert believed that Dark-Resentment ignored their worry in the end and invited Dark-Sound.

Dark-Resentment firmly denied it with a low voice.

{It wasn't me-}

Dark-Sound cut in.

{Haha, there's no need to find fault with the wrong people. I was simply much more competent than you thought.}

Was Dark-Sound's personality always like this? He was different from before when he had a quiet, cold appearance. While they didn't know why he was so excited, as people who gathered as members of the 'Anti-Flame Wing Faction', they couldn't help but feel uneasy.

As if he read their thoughts, Dark-Sound said.

{Ah... It seems I was too excited. However, please understand. I have lived my entire life to say these words. So please listen carefully. Now, before this war ends, we will execute the grand

scheme. I'll say it once more. Execute! The grand scheme!}

It seemed he couldn't contain his excitement.

{... While I don't know what this grand scheme is, I still don't know why you, Dark-Sound, are here. Isn't accessing a private communication without an invite not simply rude but criminal?}

Nervousness was clearly present in Armor-Desert's voice. Since Dark-Sound, Flame-Hell's second in command, joined this gathering, whose goal was to topple Flame-Hell, without permission, it was true that, no matter what he said, it would be difficult to take his words at face value.

On top of that, how did he access this communication device that was created with the Armor Soul Tribe's innate skill? There might even be an informant in the tribe. If he knew this much, then he...

'Did Flame-Hell know as well?'

Armor-Desert's blood ran cold. However, if he noticed, then he noticed, why did he appear now? To warn them? No way.

Though everyone had fallen into a state of confusion, only Dark-Sound sounded completely calm.

{Well, I understand that you can't trust me. However, a guest who can vouch for me will soon arrive.}

As soon as he said this, a new voice joined their discussion.

{... I am Flame-Rain, the Fourteenth Exalted Wing. Thank you for inviting me. Also... I can vouch for Exalted Wing Dark-Sound.}

{Flame-Rain... It was you?}

Light-Step said in exasperation.

To be honest, the goal of this meeting was to bring Flame-Rain over to the 'Anti-Flame Wing Faction'. When they were wondering where the information leaked, to think it was Flame-Rain.

The truth was different. Dark-Sound already knew before Flame-

Rain vouched for him. However, Flame-Rain didn't correct this fact.

{What's important is that I have long since discussed with Dark-Sound about means to drive Flame-Hell out and the order of things after. Meaning, his goal is similar to yours. Also... You probably understand from my words, but you don't need to persuade me. I am already on your side. I believe that we need to stop Flame-Hell and do not think that the Flame Wing Tribe should hold a special position in this universe.}

She went straight to the point as though she didn't find this gathering very comfortable.

When Flame-Rain said this, it was difficult for the others to be suspicious of Dark-Sound.

While one couldn't trust a person's heart, there were also things they had no choice but to believe. Among those was that Flame-Rain was hostile towards Flame-Hell. The two couldn't coexist.

A short silence hung in the air. This silence indicated agreement.

Armor-Desert stopped feigning ignorance and bluntly asked.

{So Exalted Wing Dark-Sound, what exactly is this grand scheme you mentioned?}

{First, I'll personally take action soon.}

{Take action?}

{Yes. Since the monsters' force is too strong, it's better for Exalted Wings to participate than simply holding onto the Net of Fate. We will be victorious once we personally raise our weapons and fight. At that point! Please set the mood. So that Flame-Hell, who's practically the alliance's chairperson, can participate too. It doesn't matter if you give him a hard time or praise me and make him jealous. Anyways, we'll send him to the battlefield. However, since he's someone who is very concerned with his safety, he'll probably bring along his trustworthy guards... Then, when he's

exhausted from the intense battle, his trusty guard will stab him. While Exalted Wing Flame-Rain nobly said to drive him out… I want him dead.}

There was even madness present in his voice.

{…}

The other Exalted Wings showed their agreement with a short silence. If they could kill Flame-Hell with the method he mentioned, then it would be easy to cover it up him dying in battle instead of being assassinated. There was no need to worry about political backlash either.

At the end of their short silence, Armor-Desert indirectly asked.

{… It'll be best if we killed him like that. However, is that guard Choi Hyuk?}

{That's right. However, since I've already prepared a plan B and C, you don't need to worry about the plan not being executed. You just need to set the mood.}

{… Understood.}

Though Armor-Desert had already plotted to assassinate Choi Hyuk, he didn't bring it up here. There wouldn't be a problem since Dark-Sound had already prepared a plan B and C.

{Then do we only need to set the mood?}

When Light-Step asked, checking if this really was all they had to do, Dark-Sound cheerfully replied.

{There's no way that's it. The grand scheme doesn't simply end with Flame-Hell's death. If killing him was our goal, then there would be no need to use cumbersome schemes or wait until now. What's really important is how we are going to structure the alliance's new order after Flame-Hell's death. The reason why I had endured this long was because of this, and this is precisely why I have come to you all today.}

This was the start of the real meeting.

How were they going to reorganize the alliance's order after they purged it of Flame-Hell? If there were others to purge, who were they? How would they block the monsters' attack during this confusion?

No one believed that everyone would keep the promises made here. Nonetheless, this was an opportunity to set up safety measures so that the plan wouldn't fail and to judge each other's capabilities before this drastic change.

That was how they prepared for the future.

**

Blaaze!

Black flames spread at a dangerous rate. They ran along the tentacles that connected the monsters together to spread even further. The tentacles, which were their weapons, had now become shackles that snared them together.

As the dark universe blended with the black flames, it was difficult to tell where the flames ended and the universe began. It seemed like the entire universe was on fire.

{Kiiyyeeeeh!}

The monsters' screams as they burned together shook the space enough that the insides of low leveled warriors were a mess from just hearing them.

'A living hell.'

Even Lee Jinhee, who brought up the Battle of the Red Cliffs, felt her blood run cold.

Even though there were warriors from the Flame Wing Tribe amongst the struggling warriors, the monsters' net, which endured their flames well, was currently being burnt into ashes.

There was no need for the Flame Army to act.

“I-I’m alive.”

The warriors, who barely managed to escape the monsters’ chase, joined the Flame Army. Choi Hyuk’s flames only burnt the monsters and didn’t hurt the alliance’s warriors in any way.

Seeing this, Lee Jinhee sighed.

‘Can I protect him like this?’

Looking at the situation, it seemed like she didn’t need to act.

‘I need to always stay alert.’

She exerted strength into her ankles. Space folded at the end of her feet.

Whoosh!

She stepped forward. She jumped over the folded space as she rushed forward.

Srring.

She unsheathed and raised ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’.

Her vow was to not let Choi Hyuk die before her. Whether she was of help or not, the place she had to be was in front of Choi Hyuk or at least beside him.

However, when Lee Jinhee arrived at the location where she guessed Choi Hyuk was, she felt that something wasn’t right.

**

It introduced itself as ‘Kwe’.

Though the monster looked like a human, it was a midget the size of a forearm. Yet, the vigor the monster emitted was at least on the level of Exalted Wings.

Indeed, it was probably because of a monster like it was running amok that 3 superclusters were instantly annihilated and the Laniakea and Shapley superclusters were driven into a corner.

It was different from any monster Choi Hyuk had encountered until now. Unlike other monsters that, while possessing reasoning, couldn't hide their instinctive killing intent, the monster didn't show any such intent.

The monster was happy.

"Black flames... There's no doubt. Nice to meet you! To think that I'd encounter you, my luck is really good."

The monster even talked a lot.

"Did you know? You're really famous among us. You played a significant part in monsters like me being born."

Of course, Choi Hyuk didn't listen idly. Mouth shut, he advanced in order to slash the monster.

However, other weird things obstructed his path.

Grrrng.

When he heard this low wailing sound, monsters that looked like boxes made of dark metal appeared. Like bricks, they stacked themselves in front of 'Kwe' and blocked Choi Hyuk's path. While they looked easy to deal with, from the aura they released, they seemed to be monsters at the high or highest-rank. It looked like they had no offensive strength and maximized their defenses as flame or slashes were very effective. Of course, he could steadily kill them. However, because another one flew out from somewhere as soon as one died, it was difficult to advance.

Crush! Smash!

Choi Hyuk, who had swept his surroundings with his flames and attacks, advanced slowly, killing them one by one, as though he was making his way through a dense jungle.

'Kwe' didn't care whether its subordinates died or not as it continued to speak what was on its mind.

"Apparently, a case like your universe is a first. While it's the

universe that is the most persistent on resisting... The queen seems to be very shocked that you invaded us. We've only invaded and have never been invaded before."

The monster seemed to be talking about when Choi Hyuk crossed over to the monsters' universe, wiped out an area densely packed with Kahur Kabkuns, and killed a demise-ranked monster.

"You even made a fortress on top of that... The queen's temper isn't good. That's why... We decided to properly study you. That was how someone like me was born. A woman that spewed transparent flames and a man that spewed black ones! So I heard about you since the day I was born. It's really nice to meet you. Ah, right. I heard that you were the one who killed all those wolves as well? Wow... I'm the one who negotiated with them. So you ruined our first negotiations like that, eh? Haha, how amusing."

Clang! Crush!

Blaaze!

Even while the monster talked, Choi Hyuk steadily advanced forward as he ripped and burned the square monsters in his path.

'So noisy.'

This was to clash swords with the monster.

Yet, when he came close enough to touch the monster, it giggled.

"Anyways, it was impressive. Even though I made them quite resistant to flames, you slaughtered those kids with your flames. On top of that, your slashes are fearsome. Good. I get it now. Then how about this tactic?"

Red light slowly seeped out from the monster's body, which at shown no light previously. It no longer hid its killing intent.

A thin tentacle came out of Kwe's body and attached itself to a monster that was being burnt into ash. Then, as if the tentacles transmitted something, with this monster as the start, all the

monsters' bodies began to change. Their metallic skin that was burning from the flames became runny and created bubbles as it boiled from the flames.

Tsss.

Smoke began to rise.

Before, Choi Hyuk's flames had cleanly burnt its target without leaving a whiff of smoke, yet the monsters now created a thick, heavy smoke as they boiled and melted.

Choi Hyuk was instantly surrounded by this smoke.

Before the smoke could completely cover Choi Hyuk's sight, he saw Kwe's body also undergo a change. The monster became more slender, sharper, and darker.

Seeing this, Choi Hyuk unconsciously thought of the word 'executioner'.

Soon, the smoke completely covered Choi Hyuk's eyes.

'... I can't feel anything?'

His five senses were completely sealed. Even Dark-Sound's darkness wasn't this thick.

"You can't see anything, right? Aren't you curious how this is happening?"

'Where is it?'

While he heard the monster's voice, he couldn't figure out where it came from.

"Do you know how many kids were sacrificed to defeat you? You just need to think that my kids' resentment runs this deep."

This meant that the monster manipulated the dying monsters to obscure Choi Hyuk's senses. This was actually an amazing feat.

However, this wasn't what annoyed Choi Hyuk.

Grit.

He grounded his teeth.

He couldn’t tell where the voice had been coming from, yet he could clearly tell where it came from now.

As if taunting him, the voice was whispering straight into his left ear.

Means odd, strange, peculiar, etc. The character is also used in the word ‘괴물’ or monster.

Chapter 185: Fate (4)

Choi Hyuk didn't slash his sword. Instead, he raised the senses in his body.

Though his eyes and ears were covered by this thick smoke, he could clearly sense his internals and blazing karma.

Choi Hyuk focused on his body rather than the external stimulation.

"You're calmer than I thought?"

This time, Kwe taunted him by whispering in his right ear. Choi Hyuk didn't move as he stood with his sword raised.

"Then how about this?"

Shiver.

A chilling blade touched Choi Hyuk's neck. The sharply surging karma tried to slice his neck. There were no preliminary signs, yet he could sense the moment the blade landed on his neck. The instant he felt his hair being cut, Choi Hyuk made his move.

Pih!

Blood spurted from Choi Hyuk's neck.

Crush!

At the same time, a blue blade was crushed by his left hand.

Jjoong!

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' sliced through the air. The thick smoke rippled as it was sliced through.

However, before the figure behind the smoke could be revealed, more smoke filled this opening.

'... So it's like this?'

Having allowed the monster to attack first, Choi Hyuk nodded

inwardly. The moment he grabbed the blade, he clashed his karma against Kwe's aura. It was weaker than he expected. While the power Kwe possessed wasn't small, it didn't seem like the monster specialized in close combat.

"Wow... How shocking."

Kwe made a fuss.

"If you're going to be so scary, I guess I'll have to wait until you exhaust more of your strength?"

Its voice was smeared with laughter.

"But I don't know if you know? The moment I discovered you, I already sent the news to my brothers. It's disadvantageous for you if you drag this on."

It was a lie. How could the monster have shared such a delicious prey?

But Kwe was confident that Choi Hyuk wouldn't take its words as an empty bluff.

"Huh? I'm right next to you. It's true. I'm really right beside you. Wouldn't it be easier for you to face my brothers if you take one down?"

This was because Kwe had realized that Choi Hyuk could be dangerous even within this thick smoke if he solely focused on counterattacking. Kwe hoped Choi Hyuk would attack first. This was a trick to make Choi Hyuk show an opening.

It was this moment when Choi Hyuk thought,

'Do you think you'll be able to win if I attack first?'

A bloody smile hung on his lips.

"Try it."

Pscht!

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' swung without warning.

The smoke, which densely enshrouds his surroundings, was sucked into his sword's path.

Swaaaah!

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' sliced through the smoke again. This time, a portion of the smoke melted with a boom.

Wherever Choi Hyuk swung his sword, the dense smoke would swirl, explode, and melt. It seemed like the smoke would clear up at any moment. Yet, the smoke always filled the area again by a hair's breadth.

Pih!

"Waha! That's it!"

Pscht!

"Aha! That was close!"

In a fervor, Kwe stabbed Choi Hyuk.

It could deal a critical wound. When Kwe tried to slice Choi Hyuk's neck, he would avoid it as it sliced into his skin. When it tried to stab his thigh, the blue blade would be grabbed by Choi Hyuk when it went halfway in.

Even while Choi Hyuk was swinging his sword without rest, he diligently avoided any critical injuries.

'Terrifying bastard.'

While Kwe was stabbing and teasing Choi Hyuk, inwardly, it was shocked by Choi Hyuk's might.

Even though he was enshrouded in smoke created by sacrificing tens of thousands of sturdy monsters, Choi Hyuk could still threaten Kwe.

"Yeah! Yeah! Dance more!"

Kwe teased Choi Hyuk even more in order to hide its turmoil.

The monster sent more power to the bodies of monsters it was

connected to. The monsters, connected by tentacles, boiled up as they spewed foul smoke.

The rate at which Choi Hyuk cleared the smoke and the rate at which the smoke was being created reached an equilibrium. However, Choi Hyuk was the one one-sidedly being wounded.

Choi Hyuk didn't care about this one bit.

'Just once.'

Pih!

His wrist was slashed this time. His recovery rate was gradually slowing down. The dense smoke burrowed into his wounds, infecting his body.

'Show even your shadow.'

He didn't bat an eye. Still swinging his sword, he cleared away the smoke that now even felt heavy.

Though he was one-sidedly being injured, he didn't think he was at a disadvantage at all.

"You're dead the moment I see you."

Facing the glaringly dangerous individual that didn't become even the slightest dispirited after being one-sidedly wounded, it was Kwe who felt anxious.

It taunted him to hide its anxious state.

"You will never be able to see me."

Pscht!

This time, Kwe left a decently deep wound on Choi Hyuk's chest.

"To die while locked up in the smoke your flames created. Isn't it romantic?"

Saying this, Kwe trembled.

'Thrilling!'

It hadn’t been long since Kwe was born.

The warriors it had fought until now were boring. This was its first time facing an opponent like Choi Hyuk. While Kwe was so scared that his body shivered, being able to fight someone like him without being pushed back, no, to even be able to push him into a corner, it believed itself to be even more amazing. At the same time, the sense of danger, where it felt like Kwe could die if it lost its concentration for even a moment, felt thrilling.

Kwe became intoxicated in the fight.

Whoosh!

“… Huh?”

There was a sudden change.

Because something from outside invaded the smoke, the smoke was slashed through in a thin line, revealing a slight opening. The problem was that whatever invaded the smoke was rushed straight towards Kwe.

Clang!

It wasn’t a dangerous attack, but there was no way to block it.

Blood spurted out. It wasn’t Kwe’s, but the warrior who had rushed in. She had short, black hair and a slightly tanned face. The warrior, who was wielding a white short sword, spurted blood, seemingly having suffered an internal shock.

Her blood splattered on Kwe’s cheek.

‘Ah… Ah!”

Kwe made a commotion in surprise. Until now, the battle between Choi Hyuk and Kwe was close like walking on a tightrope. Choi Hyuk was trying to clear the smoke, while Kwe was trying to maintain it. Kwe wanted to deal a fatal wound, and Choi Hyuk wanted to avoid and counterattack. This equilibrium was shattered by the attack just now.

“I see you.”

Kwe heard Choi Hyuk’s voice right beside it.

There clearly should have been some distance between them, yet Choi Hyuk was right in front of it. Choi Hyuk hadn’t moved. Rather, his black sword had erased the distance between them. Because the space between them had shrunk like a deflating balloon, they were right next to each other. Kwe couldn’t avoid Choi Hyuk’s sword.

Kwe screamed,

“Damn it! This is dirty!”

Choi Hyuk replied,

“What’s this corpse saying?”

**

Light-Maze, who was the commander-in-chief of the Event Horizon Troop, gritted his teeth as he blocked the monster’s attack.

“Defensive formation! Number 0!”

When he shouted, the tiny speckled lights, which formed his body, made a commotion.

‘Hey! Quickly supply smelting furnace #7 with karma!’

‘What are you doing? Team 3! Quickly make an 11-dimension reality distortion field!’

‘Ninth combat unit! Brace for impact!’

The karma weapons of Speckled Light Tribe members, who possessed group intelligence, were very different from other species. Rather than a weapon that was visible to the eye, the countless nano-sized facilities and equipment were their weapons. Countless speckled lights worked together to make miracles.

Voong!

Karma surged like a swarm of bees. Light-Maze's dimension was distorted by dozens of layers. To the monsters, Light-Maze's appearance distorted like an abstract painting.

Bang!

A long-haired boy's fist smashed into it from above.

'Gwaack!'

Even though they dispersed the impact through various dimensions, the remaining shock left a few speckled lights injured or dead.

'Damn it! Damn it!'

Light-Maze swore. Compared to other species that recovered their injuries, Speckled Light Tribe members 'healed' by increasing in number after speckled lights died. Of course, this meant their recovery rate was slow and, even if they recovered completely, they couldn't erase the sorrow felt from the deaths of their members.

This was also a reason why Speckled Light Tribe members usually took supporting roles, like healing or providing buffs, rather than fighting.

However, they didn't have any other choice.

They didn't have the time to mourn their deaths.

All because of that small monster that called itself 'Myeol'.

"Wow! You blocked it again?"

No matter how one looked at it, it looked like an earthling. The monster's hair, which ran down its back, fluttered like a splendid mane, and its face made it look like a youth.

"Wow... This is fun. Fighting is so fun!"

It seemed like the monster, who had recently been born, was learning the pleasures of fighting while facing the Event Horizon

Troop.

On the other hand, Light-Maze was suffering gravely.

“Keuh… Sorry.”

The vice-commander-in-chief, whose injuries were so severe that he couldn’t use more than 60% of his power, apologized.

Being ranked 117th in the alliance rankings, this wasn’t something he should be apologizing for.

“No, we were just unlucky…”

The problem was that the monster holding the Event Horizon down was too powerful.

Even though the 24th ranked Light-Maze, 10th if excluding the Exalted Wings, and the 117th ranked vice-commander-in-chief fought together, all they could do was endure.

“To face that monster, the Exalted Wings will have to personally take action… Or, two in the top 10 of the warrior ranking…”

None of these were currently applicable to this situation.

Light-Maze’s face darkened.

They could endure for now. However, they would die in the end. Both him and the Event Horizon Troop that was fighting intensely after being encircled by monsters.

‘Annihilation…’

Thinking about the grand scheme, Light-Maze swallowed his rage. He didn’t work under Dark-Sound to prepare for the grand scheme for such a long time only to die here like this.

How did things come to this…? They had encountered this monster while protecting the border at the very front as usual. Though they received the message to retreat from the alliance and Dark-Sound, they were too late as they were already caught by then. Currently, even if they somehow ran away from the

monster, retreating was clearly impossible.

"… I'll kill that monster even if I die."

Seeing Light-Maze say this with such determination, Vice-Commander-in-Chief Kalon nodded. Kalon was born as a descendant of a now extinct species and had reached the transcendent level. He couldn't accept his last moments being powerless, unable to kill the enemy in front of him.

'Childish monster… I'll show you the experiences of a warrior.'

Grinding their teeth, the two decided to give the young monster hell.

However, Myeol's face suddenly distorted. The monster quickly turned around and shouted,

"What? Black Flames appeared there? Wait. Wait! It's really the Black Flames? Ah, hold him back for a bit! I'll go after finishing things up here! What? Elder brother is injured? Really?! Black Flames is that strong?"

Myeol, who was talking to itself, turned towards a tense Light-Maze and Kalon with eyes shining with excitement. Then, while giggling, it said,

"Sorry! Something urgent came up so I'll be going now! Let's see each other next time, kay?"

Whoosh!

Then the monster pierced through space and disappeared.

"… What the hell?"

Beep!

{Ah, I'm here to report.}

A hologram suddenly appeared in front of the taken aback Light-Maze.

It was the face of Choi Hyuk's right-hand man, Baek Seoin.

{Reporting to all warriors in the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters. The Flame Army, Virgo Cluster Regional Troops, and all the dragon races within the superclusters have decided to fight back with Dragonic at the core. Troops that fell behind and failed to retreat and warriors who want to protect their homeland until the end, we hope that you will gather in Dragonic. If necessary, we will dispatch rescue troops. While the current situation is very disadvantageous, Exalted Wing Leviathan has promised to send support. It'll be our victory if we endure until support arrives. Once again, troops who failed to retreat and warriors who want to protect their homeland, we hope that you can gather in Dragonic.}

Then the screen changed.

{Kiyeeeeh!}

Monsters that didn't know pain were screaming as they burned. The entire universe seemed to be blazing because the flames were black. Tens of millions of monsters were burning in flames and were being crushed by the Flame Army's advance.

The scene of Choi Hyuk inflicting a critical wound on a monster that looked to be as strong as Myeol was replayed as well.

Baek Seoin's voice resounded.

{This is the beacon of victory we are sending.}

Character for 'Destroy'. Used in the word 'Collapse'.

Chapter 186: Dark Clouds (1)

A black smile hung on Dark-Sound's white face.

It was because of a message secretly sent by God Dragon Leviathan.

{Please dispatch support troops to defend Dragonic. I will not forget this favor.}

"Leviathan, you certainly love your race to a terrible degree. It seems your body has worn down, huh?"

To send support troops to a place they had already strategically given up. How absurd. Nonetheless, this could be an opportunity to gain the support of the dragon race, which strictly maintained a neutral stance. While happily pondering about how to use this opportunity, Dark-Sound sent a message.

{Do you have any additional information regarding the area? I think it'll be best to know what the current situation is like there...}

Leviathan probably didn't have any additional information, and if he did, it would probably be devastating. If Dark-Sound opposed it as soon as he heard his reply and dragged things on, then Leviathan would bring up various conditions himself.

'Then, while listening to him, if there's a condition I like... Well, I could try sending support troops. Though I don't know whether we'll be able to rescue Dragonic fully intact.'

After reading the next message with a dark smile on his white face, Dark-Sound froze.

The first to disappear was his dark smile.

Whoosh!

Instead, a thick darkness fell in his office. This darkness wasn't normal, it was filled with an ominousness akin to a beast lurking in

its cave or a ghost behind a door.

{We received a miraculous message thanks to the ancient dragon race's technology on Dragonic. The Event Horizon Troops, which had failed to retreat, and the Flame Army, which had promised to protect Dragonic, are taking part in the battle. Aside from them, other troops and warriors are also rapidly assembling there... Will you be okay with that?}

The darkness in his office darkened. After staying silent for a long while, Dark-Sound was barely able to mutter a name.

"... Shiro."

Even in this darkness, a shadow was cast on Dark-Sound's pale face, making it difficult to make out. Dark-Sound made a pained moan.

While he understood the situation was urgent, he didn't think that the Event Horizon Troop would fail to retreat.

"And Choi Hyuk and Light-Maze..."

He recalled other names later.

"The risk is too high to lose both of them."

The two were important pieces to the grand scheme.

It wasn't like there wasn't anyone to replace them if something happened but....

"Shiro..."

Dark-Sound mumbled once more.

Grit!

All that was heard was the sound of grinding teeth within this absolute darkness, where nothing could be seen.

Dark-Sound sent Leviathan a message. He even forgot about adding any conditions.

{I'll cooperate.}

Then he recalled the only individual who could send proper support troops in a situation like this.

**

{Jinhee! Quickly grab the leader and get out! The monsters are approaching!}

{Got it.}

Lee Jinhee sent Baek Seoin, who was at the headquarters, a simple reply before looking at the thick smoke in front of her.

No, could she even call it that?

It was so dense and heavy that it rippled and moved that it looked like a sea of molten metal.

She had been standing here blankly for a while now. However, it was now time to move, whether it was assisting Choi Hyuk, who was fighting in there, or dragging him out and retreating.

Lee Jinhee took deep breaths.

While she answered easily with a ‘Got it’, there was no way it would be easy. This was a phenomenon created by a monster that was as strong as an Exalted Wing. Even Choi Hyuk lost his senses in this smoke.

“But I can do it.”

Lee Jinhee gripped her short sword ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’.

Her heart turned into karma covered her sword. ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ gradually shined brighter.

‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’, which was created by her vow to protect her friends and Choi Hyuk, possessed a special ability. Wherever Choi Hyuk was, it could find him. Even in this pitch-black smoke, she would be naturally put on a path leading towards him. It didn’t matter if she couldn’t see or sense anything. Her sword would be able to find the path on its own.

Also, as long as her heart, which vowed to protect him, was sufficient enough, her sword would be able to pierce through this phenomenon created by someone equal to an Exalted Wing as, theoretically, the power Swords of Vow possessed was limitless.

There was one more thing she believed in.

“Choi Hyuk is also trying his best in there.”

He was probably already in a scuffle with this smoke. She believed that, if this was true, there would be an opening to enter this terrifying smoke.

“The recording… is going smoothly.”

Thinking about how Baek Seoin asked her to record this as promotional material, Lee Jinhee grinned. That was how she shook off the last of her nerves.

“Hu.”

Letting out a short breath, she shot forward.

She swung her sword.

Jjong! Riip!

The moment the blade contacted the smoke, it felt like it had hit a boulder. The smoke stuck on the blade like a sticky rice cake.

However, she clearly cut through it. She opened up a narrow, faint path.

The fate she was building towards was ‘Freedom’.

Cutting through the heavy smoke that crumbled as soon as it made contact and lightly running in the threadlike opening, she pushed on with her sword.

Without a doubt, her sword was moving towards protecting Choi Hyuk.

Kaang!

As expected, she reached him.

With a faint smile, Lee Jinhee vomited blood and fainted.

**

"... So reckless."

After staring at Lee Jinhee, who was lying in her hospital bed, Choi Hyuk shook his head.

While he firmly believed he would have won without her, it was still a fact that he was able to win more quickly and easily thanks to her.

She had already undergone all her treatment procedures. Her hospital room was set up like the ones on Earth so that she would be at peace when she woke up.

Choi Hyuk tucked her snugly under her blanket before leaving.

The El Tribe's sanctum was crowded with warriors. Choi Hyuk, who was walking through a pathway created by tangled roots, fixed his gaze on a familiar face.

Their eyes met.

The man's eyes trembled as he saw Choi Hyuk. Instantly, he tried to avoid him by turning around and going in another pathway. If he did, Choi Hyuk would have ignored him and walked past him.

However, he turned his half-turned back around to its original state and looked at Choi Hyuk. He had brown skin, wasn't very tall, and possessed an innocent appearance, but deep within his eyes hid a sharp gleam.

"It's been a long time, Overseer Choi Hyuk."

He was Night Sovereign Ding, who had attempted to use and tame Choi Hyuk in the past. Thanks to this, Dragonic experienced a purge started by Choi Hyuk. A cruel purge where he used his Resource Transfer Right to send warriors on impossible missions.

However, Ding hid under Armor-Phantom's shadow and avoided the purge. Choi Hyuk now met him here.

Since he acted familiar, so did Choi Hyuk.

“You’re bloody?”

“Ah… My subordinates who went on a mission outside were wounded. It seems like I was stained when I went to save them. We failed… to retreat.”

Ding said as he slightly held up his bloody shirt.

As if uninterested, Choi Hyuk asked,

“You were on Dragonic?”

“Yes… Since everyone was leaving Dragonic, I was leading those who remained.”

In the past, Ding made a naïve smile. He held wicked motives behind his naïve smile. However, it was different now. Rather than his naïve smile, he seemed nervous. With a face that seemed like he had come to a resolute decision, he looked at Choi Hyuk.

“Why?”

“I am a coward who hates dangerous things.”

The majority of earthlings migrated to the newly created fortress in the monsters’ universe. Though it was safer than expected, it was still at the very front lines.

Ding said that he remained on Dragonic because he was a coward without the slightest trace of shame.

‘Yeah, he was this kind of person.’

Choi Hyuk scoffed in his mind.

“Okay. But you know, right? That as long as you’re under my command, you’ll have to fight with your life on the line.”

This was something Choi Hyuk pretty much forced on the earthlings, sometimes at the cost of countless lives.

Night Sovereign Ding smiled bitterly.

“I know. And I will. Only then will I be able to save even one of my people.”

‘Was he always like this?’

Hearing Ding’s belief-filled voice, Choi Hyuk saw his bloody shirt in a new light.

Ding stared directly at Choi Hyuk and said,

“To be honest, I don’t like you. No, I hate you. However… In this current situation, I think it’s a relief that we have someone like you… Since our chances of survival might rise even slightly.”

After saying this, Ding looked at Choi Hyuk for a moment before silently lowering his head.

“Then I’ll take my leave.”

Ding walked past him.

Choi Hyuk grinned before continuing to walk towards the headquarters.

**

The defensive line was created by selecting 13 of the stars closest to Dragonic.

The key point of this defensive battle was safely protecting Dragonic.

Since it was common for nearby stars to split apart when warriors with extraordinary strength clashed, they needed a defensive line that was sufficiently distant from Dragonic.

However, as the alliance’s forces were utterly inferior in this situation, they couldn’t set up a defensive line too far away either. There were 13 stars nearby that could ensure Dragonic’s safety and prevent their forces from being too dispersed.

The ancient dragon race’s knowledge, the alliance’s technology, and the glass crabs were sent to establish the defensive line.

Whiiiek!

Whiiiik!

Outer space was filled with the glass crabs' whistling.

The glass crabs, which had been Consumables but then grew to become members of the alliance with the Berserkers' help, showed surprising results.

While their technology might seem worthless when compared to the technologies and methods that existed in the alliance until now, when their technology was combined with the alliance's, it resulted in a great synergistic effect.

Previously, the glass crabs had used the glass sand that covered the Blue Ocean planet to create various karma structures. Then they used the interaction of these structures to suppress their opponents' karma while raising the karma of their allies. These crabs, which were broken up into countless tribes, gathered to increase their overall intelligence.

Currently, countless structures that were inspired by the glass crabs' structures were littered between and on these 13 stars, making them look like characters.

"What a sight!"

These were the first words spoken by Lee Jinhee, who regained consciousness and flew off Dragonic after receiving treatment.

The universe was shining with a pale milk-white light. Light emitting robots filled the area to create countless characters and constellations. Satellites endlessly flew between them while emitting a strange karma. The 13 stars, which were the key points in the defensive line, shined brightly as they connected all spaceships and satellites together like a spider web.

"The glass crabs' technology was this amazing? On the Blue Ocean planet, they looked like pretty sculptures and buildings."

Naro was the one who replied.

{Strictly speaking, the key technologies used here are the ancient dragon race's karma technique known as 'magic' and the colony system that make up Speckled Light Tribe members. The glass crabs' technology was used to fuse these two different techniques.}

Kwaohh!

A satellite brushed past Lee Jinhee. Even though there seemed to be nothing in satellite's trajectory, mysterious characters flashed momentarily before disappearing.

Whiiiek!

Whiiiiii!

The glass crabs' unique whistling sounds echoed throughout this area like a whale call.

As if he was crawling into this scene, Naro stretched his head out and immersed himself in this scene before continuing.

{If we can survive this, the alliance's technology will advance greatly as well. I learned a lot this time as well. A defensive line created by using the dragon race's magic as the microstructure, the glass crabs' technology as the structure, and the Speckled Light Tribe's colony system as the macrostructure... Dragonic's current defensive line itself is an enormous lifeform. It would be alright to call it an artificial Speckled Light Tribe warrior.}

The one who heartlessly cut Naro's words which were filled with emotion was Choi Hyuk, who had been standing nearby.

"And its function is?"

Naro glanced at Choi Hyuk before shaking his head and explaining.

{The inside of the defensive line is now no different from the headquarters. You can see the situation of the war when and wherever and can access the Net of Fate to increase its influence.

Then, even if three enemies at the same level of Kwe, which you fought, come at the same time… If we limit it to within the defensive line, we can obtain up to 70% of the Net of Fate. We'll be able to fight much more advantageously. Also, a fixed amount of impact from enemy attacks on our allies will automatically be absorbed by the defensive line. Also, even if Dragonic faces a sudden attack, using the connected dimension system, we can disperse the impact between the 13 stars. Arithmetically, we can face off against an army ten times the size of ours. The problem is… our enemies will number over a hundred times ours.}

The effectiveness was great despite how hurried they were. Nodding, Choi Hyuk asked again,

"And its weakness?"

{Each time one of the 13 stars that make up the key points in the defensive line is destroyed, the effectiveness drops drastically. Also, once the defensive line collapses, it is impossible to restore. We used all the resources and treasures that could be brought over from throughout the superclusters into making this defensive line. If three stars are destroyed, then the control of the Net of Fate will drop to 50-50… We believe that if all the stars are destroyed then it could drop to 80-20. Of course, the stars will be able to absorb a significant amount of impact because they have each been equipped with powerful dimensional distortion fields… If Kwe, who you faced before, or Myeol, who the Event Horizon Troop encountered, personally make a move, they could be quickly destroyed.}

"As expected, I should have killed that monster then…"

He had successfully landed a strike thanks to Lee Jinhee, however, though Kwe received a critical injury, it survived and escaped.

{Also, it seems… the enemy will gather around our defensive line in a day.}

In the dark universe, morning seemed to have only arrived here as the area within the defensive line shone with a milk-white light.

Monsters that desired the deaths of all karmalings quickly gathered beyond it.

Chapter 187: Dark Clouds (2)

The warriors didn’t sleep. They gathered around the defensive line created by connecting 13 stars as they observed the monsters’ movements.

The monsters didn’t sleep either. As though they had been turned into hideous stuffed creatures, they didn’t move as their black eyes glared at the alliance warriors and the defensive line.

There were common sightings of monsters with long octopus legs and a wide mouth with saw-like teeth on the top of their heads. Earthlings called them ‘Teeth Krakens’.

It was a tense standoff.

However, the warriors were belligerent even as they faced off against the enormous, threatening monster army.

‘Come at us if you dare.’

They had already resolved to risk their lives the moment they gathered on Dragonic for the final resistance.

The glass crabs’ whistling resounded lengthily like whale calls, and the universe within the 13 stars was shining brightly with a milk-white light like a sunrise. There were mysteriously appearing characters. Opinions that dying in such a beautiful place wasn’t bad were spreading.

However, the basics of fighting were dampening your opponents’ spirits, doing the unexpected, and smashing your opponents’ calculations into pieces.

War started in a state no one expected.

“Huh? Huh? That’s?”

The monsters, which didn’t move as though they were stuffed, suddenly moved aside, opening holes in between them like sponges.

Meteors shot through those holes at incredible speeds.

Bang! Baang!

Brightly shining characters appeared on the defensive line. The shooting meteors scattered into tiny fragments when they contacted these lights. However, the defensive line and the characters making up the defensive line shook.

Kreeeeuudk!

The participating earthlings felt that their vocabulary was lacking at times like this. Should they describe the sound of countless meteors crashing into the defensive line as a downpour? Simply a downpour?

This might be how it sounded on Dragonic, which was the furthest from the defensive line.

The sound echoed out by riding on the karma that filled the milk-white defensive line. Since their bodies were shaking, the sounds were not coming from outside but from within. Endlessly, it sounded like their flesh was ripping into a thousand pieces and their bones were shattering into thousands of pieces by just the impact.

This was the drumbeat that declared the start of the war.

The monsters charged after the meteor shower.

“Euah… Euaaah!”

The warriors tried everything to block them, but their bodies didn’t move as they wanted. While they had a lot of experience, this was their first time fighting a battle like this. A battle with superclusters’ life or death on the line? A meteor shower that fell like raindrops? Each meteor seemed to possess the power to bring all life on a planet to extinction. Each one was a calamity, yet they belted the defensive line like a machine gun. This wasn’t a legendary battle, rather, it seemed like they were literally flung into a myth like Ragnarok that would result in the deaths of gods.

In other words, the warriors were scared.

“Get a hold of yourselves!”

The ones who didn’t lose their fighting spirit in a situation like this were those from the so-called noble tribes like the Flame Wing Tribe, which was born from the flames of the Big Bang, the Dark Tribe, which was born from dark matter, and the Armored Soul Tribe, which was born from warring civilizations in the universe and had witnessed the collapse of such civilizations. Those whose birth backgrounds were spectacular didn’t lose their focus when faced with such a terrifying sight as though they were proving why they were called ‘nobles’.

“They are just physical attacks! You are warriors who wield karma!”

Even if they were physical attacks, it was a different matter if these physical attacks could destroy planets. Still, their thunderous shouts weren’t completely wrong. Since the defensive line was holding up magnificently, the majority of the meteor shower’s impact was absorbed. The damage the meteor shower left was more mental than physical.

Perhaps they felt something from the outstanding warriors’ encouragement, but one by one, the warriors overcame their fear and focused on fighting. However, the monsters didn’t wait for the warriors to recover their senses.

“Keuak!”

“Grak!”

Grit.

Teeth krakens grabbed warriors with their long legs and shoved them in their mouths, crunching down on them, as they swiftly swam through space.

An all-out war broke out without delay.

**

“… They are collapsing faster than I thought.”

Lee Jinhee mumbled.

The most elite warriors partaking in the Dragonic defensive battle were gathered at the back.

There were four transcendent warriors.

They were Choi Hyuk, Commander-in-Chief of the Event Horizon Troop Light-Maze, Vice-commander Kalon, and the alliance ranked 49 Dark-Feet, who had been dispatched to the Perseus-Pisces Supercluster but couldn’t retreat and had been chased here.

They didn’t go out to the frontlines and instead observed the war situation.

This was the advice of various ranking advisors under Baek Seoin.

“You still have to endure. Until now, we have confirmed three monsters at the level of Exalted Wings. We have no idea how many transcendent monsters there are besides them. They too aren’t showing themselves. If you show yourselves first, there’s a chance you’ll be targeted.”

The strongest spears of both the alliance and the monsters were still hidden in a fog. These spears would show their greatest strength when they pierced through the fog and launched a surprise attack.

Exposing themselves first was more dangerous.

“Hmmm…”

Choi Hyuk’s expression didn’t seem like he quite agreed.

Baek Seoin attempted to calm Choi Hyuk.

“Endure it for a bit and use your strength to maintain the Net of

Fate. It is especially important to quickly maintain the time scale.”

The ‘Net of Fate’ was the most powerful strategic asset the alliance possessed. Its function didn’t simply end with suppressing monsters’ strength and reinforcing allies.

The universe was a complicated place. Like in a movie that came out a long time ago, depending on the speed and gravity of a celestial body, an hour in one place could be a year in another. The miraculous feat of tying all these different time zones on a single time scale and allowing countless tribes to communicate with one another was only possible through the Net of Fate.

Currently, the four transcendent warriors were meddling with the Net of Fate to make time flow slower in the Laniakea and Shapley Superclusters. A day here was four days outside. This was possible because they were in control of over 70% of the Net of Fate.

Because of this, the support troops would arrive faster than expected. This was why it could be better for the four to maintain the Net of Fate rather than partaking in the battle.

“That’s why I’m worried.”

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn’t seem to fully agree with Baek Seoin. While he doing what he was told right now, a dangerous feeling swelled as he observed the constantly updating war situation.

Whiiiek!

Whiiiii!

The glass crabs’ whistling hadn’t stopped even now, but a more ominous shriek covered their whistling sound.

Kyaaaaaah!!

A shriek that seemed to come from hell ripped the world around them.

The teeth krakens forced their way through after the meteor

shower. While the warriors endured the best they could, the frontlines kept receding, and one of the key points of the defensive line, a star at the very front, happened to enter the monsters' range.

The shriek erupted at that moment.

"What... What is that?"

It was an enormous stake that looked like it could cover a continent. It looked like a cross. A gigantic dragon was nailed to it as it bled, its body trembling as it shrieked.

Kyahhh!

Its shriek sounded like it was announcing the end of the world.

Kiiing!

Whooong!

Whenever the dragon shrieked or squirmed its large body, the pointy tip of the cross emitted a strange resonance, releasing a destructive power.

"Just... What..."

There weren't just one or two.

Ten stakes were held up towards the star. They were so fast most warriors didn't even see an afterimage.

Kwwaaaoh!

Something seemed to fly by when bang exploded a moment later.

Whiiek! Whiiiek!

The whistling sounds of glass crabs stopped, and instead, an incredibly loud scream erupted.

Kwaaaaah!!!

This was the scream of the defensive line that surrounded the 13 stars and Dragonic. Having utilized the Speckled Light Tribe's

colony system, the defensive line itself was no different from a similar lifeform, and this defensive line squirmed in pain. The milk-white space flickered as though there was an earthquake and the characters that appeared mysteriously trembled. The artificial satellites and robots blew up in a chain explosion.

Kwaaaaaah!!!

The scream had yet to end.

A stake that stabbed into the star's dimensional distortion field twisted its body as it slowly penetrated the distortion field and pushed its way towards the star. "Kiyyyaaaak!" The dragon nailed on the stake trembled as it roared.

It felt like the entire universe was screaming. The warriors fell into a state of panic just from the screams.

"Crazy…"

Baek Seoin swore.

Then, at some point, a stake fully penetrated a star's distortion field and stabbed into the star. Unconcerned with the star's surging flames, the gigantic dragon nailed on the stake was injected into the star like a syringe.

Not long after, the star exploded with a bang. Numerous warriors were swept up in this explosion and oxidized into ash. The only ones that remained were warriors of the Flame Wing Tribe.

[… Our control of the Net of Fate dropped to 65%. The time scale has been reset to 2.5 days from 4.]

Naro's stiff, tense voice sounded out.

Clang.

Choi Hyuk stood up. 'Choi Hyuk's Denial', which hung on his waist, shook with a sound.

"As expected, we can't keep going like this. We can't have one of our 13 stars collapse already."

“However, if they launch a counterattack...!”

Baek Seoin tried to stop him, but Choi Hyuk wouldn’t listen to him.

“Let them launch a counterattack. We’ll win anyways if we endure until support arrives, right? Even if they don’t, we win if we kill all the monsters at the transcendent level. If we keep waiting, we’ll just die sitting as they break down our defensive line one star at a time. It hasn’t been that long since this war started, yet we already lost a star.”

The light from the explosion had yet to reach them, who were standing near Dragonic. The reason why they could see the situation in real-time was because of the Net of Fate, which transcended space and time.

Nevertheless, Choi Hyuk looked in the direction the star exploded in.

A strange feeling covered his body.

While he didn’t learn it, he instinctively knew what he could ‘deny’.

Simultaneity.

Einstein’s train.

According to Einstein, two objects moving at different speeds perceived the ‘simultaneous events’ at different times.

Someone inside a train traveling close to the speed of light would perceive lightning striking the front of the train and then the back whereas someone outside might perceive lightning striking the front and back of the train simultaneously. Simultaneous events to someone was not the case for someone else.

Existences each lived on different space-time axes. To aliens currently standing a million light years away, the ‘present’ might be 200 years in the past or future, at least until Exalted Wings used

the Net of Fate to fix the time scale between karmalings.

However, at this moment, Dragonic's defensive line was already misaligned with the alliance's normal time scale. Also, due to the pressure of the monsters, there was a subtle difference in time scale between Dragonic and the outer most defensive line.

If space-time was bread, its current state wasn't a properly cut cross-section but cut diagonally so that it stuck out at the front.

Choi Hyuk found what he had to do inside this.

He decided to cut the part of the bread that was sticking out, the twisted space-time.

Sling.

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' was pulled out from its sheath.

Whoosh!

He struck out the moment he unsheathed his sword, and it stirred up dense dark matter from Dragonic to the location of the shattered star. The space-time of the star shattering was completely cut off.

Events that could occur and events that already occurred, he 'denied' them all.

Step.

When Choi Hyuk took a step, the world surrounding him shed its skin. The fragments of the shattered star and the bright light emitted when the star exploded slipped back and disappeared like plastic wrap. Then the world changed.

Choi Hyuk looked around at his surroundings. He was standing where the star had been destroyed just now. However, the star was still burning brightly here.

"What... the hell? I just die-Kack!!!"

The defensive line was completely restored. Even the dead

warriors looked fine.

However, not everything was the same.

“Wh-what’s happening…?”

“Haaaaah!”

The revived warriors trembled as they died again. Fate and karma transcended space-time. While space-time was denied, the already dissipated fates and karma of the dead warriors didn’t return and the warriors who revived again had no choice but to die again.

Only, because the defensive line, which was like a lifeform, hadn’t died or was entirely a lifeform, it could recover its functions once space-time was denied.

For Choi Hyuk, this was enough.

Kiyaaaah!!

The stakes charged towards the star while shrieking like before. One of the stakes had been injected into the star and exploded along with it so the dragon on it vomited blood as it died like the other warriors. There were still nine unscathed stakes remaining.

Choi Hyuk gripped his sword handle and smiled.

“I’m here. Try crossing over.”

Bababang!

The nine stakes shattered at the same time and opened the curtains for the real defensive battle.

“Crazy bastard… It was possible to slash through those with a sword?”

At the back, Light-Maze felt an unknown sense of inferiority and defeat after watching Choi Hyuk’s splendid declaration of war and swore.

Chapter 188: Dark Clouds (3)

Grit.

She ground her teeth so hard it seemed she would bite her tongue. Blood ran between Mack's lips. Surging lightning crackled as it evaporated the blood flowing from her mouth.

Vice-Commander-in-Chief of the Event Horizon Troop, Kalon, glanced at Mack as he mumbled,

"The monsters... Are still using dragons as weapons...?"

"Yes, they degraded and made us into living bombs."

Mack said, her voice was laced with uncontrollable rage.

A large part of the dragon race's ruin was due to other tribes' disinterest, but the monsters played a large part as well. They tenaciously targeted the dragons. Not created by flames, machinery, dark matter, or a group intelligence, the dragon race were the most powerful lifeforms of blood and flesh. The monsters used dragon bodies as materials to create various weapons like the Planet Destroying Stake used just now.

As he could sympathize with her fierce spirit since he too was the descendant of an extinct species, Kalon didn't say anything and excused himself.

'This isn't something that can be comforted with words.'

Though he understood her feelings, he was an outsider in the end. Kalon didn't look at Mack any longer, fixing his gaze on the monsters, because he knew this better than anyone else.

Mack felt sorry because she felt like she vented to the wrong person, but it was only for a moment as her vision was now filled with monsters that would be killed soon enough.

Yet, the situation was good.

"Haaa... They appeared as expected."

Baek Seoin, who had been silently looking at the frontlines, held his head.

At some point, Choi Hyuk's appearance, which had clearly been running amok at the front, split into fragments and couldn't be seen clearly. Instead, various indiscernible images of round and square objects filled his mind, making him confused.

He was referring to one thing.

"Transcendent monsters have appeared."

When Baek Seoin turned around after saying this, there were no longer any transcendent warriors standing behind him.

They had already disappeared in order to deal a severe blow to the newly appeared transcendent monsters.

"Haa... We're screwed."

Baek Seoin held his head again. Their judgment wasn't wrong considering Choi Hyuk had already been exposed, but this progression of events was the worst since there was no doubt the other side would have more transcendents than them.

"Now... We can only rely on our individual capabilities."

Baek Seoin mumbled as if resigning himself to this situation. He bit his lips as he unsheathed his sword. The longsword, 'Baek Seoin's Premonition', revealed its mirror-like blade that reflected the universe. A chill shined in Baek Seoin's eyes.

Baang!

It was as he expected.

The three who were rushing towards Choi Hyuk were ambushed before they could reach him. The monsters clearly had the advantage.

Three Exalted-Wing-level monsters ambushed Choi Hyuk, and seven transcendent-level monsters, who were similar in power to the top 100 of the alliance ranking, attacked the three transcendent

warriors who were rushing to save Choi Hyuk.

The unfavourable battle began at a disadvantage.

**

“Nice to meet you. You can call me Jae.”

It was a casual voice that accompanied a casual ambush.

Jae looked like an eight-year-old boy and wielded a pointy broadsword that looked rusted. It had suddenly appeared behind Choi Hyuk and swung its sword.

When Choi Hyuk dodged its attack by a hair’s breadth, it smiled as it blew on him. Brown smoke blew and permeated Choi Hyuk’s body.

‘Huh?’

Though it was unbelievable, Choi Hyuk felt dizzy.

However, Jae didn’t give him a chance to examine his body.

Kwe stood at the back due to its injuries from last time as it changed the course of the nearby monsters.

The monsters were more closely connected than the previous time when they had used the chain-link strategy.

The monsters attacked Choi Hyuk as an enormous wave.

A sea of tens of thousands of eyes filled with killing intent and teeth and claws that could rip one to shreds swarmed towards him. There seemed to be no point in differentiating whether a monster was of the high or highest-rank. It was simply a cosmic disaster.

Rooar!

Monsters within this wave were crushed by other monsters as it continued to advance faster and faster.

Choi Hyuk endured this spell of dizziness as he pushed his sword into this disaster.

With smooth movements as if churning cream, ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’ passed through the monsters’ bones, flesh, and teeth. He broke the wave of monsters up as though he was slaughtering animals.

Puahaha!

Hudrdrdrk!

Though the monsters pushed forward like a landslide, the moment they arrived in front of Choi Hyuk, the wave was ripped to shreds and scattered like a drizzle.

Choi Hyuk calmly wielded his sword while feeling dizzy. His eyes suddenly widened.

“Keuk!”

Baang!

A heavy strike had been hidden behind the wave.

Choi Hyuk barely managed to block it with the side of his sword. Though he blocked it, the side of his sword was pushed back against his stomach. His body bent like a twig against the impact to his abdomen.

“Wow! You weren’t pierced through? It was really powerful this time. Anyways! I’m Myeol!”

It was at this moment Choi Hyuk realized that Jae’s attacks and Kwe’s attacks from behind were all in preparation for Myeol’s attack.

It had used the fact that Choi Hyuk’s focus had become hazy from Jae’s attack to hide and ride in the wave of monster to increase its momentum and punch Choi Hyuk’s abdomen.

Kiririiiiik!

‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’, which couldn’t break, buckled under the impact as it groaned.

“Kaff!”

Blood gushed from Choi Hyuk’s mouth. However, even in this situation, Choi Hyuk didn’t bat an eye as he stared directly at Myeol, who had punched him.

“Wow… Thrilling eyes!”

Flash!

For 0.0001 seconds, no, in an instant even shorter than that, Choi Hyuk lost consciousness.

‘Did it… punch my chin?”

His head turned back. The right side of his chin throbbed as though it was shattered. His body was flung back, unable to withstand the impact. Only after understanding this did Choi Hyuk realize that he had been hit. While it was for an extremely short instant, Choi Hyuk had lost consciousness. His physical body from when he was human was simply a shell now. His body now moved using karma, yet he fainted? Whether this made sense or not, Choi Hyuk sighed in sincere admiration.

‘Ha…’

It was the first time he had experienced this. To think that he would lose consciousness after taking a blow from his opponent during a fight? This didn’t happen even when he faced Narci, a highest-ranked monster, when he was a high-ranked warrior.

The monster known as Myeol was of similar strength to Choi Hyuk. Even if he considered that it had Kwe and Jae’s assistance, its punch just now contained unbelievable talent.

“Haa… You blocked that too?”

However, it wasn’t only Choi Hyuk who sighed in admiration. Forgetting to attack Choi Hyuk again, Myeol alternated its gaze between its fist and Choi Hyuk as it sighed in admiration. Even in its perspective, its punch just now was perfect. Its punch just now

was the most covert, most destructive, and most timely punch it had thrown since birth. Yet, Choi Hyuk blocked this with the side of his sword. Of course, he didn't completely withstand the impact and fainted momentarily due to the blow to his chin.

'I blocked it?'

Though Choi Hyuk was dazed by Myeol's mumbling, it was true. If he hadn't blocked it, that would have been the deciding blow.

Still, Choi Hyuk didn't remember blocking it. It was either he blocked it unconsciously or he forgot after blocking it.

Whatever the case, it left a huge blow to his pride.

"Haaa..."

Choi Hyuk's gaze became cold. A smile hung crookedly on his lips.

It felt like all the hairs on his body were raised and each cell had eyes. A powerful awakening controlled him. The pure, savage emotions Choi Hyuk had always suppressed were released without any restriction as they ran amok.

He wasn't the type to talk a lot during a fight, but without being aware of it, his mouth spoke with a pretentious air,

"It hurts?"

Choi Hyuk didn't know what he was saying after experiencing this feeling for the first time during a fight.

Myeol was the first rival he had met in his life.

**

Blaaze!

A white light shined from Lee Jinhee's raised sword, illuminating its surroundings. 'Lee Jinhee's Vow' was notifying her that Choi Hyuk needed her help.

'I need to protect him! ...But how?'

The situation was different from before. ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ only shined, it was unable to show her a path. Lee Jinhee thought she knew the reason. While she wasn’t certain, there was no doubt there were at least two Exalted-Wing-level monsters attacking Choi Hyuk. There was also no doubt that she would die a dog’s death if she rushed in to help Choi Hyuk.

‘Then what about the other transcendent warriors?’

Helping them was also impossible. The most rational scenario was where they quickly defeated their enemies and went to help Choi Hyuk, but joining a fight between three transcendent warriors and seven transcendent monsters would be a one-way ticket to dying a dog’s death.

‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ didn’t know what to do as it simply shined brightly.

Baek Seoin shouted at Lee Jinhee, who didn’t know what to do,

“There’s no other way now! We need to protect the 13 stars no matter what! If our defensive line remains intact, the transcendent monsters will weaken to a degree! Our duty is to protect the 13 stars so none of them are destroyed!”

Blaaze!

The light shining from ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ surged as if saying he was right. Lee Jinhee bit her lips.

‘What vow…’

She was quite proud when she had helped him in his fight against Kwe last time, but this was the worst. Who was protecting who when she couldn’t even get near the fight between transcendents. Rather than being of direct assistance, she could only use the most roundabout method of all the roundabout methods to help Choi Hyuk.

Though she ridiculed herself, she ground her teeth.

Even if she was upset, she had to endure it. Now was the time to fight with all her strength.

Baek Seoin rushed towards the front and Lee Jinhee followed behind him. Mack was already way out in front of them. There was no point in differentiating the front and rear lines.

**

In the all-out war where there was no distinction between the front and rear lines, Shiro desperately tried to stop Chu Youngjin.

“It’s not logical!”

Her usual stiff voice was nowhere to be heard. She screamed like a child.

“We can only protect the defensive line! That’s the best we can do! You’ll die a dog’s death if you go there! As we are now, we can’t even perceive a battle between transcendents!!”

Chu Youngjin and Shiro naturally followed along when the Event Horizon Troop joined Dragonic. Chu Youngjin didn’t even glance towards Choi Hyuk’s fight so that his relationship with him wouldn’t be exposed.

However, what caught his attention was a different problem on the battlefield. He couldn’t take his eyes off the hellish fight happening between the three transcendent warriors and the seven transcendent monsters.

He was completely entranced by it, like a moth rushing towards a flame despite knowing it would burn to death.

He was fascinated by the overwhelming violence that seemed like it could rip him to shreds just by looking at it.

This was a type of mental illness.

He had been traumatized when he powerlessly watched his girlfriend, the dearest person in his life, being brutally murdered. After that day, Chu Youngjin hated violence more than anyone,

but he was also engrossed by it. Those without hope were bound to resemble what they hate.

Also, the fight between transcendents was the most perfect violence in the world.

“No! You can’t!”

Shiro blocked Chu Youngjin’s path with her body. Him acting recklessly wasn’t uncommon so Shiro had even begun matching his rhythm and fighting alongside him. This time, she couldn’t. She couldn’t lose him like this.

Shiro held him back with the resolve to beat him down if she had to.

“Where are you trying to go?! When you can’t even see them!”

Shiro screamed deafeningly.

However, the next moment, she lost her hold on him.

“Huh?”

She couldn’t ‘perceive’ how Chu Youngjin escaped her grasp.

“I see it. No… I think I see it.”

What resounded in her ears was Chu Youngjin’s voice, who seemed to be dreaming.

“No… Just what are you saying!”

Whoosh!

“Huh?”

Shiro was about to refute his words, but she lost sight of him again.

No matter where she looked, she couldn’t see him.

Her gaze instinctively turned towards the fight between the three transcendent warriors and the seven transcendent monsters.

“You… Crazy bastard!!”

Her cold, stiff face crumbled, almost about to cry.

Jae – Disaster/Calamity

Chapter 189: Dark Clouds (4)

‘Crazy bastard.’

Night Sovereign Ding coincidentally saw Chu Youngjin.

Because he would only end up becoming mesmerized by the fight between transcendents, he was trying his best not to look at the fight and eventually forgot about it while fighting the monsters. That was why he unexpectedly discovered Chu Youngjin. Their gazes had coincidentally met when Ding was looking around to check on his subordinates.

Chu Youngjin was going crazy trying to overcome the ‘wall of laws’.

‘Tsk, tsk. Though they say there’s no one in their right mind amongst the Berserkers, he’s a highest-ranked lunatic. His lunacy must have been bad to be chased out of the Berserkers… but he’s still like that?’

The incident where Chu Youngjin was exiled from Dragonic was famous. An extremely bloody wind blew that time. There was a reason why the talented amongst earthlings, Ding included, attempted to tame or keep the Berserkers in check. Because they were scared. If it was insane, humans were even scared of a crazy dog the size of their forearm, yet they were like crazy tigers.

‘If he’s going to die, he should die while being beneficial for others. He’s also acting recklessly like that.’

Last time, he was beaten to a pulp by Choi Hyuk after coming at him. This time, he was struggling to join a fight between transcendents as a highest-ranked warrior.

He looked utterly shabby compared to his grand reputation.

The battlefield of the transcendents.

Chu Youngjin arrogantly jumped into the space that was blocked

by the ‘wall of laws’, which prevented even highest-ranked warriors from perceiving it. However, he ended up nailed to the middle of the wall. He couldn’t go forward or retreat backwards like a butterfly on a pin. His body shook like a bug zapped by an electric fly swatter.

‘Haa, that must hurt.’

He felt like he could hear the crackling sounds all the way over here. His body was bent at an impossible angle, and it looked like his left arm was rolling up, piercing through his mouth and then out again. His body was flipped inside out, and his leg grew impossibly long as it coiled like a snake.

Seeing a body that should be dead squirming was very grotesque. The object, which was almost too pitiful to call Chu Youngjin now, squirmed as it continued to burrow its way through the wall of laws.

“Chu Youngjiiiin!!!”

A pretty face, but seeing her frighteningly armed state, she was undoubtedly a warrior of the Armored Soul Tribe. She stood next to him, uncertain of what to do, as she wailed. But this didn’t concern Ding. Ding turned his head back.

“Not one of you die! You hear me? Dying here is a dog’s death! You must survive and push towards our target spot!”

Ding shook and slapped his dazed subordinates, grabbing them by their collars, as he instilled them with fighting spirit.

“Let’s live high and big!”

Seeing his subordinates get in formation, Ding nodded.

Before he focused on fighting again, Ding glanced at Chu Youngjin, who continued to advance while enduring the pain. A firm resolve shined in his eyes as he looked at Chu Youngjin with pity.

‘Idiotic bastard. I would never degenerate like him.’

**

The three monster brothers, Kwe, Jae, and Myeol, were the perfect party.

Kwe used the overflowing number of monsters to control the battlefield. The wave of monsters it caused obstructed Choi Hyuk’s view or restricted his movements and, alternatively, assisted Jae and Myeol’s movements.

Jae moved quickly as it nibbled away at Choi Hyuk’s strength. A dreadful curse was present in its brown breath and its saw-like blade, which was carefully and secretly scratching Choi Hyuk. Whenever the curse invaded Choi Hyuk’s karma, Choi Hyuk felt his arms and legs tremble and he felt like vomiting.

Yet, Myeol was the highlight of the group. With its overwhelming power, it clashed with Choi Hyuk head-on.

‘I think I can understand the feelings of a monster in an RPG game….’

Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly.

To a monster facing a party of adventurers, it was advantageous if it took out their healer, magician, or even their archer first.

Yet monsters would foolishly attack the close-ranged warrior in front and die in vain. Choi Hyuk had thought this was due to the limit in artificial intelligence.

But his thoughts had changed now.

Riiiip!

“Keuk!”

He unconsciously groaned.

“You can’t lose focus. I’m Myeol! Mother said I was the most special amongst us five brothers!”

The monster boasted like a child. However, its uncultivated fists were endlessly sharp and heavy. If Choi Hyuk even momentarily tried to keep Kwe or Jae in check, Myeol would notice and approach to launch a fist at him.

“Do you really have to boast what the queen told you to your enemy? Huh, youngest?”

Jae grumbled as it swung its sword at Choi Hyuk, who became rigid after blocking Myeol’s heavy fist.

Seeing how one called her mother and another called her queen, he could clearly tell who was more special.

Myeol was strong enough to justify it. He couldn’t get rid of it at all.

‘Yeah. It’s not that the monsters aren’t able to ignore close-ranged warriors because they’re dumb. It’s because they can’t.’

The wound Jae inflicted on him throbbed. Heat blasted from his nostrils and his mind became dizzy as though he had a fever.

Even at a time like this, a small fist surged towards his chin yet again.

Baaang!

Choi Hyuk barely managed to deflect Myeol’s punch with the side of his sword. Even though he deflected it, his body shook as though it was hit by a cannonball. His hand, which was holding his sword, burned like it was on fire and his head felt faint. Would Earth split apart if it was hit by its fist?

However, Choi Hyuk smiled.

While he wasn’t some pervert, it felt like his head was becoming clearer and clearer the more he got hit.

Shhhaaak!

A black blade covertly aimed at Myeol’s throat. While it looked like he unconsciously launched an attack the moment Myeol hit

him, that wasn't true.

It was a sword strike to determine the victor that was fully infused with Choi Hyuk's talent. Like how hot steam suddenly escaped from a pressure cooker when opened, this was Choi Hyuk's best counterattack, one where he had been waiting to be hit by Myeol while he kept Kwe and Jae at bay. His karma could 'deny' anything. This strike would disintegrate highest-ranked warriors just brushing past them.

Piik.

Yet, Myeol avoided his perfect counterattack. While his sword brushed past its forehead, its eyes were calm. He couldn't 'deny' Myeol with this sort of injury.

What was worse was that it countered right away. Choi Hyuk felt shivers as he saw its fist nail into him.

Jjooong!

'Ah...'

He almost lost consciousness again. It was like this when he was hit in the chin, but it was his side this time. A pain that felt like his flesh was being ripped apart followed after.

A shout now erupted from deep in his heart.

'So you can be this strong at this rank.'

Choi Hyuk had always faced opponents that were of a higher rank than him.

If the fight was difficult, it was because their rank was higher than his.

However, currently, Myeol was of the same rank as him. Yet, this fight was more dangerous than fighting higher ranked monsters before. Even though Kwe and Jae were supporting Myeol, he thought it would be an equal match if they fought one-on-one. That was why, while Kwe and Jae were assisting it, he was being

beaten one-sidedly.

“Kaaff!”

He was hit by the wave of monsters while he attempted to keep Myeol at bay. When he barely managed to push his way out of the attack that felt like his entire body was being fed into a shredder, Jae hacked at his shoulder with its cursed blade. By the time he barely managed to squeeze out his recovery ability against the dizziness that almost made him flop down, Myeol’s fist smashed into his gut.

This was the first critical blow he had taken.

His strength slipped from his body. It felt like his karma, which was embedded in his body instead of muscles, was being torn into pieces. Drool flowed from his mouth, and a cold sweat ran down his back.

The fact that a warrior made of karma was drooling and sweating meant that his karma was currently in the process of collapsing. This was a very bad condition.

Yet, Choi Hyuk didn’t lose consciousness.

A single thought filled his mind.

‘So you can be this strong!’

What he grasped in his fight against Myeol was a possibility. A possibility that surpassed simply increasing in rank and allowed one to reach the highest peak of their current rank.

Choi Hyuk was currently seeing and being hit by this possibility, which he had simply vaguely assumed previously.

At the same time, he realized how strong he currently was and how much stronger he could get.

Jjong!

Even though he was dealt a big blow by Myeol just now, Jae’s terrifying sword swung at him without rest. Blocking its attack

with his sword while his mind was befuddled, Choi Hyuk smiled again.

After getting hit, it became bearable, and after blocking their attacks, it became possible to block them.

He blocked them without thinking about blocking them, and he had a premonition he blocked them before he actually did. He didn't know, yet he did. Choi Hyuk's subconscious rose up and became one with his conscious.

A bead of sweat followed Choi Hyuk's hair and then dripped down.

Choi Hyuk bared his teeth as he clashed with the monsters.

'Th-that monster-like bastard.'

Even though Kwe was a monster, that was the only way it could describe him. They were three out of the five brothers that the queen used her heart and soul in creating. While the queen made them after Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain left an impression on her, the reason why they were dispatched wasn't to face Choi Hyuk, a single transcendent warrior. They were the monsters among monsters that were sent to end the Exalted Wings.

Yet, three out of five of them were busy fighting Choi Hyuk.

Though Choi Hyuk was the one being constantly hit, and the fight with him always seemed to be on the cusp of ending, it didn't. Kwe cheered when Myeol's fist landed on his gut. Kwe thought that this fight would finally end. Yet, after that, the bastard was now unbelievably dodging their attacks. No, it felt like he was getting better at avoiding and enduring as time passed even though Kwe wasn't sure if that made any sense.

Kwe felt an unknown sense of fright.

"Just die!!!"

With his shout, monsters swarmed towards him. Like hardcore

fans in a frenzy in an enormous concert hall, the monsters shoved and stepped on each other as they rushed towards Choi Hyuk with an explosive vigor as though a blocked floodgate had opened.

With Kwe's ability, the densely packed monsters overcame their limits as they attacked Choi Hyuk with fervor. Exhausted, Choi Hyuk would have no choice but to pushed back by their might.

Swiiish!

When Choi Hyuk pushed his sword out, the tidal wave of monsters instantly crumbled into pieces. Black blood fluttered like cherry blossoms, and their thinly minced pieces of flesh were burnt by black flames. It was such an extreme change that one might mistake it for a spring breeze of flower petals rather than a tidal wave of monsters.

"Huh?"

A bit later, Kwe let out a dull sound. The figures of Jae and Myeol, who were running around while hiding behind the tidal wave, were exposed within the slowly fluttering pieces of monster flesh.

Then Kwe saw it.

Choi Hyuk's gaze was locking onto Myeol.

"Ah, Noo!!"

Kwe instinctively shouted.

Just then, Choi Hyuk ridiculed the charging Myeol.

"You did well, but why haven't you advanced?"

There was no doubt that he couldn't even see its fist in the beginning, yet he could now clearly read its path.

It was clearly a blow that could instantly knock him unconscious in the beginning, yet he could now sufficiently disperse its impact.

What was more...

“Let’s end it now.”

He could now land the counterattack that was unsuccessful previously as though it was nothing.

This was the moment he had been waiting for.

Slice!

‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’ cleanly sliced through its neck.

“Huh? Huh?”

It made a dazed sound as though it couldn’t believe its neck was cut.

Though it looked like a young boy, it was a monster.

Sticky, black blood shot out like tentacles and attempted to stick its head back on.

However, since his sword, which was filled with the power of denial, precisely sliced through its neck, the monster didn’t have the opportunity to activate its regenerative ability. Its surging blood caught on fire and evaporated before it could touch Myeol’s neck. Like flames on an oilfield, blood endlessly surged out and disappeared after being burnt up by the flames.

Aware of its own death, Myeol mumbled as only its head remained.

“This isn’t… possible. Mother said I was special… There’s… There’s no way…“

“There is.”

Choi Hyuk mocked as he turned his gaze away.

He aimed his shining black sword at Jae and Kwe. Jae, who had been rushing at him along with Myeol, had at some point retreated and was now standing next to Kwe. He could see the confusion and nervousness in its eyes.

It wasn’t a bad feeling.

“H-how? It’s not like your rank increased?”

Kwe asked in confusion.

Wiping away the sweat from his forehead, Choi Hyuk said with a refreshed expression,

“Yeah. I didn’t increase in rank. I became able to properly manipulate my rank.”

‘Should I thank them?’ While he was happily thinking about this, he suddenly felt a powerful karma and turned around.

A powerful karma swept through the area where the three transcendent warriors and the seven transcendent monsters were fighting. A fourth transcendent warrior, who had suddenly appeared, reversed the disadvantageous situation as he trespassed onto the battlefield.

Choi Hyuk’s smile thickened when he felt the familiar karma.

“Just what was that just now?!”

Choi Hyuk looked at Kwe, who was almost foaming at its mouth, as he happily said,

“What do you mean what? It means you’re all dead.”

Chapter 190: Dark Clouds (5)

It was a very long fight.

When they thought that one thing was over, another thing would swoop in, and when they thought that they overcame that, another would pop out.

That day was no different from deciding the fate of the universe.

**

Myeol's decapitated corpse didn't disappear easily. The retribution it had accumulated in this unfamiliar universe flowed out to form an ocean. The rate at which its retribution flowed out exceeded the rate it dissipated.

A nebula would probably form in this region. First, using the retribution it had accumulated, then later, the great universe would dismantle its retribution and absorb it to create a new fate. A new star would form and then a new karma species would be born.

Choi Hyuk felt a change in himself from the new retribution he had accumulated by slashing through a fate that had crossed over from another universe.

Choi Hyuk felt his karma change. There wasn't an immediate effect since his body was exhausted to the point of drooping. However, he knew that everything would change once he had some sleep. Then, although he wouldn't be able to match Flame-Hell or Dark-Sound, who were considered the strongest amongst the Exalted Wings, his power would only be slightly lower than theirs.

"Hooo..."

Pulling himself together, Choi Hyuk stared at the enemies in front of him. While it would be difficult, he wanted to deal with Kwe and Jae.

However, they were crafty.

“Damn it! Damn it all! But… But you will all die here!”

“How surprising. But it’s too late. This is as far as you’ll go… Though it is a bit of a waste.”

Once Myeol died, Kwe and Jae spoke stale words that only a villain might say before fleeing.

Choi Hyuk attempted to catch them, but he failed. It was difficult to chase transcendent monsters that focused on escaping, and on top of that, he was very exhausted.

In the end, he shook his head and looked at the situation of the war.

It was tragic.

There were no alliance warriors where Choi Hyuk stood, only pieces of monster corpses.

Two stars that were a part of their defensive line were completely destroyed, and the area was filled with bits and pieces of monster and warrior corpses.

Kuaaack! Kuaack!

While the leaders of the monsters, Kwe and Jae, fled, the war hadn’t ended. All around him was an intense battlefield.

Only the area around Choi Hyuk was quiet because no one dared to approach. Choi Hyuk sighed as he stood amongst the remains of the monsters Kwe had controlled and Myeol’s thick retribution, which floated in space like a liquid.

“… I’m thirsty.”

How long had it been since he felt this?

He wasn’t just thirsty, he felt hot and drowsy. This was the effect of his body becoming imbalanced.

“Should I rest for a bit…? I wish there was a cool drink.”

When Choi Hyuk said these weak words, someone arrived next to him and handed him a cup filled with refreshing liquid.

“You worked hard.”

Unknown when he arrived, Night Sovereign Ding was standing with a sincere face while holding a cup.

Choi Hyuk’s gaze alternated between the cup and Ding.

“… What are you doing?”

Though he hadn’t received it yet, he felt the chill emanating from the cup on his lips and cheeks. Just from this, he felt like he was freezing.

Choi Hyuk knew what the drink was – ‘Glacier Tears’. It was the drink Mack let him taste while bragging about the dragon race’s technology. The drink had a strong effect on karma, so much so that it even gave Choi Hyuk, a mid-level transcendent warrior, a buzz. If he drank this in his currently extremely exhausted state, he could forget everything and fall asleep as if it was strong alcohol.

In some ways, this was ideal. A refreshing drink after a battle. It was good.

However, the problem was the fact that the battle hadn’t ended yet. Though the scales of victory leaned on their side with Chu Youngjin’s awakening, the battle between the transcendent warriors and monsters had yet to conclude. Drinking this wasn’t advisable in a situation like this.

Choi Hyuk looked around at his surroundings.

The area was empty like a demilitarized zone. He and Ding stood at the center while around a hundred or so earthling warriors surrounded them. They looked to be Ding’s direct subordinates. Unfamiliar machines the size of one-room apartment units were set up around, above, and below Ding and him.

Choi Hyuk truly found it odd.

“Don’t tell me… You’re going to come at me?”

The situation seemed like it.

Others weren’t paying attention here because they were focused on fighting. On top of that, because of the intense power emitting from Myeol’s corpse, they couldn’t peer through it even if they wanted to unless they personally came over here. Choi Hyuk was exhausted after his intense battle. A hundred or so warriors and unfamiliar devices surrounded him.

He couldn’t believe it.

But, if that wasn’t the case, then why would they play a trick like this in the middle of a fight?

Ding smiled as he saw Choi Hyuk was taken aback. It wasn’t a naïve smile that hid his inner thoughts nor a nervous smile. It was, without a doubt, one of ridicule.

“Why? Didn’t you say that you were thirsty?”

As if his voice was a cue, he felt something explode with a pop.

A chill permeated around him like when one opened a freezer on a hot day. The space around him felt dense like ice cream, and his head ached as though he ate a pile of ice.

It suddenly became difficult to breathe and move.

Even when he tried to move his karma, his karma didn’t move as though it was frozen.

Even Myeol’s dead retribution, which flowed continuously, halted as if time had stopped.

“Is this perhaps…”

When Choi Hyuk mumbled absent-mindedly, Ding smiled brightly. It was a cruel smile.

“If would have been better if you drank this as well, but it doesn’t

matter. How is it? It's a technology we're developing to take down the queen of monsters."

He threw away the cup in his hand. The cup flew slowly. The liquid inside splashed out of the cup in a clump. Ding's movements seemed somewhat restrained.

"... Your rank has fallen too? Early middle rank... No, peak low rank?"

"Yeah, just like you."

While he didn't know how they did it, his, Ding's, and the hundred-odd warriors' ranks had standardized at the peak low rank.

All karma beyond a certain limit was frozen, unable to be used.

Choi Hyuk grumbled,

"If you had something as good as this, you should have used it on the monsters."

"We're still developing it. We need to use it when fighting the queen so it would be troublesome if they figured it out and took precautions against it after us having used it beforehand, wouldn't it?"

Ding explained quite friendlily, seemingly thinking he had won.

"Armored Soul Tribe?"

When Choi Hyuk took this chance to ask in more detail, he slyly shrugged his shoulders.

It wasn't a question that really needed an answer as it was obvious either way.

"That's not what's important right now, commander. The main point is you're currently surrounded by a hundred warriors equal to you, isn't it? Up till now, it felt like the whole world was yours, didn't it? I'm jealous. However, even still, you shouldn't have offended me."

As though he had been waiting for this moment, Ding couldn't endure his happiness and waved the weapon in his hand.

"It's stifling to move in space because my rank dropped. Let's end this quickly, commander."

He aimed his sword at Choi Hyuk with cold-blooded eyes.

Tang!

His sword was flung from his hand. Ding didn't know what happened.

"... Huh?"

His face became flustered.

"I think you're mistaken about something..."

Choi Hyuk revealed a bloody smile.

"Did you think you'd win if our ranks were the same?"

The 'Game of Thrones' crossed his mind. The incident where the students and teachers had gathered in the gymnasium to kill each other. That time, everyone was of the same level. And Choi Hyuk came out victorious amongst them.

Also, the difference between Choi Hyuk's fighting senses then and his current senses now was as vast as the difference between the Laniakea Supercluster and Earth.

Pstch!

"Kah! Grrr...."

Ding, who was taken aback and attempted to flee, was unable to dodge and collapsed with blood foaming from his mouth after his throat was pierced.

Myeol's head was still cut off, Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin were too busy with their own fights to pay attention to the situation here, and Chu Youngjin was about to awaken as a transcendent warrior.

**

There were two memories Chu Youngjin couldn't erase from his mind.

How Lee Hyejin's shoulders trembled in his embrace.

And the final smile of the doppelganger queen, who had looked identical to her.

Though he acknowledged that the doppelganger played him for a fool, it was still a memory of despair.

Memories where he failed to protect her when he said he would.

Her existence which he had lost once in his embrace and again behind his back.

That was why there was a lingering reluctance he couldn't give up even though he fought to die.

'I want to get stronger.'

He didn't hope for much. He hoped to possess enough strength to protect the person in his arms, the person whom he could hold onto if he just stretched his hand out.

No matter who that was, even if that person was Choi Hyuk.

Even if he lost everything, he hoped for the strength to save the person in his hand.

What should he say if he met Lee Hyejin once he died?

'Sorry. No matter what I tried, I couldn't do it.'

Chu Youngjin couldn't say such words. Rather, he wanted to get on his knees and apologize.

'If I tried a bit more, if I became stronger a bit faster…'

He believed he should suffer like this.

Lee Hyejin died because he didn't try. Twice. He had to think this and feel guilty. Only then would he never forget her.

Chu Youngjin needed to get stronger.

“Grraaaaaah!!”

He repeatedly thought this while stuck like a fly against the ‘wall of laws’. Even though it was so painful it felt like someone had rubbed salt on his wounds after tearing his body to shreds, he continued to advance forward. Because he lacked the effort. Because he had to prove that he lacked the effort to protect even one person.

At some point, ‘Chu Youngjin’s Protection’ began to shine brightly.

‘What protection. I couldn’t protect anything…’

The sword that was created through Lee Hyejin’s death. While shining, the sword, which made him sad, lonely, and sorry, transformed. It obtained a new fate fueled by Chu Youngjin’s transformation.

His body, which couldn’t overcome the ‘wall of laws’ as though it was stuck to it with glue, suddenly became lighter.

His twisted body returned to normal without a trace.

‘This… is the world Choi Hyuk sees….’

Chu Youngjin instinctively realized that he had entered the transcendent level.

He could clearly see inside the ‘wall of laws’.

Light-Maze, ranked 24^{th} in this alliance, was taking on three monsters, while Dark-Feet, ranked 49^{th}, was fighting two, and Kalon, ranked 119^{th}, was fighting one. This meant that, naturally, one monster remained. The warriors were losing out by a difference of exactly one monster.

Chu Youngjin knew what he had to do.

He instantly chased down the monster that was causing a ruckus

as it went between the three warriors without anyone keeping it in check.

“Ah, no!!”

Kalon shouted when he saw Chu Youngjin’s actions.

“Kehih!!”

The monster that was targeted by Chu Youngjin didn’t show any traces of being flustered as it created an explosion, seemingly having waited for this opportunity. The explosion was strong enough to annihilate nearby enemies, even if they were at the transcendent level.

The warriors who suffered heavily for not knowing this at first frantically kept a distance from it throughout their battle.

Blaaze!

However, Chu Youngjin, instead, rushed towards the explosion. He didn’t even bat an eye.

The red sword in his hand emitted a light. The light shined in a very small radius. A short distance that Chu Youngjin could reach it if he stretched his hand out. However, everything within this radius disappeared.

‘Chu Youngjin’s Absolute’.

Chu Youngjin’s sword, which was reborn as a Weapon of Conclusion, possessed an absolute influence within any area his hands could reach.

As long it was within this radius, Chu Youngjin was confident he could kill a transcendent-level monster in a single exchange as this was the fate he hoped for. The power to eliminate anything that was a threat to the person within his arms or next to him with absolute certainty.

Ptsch!

“Keuk?!”

The monster's expression revealed its disbelief.

Though Chu Youngjin, having become a transcendent warrior, wasn't as versatile as others and didn't have any special characteristics like Choi Hyuk, he obtained one thing – an outstanding close combat prowess that could kill anything within a certain distance.

The transcendent-level monster's body was ripped into tatters at his continuous sword strikes.

With this, it was over.

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"Huh... Amazing."

Light-Maze gave Chu Youngjin a blank look. While it was only within a close range, he was shocked by the divine power Chu Youngjin revealed.

It was enough to make him, who was ranked 24th in the alliance, discouraged.

Chu Youngjin had an irregular power. While it was impossible to control in fine detail, as long as the conditions were met, he was a weapon that could wield absolute power. In the perspective of his opponent, the best they could do was predict it in advance. If it activated, his attack would leave them with heavy losses.

His first display was quite impressive. The six monsters that were fighting the warriors were inevitably killed when Chu Youngjin approached. If Chu Youngjin was a normal transcendent warrior, it would have been impossible for him to cause such an extreme reversal.

"Are all earthlings monsters...?"

First, Choi Hyuk, and now Chu Youngjin, they were two weapons that could be used in any situation, despite facing potentially difficult opponents.

Light-Maze shook his head as he heard a screaming voice.

“Chu Youngjin! Chu Youngjin! You crazy bastard!!!”

Shiro screamed as she approached once the ‘wall of laws’ dispersed after the fight.

Chu Youngjin saw her, who always looked cold-headed, in a new light.

Without realizing, he stretched his hand out towards her as she cried, saying how she thought he would die.

“Hey!!”

Before the tips of his fingers could touch her hair, Choi Hyuk called out to him. No, he wasn’t particularly calling out to him as he called out to all the transcendent warriors there.

“If you’re done, come here!”

Earthling corpses were scattered around Choi Hyuk. Around a hundred of them.

“What is this?”

“Foolish yet thankful guys.”

Choi Hyuk gathered the machines floating amidst the corpses and told Baek Seoin, who hastily arrived, to store them.

“But…”

After gathering all the machines, Choi Hyuk lowered his voice. His gaze was on Myeol’s decapitated head.

“But I don’t think this is the end.”

He sounded fed up. However, his voice also contained some nervousness.

“That’s…”

Chu Youngjin followed Choi Hyuk’s gaze and saw it. After being decapitated, Myeol’s body kept spewing a ferocious power. Yet,

that wasn't important. Something more ferocious than this ferocious power was squirming, awakening, within it.

"Don't tell me..."

"No way!"

"What... are we supposed...?"

Light-Maze, Dark-Feet, and Kalon, who had fought with their lives on the line just now, showed extreme reactions.

They looked like they were resenting without a target to resent, asking how this could be, before becoming uneasy.

Choi Hyuk revealed a bitter smile.

"I only noticed now after all this time because these guys had played a trick on me."

Only after killing Night Sovereign Ding and his 100 subordinates and disarming the machines did his karma return to its normal state. It was at that moment when he sensed this ferocious power.

Choi Hyuk ground his teeth as though he was fed up with it as well as he asked, "It said its name was Myeol... It's probably the character Myeol for 'demise', right?"

If it was demise, then something came to mind. A force that overwhelmed even Exalted Wings. Not an incomplete one he had faced with Flame-Rain before, but a complete one.

The words Myeol said flashed through his mind.

'Mother said I was the most special!'

He also recalled the last words Kwe and Jae had said.

'Damn it! Damn it all! But... But you will all die here!'

'How surprising. But it's too late. This is as far as you'll go... Though it is a bit of a waste.'

Choi Hyuk felt like he finally understood why it was special and why it was a waste.

Myeol’s stomach ripped open, and an enormous hand, which one wouldn’t imagine could come out from there, abruptly appeared.

Chapter 191: Denial and Glory (1)

The five brothers the monster queen created were, in fact, ‘bait’ to destroy the Exalted Wings.

The five brothers had already destroyed the Heracles, Coma, and Perseus-Pisces Superclusters and were pushing the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters to the brink of ruin.

If they crushed Choi Hyuk’s resistance and slaughtered all the soldiers attempting to flee, the queen calculated that the Exalted Wings would have no choice but to act.

The monsters’ forces were simply too powerful. With the five brothers that were comparable in strength with Exalted Wings and 13 early transcendent-level monsters, their forces equaled almost a third of the alliance’s total strength.

A third, this was the ratio the queen had painstakingly decided on. A force powerful enough that many of the Exalted Wings would have to personally partake in the battle to stop them. A force just powerful enough that they would be able to stop them if they overexerted themselves a little.

There was no doubt that the alliance would drag the five brothers deep into their formation to reduce losses, focus their forces, and prevent any of the Exalted Wings from dying in battle.

This was what the queen had predicted.

She predicted that at least eight Exalted Wings and many high-ranking warriors would participate in the battle since that would be the only way to stop the five brothers without taking any large losses.

The moment the battle began, the queen’s trap was complete.

The special youngest brother, Myeol. It was a booby trap.

The moment Myeol died, a demise-ranked monster would be

born in the middle of the alliance. It was expected that the monster that could collapse an entire universe on its own would slaughter all the Exalted Wings gathered there and break all the systems in the alliance. Even if they were Exalted Wings, they wouldn't be able to confront a demise-ranked monster without any prior preparation and in an exhausted state after fighting the five brothers.

However, this plan was ruined thanks to Choi Hyuk.

The five brothers, who had promised to meet once they annihilated the Shapley and Laniakea Superclusters, had lost Myeol before they could even gather.

Thanks to this, the booby trap that the queen had prepared had activated, not in the middle of the alliance, but in the Laniakea Supercluster, which could be considered to be at the border of the alliance.

This was great news for the alliance.

To the warriors participating in Dragonic's defense, however, this was a nightmarish situation.

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Even Choi Hyuk, who loved fighting, was somber regarding this situation.

Only its arm had come out, yet it felt like the entire universe was screaming.

This wasn't the underdeveloped demise-ranked monster he had killed with Flame-Rain in the past. This was a fully matured demise-ranked monster.

In this current situation, where Flame-Sky, the alliance's strongest warrior in history, was no longer alive, it was the only existence to have overcome the limits of the transcendent level.

Kuaaaah`!!!

The demise-ranked monster's roar burst through Myeol's ripped belly.

That moment, Choi Hyuk grabbed Baek Seoin and retreated. That wasn't all. The other transcendent warriors hastily flew back as well. Chu Youngjin held Shiro as he ran back.

"Kueh... Ak...."

Yet, Baek Seoin and Shiro, who were both highest-ranked warriors, couldn't endure the impact and trembled. Blood burst from Baek Seoin's eyes and ears, and sparks flew from Shiro's body accompanied by the sound of creaky, rusted gears.

It was the same for Choi Hyuk. Instantly, the senses in his entire body seemed stunned.

When he blankly turned around, he saw warriors breaking ranks and retreating like a receding tide. The ones who fled were lucky. Even though the monster had only roared, he saw quite a few whose chest had exploded from the vibrations.

The ringing of its roar vibrated and burst the warriors' veins. A bloody taste lingered in his mouth as though he had eaten steel.

'This is unbelievable...'

He saw a fear-stricken Kalon. It seemed Chu Youngjin's legs had frozen up as he was punching his thighs. Light-Maze and Dark-Feet looked fine, but their bodies were trembling subtly.

Choi Hyuk had no choice but to admit that his thoughts were completely wrong.

'There is a huge gap between reaching the limit of the transcendent level and my current level.'

Encountering a true demise-ranked monster felt like a shock, similar to when he saw the monster Narci back when he was a middle-ranked warrior.

No, it exceeded that because the demise-ranked monster made

him feel that they couldn't win. This was the first time he felt this way since meeting Dark-Sound for the first time when he joined the alliance.

Baek Seoin trembled in his arms as he barely managed to say, "Le... Leader. Those... machines. Those machines... Reactivate them..."

It seemed he was trying to tell him to reactivate the devices that suppressed his karma before. Choi Hyuk smiled bitterly as he shook his head. It didn't seem possible to stop this demise that had already started to move with the machines. Also, there was a bigger problem.

"Sorry, I didn't know how to turn them off so I cut everything that looked to be a power source."

Baek Seoin's eyes were filled with disappointment.

"God... Damn it... This is why you have no friends..."

Baek Seoin had always been respectfully, but it looked like he bore quite a grudge. Currently in a state where his rationality was paralyzed by the fear of this demise, his inner thoughts made their way out his mouth.

It felt like he was seeing an acquaintance talking nonsense under an anesthetic.

Choi Hyuk ended up chuckling when he saw Baek Seoin grumbling nonsense while wasting away.

Thanks to that, his stiff body relaxed.

He left Baek Seoin, who had almost fainted, with the other Berserkers and examined the situation once more.

"We need to disperse in different directions!!"

Dark-Feet, who had been relatively calm, shouted.

"Do you think we can escape the demise like that?"

Light-Maze ridiculed while trembling.

Even the transcendent warriors were stricken with fear.

‘Still, this is a bit much…’

No matter how amazing a demise-ranked monster was, these reactions were too severe for experienced transcendent warriors.

A bigger problem was that Choi Hyuk himself wasn’t much different either. This was true now even though he had regained his cool. Something like a scream rampaged inside him and rocked his karma. It felt like his body wasn’t his own as though he was possessed by a ghost.

‘Ah…’

Thinking about this, Choi Hyuk found the answer.

What was scared wasn’t him.

It was the universe.

The universe itself was seized with fear at the appearance of demise. Choi Hyuk’s karma was of the universe in the end. It rolled and shook along with the scared universe.

Choi Hyuk couldn’t do anything about this universal phenomenon.

‘Flame-Rain’s father slew a monster like this on his own?’

He smiled bitterly as he mumbled,

“Just when are the support troops arriving?”

**

Around the same time.

Lights went on simultaneously at the ‘Brain’, which was located in Alliance City.

The screams of Exalted Wings filled the ‘Brain’.

{A demise! A demise-ranked monster has appeared!}

{There was no hint of it until now!!}

{That's not the problem! It has appeared in the Laniakea Supercluster, where Army Leader Choi Hyuk and the others are isolated in!}

{If it's that place... Isn't that where Exalted Wings Dark-Sound and Leviathan requested support troops?}

{We need to let them know of this situation and cancel support!}

{...}

In the midst of their buzzing voices, it was Dark-Sound who was quiet. He felt like his heart was being sliced into thin pieces.

'Shiro... So I lose you in the end as well.'

He had believed that he could give up many things for that child, yet... for a demise-ranked monster to appear. That was his limit. If he didn't cancel sending the support troops, then even they would be annihilated, and if that happened, his grand scheme would be off the table as well. He had longed for this grand scheme his entire life – for revenge. Even if it was Shiro, he couldn't protect her whilst giving up on his grand scheme.

'A cruel world until the end...'

While uncertain to whom he should resent, Dark-Sound broke his silence and contacted his support troops.

{A demise-ranked monster has appeared in the Laniakea Supercluster. The 13 Exalted Wings demand the support troops to retreat.}

{Hmm...}

Leviathan groan in grief when he heard Dark-Sound's message.

The other 11 Exalted Wings waited quietly. Soon, a reply came from the middle of the Brain.

{Is that so?}

{...}

Then there were no more words. To say, ‘Is that so?’ instead of ‘Understood’?

{We demand you retreat! Did you hear us?!}

Flame-Fog shouted in an irritated voice, unable to contain his patience.

Yet, there was no reply.

**

Just then, the demise-ranked monster was about to show its face. Its two shoulders and arms had already come out and were grabbing the universe. The distant stars looked stretched thin like a meteor shower due to how the universe was bending.

Those who wanted to flee had already fled.

Even the monsters fled. They were unconcerned about formations as all things that lived with a fate couldn’t help but run when faced with ‘demise’.

The only ones who remained were the transcendent warriors. They knew better than anyone else that running was useless. They were the only force that could resist it.

“Our goal... is to inflict even a wound the size of a fingernail. We need to make it constantly use up its strength... so that the warriors who come after us will be able to fight it a bit more easily. Leaving even the smallest wound on its body will be evidence that we lived as warriors of the alliance.”

Light-Maze resolved himself, having already given up on his life.

While Choi Hyuk was very displeased with how he assumed they would face defeat, he couldn’t correct him.

Even his fighting senses that had reached their peak after fighting Myeol was of no use. When looking at the demise-ranked monster, all he saw was demise. There was a fundamental

difference between them. He couldn't even guess its weak points, let alone find them.

Kuoaaaaah!!!

The monster's second roar rang out. It rang more loudly this time as its entire head was extended out from Myeol. The demise-ranked monster didn't have eyes, ears, or a nose. All he saw were its widely-opened mouth filled with teeth.

"Keuk!"

Kalon, who was the weakest among them, lowered his head. His flowing nosebleed drenched his front.

"Keuuuuh!!"

With his nose bleeding as well, Chu Youngjin bitterly endured it. His eyes were so bloodshot that blood dripped from them.

With just its roar, it was able to damage warriors who had reached the transcendent level.

Seeing them like that, Choi Hyuk silently stepped forward.

His sheath, which he threw, spun as it flew towards the other side of the universe.

"I still have to try."

Choi Hyuk tightly gripped his sword handle.

He acknowledged that the monster was stronger than him.

He acknowledged that he couldn't see any openings.

He acknowledged that he could die.

Acknowledging all this, Choi Hyuk stepped forward. The moment he aimed his sword at the now fully extended head, he once again denied everything.

He would break its strength, create an opening, and reject death.

Choi Hyuk's sword shot towards the demise-ranked monster.

A completely reckless strike.

Yet, a miracle opened up behind his sword.

Kwaoooh!!!

Choi Hyuk's sword extended towards the monster's head while erasing space. A gate that looked like it could swallow an entire planet opened up just above it.

It looked like a prosperous sky was opening up behind Choi Hyuk's back.

The boom that exploded from the gate erased the lingering effects of the monster's roar.

It was a stronghold enshrouded in delicate flames. The stronghold, which could be called a planet, fell directly towards the monster's head.

Everything changed at that moment.

Everyone felt it. The fates that had left this great universe had returned on a large-scale. This new inflow of fates awakened the universe.

A fiery shout resounded throughout the universe.

"Look at you all!! Pull yourselves together! Everyone attack!"

It was Flame-Rain's voice.

The support troops Leviathan had promised Choi Hyuk before the situation changed had arrived.

Chapter 192: Denial and Glory (2)

Flame-Rain had left the monsters' universe. As difficult as her mission was, she led a force that made up 15% of the alliance's strength. In it were five warriors that ranked in the top ten excluding the Exalted Wings, eight in the top 50, and ten warriors at the transcendent level outside of that. Her force consisted of the most elite warriors as she was the only Exalted Wing leading it.

That wasn't all. Each of the three dimensional strongholds mobilized to colonize the monsters' universe was comparable to the size of Earth.

The largest and sturdiest among them, 'Deus', had crossed over with Flame-Rain and was charging at the demise-ranked monster. Having already exceeded its max speed, 'Deus' didn't slow down as it fell directly onto the monster's head.

Though the gate opened a bit behind Choi Hyuk, it instantly passed him and crashed into the monster's head.

Booooooom!

The sound wasn't as loud as expected.

The moment the gigantic stronghold impacted the demise-ranked monster's head, it crumbled, reducing in size.

The enormous object that was larger than a planet crumbled to reveal its core.

Deus's colossal mass compressed into the size of three watermelons as it pierced into the monster's head.

"Kuah?!"

The monster opened its mouth wide under the impact.

However, the true impact had only begun.

It could be considered that Deus's core largely consisted of three power sources, but in reality, there was only one.

Karma weapons of fallen warriors taken from the Tower of Warriors;

The Flames of Beginning that remained from the Big Bang; and

A black hole also known as the hole of the universe.

There was only one in the end, however, as the black hole devoured the karma weapons and Flames of Beginning.

The black hole born from this exhibited such a powerful force that it could be considered a world inside the world.

The black hole was, by nature, an isolated world. There were even scientists from Earth who guessed that the universe we live in was also inside an enormous black hole.

The black hole used as Deus's power source was a black hole, which was a small universe, granted with the essence of karma.

The black hole grew by devouring karma weapons and the Flames of Beginning, and it freely manipulated space-time to create a 'complete world' which even Exalted Wings couldn't easily approach.

A world crashed into a demise.

"Kuaaahhh-!"

The monster's scream erupted after a delay, but there was a pitiful note to it.

'We'll win!'

The warriors drew hope from the monster's scream.

Flame-Rain didn't miss this opportunity.

With herself at the lead, the 23 transcendent warriors charged forward with their lives on the line.

Light-Maze, Dark-Feet, and Chu Youngjin, who were watching blankly, regained their senses and also charged towards the demise-ranked monster.

“We end it in a single clash!!”

Flame-Rain’s voice ignited the warriors’ fighting spirits.

The demise-ranked monster didn’t have eyes, ears, or a nose. It only had an enormous mouth.

Its teeth had even densely filled the ceiling of its mouth, and each one exceeded the power of the transcendent warriors’ karma weapons. Like karma weapons, fate was indwelled in each of its teeth. ‘Demise through disease’, ‘Demise through war’, ‘Demise through time’… In the end, they were all demise.

Every time it roared, its densely packed teeth resonated to release the power of demise without restraint.

“Someone shut its mouth!”

“Yes!”

Flame-Rain’s right-hand man, Light-Blue, who was ranked 20th, replied cheerfully.

The speckled lights which made up her body created a long needle and thread from the production factory inside. Like a skilled physician, Light-Blue sewed the monster’s mouth in an instant.

Keu-!!!

Its mouth shut, the demise-ranked monster could no longer shout as it struggled. The warriors’ attacks shot down from above.

Their attacks could slice through continents, pierce through skies, and freeze and burn as though they were creating hell. The monster helplessly endured their attacks as it hadn’t regained its senses after being hit by Deus and having its mouth sewn.

Brrrrk!

Until its teeth popped out above its sewn mouth.

It was a strange sight. The teeth inside its mouth came out one

after another and ripped its lips. The lips Light-Blue had robustly sewn together were powerlessly ripped apart.

It opened its mouth once more.

Crunch!

It bit down on the world.

It was similar to Choi Hyuk's 'denial'. No matter how far apart they were, the distance between them was devoured and disappeared. When they came to their senses, they were already inside the monster's mouth. Six transcendent warriors were swallowed.

Drip.

Each drop of blood stickily flowing from its mouth and shined like warning lights. Light-Blue, who had sewn its mouth, and Kalon, who had participated in the defensive battle for Dragonic, instantly lost their lives.

Without even the time to register the shock from this unreal scene, the monster roared again.

"Kuaaahhh-!"

"Kuah! Block it! Block it!"

It felt like flames were blazing – flames known as fear. In an instant, their once optimistic mentality evaporated and their bodies trembled. The warriors attacked violently out of desperation to flee from the monster's nightmarish teeth.

Their attacks naturally avoided its teeth, concentrating on the back of its head or its shoulders.

Choi Hyuk, who had been diligently wielding 'Choi Hyuk's Denial' while mixed in with Flame-Rain's support troops, retreated at some point.

His eyes narrowed.

The demise-ranked monster received a huge shock from Deus's self-destruction attack and had yet to recover. However, it was quickly regaining its strength. While, at a glance, the warriors' desperate attacks seemed to overwhelm the monster, in reality, they weren't able to deal the decisive blow.

'Its head and shoulders aren't its vital points.'

Choi Hyuk concentrated. Its weak points, which he couldn't see previously, slowly became visible.

His fighting senses which reached their extreme peak in his fight against Myeol finally shined. Like how he could later see Myeol's fist, which he could barely see at first, in detail, he currently saw the demise-ranked monster.

Choi Hyuk's eyes shined with a black light.

"It's the teeth!"

Choi Hyuk shouted.

Light-Maze, Dark-Feet, and Chu Youngjin, who were fighting nearby, reacted to his voice.

'... Its teeth?'

Its teeth had instantly slaughtered six transcendent warriors. Its teeth had powerful enough energy to make their bodies freeze just by looking at them. Yet, for them to be its weak point, it was hard to believe.

However, the one who said this was Choi Hyuk. They couldn't simply ignore it.

During this time, Choi Hyuk's sword went through space and clashed against the monster's tooth.

Jjoong!

"Keuu..."

Choi Hyuk let out a groan.

‘Denial… didn’t work on it?’

At first, Choi Hyuk’s karma smoothly burrowed into its tooth, yet the moment it was about to cover the tooth, it was bounced away more quickly and smashed into his chest.

It felt like smashing his hand into a metal plate. The palm of his hand hurt, and a ringing resounded throughout his body.

However, Choi Hyuk slashed out with ‘denial’ once more. Though it was bounced away, his karma did burrow into its tooth.

‘Let’s see how long you can last.’

Jjong-!

“Keuk!!”

The demise-ranked monster, which seemed fine no matter how much they attacked its head and shoulders, finally showed a reaction. Even though his hand panged with pain as though it was being torn apart, Choi Hyuk became certain. In some ways, it was similar to when he was facing Myeol, Kwe, and Jae. Monsters were different from humans. Their weakest points weren’t their weakness, rather, their strongest points were their weakness. There was no other way to kill the demise-ranked monster besides breaking its teeth.

It was the most dangerous method, yet the only method.

The monster opened its mouth wide. He saw its densely packed teeth. Would there be any effect from breaking one? Hundreds of teeth which exceeded Choi Hyuk’s strength attempted to swallow him like they did the six warriors before.

“Block it!”

Light-Maze’s voice rang out.

Baang!

Chu Youngjin’s sword stabbed into its cheek and exploded. While the monster flinched momentarily, its blank face scowled scarily as

it bit towards Choi Hyuk.

Blaaze!

However, its teeth didn't reach Choi Hyuk. Dark-Feet stood in front of Choi Hyuk as he glared at the monster.

"No one can touch my body without my approval."

Dark matter, which couldn't be seen or touched, filled the universe. While it filled the universe, dark energy couldn't be seen or touched.

While their names were similar, one possessed gravitational force while the other possessed a repulsive force that pushed stars away. The common notion among earthlings was that these two things were different. However, the great warriors of the Dark Tribe could manipulate both of them. They could consume their bodies to create dark energy. The dark energy inside the monster's mouth expanded explosively. Like stars growing apart at a speed faster than the speed of light, the monster's lower and upper jaw were swiftly pushed apart. Roaring, the monster's face scowled more severely.

"Kuaaah!"

Just then, Light-Maze pushed its cheek. He was attempting to make it turn its head to devour a different area. The speckled lights in his body created a propellant like rocket fuel. Light-Maze's brilliantly shining body looked like a comet. The monster's head gradually turned, but it was slightly too late.

The demise-ranked monster suppressed the dark energy, which had expanded by squeezing Dark-Feet's life, and devoured a part of the universe again.

Crunch-!

The demise-ranked monster's teeth missed Choi Hyuk thanks to Light-Maze frantically turning the monster's head. However, Dark-Feet, who was in front of him, couldn't avoid them and was

sucked into its mouth. As a member of the Dark Tribe, he didn't bleed a single drop of blood. A clump of invisible energy simply slapped Choi Hyuk's cheek.

All this happened in a moment.

Choi Hyuk was powerless.

Grrt!

He gritted his teeth. He wasn't taken aback or scared, nor did he blame himself. He simply raged. 'Choi Hyuk's Denial' smashed against the monster's teeth.

Jjong!

Due to swinging his sword at an extreme speed, there was only one impact though he swung three times.

Vomiting blood, Choi Hyuk was ricocheted away.

"Kuaaah-!"

The demise-ranked monster's scream was the news he had been eagerly waiting for, and its broken tooth was his spoil.

It was the first effective strike since the stronghold 'Deus' smashed into its head. The warriors' gazes fixated on Choi Hyuk and the monster's broken tooth.

Choi Hyuk didn't cheer since he only successfully broken a single tooth out of hundreds.

Choi Hyuk got into position once more and swung his sword. As always, the distance between the monster and him was instantly 'denied'. Choi Hyuk stood in front of the monster and attacked its tooth.

Jjong!!!

'More! More!'

Choi Hyuk was impatient. Though he was already overexerting himself and heat boiled from his body, it still wasn't enough.

‘Denial’ was undoubtedly effective. However, the instant the fate of demise inside the tooth was denied, it was filled up again like a spring. He had no choice but to instantly swing with an overwhelming strength like before to cut that flow off.

A battle of attrition.

In addition, time wasn’t on Choi Hyuk’s side.

‘Before it recovers from the impact!’

Even now, the monster had only partly recovered from the impact from Deus. Yet, it was already this difficult.

‘More!!!’

Choi Hyuk swung in desperation.

Jjong!

The monster’s tooth emitted a loud sound as it shook, but it wasn’t enough. He couldn’t continuously wield the same strength as before.

Cough!!

His internal injuries became more severe from the recoil of not being able to break its tooth. He drew bloody saliva. It was difficult to breathe as if he was biting down on a blood-soaked rag.

The problem was their incompatibility.

‘Denial’ was the power to erase everything and return it to nothingness, but ‘nothingness’ and ‘demise’ weren’t greatly different concepts.

Choi Hyuk’s Denial denied even demise, but the space where everything was turned into nothingness became the home for demise again. The two powers endlessly snatched each other’s space. Choi Hyuk had exhausted too much of his strength from fighting consecutive battles to cut this cycle instantly.

Thud.

Someone supported Choi Hyuk's back, who was pushed away from the recoil.

"I'm here."

Her voice sounded like she had been on a walk.

A sword shrouded in transparent flames passed above Choi Hyuk's exhausted shoulder and hit the tooth he had swung at just now.

It was the Weapon of Conclusion Flame-Rain possessed, 'Flame-Rain's Glory'.

Her flames burrowed into the monster's tooth, which was filled with nothingness through Choi Hyuk's Denial.

Glory bloomed in a place with nothing.

The moment her karma and Choi Hyuk's karma lingering in its tooth met, a powerful explosion erupted as though oxygen was fed to a flame.

Baaaang!!

It was much more impressive than when Choi Hyuk forcefully broke a tooth earlier. The monster's tooth exploded as even its roots were pulled out. It was easy and snappy, like making popcorn. Everyone's gazes were stolen by this scene, even the demise-ranked monster's.

"Huh...?"

Choi Hyuk blankly stared at Flame-Rain.

"...Ah?"

Flame-Rain also foolishly looked at Choi Hyuk.

The two of them shuddered at the chemical reaction of their karmas.

In a dazed voice, Flame-Rain said,

"Uh... I think we're quite compatible?"

The problem of incompatibility.

If there was a glory that surpassed all glory, it would be the creation or resurrection of a world.

‘There is light.’

In the world of nothingness created by Choi Hyuk’s Denial, Flame-Rain’s Glory became the light announcing a new beginning.

Kuaaah-!

The monster’s belated scream didn’t register in Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain’s ears as they looked at each other.

Chapter 193: Spring of the Great Universe

Later on, Flame-Rain would recall this fight and say, ‘It was a thrilling romantic comedy!’ She would then proceed to boast about how well-informed she was of Earth, making comments such as, ‘How about it? Don’t I sound exactly like an earthling now?’

Choi Hyuk, on the other hand, who didn’t enjoy watching movies and dramas, didn’t have much feeling towards the words ‘thrilling’ and ‘romantic’, but whenever he recalled the strange fight that day, he too unknowingly ended up shaking his head.

**

“Should we do it again?”

She laughed like a child with the screaming demise-ranked monster in the background.

When she tapped Choi Hyuk’s shoulder, without realizing it, he immediately swung his sword at the tooth next to it.

Jjong!

Flame-Rain’s sword followed right after it.

Glory filled the vacuum created by denial.

Baang!

It was the same this time as well. The demise-ranked monster’s tooth popped out like a piece of popcorn, accompanying the explosion caused by denial and glory.

Her villainous grin widened.

“All troops!! Cover us!!”

Her order heated the warriors’ bodies as though they had taken a shot of strong vodka.

Speckled lights gradually shone brighter and members of the Flame Wing Tribe members interspersed the universe with flames.

Darkness spread by the Dark Tribe members cast shadows and the Armored Soul Tribe members made metallic sounds that were like guns being loaded.

An orchestra in space.

The demise-ranked monster that tried to capture Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain was the conductor, the transcendent warriors that slashed, smashed, and pushed to obstruct it were the musicians, and Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain were the dancers in the center.

Bang!

A tooth popped out.

Bang, bang!

Two teeth popped out.

Even as she narrowly dodged the monster's attacks with the help of the other warriors, Flame-Rain's face gradually blossomed into a bigger smile.

If Choi Hyuk decided on a target, Flame-Rain would follow his lead, and when Flame-Rain popped a tooth out, Choi Hyuk would look back at her and deliberate their next target. Since she kept laughing, Choi Hyuk laughed as well as though he was infected.

"I think we're crazy."

Flame-Rain said.

"I've never gone crazy like this..."

Choi Hyuk replied.

To think they would laugh like this while fighting a demise-ranked monster, which made the entire universe tremble in fear. They weren't scoffing or laughing manically, rather they naturally began roaring with laughter. The moment they thought, 'I never imagined such a funny fight...' they would smirk and laugh.

Of course, it didn't only make them laugh. It was thrilling as

well.

Even the monster's smallest movements distorted space and made stars look like streaks, and its hard claws and teeth, which were hard to discern, poured down on them like a waterfall or subway. Even though its attacks didn't land, they had to protect their bodies with karma to survive and their cheeks and chests tingled as though they had been slapped. Cold sweat ran down their backs every time they narrowly avoided the monster's attacks.

However, after perspiring cold sweat, they giggled due to the thrilling chill.

"Blow it away!"

"Push!"

"I'm on my way there!"

The warriors suppressed the demise-ranked monster with all their strength, and Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain danced. They laughed as they danced a dance that would lead to their gruesome deaths with a single misstep.

Every time the monster's claws swept the universe and its teeth devoured space, Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain, like falcons, would target its teeth with their blades, popping out one after the other like fireworks brightening the universe.

Then, at some point...

{Kuaaah! Feel the demise!!}

Enraged to no end, the monster sent out a comprehensible telepathic message as it raised its upper body like a snake and took a big bite of the world.

Cruuuuuunch!!

"...Huh?"

The heatedly fighting warriors suddenly froze.

No one could react to the monster's sudden action. Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain were no longer in sight.

Its mouth was firmly shut.

"Don't tell me..."

The warriors became pale.

The demise-ranked monster's mouth curved upwards.

Just like that, its mouth tilted back and exploded.

Baaaaaang!

The monster's dented head exploded.

Whoosh!

Hundreds of teeth shot up into the air.

Stepping on the monster's slumped torso, Flame-Fain held an exhausted Choi Hyuk up as she stood in place.

The 'Spring of the Great Universe' had begun.

**

Killing a demise-ranked monster was completely different from killing any other monster.

The death of a demise-ranked monster, whose existence approached the bounds of a law of the universe, created a phenomenon that was called 'the Spring of the Great Universe' throughout the universe.

The universe, which had been trembling at the sight of demise, cheered at this unexpected victory.

Having overcome demise, new possibilities opened up for the universe. Warriors would get stronger, karmalings would prosper, and new species would be born.

Standing in front of the demise-ranked monster's remains as it melted from the light of the universe and dispersed, the warriors

could confirm this as fact.

Like a sunrise, the universe became transparent starting from its edges. From this transparent beyond, a warm, red light rose like the sun. A horizon was created in the universe that had been dark in every direction. As if the sky was opening, the light in the horizon slowly pushed on and covered the entire universe. White and red light fluttered like feathers.

“Wow… Look at this.”

Flame-Rain propped Choi Hyuk on top of the crumbling demise-ranked monster’s body and jumped around. Since she was jumping around on top of a corpse, it should have looked strange, yet contrarily, it was a beautiful sight. The demise-ranked monster melted into the universe as its corpse dispersed into specks of light, and Flame-Rain jumped around like she was running through a shimmering field of spring flowers. She chased after the fluttering red and white lights. She tried eating them, sticking them to her hair, and twirling around.

Her cheeks glowed, and transparent flames blazed on her hair.

Choi Hyuk thought she was dazzling.

He suddenly realized that he no longer saw the symbols and lights shown by his Eyes of Distinction and Eyes of the Judge, which had helped alleviate concerns from his actions. They had changed so naturally that he didn’t realize it.

Choi Hyuk now simply read a portion of people’s will and fate.

His ‘Eyes of Distinction’ allowed him to sense the other’s will towards him, and ‘Eyes of the Judge’ allowed him to read the relationship between one’s fate and his.

Her will was still firmly directed at him, and her warm fate was embracing his cold-hearted one.

While this information wasn’t as intuitive or simple as seeing a white light or a blue shield symbol, perhaps she was more dazzling

because it was so.

While what kind of goodwill she possessed towards him and how her own fate embraced his own wasn't as simple to read as before, because he knew them more clearly, she was dazzling.

Acting exhausted, he closed his eyes and mumbled,

"Thanks."

"Huh? What did you say? This nunim who was cold-heartedly rejected yet magically appeared to save your life couldn't hear you properly. Say it again."

Choi Hyuk shook his head when she smiled and acted innocent even though she had heard him clearly.

He had refused her proposal of going to the monsters' universe together with her and had fought as a loyal subordinate of her mortal foe, Flame-Hell. Yet she was still like this.

'What's making her so happy for her to laugh like that?'

Seeing how he didn't speak and simply shook his head, Flame-Rain laughed. Then she looked up at the universe, which was now clearly dyed like spring flowers, and said,

"It's spring."

In this spring which had clearly arrived, warriors who had scattered to run from the demise-ranked monster were now looking for each other as they gathered.

Chu Youngjin was the same. He traversed through the gently glittering universe to find one person.

Even though he suffered a moderately severe injury and was completely worn out, he felt like he had to find that person.

It was a highest-ranked warrior who had been unable to bear the monster's roar and had retreated. Since he didn't know where she went or if she was alive, it was a suffocating search.

‘Not here, not there.’

Though he needed rest and get treatment, perhaps it was due to his exhaustion, but he couldn’t think at all. He searched for her thoughtlessly like a machine with a predetermined command.

Just as his vision became blurry and his strength left his arms and legs, he finally discovered a familiar silhouette. She too discovered him.

“Chu Youngjin!!”

Even hearing it again, she sounded awkward because her voice was overfilled with emotion. Still, it wasn’t bad.

“Ha… I found you.”

As soon as he said this, all his tension relaxed. Chu Youngjin lost consciousness. It was fine since she was alive. For some reason, a smile hung on his lips.

Shiro embraced Chu Youngjin.

She covered her smooth, hard skin with warm, gentle karma.

She recalled the fight against the transcendent-level monsters, which she couldn’t perceive let alone join in, and the fight against the demise-ranked monster that followed soon after. Then she gazed down at Chu Youngjin, who had come looking for her after all the fighting had ended.

While it was impulsive, she made a decision.

She whispered quietly,

“When you wake up… I’ll tell you about the grand scheme. Let’s fight together, and bask in the glory together. From now on.”

To Shiro, them partaking in the grand scheme together meant that they would be fighting together in the most important battle in this war, which could be considered her life. It meant spending their lives together.

She couldn’t imagine this great warrior, who had come looking for her, rejecting their grand scheme.

No, it was her selfishness. She no longer thought she would fight apart from him.

Her unease disappeared, and certainty and expectations filled that space.

This was the first Spring of the Great Universe since Flame-Sky died slaying a demise-ranked monster.

Some said that those who watched this spring together would be tied by fate and that if they held hands or gazed in each other’s eyes when the dark universe turned transparent and white and red lights fluttered like feathers, they would become once-in-a-lifetime lovers or friends…

**

As the Spring of the Great Universe occurred at the same time throughout the universe, the Exalted Wings soon learned that the demise-ranked monster had died.

“Haa… Was this a blessing in disguise?”

Dark-Sound’s eyes shined.

Shiro was alive. Just this fact filled his heart with emotion.

Yet, that wasn’t all. The entire situation was the best.

While the demise-ranked monster was killed, a significant number of remnants remained. Dark-Sound now had the justification to personally mop them up.

Flame-Hell would have no choice but to personally act following Dark-Sound’s suggestion in order to keep Flame-Rain, whose name spread once again as a hero of the alliance, in check.

That wasn’t all. He was able to confirm that Light-Maze and Choi Hyuk were both alive through the restored communication network.

There couldn’t be a better opportunity than this.

“Carry out the grand scheme.”

Finally…

Finally, this day had arrived.

Dark-Sound revealed a huge grin.

*

“Apparently, Youngjin obtained Dark-Sound’s trust.”

“Then tell him to kill Dark-Sound during this expedition. The method will be… the same method he requested me to use.”

A more respectful version of nuna, which is how a younger guy would refer to an older woman.

Episode 12 - Final Episode

Chapter 194: To Hope for the End

{I will go off to war soon. Flame-Hell will most likely follow after me. Keep up your loyal appearance. It's also good if you look like you have a lot of desires. Then you will be selected as his guard. Wait for the opportunity to kill him.}

It wasn't like Dark-Sound personally came looking for him.

Dark-Sound's voice whispered in his ear as he was walking down the streets of Alliance City, the night sky darkening.

"After killing Flame-Hell... What next?"

Choi Hyuk mumbled inwardly. He heard Dark-Sound's distant voice.

{After that... will be the start of a new era.}

Alliance City's sky was colorful. It was a dream-like sky that recreated the native skies of species in the alliance.

A section blazed with flames, while another was completely black, and one section was filled with brilliantly shining stars, making it look like a desert. There was even a frosty sky. While the sky was mainly recreating the native skies of the top four tribes, night had now arrived in the section that had recreated Earth's sky. The Big Dipper shined once in the dark sky.

**

{Earth's environment will be introduced to Alliance City.}

{An evaluation regarding whether earthlings will be appointed as a 'High-Ranked Warrior Species' will commence.}

{The galaxy that Earth was a part of and its solar system will be renamed 'Earth Galaxy' and 'Earth Solar System' respectively.}

{Restoration of Earth in the Earth Solar System, Earth Galaxy, Virgo Cluster, Laniakea Supercluster will commence.}

Choi Hyuk traversed through Alliance City.

Under the influence of the newly introduced Earth's environment, cherry blossoms grew densely and yellow forsythias peeked out between the buildings. If it wasn't for the aliens that crowded the streets, it would feel like he was on his way home after school as even the buildings were erected in Earth's style.

Following Choi Hyuk's footsteps, the warriors who were on the streets made way and saluted, "For life and freedom!"

Choi Hyuk calmly walked down the path opening up in front of him.

He didn't look back.

{This is Flame-Thorn. You've probably heard her voice a lot before.}

Flame-Hell had an abundant beard while Flame-Thorn's cheeks were smooth. Although her clear skin composed of flames showed no signs of age, her imposing aura made her feel like a great senior. She had a human-like appearance but was also transcendent like the large figures of the Four Heavenly Kings in ancient temples. She gave off a different feeling compared to Flame-Rain, who was generally friendly.

Choi Hyuk bowed his head slightly before meeting their gaze.

'I'm finally at this point.'

In the immeasurably tall pyramid known as the 'alliance', Choi Hyuk had crawled up from the deep underground and was now looking up at its peak.

No one could disregard him as he had brought upon the Spring of the Great Universe for the first time in thousands of years.

He could now face them 'almost' as equals.

Flame-Thorn glanced at Flame-Hell as she smiled faintly.

{I'm the one who suggested designating earthlings as a high-

ranked warrior species.}

Unlike Flame-Rain who always talked to Choi Hyuk in Korean, Flame-Hell and Flame-Thorn talked to him in their native tongue.

{I respect you, who has made exceptional achievements starting as a low-ranked species, and the earthlings.}

Flames blazed following her smooth hand gesture. It was their own way of expressing respect. It was a hand gesture he had often seen while leading the Flame Army.

{At this point, it's impossible to not reflect on Earth's recruit training method. We considered you simply as a species living at the border... Thinking about it now, it would be sufficient to call you a brother of the Flame Wing Tribe considering your appearance and potential.}

Flame-Thorn spoke slightly apologetically yet annoyingly. She observed Choi Hyuk's reaction after saying this.

Behind her smiling eyes, she coldly observed him to see if he held any grievance from the recruit training and how he reacted when she said, 'brother of the Flame Wing Tribe.'

"A brother of a great tribe... What an honor."

Choi Hyuk acted like a young warrior who possessed absolute confidence in his skills but also cared about the alliance's evaluation of him. He showed them what they wanted to see.

{Hahaha, making each other proud... It's a great relationship.}

Not only Flame-Thorn, but even Flame-Hell was delighted at Choi Hyuk's answer.

They didn't hide their pride as members of the Flame Wing Tribe. They possessed a thorough sense of elitism and speciesism. These traits were also decisive in why they separated from Flame-Rain.

Choi Hyuk secretly glanced around. There were six warriors

guarding Flame-Hell and Flame-Thorn. They were surprisingly all transcendent warriors. Should he say that this was expected of people who stood at the peak of power and violence in the universe?

{We have decided to dispatch the Flame Army to the monsters' universe, which is under Flame-Rain's jurisdiction.}

The gentle mood slightly cooled. Flame-Hell observed Choi Hyuk.

{Only, I hope that Army Leader Choi Hyuk will remain with me. First, as my guard. We can discuss your next position slowly afterwards. Since I am planning on calling back the earthlings again... It might not be bad to create a new army centered around earthlings. Whatever the future holds, I promise you that I won't disappoint you.}

They were sending the Flame Army, which was renown as the most elite troop, to the monsters' universe to keep both Flame-Rain and Choi Hyuk in check. On the other hand, Flame-Hell strengthened his support base by keeping Choi Hyuk next to him.

Upon the miracle known as the Spring of the Great Universe, Flame-Rain's popularity shined throughout the universe. Flame-Hell's move to keep her in check and to bring Choi Hyuk, who was as popular as her, by his side wasn't a bad one.

{In the past, we weren't able to pay sufficient attention to you. For a warrior of your skills, you should have long since taken command of the battlefield. Luckily, there is a perfect opportunity for you as we'll be advantageous in the war against the monsters for a while. Look at the big picture now. Starting from the recruit training, there were probably many points that were difficult to accept up until now. Our alliance policy has a bit of a... heartless side to it as well. However, I'll take measures personally from now on. What I want you now is to grasp the inevitable actions of leading a 'war' rather than a 'battle' and personally change the

field.}

Saying that everything would be different from the past, Flame-Hell praised and comforted Choi Hyuk with his words and gestures.

“Changing the field… Then what should I do next?”

Choi Hyuk directly met his gaze and asked. As if he had been waiting for this, Flame-Hell replied benevolently as he stretched his hand out towards him.

{It’s the exalted history you will forge. You too will become a wing of history. You will see a new world.}

Choi Hyuk courteously bowed his head and held Flame-Hell’s hand.

However, he had different thoughts in his mind.

‘Everyone’s… thinking of the future.’

Flame-Hell was looking far into the future by keeping Flame-Rain in check, setting the Flame Wing Tribe in an absolute position in the alliance, and the winning the war against the monsters.

Like how he had lived for tens of thousands of years, he was also looking at tens of thousands of years into the future.

Dark-Sound and Flame-Rain were no different in this regard.

‘It’s okay if you don’t assassinate Flame-Hell. Everything’s changed now. Dark-Sound? It’s fine to ignore him. If he keeps pushing you… Then I’ll definitely protect you. Also, wait a little longer. I’ll make this universe more worthwhile… and more loving. That’s why… don’t hate so much. Other things, and yourself as well.’

Choi Hyuk thought about Flame-Rain, who spoke confidently like a young queen with great consideration.

Choi Hyuk believed that she would bring forth a great future.

However, since the day Earth's fate had been determined, Choi Hyuk had never thought about the future. His fate didn't include the future.

"A new world... I can almost already see it."

Choi Hyuk smiled as he looked at Flame-Hell.

**

"Youngjin, kill Dark-Sound. It'll be your final mission."

Baek Seoin demanded as though he had left Dark-Sound's death in his care.

As though he was handing Baek Seoin an item he had left behind in his care, Chu Youngjin nonchalantly replied, "Yes."

When the communication ended, Lee Jinhee grabbed hold of Baek Seoin.

"... Will it be possible?"

Would Chu Youngjin be able to kill Dark-Sound? Would Choi Hyuk be able to kill the 12 remaining Exalted Wings afterwards? Lee Jinhee thought things were proceeding too quickly. Couldn't they proceed when they were more prepared? When they looked even further into the future? When they were more certain of their chances?

"Leader... seems like he's being chased by something."

Baek Seoin stopped in place and looked at her.

"While it may be meaningless to calculate the probability of winning... If we were to, it'd be less than 10%."

He talked about this gloomy prospect as though it wasn't all bad.

"It's an unbelievably high probability."

This wasn't sarcasm.

The probability in which earthlings, who had been Consumables, could completely slaughter the most powerful individuals in the

alliance was 10%. In some ways, this could be considered incredibly high.

“What if Youngjin gives up his mission? To be honest… It’s been a long time since we’ve met.”

“Then we’ll wait for the next opportunity… or we’ll all die after being sadly discovered.”

Baek Seoin replied blandly.

Chu Youngjin could sleep.

The conversation from this morning kept lingering in his head.

While he had replied easily at the time, the ripples in his heart gradually grew larger as time passed.

Though he didn’t know why, various emotions entangled and murmured in his heart.

On nights he couldn’t sleep, Chu Youngjin would normally sit rigidly in his dark room. The thick darkness, in which he couldn’t even see his own hands, made it feel like he was abandoned in the vast ocean, and it also gave him the feeling of being enclosed in a coffin, unable to move a finger.

When he sat there like that, a sudden thought would cross his mind.

‘Must have been very scary.’

This wasn’t his own fear.

The girl who couldn’t step onto the Ring of Rebirth, where they killed each other, in the very end that fine afternoon.

Some disappeared after being killed by their colleagues, while she remained alone in the classroom after the others, who had killed their fellow students, had left. Her hair became disheveled above her trembling shoulders, and the sun cruelly shined its bright rays down on her.

Even though he hadn't witnessed it, it was as vivid as a memory. What he couldn't forget was the fear Lee Hyejin had felt that day.

"Kill him, huh...?"

It was sweet.

While humans were being slaughtered like bugs, those at the very top remarked that it was an 'inevitable sacrifice' before they continued on indifferently. And if someone stabbed and killed one of them at the peak and then mocked them? Just imagining it caused his mouth to fill with a bittersweet taste, akin to that of soju, and his heart began to thump furiously.

Someone once stated that revenge was an emotion of slaves. Fuck that.

However, once the bout of giggling madness passed, similar to sobering up, his chest suddenly felt stuffy. He couldn't figure out why.

When he opened his door and left, he was in a yard filled with rectangular doors.

These rectangular doors stood like trees in this white space where it was impossible to distinguish the floor from the ceiling. The big ones were the size of buildings, while the smaller ones were the size of mouse holes. From wood to steel, there were doors made of various materials. This was the 'Garden of Doors' in which the 'Event Horizon Troop' resided.

Chu Youngjin quietly walked through this place. Walking in a white space after leaving his dark room gave him an unpleasant feeling for some reason.

After walking for a while, he came across a long bench amidst the doors. Gulp-sized drops of drinks that could be drunk at any time floated around it.

Shiro was sitting on the bench, unmoving, like a picture.

“Ah.”

She looked surprised when she saw him.

Chu Youngjin asked,

“Why aren’t you sleeping?”

“I naturally don’t sleep.”

“Then do you sit there every day?”

“No… I just had something on my mind. But why aren’t you sleeping?”

“It’s not like I really need sleep either… Let’s just say I had something on my mind as well.”

Chu Youngjin plunked himself down next to her. Seeing her, it felt like his complicated mind was calming down.

Looking straight in front of her, she opened her small, glossy lips and asked, “Because of the grand scheme?”

“… I guess you could say that?”

Since Choi Hyuk’s plan of killing all the remaining Exalted Wings after killing Dark-Sound could also be considered a grand scheme.

“You’re going to be Dark-Sound’s guard on his expedition, right?”

The moment he heard her voice, his chest felt stuffy again. Yes, now he understood the reason. This cold girl, born as a weapon of war, Puppet Shiro. When she mentioned Dark-Sound, her voice was filled with affection. Chu Youngjin knew this.

“… Yeah.”

His reply was late.

Shiro looked directly at him as she said,

“While I probably don’t need to say this… Please take care of him.”

She smiled before swallowing a marble-like drink drop floating in the air.

She changed the subject.

“Once the expedition is over and Flame-Hell is killed, it’ll be the start of the real battle. Not everyone will acknowledge the new rule, especially the Flame Wing Tribe, who might resist vehemently.”

Chu Youngjin noticed her eyes igniting with revenge. Strangely, this cruel emotion seemed to wash the stuffiness that filled his chest.

“After killing Flame-Hell… And the battle after that ends? What about then? Did you think about it?”

Shiro blinked at his question.

“After killing him…? I never really thought about it. I think I’ll only know once we get there.”

Chu Youngjin grinned. What she said was true. To first finish what you desperately wanted. Once you thought, ‘I don’t know what comes after,’ many things became simpler. Like how she was set on killing Flame-Hell, he too had decided to kill Dark-Sound. His current feelings, the tragedy that would ensue afterwards, those were all things he could think about then.

Chu Youngjin and Shiro sat peacefully without saying a word.

The world was already messed up from the first step.

The current sense of peace was deceptive since Choi Hyuk and he, Chu Youngjin, would smash everything apart in the end. This machine woman, who had stood by his side, would despair and rage because of him. Even though he knew this…

‘It’s good like this for now. When that time comes, I’ll deal with it then… Though I’ll probably not even be alive by then.’

The more irresponsible he became, the calmer his heart was.

Suddenly, Shiro opened her mouth.

“Now that I think about it… There’s something I want to do after this battle ends.”

“What is it?”

“Uhh… Umm… It’s a secret.”

Seeing Chu Youngjin laugh in a bland manner, Shiro added, as if making an excuse, “No, I mean I’m not saying it’s confidential. It’s my own personal secret.”

Chu Youngjin blinked. Like the world hidden behind his eyelids, whether it was a secret or not, he wouldn’t be able to know what the future entailed.

“Yeah. Though I don’t know what it is, I wish you the best.”

It seemed she was somewhat embarrassed by his reply as Shiro stooped her head down.

Alcohol popular in Korea

Chapter 195: Ripped Wings (1)

“This plan first came up… on the day Hyunsung died.”

Key individuals in the Berserkers were gathered around Baek Seoin. Naro, Lee Jinhee, Bae Jinman, Zero, representatives from both the Kundle Tribe and glass crabs, and lastly, Choi Hyuk.

They were gathered in the square inside Naro’s spaceship. The floor was made of glass, and below it lay narolings, who looked like they were made from kneaded marshmallows. The artificial light, which shined down from the high ceiling, diffused like a gentle fog as it shined on the cheeks and elbows of the dead narolings. It was a square as well as a cemetery.

They each sat on a square boulder as they listened to Baek Seoin. Around a hundred egg-shaped machines hummed as they rolled around them.

“That day, I thought about how we could bring the 13 Exalted Wings together in one place. About how we could we deal with those vicious warriors in one blow…”

Baek Seoin let out a big sigh.

“A method to gather the 13 Exalted Wings, who have never gathered since the founding of the alliance, in one place. Unexpectedly, I quickly found an answer. There’s an event in which they have no choice but to gather for. I became certain during Hyunsung’s funeral.”

“Don’t tell me…”

Bae Jinman’s voice was stiff. Baek Seoin immediately agreed.

“That’s right. A funeral. The funeral of an Exalted Wing at that. If Chu Youngjin kills Dark-Sound, there will be a funeral… and even if it’s for a moment, the remaining Exalted Wings will have to gather. However, there’s a likely chance that Exalted Wing Flame-Rain, who is in charge of the monsters’ universe, won’t be able to

attend.”

Baek Seoin stealthily glanced at Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk sat quietly with his eyes closed.

Besides Choi Hyuk, the rest were seized with fear and horror, like people sticking their heads out the water.

{But…}

Whiiek!

The representative of the glass crabs who followed the Berserkers, ‘Fragile’, sounded scared. Using a blue, thumb-sized glass pebble as her home, her body trembled pitifully on top of the boulder.

“It is impossible to kill all the Exalted Wings gathered in one place. While Leader Choi Hyuk is strong, it’ll be difficult for him to last even a minute in a fight against 12.”

Zero spoke what the others were feeling as he calmly opposed.

However, Baek Seoin leisurely flicked his finger.

Whooong!!!

The machines scattered around the square emitted a noise and stood up at the same time. It felt like an unknown power was sweeping around them.

{My karma… is frozen?}

Moonmoon, the representative of the Kundle Tribe, noticed the situation and jolted up. His plump sausage-like body twisted around as he looked at his surroundings.

“These were the devices used to ambush Leader Choi Hyuk?”

Bae Jinman guessed correctly, yet even his voice was trembling.

“That’s correct. ‘Karma Suppression Devices’. According to the dragon race’s analysis, you could call this the summation of the Armored Soul Tribe’s technology. After obtaining them, we were

able to improve them for our goal with the assistance of the dragon race and the joint research of the glass crabs, Guardian Bae Jinman, and Naro.”

“Even still, can they suppress the karma of 12 Exalted Wings?”

Bae Jinman was still pessimistic. Baek Seoin didn’t falter.

“That’s why we called the representatives of the Kundle Tribe and the glass crabs.”

While Baek Seoin was always calm and logical, at the moment, his eyes were shining with madness.

“The leader has his own fight while we have our own. For the ‘Karma Suppression Devices’ to suppress all 12 of the Exalted Wings, we need an immense amount of energy. And, there are only two places that can supply that much energy in Alliance City.”

Lee Jinhee bitterly answered,

“… The Tower of Warriors and the Light of Eternity.”

“Yes. On the day of the funeral, we need to capture the Light of Eternity.”

The mood suddenly changed at those words.

Before, they were lost like people who were plunged in water, but once a specific goal and method was decided, their eyes shined with a murderous glint like Marine Corps preparing for a mission.

“What an honor. It’ll be the end of us if someone leaked this outside… To trust us this much.”

Moonmoon said while staring at Baek Seoin.

Whiiik!

Fragile of the glass crabs agreed with a whistle.

Baek Seoin smiled faintly.

“The majority of the Kundle Tribe and glass crabs left the Berserkers and stayed on Dragonic. However, doesn’t the fact that

your two branch tribes have followed us until now mean that you have no regrets about losing your lives? You are also Berserkers. You are all great anti-socialists."

While the situation wasn't funny, they laughed.

After laughing together, their gazes gathered on Choi Hyuk as if it was decided beforehand. He hadn't said a word throughout the meeting.

The alliance ruled the great universe, yet they recklessly planned on killing their top leaders in a single blow. The warriors attending the meeting decided that they would participate without any doubt regarding this plan despite the fact that their chances of death would be very high. Their gazes were quite serious.

The mood felt like he should say some firm words as the ringleader leading them to their deaths.

A strange expectation lingered in their gazes.

Choi Hyuk blinked before standing up.

"Are we done? Then rest well as you prepare for the battle. It'll be our very last fight together, and we'll have to use all our strength during the battle."

That was all.

There were no words of encouragement or assurance nor a confirmation of his trust.

Yet, these words gave them a strange sense of relief and belonging.

Zero smirked. The others shook their heads in laughter.

Lee Jinhee had a sour expression as she mumbled,

"He's never doubted us since he's never taken care of us in the first place."

Choi Hyuk was like that.

He didn’t promise the Berserkers anything. He simply fought without looking back.

The Berserkers were more like a group of crazy warriors who followed him rather than an organization or force. On top of that, all the ones who would leave had already left. Only those with a high level of craziness remained. Even if he didn’t do anything for them, they were swords that would follow behind him. Choi Hyuk had never doubted these swords.

As always, he simply took the lead without looking back.

“I guess we’ll soon see the peak of madness.”

Bae Jinman said as if refreshed while chuckling.

**

Dark-Sound’s expedition.

An Exalted Wing personally participating in combat was a very rare incident. Dark-Sound’s combat ability was passed on through records or heroic tales told by old warriors, one couldn’t personally witness his splendor.

Warriors were curious.

The 14th Exalted Wing, Flame-Rain, and Choi Hyuk, who was 1st on the ranking of alliance warriors, had already proven their brilliant valor. Then what would Dark-Sound, who was always mentioned when discussing the strongest amongst the Exalted Wings, be like?

Would his senses have dulled since he had left the battlefield for so long?

Or would he be praised as expected?

Thanks to this unprecedented event, the mood of the alliance was heating up like a festival.

This monster subjugation plan, which started with high hopes, however, was unexpectedly dull...

… At least, in their universe.

“We’re changing our plans. After killing the demise-ranked monster and at our advance, the commanding monsters, including Kwe and Jae, all evacuated to their own universe. This is our chance. We’re going to chase them to their universe and deal a blow. The bigger the blow we deal, the longer the alliance will be able to prosper.”

When he couldn’t achieve the results he had hoped, Dark-Sound didn’t hesitate to attack the monsters’ universe.

This was a move expected of someone with the greatest authority in the alliance, and he displayed a fighting spirit no less than that of an active warrior.

“The monsters’ universe…”

Chu Youngjin mumbled as his eyes became more serious.

The monsters’ universe was completely different from the alliance’s. It wasn’t an endless vast and dark place with shining stars, instead, areas were twisted and folded. It was one of confusion, where worlds and various matter from other universes, such as a tree or ocean the size of a galaxy, mixed together like a dump. There were areas densely packed with larva-like Kahur Kabkuns.

It was a strange world, one of fear because it wasn’t as orderly as their own universe, yet it was also beautiful like a surreal painting that mixed together different sights.

After chasing the monsters down using the traces they left behind, they soon saw the retreating monster army in the distance.

Their goal was to annihilate them before other monsters noticed and swarmed them.

Dark-Sound revealed his true character in this battle.

“This place is currently my territory.”

There was a total of ten transcendent warriors following Dark-Sound, three of which were assigned as close guards, including Chu Youngjin.

“You three follow me while the rest of you scatter. We’re going to finish this in one blow!”

Accompanying his order, Dark-Sound’s white face dispersed like smoke.

The subjugation force let out a sigh of admiration.

Dark-Sound had completely hidden his appearance. A black darkness spread from the place he had been standing in.

The Dark Clan was known to be outstanding amongst the Dark Tribe.

They were pure-blooded, powerful individuals born from dark matter, which occupied 85% of matter in their universe.

The universe familiar to these warriors was contained in the darkness he created.

This darkness charged forward as fast as light.

It looked like this unfamiliar, strange universe was being devoured by their own.

This wasn’t simply a darkness. It was a weapon created by dark matter, Dark-Sound’s Weapon of Conclusion ‘Dark-Sound’s Darkness’.

The charging darkness covered and imprisoned the monsters. The relatively weaker monsters died as their limbs twisted like puppets solely from the pressure.

Dark-Sound’s voice rang out from within the darkness.

{I caught the commanders! Guards, intercept the captured commanders! The rest of you scatter and kill them all! It’s a battle of speed!}

Dark-Sound's attack was a wide-scale crowd control skill that the younger warriors hadn't ever heard of before. While it might not last very long, the monsters touched by this darkness either froze or moved extremely slowly.

The warriors rushed in and began their slaughter.

The three warriors who were initially guarding Dark-Sound were among them.

They ignored the monsters that couldn't move after being swamped in darkness and shot directly towards the four surviving brothers, Kwe, Jae, Lan, and Ryuk. They were quite far away from the main army, but none of them cared. Once the fight began, those who weren't at the transcendent level couldn't overcome the 'wall of laws', and the remaining transcendent monsters would be dealt with by the seven transcendent warriors.

In the end, the four brothers were caught and darkness ambushed them.

{I'll restrain them! Kill them!}

Dark-Sound did his best to restrain the four brothers. Caught by Dark-Sound, who returned to his original appearance, they flailed around in this darkness like beasts submerged in a swamp.

Dark-Sound's three guards had to kill them before he became exhausted.

The moment it seemed like everyone was charging in with the same goal, one had a different plan in mind.

Chu Youngjin bit his lips in the middle of this thick darkness.

The time had come.

Whether it was coincidence or fate, it was currently the best place and situation.

Wanting to successfully complete his grand scheme and become the new ruler of the alliance, Dark-Sound wanted a four-on-four

battle out of his greed for achievements. Since the four brothers possessed strengths similar to that of Exalted Wings, Dark-Sound's side was at a disadvantage. However, because of this, their victory would fall solely on Dark-Sound if they won.

While it wouldn't be an easy battle, Dark-Sound was confident in his victory with the information he had obtained until now. With two warriors that placed in the top ten of the warrior rankings and Chu Youngjin, who specialized in close-combat, he was confident that they would win if he could restrain the monsters for a certain amount of time.

On the other hand, Chu Youngjin thought,

'No one will know what happened in the middle of the monsters' ranks.'

His gaze swept past Dark-Sound, his two guards, and the four monster brothers.

In this moment where they were all caught up by each other...

In this moment where they were all submerged in darkness...

As things balanced out one by one,

'I'll kill them all.'

'Chu Youngjin's Absolute' shined in a terrifying red light as it was unsheathed.

Lan = 'Disorder', Ryuk = 'Kill'

Chapter 196: Ripped Wings (2)

Thump. Thump.

His heart raced with a determination that could smash the world.

Due to overextending his karma, his head ached and felt like it had been wrung like a dry throat, and his eyes felt hot.

Huu! Huu!

With every breath, he could see each of his enemies.

Dark-Sound would be the last one Chu Youngjin would kill as his restriction powers maintained this tense equilibrium of strength. He needed to leave him for last so that he could kill the rest, including the monsters and the witnesses.

He decided a monster would be his first target. He needed to kill one monster for the fight to be three warriors against three monsters. Also, the order would be from the weakest to strongest. Then his first target would be Kwe, whose support ability was more outstanding than its actual fighting power.

The unsheathed ‘Chu Youngjin’s Absolute’ extended towards Kwe.

Even while it was flailing in Dark-Sound’s grasp, Kwe was displaying blatant malice towards them.

Every time it cursed, its vigor, which even Dark-Sound couldn’t completely restrain, shook and the attacks of the transcendent warriors narrowly missed or were deflected.

{You will be ripped to shreds! I’ll rip your souls, stick them back together, and then rip them up again! I’ll knead Dark Tribe members into mush and use them as a mold to create new monsters, rip out the souls of Armored Soul Tribe members and revert them to slaves, and stuff the bodies of the Flame Wing Tribe members-}

“Shut up.”

Crunch!

Chu Youngjin’s red sword ripped through Kwe’s cursing mouth and shot out the back of its head.

Kwe’s eyes shook with shock before its head exploded and it died. It was no longer able to curse them again.

Kwe, who mainly used support skills, couldn’t be Chu Youngjin’s match as the trait of his sword, like its name, was ‘Absolute’ within a close distance.

{Amazing!}

{… Are all earthings’ fates so extreme…? They are so strong too…}

Dark-Sound’s guards, Armor-Blue and Dark-Soul, sighed in admiration.

{Let’s do it again. We’ll attack them so you look for an opening.}

{It seems like it’ll end quicker than I thought?}

As their optimistic hopes rose, Chu Youngjin did his best to catch his breath.

Huu! Huu!

It felt like his lungs were collapsing.

Dark-Sound restrained it, Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue attacked and lowered its defenses, and then he would be a good match against it. Yet, even after accounting for these factors, there was still a big difference in strength.

After launching that one attack that held all his spirit in order to make up that difference, he lost strength in his legs and his head rang.

Chu Youngjin gritted his teeth and gathered his dispersed karma again.

Bang!

He exploded the karma he had gathered. His karma swept over his entire body.

Grit.

His trembling fingertips regained their strength. His sword let out a creak.

Baang!!

His karma, which he had recovered faster than before, exploded once more, this time more powerfully.

Chu Youngjin's body shot forward. He bent his waist and shoulders to accumulate strength. He squeezed out all of his karma.

His second target was a monster as well. This time, it was Jae, who had lost its specialty, its mobility.

Baaaang!

Karma exploded from his foot to his waist, then shoulders and finally his upper arms.

The Weapon of Conclusion 'Chu Youngjin's Absolute' granted him absolute power within an arm's distance. The moment he swung his red sword, it accelerated once more as though it was alive. His body followed his sword's path.

Jae desperately tried to avoid his attack while flailing around, but it was for naught. The red sword precisely pierced its blind spot.

Smash!

While he slashed at it, it emitted the crushing sound. Jae's body was ripped in two from its shoulder to its waist.

{No... Way...}

Its body, which was completely destroyed by 'Chu Youngjin's

Absolute', had no way of regenerating. Jae died with glaring eyes.

{Haha! Good job, Chu Youngjin!}

Maybe it was because he took out two monsters in an instant? Dark-Sound, who had been unable to speak a word as he restrained four monsters that were on the same level as him, expressed his joy.

However, Chu Youngjin couldn't hear him.

"Haaack! Keuk..."

He almost dropped his sword.

While he thought he was used to pain more than anyone else because he had always fought while bringing his body to its utmost limits, this pain was on another level.

The problem wasn't that he almost dropped his sword, it was that his shoulders and arms felt like they had been ripped apart.

'Chu Youngjin's Absolute' consumed more than his current strength. His limbs trembled, and he couldn't breathe as if he was being waterboarded. His head ached and felt so heavy that it kept drooping. Maybe it was his heart weakening as his body was, but he felt as pathetic as a dying bug.

After flailing through this pain, sleep suddenly washed over him. A sweet flood that numbed the pain dragged his body down.

"Keuu!"

Chu Youngjin abruptly raised his head. He forced his eyes open. The more he endured, the more painful it was, making his urge to drift in a sweet sleep for even a moment grow. Nonetheless, Chu Youngjin stood enduring this.

{You did well. Rest for a bit!}

{When our junior is doing so much, we each need to kill at least one to save face!}

Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue ignited their fighting spirit.

Even if they excluded him, it was would a three-on-two fight. The situation became extremely advantageous for them. The two of them began to overexert themselves even further to put an end to this battle.

Chu Youngjin kept hold of his frequently slipping consciousness and observed the fight.

'A little… A little more…'

He waited for the final moment even as each passing second felt like an eternity of pain.

Dark-Sound's method of restraining Lan and Ryuk was intense.

His sticky, heavy darkness submerged their limbs and filled their throats. However, even this couldn't completely restrain them. While hiding his appearance, Dark-Sound revealed his pale arms and legs at critical moments to grab, rip, crush, and bind their limbs. This looked no different from a wrestling match in the mud. Lan and Ryuk struggled to get out of Dark-Sound's grasp while Dark-Sound used every ounce of strength to drag them into the darkness.

During this time, Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue battered Lan and Ryuk with their attacks.

They both used spears. As expected of guards of Dark-Sound, who possessed the strongest restraining skills in the universe, they focused on attack rather than defense.

{We'll end it this time!}

{Heuaah!!}

Dark-Soul, who was ranked fifth in the warrior rankings, hid his spear within the darkness and precisely struck when he saw an opening. Armor-Blue, who was ranked seventh, rotated his spear like a power drill and rapidly and repeatedly stabbed his targets,

trying to smash them apart.

{Kuah!}

{Grrk!}

Lan and Ryuk's screams echoed out. No one could hold back in this fight. The two of them struggled to live while Dark-Sound suppressed their struggles and Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue stabbed at them at full speed.

{This is the end!}

{Oryah!}

The intense battle was nearing its conclusion. Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue squeezed their remaining strength and launched fatal attacks at Lan and Ryuk.

This was the moment Chu Youngjin had been waiting for.

Grrrt.

Accompanied by the sound of tightly gripping his sword, as if to crush it, 'Chu Youngjin's Absolute', which had been relaxed, rose into position.

Chu Youngjin could tell that this was the moment of no return.

If he squeezed out his already messed up karma again, he couldn't revert it back. He couldn't recover it again. Also, the moment his sword pierced through Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue, he would no longer be a great warrior of the alliance but be known as its worst traitor.

'Yeah. Finally.'

For some reason, there was a smile on his face. The final moment had finally arrived after fighting endlessly since Lee Hyejin's death. He might very well have lived through such a nightmarish life for this very day.

Rumble!

Slice!

{Keu…uk?!}

{Huh?!}

A red light swept through Dark-Soul and Armor-Blue, who had been about to kill Lan and Ryuk.

Armor-Blue's waist was completely sliced through, and while Dark-Soul twisted his body to avoid it, a black fog flowed out from the long wound on his side.

{Chu Youngjin?!}

Dark-Sound, who had been restraining Lan and Ryuk, shouted in confusion.

However, he couldn't move. Having been on the cusp of death, Lan and Ryuk seemed to have noticed this was an opportunity and, in return, restrained Dark-Sound.

{Chu Youngjiiiiin!!!}

While hearing Dark-Sound's shriek, Chu Youngjin rushed towards Dark-Soul, who hadn't died yet.

His vision was dyed completely red. His karma dispersed like sand and couldn't be gathered again.

He still didn't stop. If he couldn't gather and explode his karma, then he just needed to burn it up to cause an explosion.

It was normally an impossible feat. However, 'Chu Youngjin's Absolute', which was created as an absolute power to protect those within his grasp, granted him his wish of burning his life to squeeze out more strength. All the karma that made up his body boiled up. Hot steam gushed out from his entire body.

Rumble!

With his signature rumble, Chu Youngjin's sword shot towards Dark-Soul.

{Wait! Wait!}

Having already been inflicted with a fatal wound and unable to get in position, Dark-Soul tried to buy some time, but Chu Youngjin didn't give him the chance.

Pakang!

His first strike hit the tip of Dark-Soul's spear, moving it aside.

Jjok!

His second attack slashed down against the suddenly raised spear handle.

Kakang, slice!

His blade slid down the handle and cut Dark-Soul's fingers off.

Then he grabbed him by his collar.

{Kuak! No!}

He pierced his sword into his struggling neck.

{Keuk... Keuk...}

He twisted Dark-Soul's neck, which was releasing a dark fog, cut it off, and threw it away.

{Chu Youngjin!!! Just why are you doing this?!!!}

Entangled by Lan and Ryuk, Dark-Sound could only bitterly scream.

Chu Youngjin looked at Dark-Sound and said with a voice hoarse from exhaustion,

"Since she died... Died a death... Worse than a dog's"

Whirlwinds of rage and sorrow raged in his hollow eyes and then calmed.

{Ah...}

Dark-Sound was at a loss for words when he saw those eyes. There had been a time when he possessed such eyes.

He knew better than anyone because he had become a dog of Flame-Hell, who he hated the most, and had polished his grand scheme for an immeasurable amount of time for this resentment and sorrow.

That was why he understood Chu Youngjin's reason.

That was also why he hadn't know until now.

{Ha, haha... So I was mistaken. I... didn't know.}

He was aware that Choi Hyuk and Chu Youngjin possessed an unimaginable amount of rage. However, his blunder was mistakenly believing their rage was similar to his.

He possessed a cold, calculated rage, one where he searched for the person responsible, took measures so that he wouldn't lose everything after taking revenge, and acted like his mortal enemy's slave.

Dark-Sound thought that Choi Hyuk and Chu Youngjin would be the same since they were tempered souls who had made it to the transcendent level.

{To think they would be so insane...}

Dark-Sound said in a dispirited voice.

He had a hunch regarding his fate.

Normally, he would be able to easily kill Chu Youngjin, but he was thoroughly exhausted after fighting against the four monster brothers. Even as they died, Lan and Ryuk clutched onto him as though they wanted to drag him down with them.

Above all, Chu Youngjin, who was steaming like he would melt away, was emitting such a powerful karma that he couldn't comprehend it.

{To think... This is the end.}

The long time he had spent enduring while thinking about his grand scheme seemed to pass by like a kaleidoscope. He recalled

the alliance's discriminatory, cruel policies he agreed on so that he could earn Flame-Hell's trust and create his own force.

So the time I spent enduring created monsters like them.

Dark-Sound saw the red blade that slashed through Ryuk, pierced through Lan's head, and penetrated his chest. He couldn't avoid it.

Pscht!

The sensation was terrifying. It felt like his soul was being pierced.

Releasing a black fog, Dark-Sound asked.

{So you killed us all in the end… Okay… Now what?}

{Your funeral. Though that's not something I'll be doing…}

Dark-Sound understood the situation when he heard the word 'funeral'.

{Ke… ke… Crazy bastards.}

Slash!

Dark-Sound's bitterly laughing face was vertically split in two. 'Chu Youngjin's Absolute' slashed up from his chest and floated away. Chu Youngjin couldn't hold his sword anymore.

His limbs no longer trembled. Instead, he couldn't feel anything as though they had disappeared. Chu Youngjin's eyes, which could no longer move as well, reflected the dead Dark-Sound, whose body had turned into a black fog, and the monsters' slashed corpses.

The last thing Chu Youngjin's gaze landed on before his eyes went completely blurry was the various worlds piled in the monsters' universe.

This unfamiliar sight abruptly made him think that this couldn't be real.

While the karma and strength he had accumulated until now

dispersed, in a semi-conscious state, Chu Youngjin's final thought was...

'A terrible nightmare.'

**

During this time, Dark-Sound's subjugation force achieved a great victory, and the 'wall of laws', where Chu Youngjin and Dark-Sound fought, cleared around the time they had almost completely annihilated the monsters.

{It is a great victory!}

Shiro, who was looking for Dark-Sound and Chu Youngjin with an excited voice, stood in place when she saw the center of what had been an intense battle.

{Huh...?}

Amongst the ripped and scattered corpses of the monster brothers...

Nothing moved.

Chapter 197: Ripped Wings (3)

Light-Maze collected Dark-Sound and his guards' corpses.

The three besides Chu Youngjin, at a glance, looked like they had died instantly, and Chu Youngjin was the only one who looked wholly intact. His body was still releasing hot steam. This was evidence that his karma still maintained its characteristics unlike the karma of the other three, which had lost all its characteristics, but it was melting away at a noticeable rate. If they were to assess him based on the alliance's judgment, he would be considered dead.

"Exalted Wing Dark-Sound... Exalted Wing Dark-Sound! Youngjin! Youngjin!!!!!"

Light-Maze had known Shiro for a long time, but this was his first time seeing her in such despair.

She couldn't even control her karma at a basic level. Having lost control in the monsters' universe, where gravity and space distorted at their whim, she couldn't even move forward, flailing in place. She desperately stretched her hand out, but she couldn't get their attention.

'Well... Exalted Wing Dark-Sound is dead.'

Light-Maze thought that he could understand her feelings.

Hadn't their long-time dream just disappeared like that? In an unexpected place, so fruitlessly.

On top of that, since Shiro was learning about the feelings of love for the first time, the hell she had fallen into was likely deeper and more painful than Light-Maze's own.

Light-Maze felt the many speckled lights that made up his body lose their motivation and slump down. They didn't want to do anything. They simply wanted to slump down and sleep. Maybe it would a dream when they woke up?

Light-Maze bit his lips.

‘Keep it together.’

As Dark-Sound and his guards had died, he was currently the highest commanding officer. If they simply drifted in the monsters’ universe, all that would remain for them was annihilation. As the commanding officer responsible for everyone’s lives, he had to make a decision.

He desperately tried to think of a plan with his uncooperating brain.

‘It’ll be difficult to return to our universe right away. We currently don’t have the strength to open up a gate large enough to transfer an army of this size because everyone’s exhausted. Also… We don’t know when the monsters will chase us down.’

In the end, they had rest and reorganize in the monsters’ universe before attempting to return. They needed support if they were to return safely. When he thought this far, there was only one answer.

Light-Maze forced himself to make a decision as he shouted,

“We’ll head to Exalted Wing Flame-Rain’s stronghold! We’ll rest there and then return!”

The subjugation force was made up of elites among elites.

While they suffered a great shock, they returning to formation when they heard an order.

Shiro, whose eyes were completely hollow, followed the order and slowly joined the ranks. It seemed that, while it was impossible for her to act on her emotions, it was possible for her to take familiar actions such as following orders.

Light-Maze knew what he had to do.

“We’ll implement a karma concealment cover. Follow my pattern.”

He analyzed the surrounding energy pattern and created and released a karma pattern similar to it. Soldiers who comprehended his pattern would copy it. Their karma patterns would change accordingly to their surroundings like a chameleon.

When Light-Maze emitted his karma, the soldiers would copy it. This continued like an endlessly repeating camp song.

While this was a technique normally used to camouflage themselves from enemies, it currently wasn't used for that. They couldn't hide the karmalings' difference in nature in the monsters' universe with a simple karma concealment cloak.

His tactic was to have them focus on something familiar and repetitive so that they could momentarily forget their despair and sorrow. Fortunately, this seemed to have an effect as their slow-moving advance picked up speed.

That was how the subjugation force walked their path of return while carrying the four corpses: by continuing this song of suppressed karma. They looked like a funeral procession rather than the figures of soldiers returning from the battlefield.

**

{...}

{...}

14 of the stone plates on the 'Brain' were lit up.

No, as one of them didn't light up until the end, only 13 stone plates were lit up.

{...}

Though quite a bit of time had passed since the start of the meeting, no one talked. It was a rare situation considering how the Exalted Wings always quickly made decisions.

It was as shocking as Flame-Rain's report, who had hastily called for this meeting.

{Exalted Wing Dark-Sound has died in battle. While the members of the subjugation force believe that the battle against the four monster brothers ended with both sides facing defeat, no one witnessed this first-hand. I am personally investigating the specifics using the results from their autopsies. However, as the majority of their karma is already absent… It'll take likely some time to analyze the situation.}

A long silence hung in the air after her report.

Leviathan finally managed to speak. Flame-Hell, who had the duty to lead the meeting as the chairman, seemed to be shocked from losing his right-hand man, Dark-Sound, and was unable to speak a word.

{… Though we're taken aback as Dark-Sound's death was unprecedented… I think holding a funeral is right. I heard that you are investigating the situation… When will you be able to send his body?}

{… I already ordered the production of an identical copy. As we should be able to investigate through the copy, it should be possible to send the body once it's complete.}

{…}

The copy would be identical in both matter and karma. Obviously, this was impossible to do with living warriors as the fate of their soul was engraved in the universe and the karma created from it would be impossible to copy.

That was why creating a complete copy meant that Dark-Sound had died, his soul and fate completely scattered and the karma left in his body having lost its characteristics.

He had degenerated into an inanimate object that could be copied.

The 'Brain' became silent at this realization.

The one who broke the silence this time was Flame-Hell, whose

voice was unstable. He seemed to have opened his mouth to uphold his duty as the chairman.

{To show proper respect for him, I think it's best if we all gather even momentarily and attend his funeral. As... the monsters' spirits have been broken, I think it'll be fine if we took the time to do this.}

While everyone was agreeing to his suggestion with their silence, Armor-Desert added a condition.

{However, we cannot predict the amount of strength the monsters have in reserve. Didn't no one expect Exalted Wing Dark-Sound to fall in battle in this expedition?}

All the Exalted Wings knew about Dark-Sound's powerful restraining skill. They had also believed that they completely understood the four monster brothers from past battles. This was why they had assumed an easy victory. Yet, the result was Dark-Sound's death. There was a likely chance they had made an error in their understanding of the monsters' strength.

Perhaps this was why Armor-Desert's voice contained a hint of fear.

{Then... Let's have Exalted Wing Flame-Rain remain in the monsters' universe to keep an eye on the monsters' movements. If we do that, then it wouldn't be too much for the rest of us to gather for half an hour. Every Exalted Wing needs to make an appearance to comfort alliance members.}

Flame-Rain said in a firm tone though accommodating a part of Armor-Desert's suggestion. Each Exalted Wing was a hero and leader representing the key species of the alliance. Having them gather and speak words of harmony and weathering this crisis could greatly soothe the alliance's agitation.

{...}

This time, all the Exalted Wings expressed their agreement.

Though this was the same agreement of silence as before, it felt heavier considering the situation.

Flame-Hell sighed as he said,

{Haaa… The monsters may be much stronger than we thought. I will annul the future subjugation plans, including my own, for now.}

The Exalted Wings who had prepared for the grand scheme alongside Dark-Sound felt a sense of futility at Flame-Hell's declaration. How hard had Dark-Sound worked for this expedition, for Flame-Hell's assassination? Yet, everything had instantly gone up in smoke. Nonetheless, they soon shook their heads to erase this sensation. They currently couldn't imagine the monsters' strength. Now wasn't the time to confront Flame-Hell.

{We'll assign Choi Hyuk, who is first in the warrior rankings, to be in charge of Alliance City's security until the funeral.}

It was only obvious that Choi Hyuk, who held the highest position besides the Exalted Wings and was considered possibly stronger than the Exalted Wings after killing a demise-ranked monster, would be in charge of the security for such an important event.

No one opposed this.

This was the moment Choi Hyuk took command over Alliance City.

**

"Haack… Haaaa…"

Sweat dripped from Choi Hyuk's jaw.

His hair kept shaking due to his trembling legs, and whenever they did, beads of sweat scattered in the air.

'How many are left…?'

He couldn't tell. He couldn't even remember how many he had

taken down. His karma had turned stiff, and thanks to this, his head felt heavy.

‘One more.’

He avoided a wooden spear as he stabbed with his wooden sword.

“Keahak!”

A Berserker team leader, who was struck in the neck, let out a frustrated groan as he collapsed.

“Haa… Haaa…”

His palms ached. His wooden sword almost slipped from his hand due to the lack of power in his grip.

‘One more.’

He had long since passed his limits. It would be nice if the only thought that filled his mind was taking down one more person, but a distracting thought couldn’t be erased from his mind.

Choi Hyuk had decided on special training when he discovered this thought.

Even though he was past the point of return as Chu Youngjin had died together with Dark-Sound, a hesitation still hid somewhere in his heart. Though it was very faint, it wouldn’t disappear, a whisper tugging on his mind. A lingering thought that hid itself when he cornered it but would stick its head out the moment he became soft-hearted.

‘Do I really have to end everything and does it all have to end?’

‘What about Flame-Rain?’

A wooden sword stabbed at him.

“Hup!”

Choi Hyuk avoided the stab aimed at his chest by twisting his body. His actions were needlessly big due to his bottomed-out stamina and wavering focus. Still, he succeeded in countering by

slashing his sword as he turned around.

Pak!

Violently hit on his forehead, Baek Seoin tumbled on the ground.

Yet, that wasn't the end of the attack. As if he had been waiting for this, Alexei, Lee Jinhee's right-hand man, charged at him with three other team leaders. The team leader charging from behind aimed for his right ankle, the one on the left aimed for his knee, and the one of the right targeted his elbow. Alexei raised his sword and swung down vertically.

There was no way to dodge.

This was checkmate as his karma had been exhausted long ago.

Choi Hyuk still didn't give up.

"Kuah!"

Baang!

Choi Hyuk stomped his left foot and leaped forward. He narrowly avoided the sword targeting his right ankle. He slammed his forehead against the bridge of Alexei's nose and stabbed the team leader aiming for his elbow before he could by extending his right arm. However, he couldn't avoid the sword targeting his left knee.

Crunch!

Choi Hyuk's knee bent at a weird angle. While falling, Choi Hyuk twirled his body and slammed his sword into the culprit's knee.

Crunch!

"Kuak!"

But anymore was impossible.

"It's 10 victories out of 10 matches, huh? Though it hurts my pride a little that it's one against so many... A win's a win, right?"

Lee Jinhee chuckled as she made an appearance.

Choi Hyuk menacingly swung his wooden sword even though his leg was broken, but he couldn't hit Lee Jinhee, who moved like the wind, with that. Lee Jinhee avoided his attack as though she was dancing before coming close and pushing him onto the floor.

Thud!

He felt dizzy. The ground felt like it was rolling. Writhing on the floor, Choi Hyuk said,

"Your actions... felt like they held a grudge?"

"Of course they do. Do you know how many times I was beaten up by you...? Also, you're a bastard who won't even listen to a word I say."

Lee Jinhee grabbed him by his collar and pulled him up. Choi Hyuk's neck was pulled up.

Lee Jinhee seemed to be angrier than usual for some reason.

"So... You damn leader. If you're not going to listen to a word I say... At least do it properly. If you're going to die, kill them all before you do. Don't die so clumsily like you are now!"

Crack!

Lee Jinhee's wooden sword shattered and penetrated Choi Hyuk's chest. Even though they were all suppressed at the no-star level, she displayed an amazing burst of strength to stab into his chest.

"Ah..."

It was so painful. Because it was so unexpectedly painful, Choi Hyuk fainted while thinking he might actually die. A face appeared in his mind when he thought that he might die.

.....

...

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“Are you awake, leader?”

Baek Seoin woke him up.

‘…’

He felt like he had had a dream, but it evaporated as soon as he opened his eyes. For some reason, tears were dried up near his eyes.

Choi Hyuk raised his body. His wounds were already healed, and his sealed karma had returned. He felt calm. His resolve was pure without a single speck of doubt.

“Wouldn’t it be fine if the goal of your training wasn’t victory? Since the difference in level disappears once karma freezes… It’s impossible for you to take down 200 of the top elites, including the executives, in that state. Though… It’s great training for us.”

Choi Hyuk shook his head.

“I already told you that we can’t rashly assume the Exalted Wings’ strength. Even if we seal their karma, they are still Exalted Wings.”

“While that’s true… I’m only saying this in hopes that you won’t be so disappointed if you fail. One’s spirit is important in a fight, but I’m worried our leader’s spirit might be broken before the fight even begins.”

While he said this jokingly, Choi Hyuk felt a hint of sincere worry in those words. He smiled bitterly.

“Baek hyung.”

“Yes.”

“Flame-Rain. She’s the only variable. She can’t be allowed to attend the funeral under any circumstances.”

Baek Seoin’s eyes widened at the sudden change in topic, but he quickly replied in a serious manner,

“Understood. I’ll set up additional measures.”

“Okay.”

Choi Hyuk brushed away his lingering thoughts with this.

‘It’s fine with this.’

It was now completely settled. No one could stop him. If Flame-Rain tried to stop him, he would kill her too.

He felt the thought that stubbornly lingered in his mind be plucked out. He understood that he had changed.

Whatever the result, he would soon die. In return, he would be able to kill everyone.

He stood up and said,

“Then let’s begin the 11th mock battle.”

Chapter 198: That Day (1)

“Will it be possible? I think they’ve already changed their minds…”

“It’s possible. I know because I have come in contact with their hearts under the pretext of giving them buffs. Even if they left, they are Berserkers.”

“But… Haa. If you think so, we’ll do it. I believe in you.”

Baek Seoin eventually gave in while scratching his head.

“Don’t worry. They also unconsciously know that this fight will come. Also, they know that they can’t avoid it.”

**

“Living here? You won’t believe me if I described it to you and it won’t be enough just looking at it. You need to experience it to know. It’s so great it’ll shock you!”

Handke seemed many times brighter than when he was a Berserker.

“Ah, have a glass of whiskey.”

Ting!

He opened a whiskey bottle filled with golden liquid and tossed it into the air. Glass plates appeared in the air to catch and serve the whiskey bottles. Not a single drop of alcohol was spilled.

Various alcohols from Earth were already lined up in the air and on the table.

Bae Jinman and Zero raised their glasses in a slightly flustered manner. The whiskey bottle tipped on its own, giving off a pungent scent, and poured well-aged liquor into their glasses.

“Try it. You’ll probably be surprised.”

Handke raised his glass boastfully. Leah smiled subtly beside

him.

Although only two years had passed since he had left the Berserkers, even at a glance, they could tell that he had adjusted well to his new life in the monsters' universe.

Gulp.

When they took a sip, fiery liquid spread throughout their bodies. Their bodies heated up as if they had drunk hot water, and their taut karma relaxed.

"Good, isn't it? Haaa... There's no need for drugs like Water Fog now. Apparently, karma engineering has advanced, making it possible to easily suppress or scatter one's karma. They can also heat your body while making you lose control over your karma. This is the result of that."

Handke recklessly emptied his glass and exhaled, releasing a fragrant, cool alcoholic scent. With his mind becoming fuzzy, he chuckled happily.

"This is a precious liquor to me. Have you heard of it, Fate's Salute?! I only brought it out because you are my welcomed guests."

Handke was magnanimous and childish like an upstart from the countryside who had gotten rich in the city. Looking at him, Bae Jinman sipped his glass.

It was definitely good.

Better than any alcohol he had tasted on Earth.

It also made him slightly tipsy.

"Suppressing karma, you say...?"

Handke quickly continued when he heard Bae Jinman mumble.

"That's right. Apparently, it was jointly developed by the Armored Soul Tribe and the dragon race. Oh, right, the glass crabs played a part as well? Ahahaha. Well, there's no way you'd know.

Since I'm familiar with the Berserker lifestyle, I know you don't have time to learn about stuff like this."

He wasn't ridiculing him with ill intentions. He simply felt sad that his close friend was still suffering. Unable to directly tell him to take up this lifestyle, he had to go about it in a roundabout way.

Handke was the only Berserker executive who was of similar age to Bae Jinman. His only close friend. Bae Jinman could keep a cool smile on his face only because he knew his friend's intentions.

However, he looked at Zero sitting awkwardly beside him and chuckled like a villain because he found the situation funny. It seemed even Zero, who was always incredibly formal, also found this funny as he grinned.

Know about karma suppression?

Did he just ask this to Berserkers?

"Of course, we know about karma suppression."

"You do?"

"Of course, we know it very well."

"... Damn it, then that's probably a combat skill."

Handke turned his head away like he had lost his appetite for the alcohol. Baek Jinman chuckled once more.

"But... This place is the monsters' universe. Isn't it the very border of the front lines? I'm surprised that the mood is more casual than I expected."

Zero stopped grinning and directed his cold gaze towards the alcohol and food lined up in front of him.

Leah replied,

"It's the princess's policy. In some ways, it's nothing new. During the recruit training or when we visited the supply stores while we were low-ranked warriors, it was dreary and warlike

wherever we went… But, how was Dark City or Alliance City?”

“… Free and abundant.”

Leah shrugged.

“That’s it. Karma is born from the feelings and will emitted by souls. While you might get stronger quickly if you’re pushed to the extreme… There’s a limit. Souls get exhausted too. That’s why it’s more effective to live casually, experiencing various feelings and experiences that let your soul rest during times of no combat. The princess simply opened this right only granted to the top species to more people. Of course, results are most important on the battlefield, and our results are one of the best in the stronghold.”

“You look happy.”

“Overseer Richard and I solely dreamt of the survival and prosperity of humanity. Here, humanity is polishing their foundations for survival every day and is prospering… Of course, I’m happy.”

“I don’t know about that. Overseer Richard’s will that I remember told us to follow Leader Choi Hyuk.”

The good mood shattered as Zero looked directly at Leah, who had raised her head slightly.

A chilling breeze suddenly flowed between them.

“Hey, you’re ruining the mood. Whatever Overseer Richard’s will was, I’m sure it wasn’t for the two of you to be growling at each other.”

Handke scolded them as he refilled their glasses. Leah and Zero awkwardly looked away.

“Yeah, so what brings you here? There’s no way the leader gave you a break. Isn’t he incredibly busy as the person in charge of Alliance City’s security? Because of Youngjin’s funeral? Well… Even though we aren’t Berserkers anymore, we still ought to do

what we should. I have… been thinking about this a great deal.”

As if his vigor and happiness were lies, Handke and even Leah became immersed in a depressing mood. This was unusual in Bae Jinman’s perspective. The executives who stayed beside Choi Hyuk didn’t show such a serious reaction to Chu Youngjin’s death. Even Lee Jinhee, though she was gloomy, didn’t look like she was openly cherishing Chu Youngjin’s memory. This was because a battle like that was awaiting them as well. Chu Youngjin had simply gone slightly ahead of them.

In the end, sorrow and depression were for those who remained.

‘Does that mean such emotions aren’t for those who would accompany him in death?’

Bae Jinman found this clear difference in emotions interesting. Those who were determined to die might actually be more relieved as though they were being released from their prolonged suffering.

‘But… Why am I here? Though it is a dangerous mission…’

Bae Jinman shook his head at his heart, which was becoming more complicated, as he downed a glass of whiskey.

Swoosh.

As he became drunk, he spoke what was on his mind.

“Keeu… You’re right. This isn’t a break. I came because I have work. To be honest, I came for the final battle.”

“Final… Battle?”

Seemingly aware of the unease behind those words, Handke and Leah became rigid.

“You know, right? What the final battle is for our leader.”

There was a moment of silence. Realizing something, Leah shouted, “Do-do-don’t tell me, Youngjin-!”

Both Dark-Sound and the four monster brothers suffering a

defeat was currently the biggest mystery in the alliance. However, this would be possible if Chu Youngjin swung his sword in the other direction!

Handke seemed to sober up instantly.

“What… What the hell? Then don’t tell me Dark-Sound’s funeral is… No, but, is it okay to say something like that to us? What are you going to do if we spill the beans?”

Taken aback, Handke lowered his voice. Bae Jinman shrugged.

“What can we do? We came to ask for your help.”

Handke’s eyes widened.

“This is treason! It’s risking our species’ safety!”

Bae Jinman stood up and moved his face close to Handke’s. Then, as if growling, he said, “Do you think Choi Hyuk will care about something like that?”

“But… But…!”

Even when Leah hesitated, Bae Jinman coldly cut them off.

“If you don’t want to, don’t. Why don’t you just go tell Exalted Wing Flame-Rain?”

“There’s no way we would!”

Handke shouted in anger.

Bae Jinman smiled.

“You and Ms. Leah. Think about it carefully. What this truly means for humanity? If you slip up, do you think Choi Hyuk will just end things at that? Won’t the alliance encounter a terrorist so outrageous they’d think that the mutts of the universe were tame in comparison? Also, when that happens, the alliance won’t be able to trust humans again.”

“What the hell…! Also, if the Exalted Wings are gone, what about the war against the monsters…!”

Leah said in a suppressed voice. Bae Jinman shook his head.

“No, once the purge is complete, our leader will head to the monsters’ universe. He will kill the monster queen.”

He said with certainty.

“This war will end a few days from now.”

Handke asked with a confused look,

“Even if it’s our leader… Is that even possible?”

Bae Jinman smiled kindly.

“You know our leader. You won’t believe what you hear, and it’s not enough to look. He’s someone you must personally encounter to know.”

Thump.

“Ha… Haha.”

Handke laughed because he found it funny how he was persuaded by those words. He felt his heart was childish for racing right away.

Flutter.

Zero threw a letter at a dazed Leah.

“This is…?”

Leah knew what it was just by looking at the paper. Her eyes wavered.

“It’s Overseer Richard’s will he left for our leader.”

At his nonchalant words, Leah bemoaned as she buried the letter in her chest.

“… Unfair.”

She mumbled quietly.

Berserkers.

They had no questions for fighting.

They had experienced constant victories by following behind Leader Choi Hyuk.

They were well aware that, even if they quit the Berserkers, they would have to fight at least once as Berserkers again.

Perhaps they had accepted this final battle with no regards for the alliance or humanity the moment they joined the Berserkers.

“Damn it... Bring out the other alcohol. I needlessly gave these damn bastards my good liquor.”

Ignoring the venting Handke, Bae Jinman shamelessly poured himself another glass.

“What’s wrong with that? It’s liquor you might not be able to drink again if we mess up.”

“You old geezer!! Only learning bad stuff from the Berserkers!!”

“Puahaha!”

Bae Jinman burst out laughing. He couldn’t even remember the last time he laughed so hard.

**

The preparations were proceeding smoothly.

The funeral would be held on the first floor of the Tower of Warriors. They secretly hid and installed devices under the pretext that they were setting up the defensive line used during Dragonic’s defense battle around the location the Exalted Wings would gather at.

They also dispatched plenty Berserkers and Kundle Tribe members at the ‘Light of Eternity’, which was the gate leading to the Flame Wing Tribe’s homeland and the main power source sustaining Alliance City, under the guise they were preparing for all circumstances.

“It almost makes me wonder if it’s okay to do this.”

Baek Seoin smacked his lips at their blatant preparations.

However, he also knew that no one would think something would happen in Alliance City where 12 Exalted Wings were gathered. Maybe if the monsters charged in at full force? A conspiracy? They didn’t even consider something so reckless. It was something only a crazy person would attempt.

While the most important element in their plan was the fight that would break out on the first floor of the Tower of Warriors, there were other variables outside of that. First was the ‘Light of Eternity’ from which they would draw the power necessary to power the karma freezing devices. Rather than being part of Alliance City, this place was more like a district directly under the Flame Wing Tribe’s authority. Even if Choi Hyuk, who was in charge of the security, tried, he wouldn’t be able to drive away the prideful Flame Wing Tribe warriors protecting this area. Rather, they ridiculed him by saying, “Why did he dispatch such useless people here? Isn’t Leader Choi Hyuk underestimating us too much?”

Likewise, the security on the first floor of the Tower of Warriors would be filled with the Exalted Wing’s direct guards. Though they might be allowed to escort them on their way to the Tower of Warriors, the Berserkers were not allowed inside.

“So it’s my turn now.”

Lee Jinhee stretched her body.

Her mission was as important, no, in some ways more important than Choi Hyuk’s. This plan wouldn’t work without her.

Another short sword besides ‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ also hung from her waist. It was a beautiful short sword with a geometric pattern on it.

“Occupy the Light of Eternity, extract its power source… Pierce

through the security at the Tower of Warriors and install this repeater…”

She mumbled while tilting her head to the left and right.

“Saying it’s easy. But it’ll be bustling with transcendent warriors.”

However, her expression was filled with confidence contrary to her words.

As they needed an immense amount of power to silence all the Exalted Wings, they needed to directly install a specially-made repeater in the gathering area of the Exalted Wings.

It was a difficult run where she would have to open and shove her head inside the maw of a tiger.

“Lee Jinhee with 13 years of parkour experience. Beginning the most extreme run of her life!”

Raising her hand up high, Lee Jinhee whistled as her eyes turned serious.

She got in position like an athlete and glared at the Light of Eternity, which rose up like a pillar.

Before they knew it, it was the day of Dark-Sound’s funeral.

Chapter 199: That Day (2)

Currently, Choi Hyuk was with the Exalted Wings on the first-floor hall of the Tower of Warriors.

Dark-Sound's body floated in the center of the hall. The skilled experts of the alliance dressed his body to look more dignified than when he was alive. His flesh, which became mushy once his karma left, was mixed with expensive metals to make it smooth, and they ground and sprinkled jewels of darkness to recreate how the darkness around him would always suck light in. Geometric patterns created by mixing materials that symbolized the key species of the alliance were laid out around him, and when you looked at him from afar, these patterns looked like a giant wing covering his body. The wing wasn't simply a decoration. You could indirectly experience records of Dark-Sound's battles, fate, and life when you perked your ears at or connected to the spread patterns.

His body, which was restored without sparing rare materials, was more of a beautification than a restoration, and it was more like a statue of a god than a body.

All of the Exalted Wings gathered here today used the native language of the Dark Tribe to show respect for Dark-Sound.

"The Wing of Governance. Dark-Sound..."

Flame-Fog, who was usually quiet, seemed immersed in his emotions today.

"Even thinking about it now, I think this was the right choice. It isn't just a funeral. It will set a precedent and may be written down in history."

The Exalted Wings henceforth gave titles to each other (Dark-Sound received the title 'Wing of Governance'), and they decided to make his body into a statue and enshrine it on the first-floor hall of the Tower of Warriors.

In the future, warriors who visited the tower would have their minds engraved with the great cause, ‘A United Alliance’, when they saw past Exalted Wings who laid down their lives, and they could experience the records left behind by them so that they could possibly try to comprehend their level.

However, the reason Flame-Fog was so emotional wasn’t just because of this.

“We should have done this when King Flame-Sky died.”

He was considered neutral as he maintained his silence when Flame-Hell and Flame-Rain opposed each other. However, they all knew that a part of his heart always possessed respect for Flame-Sky.

“No, rather there shouldn’t be another sacrifice like this… Exalted Wings aren’t existences that come into being like how the monster queen creates monsters.”

Flame-Thorn, who was close to Flame-Hell, pointed out.

“Though I agreed to this because there has already a sacrifice… I still think that it is best if we make sure a sacrifice like this doesn’t happen again. From the beginning, it made no sense that an Exalted Wing would personally lead an expedition. We need a manual that will allow us to fight powerful monsters without sacrificing Exalted Wings. While it might sound cruel, we need to think realistically. No matter how many normal warriors are sacrificed, it is still better than a single Exalted Wing dying.”

This was a discussion that had been ongoing since their meeting at the ‘Brain’. A discussion about what measures they should take if a similar situation occurred.

“Now, let’s stop talking about that.”

Flame-Hell cut her off.

“Warriors have already gathering in the square. The funeral will start soon. God knows how long it’s been since we’ve all gathered

in one place... Let's stop talking about such things for now. Let's talk about what Exalted Wing Dark-Sound was like when he was alive and think about how saddening it is to lose such a great individual."

A solemn mood hung in the air.

Choi Hyuk, who stood upright in a section of the hall as the one in charge of security, swallowed the anger that surged in his heart when he saw them like that.

Choi Hyuk felt his insides twist like a teenager going through puberty who felt like everything was wrong with the world.

The decisions they made at the 'Brain' frequently led entire planets to annihilation. They appointed entire species as Consumables without a sliver of sympathy and pushed them into battlefields they couldn't return from. These decisions occurred so frequently that they didn't need justifications such as 'it was inevitable' or 'a small sacrifice for the majority'.

Choi Hyuk knew the details behind their decisions better than anyone else. He had never forgotten them.

'Kill. Only then can you kill.'

Those who couldn't kill were abandoned like trash or, sometimes, were 'recycled' like Chu Youngjin's girlfriend, Lee Hyejin. The alliance wasn't heartbroken at these sacrifices. Simply a more hellish battlefield awaited those who survived.

These sacrifices were considered so obvious that they weren't given an apology or cherished.

On the other hand, the Exalted Wings felt various emotions when faced with Dark-Sound's death. Some were scared, a few were sad, and others were angry. This was likely because his death was the 'death of an equal'. The terrifying fact that it could have been them made them emotional.

'A case that can never be allowed to happen and one that is

inevitable.'

Choi Hyuk thought about the difference between the two cases. Who were the majority? Who were the minority? Didn't that all depend on the losses they would suffer? The Exalted Wings wouldn't have suffered any losses if the earthlings, a species on the border, were annihilated. So if people disagreed with their decision, they could virtuously say that 'it was inevitable'.

However, if he wanted to make them realize that they should never have done that... As expected, there was no other way besides personally engraving it into their flesh and bones. Once under unbearable pain, they would end up looking back on their actions, asking themselves if they had been wrong.

Choi Hyuk closed his eyes while imagining their screams.

Gulp.

He swallowed his surging emotions once more.

It was the last time.

**

"The monsters aren't making any particular movements."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Recently, the independent troop 'Frontier' risked their lives to investigate deep into the enemy territory. They reported no monster activity anywhere."

"That's good."

Flame-Rain nodded.

The independent troop 'Frontier' was a troop composed of warriors who had left the Berserkers. As top elites in Flame-Rain's stronghold, they were trustworthy.

Flame-Rain relaxed her tense shoulders.

"Huu... It's hard, isn't it?"

“No.”

Her adjutant, Camilla, replied immediately, but her complexion clearly showed signs of exhaustion.

Camilla, who was the Sovereign of Paradise and an overseer of Earth, followed Flame-Rain to the monsters’ universe and had gained enough experience to be promoted to her adjutant. She strengthened her position in the stronghold as her trusted adjutant. Her authority was similar to that of a chief presidential secretary’s.

Camilla, who had dreamed about earthlings’ prosperity and happiness, steadily created a foothold to realize her dream.

Of course, she had to handle an immense workload to do so.

“I understand. Restoring Deus, which was completely destroyed, is already a huge task, yet we have to stay on full alert since Exalted Wing Dark-Sound passed away like that… It must be tough for you. It’s normally something I should be doing… Sorry, please work a little harder.”

Flame-Rain patted Camilla’s shoulder. When she did, Camilla’s expression, which she tried hard to keep firm, became misty. Resignation and fear reflected on her face.

“Wow! What’s this? Was it that tough for you? Hmm… Should I assign some personnel to you?”

Camilla was never one to show it even if things were tough so Flame-Rain was shocked when her eyes looked gloomy.

Camilla shook her head. She was well aware that Flame-Rain had it tougher than her. She could easily tell by how her flames blazed limply and had lost their liveliness. She had no intention of showing a weak side of her just because work was tough.

Her gloominess was because of another matter.

“That’s not it. Rather… I just feel that something’s strange. Has

anything been discovered from the investigation?”

“What the heck? Were you worried about me?”

Flame-Rain leaned into her chair.

“Rather than a discovery… It’s regarding Chu Youngjin.”

“The warrior who passed away… Chu Youngjin?”

“Yeah, he isn’t dead yet.”

Camilla’s eyes widened.

“Ah, of course, he’s considered dead by the alliance’s diagnosis, but he’s not dead yet in my perspective. My flames can reignite a completely extinguished wick. Of course, if there is even a tiny part of the wick remaining that is. That’s why I’m thinking about it.”

Flame-Rain lowered her eyes and tapped her long finger against her cheek.

“Choi Hyuk. If I think of that damn bastard, I want to save him. Since he’s a warrior he’s been with since the beginning of the recruit training, it’ll bother him even if he acts like it doesn’t. I don’t want to make his difficult life even harder. And what about the woman of the Armored Soul Tribe who comes to me and cries? I want to save him. That’s what I personally think… However, as an Exalted Wing, I should give up this uncertain treatment and wake him up right now. You see, I need to hear his testimony.”

“His testimony?”

“Yeah. Regarding a third-party.”

“A third-party…”

“After looking at the corpses, it looks like they were all injured by one person. It doesn’t make sense for everyone to be killed by a single person in a four-on-four fight. That means someone might have intruded on their fight midway. My duty is to figure out who that person is, what his or her skills are, and why that person left

without laying a hand on the rest of the subjugation force... Also, how Chu Youngjin was able to avoid that person's attack."

Camilla's expression became darker. However, lost in her thoughts, Flame-Rain didn't notice this change and continued,

"But if I wake him up, he'll definitely die. I also can't waste my strength on a treatment that could take a hundred or even a thousand years or may not even be possible... But it'll be no different from abandoning my duty if I don't attempt it... Haaa. Also, how can I do that to Choi Hyuk and to that Armored Soul Tribe woman?"

Flame-Rain sighed with a face that seemed to have aged ten years.

White smoke exhaled from her mouth. For her, who possessed pure flames, to exhale smoke, it seemed she was under a lot of stress.

Gloomily looking at her, Camilla seemed to have decided on something as she tightly shut her eyes before saying,

"Maybe there isn't a third-party?"

"Then, you're saying the culprit is among Kwe, Jae, Lan, and Ryuk, who all died there? I don't think so..."

"No, I'm talking about Chu Youngjin."

"Huh?"

"Chu Youngjin is the only one without any injuries. Couldn't Chu Youngjin have killed everyone?"

"Ehhh...? But his level is..."

"You previously mentioned that his cause of death wasn't certain, correct? Perhaps he burned up all his karma... His cause of death has never been reported before."

"I guess?"

“What if he wasn’t injured by something? What if he broke down from squeezing out all his strength?”

Flame-Rain bounced up from her seat. However, she still didn’t believe her.

“But… But why would Chu Youngjin do that? He doesn’t have a reason to.”

Chu Youngjin was now a transcendent warrior who represented the alliance. His future would be filled with glory so why would he do such a thing? To suddenly assassinate Dark-Sound? This would cause him to obtain nothing and lose everything.

Camilla steadied her breath.

Yes, logically, it didn’t make sense. There wasn’t any evidence either. This ‘leap in logic’ she was currently talking about could destroy everything she had accumulated until now. However, Camilla still felt very uneasy. She couldn’t bear not speaking of it as the alliance, which sustained the universe, could collapse and the earthlings could be marked as the most traitorous species at a single misstep.

“Exalted Wing Flame-Rain… How much do you know about the Berserkers, about Choi Hyuk?”

Flame-Rain gave Camilla a look asking what she was talking about all of a sudden. Nonetheless, Camilla continued firmly,

“Though I don’t know what you think of Choi Hyuk… we earthlings called him the Demon King. Have you… never witnessed the endless rage he possesses? A rage that wants to burn the entire universe to cinders.”

Flame-Rain’s eyes wavered.

She completely reorganized the information she had collected until now, clearer and simpler than her previous hypothesis. The result pointed towards an unbelievable truth.

While it was absurd, the thought that Choi Hyuk, that crazy bastard, could really do it crossed her mind. The damage was too severe for her to ignore this small possibility.

“Don’t… Don’t tell me… that this crazy bastard…?!”

Flame-Rain jolted up from her seat.

She pondered over it while pacing precisely ten steps. Then she decided.

“Ah, I don’t know. Even if I take responsibility for this… I can’t leave things as they are. Assemble an army immediately! We head to Alliance City!”

Her current actions could deal her a heavy political blow, but Flame-Rain decided to act.

“Yes!”

With a complicated expression, a mix of resignation and conviction, Camilla replied in a firm, low voice.

Highest-ranking employee of the Blue House

Chapter 200: That Day (3)

“What? Who’s going where?”

On the first floor of the Tower of Warriors, Dark-Sound’s body and the 12 Exalted Wings were gathered in a hall the size of a basketball court. The somber mood broke out into a commotion at the sudden news.

“Why is Exalted Wing Flame-Rain coming here?”

“She’s bringing her army? She observed some rebellious activity? What’s rebellious? What? She doesn’t know?”

“She simply talked one-sidedly without giving a proper explanation and hung up… I don’t know who’s calling who rebellious. Is she going to overrule the matter decided at the ‘Brain’ on her own?”

This situation was so bewildering that they didn’t know what to do even after pushing their subordinates to contact others and discuss the matter.

“Shouldn’t we regard this as high treason?”

“What is she trying to do on the day of Exalted Wing Dark-Sound’s funeral…?”

“What do you mean high treason?! It’s not like she’s forcing her way here, she notified us in advance.”

“In advance? She just said what she wanted. What is it if not a sudden attack for saying something then leading her army here?”

“Your words are harsh!”

This was a delicate matter. The general in charge of defending their border declared that she would ignore orders and lead her army to the headquarters. She also justified her actions with an abrupt ‘rebellious activity’. Just looking at the situation, it was undoubtedly an act of treason, which was also why the Exalted

Wings couldn't believe it.

"I mean… Isn't the power currently gathered in Alliance City too high for a revolt…? Leader Choi Hyuk, did you notice any activities that could be considered rebellious in Alliance City?"

"None."

Choi Hyuk feigned ignorance.

However, he smiled bitterly in his mind.

'As expected… Flame-Rain, did you figure it out?'

Notifying them in advance instead of coming abruptly and not revealing the specifics while declaring 'rebellious activities' made it seem like perhaps Flame-Rain was sending him a warning, telling him not to act rashly.

'It's too late.'

All preparations were complete, and he had already resolved himself.

"No… I think it's been a bit noisy outside for a while…"

Leviathan, who had been silent, said as his brows wriggled. As an enormous dragon, he currently covered his body in the fourth dimension, laying his body out throughout the hall. Because he was covered in a higher dimension, the walls weren't damaged when his body passed through them.

When Leviathan pointed out the commotion, the other Exalted Wings noticed it as well. The racket was picking up speed as it approached the Tower of Warriors.

"What is going on? Leader Choi Hyuk?"

Flame-Thorn demanded an explanation. Her eyes narrowed as if she was warning him.

Choi Hyuk smiled. If they noticed the commotion, then it was already too late. Lee Jinhee was faster than anyone gave her credit

for.

‘The moment’s finally come.’

Sling.

He unsheathed his sword.

**

Lee Jinhee closed her eyes and controlled her karma.

She had originally thought that karma was a special, extraordinary ability. She had believed it was an external power that took root in her body, but she was mistaken.

As her rank increased, karma permeated into her cells, and now, it even absorbed the cells themselves. Karma was her body.

Controlling karma meant that she could control even the tips of the hairs on her body.

Her calm figure resembled a metal object inside a powerful magnetic field rather than a living being. She didn’t move a muscle when she stood still, yet her entire body reacted without wasting even the tiniest bit of energy when she began to move.

Opening her eyes, she saw her target. There was a total of 16 warriors from the Flame Wing Tribe protecting the Light of Eternity. 15 of them were high-ranked warriors while the one leading them was a highest-ranked warrior.

Lee Jinhee’s goal was to end it without giving them the chance to scream. It would be best if no one knew about the rebellion until they activated the karma freezing devices.

“Whew… We’ll go in immediately.”

Whoosh!

Her smooth thighs exposed beneath her shorts became taut. Feeling hot, she stared in front of her. Instead of a kicking the ground and jumping, this was more like the gathering of

willpower.

Lee Jinhee took a deep breath and then exhaled.

“Hu!”

Bang!

Accelerating to her top speed instantly, her body shot through the air.

Space rippled in front of her like a sonic boom erupting from compressed sound waves when a jet exceeded the speed of sound.

The space ripples were like a shell left behind by her sheer speed so the situation had already concluded by the time the Flame Wing Tribe warriors noticed.

“Huh?”

“Something just…”

The warriors tilted their heads, but the head of one of them dropped as his neck had been sliced at an angle.

The warrior beside him opened his mouth in surprise as his head split vertically in two.

The other warriors turned around and kept a distance from them, but before they could completely turn their backs, their bodies fell apart in various pieces.

“What…?!”

Pscht!

The warriors who had avoided this calamity as they were further away, were stabbed to death before they could open their mouths in shock. The Berserker team leaders who followed Lee Jinhee were able to easily take their lives because Lee Jinhee had caught their attention.

Claang!

The only warrior who blocked her short sword was the highest-

ranked warrior in charge of protecting the Light of Eternity. He had a flustered expression as though he had only blocked her attack out of reflex.

Thud.

The corpses of the slaughtered warriors fell to the ground after he blocked her short sword. The corpses burned up as they were strewn on the ground as though a Molotov Cocktail had been thrown. Only then did the highest-ranked warrior come to his senses and attempted to shout.

“A revo-...”

Slice!

He slumped to the floor before he could even finish.

‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ shined in a brilliant white light, and he couldn’t deal with Lee Jinhee’s speed which used her Sword of Vow’s limitless power. With only his lower jaw intact, everything above his upper jaw was sliced off.

Blaaze!

The place Lee Jinhee stood was blazing with flames from the dead warriors, and her five loyal team leaders, including Alexei, stood around her.

“Haa... Ha...”

Panting, she tightly gripped her trembling hand. Even though she had borrowed the strength of her Sword of Vow, she still sliced ten high-ranked and one highest-ranked warrior in an instant. Overwhelmed with exhausted, she felt like was about to faint.

Her karma, which had been well-controlled, extended out on its own, her legs shook, and her shoulders trembled. Her legs felt so heavy that she felt as though they were melting onto the ground.

She needed to rest, but Lee Jinhee squeezed out more strength.

Kiing!

‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ became brighter, and Lee Jinhee used this strength lent by the sword to forcefully steady her breath.

“Huu.”

When she turned around after letting out a short breath, a report immediately arrived.

“The link has been established.”

She wasn’t the only one who moved at full speed. During this short period of time, glass crabs surrounded the Light of Eternity and began to stack glass pebbles in a complicated pattern. This arrangement was set up to extract power from the Light of Eternity.

Lee Jinhee glanced down at the other short sword hanging on her waist. The patterns that densely covered the short sword shined as they received the power extracted from the Light of Eternity. Soon, the patterns fell away from the surface of the sword like holograms and twirled around her.

Lee Jinhee nodded.

She glanced at the Berserkers, Kundle Tribe members, and glass crab surrounding the Light of Eternity for the last time. These warriors who were dispatched under Choi Hyuk’s authority as head of security were assigned to defend the Light of Eternity until their revolt concluded so that the karma freezing devices wouldn’t lose their power source.

“Hu.”

Exhaling once more, she left without saying farewell. The five team leaders followed behind her, but the distance between them grew instantly.

The path to the Tower of Warriors was crowded. Due to the excessive number of people, warriors sat on rooftops and some even floated in the air as they waited for the funeral.

Since it was impossible to avoid their attention, Lee Jinhee decided to move more quickly. She charged at full speed, stepping on rooftops and sometimes even on air.

“Huu… My body feels heavy.”

The karma of the many warriors gathered here pressed down on her body. She didn’t notice it when she moved at a moderate pace, but the pressure increased as she gained speed.

“Huh? Who’s that?”

“Isn’t she Director Lee Jinhee of the Berserkers? Is it something to do security?”

People noticed Lee Jinhee’s fleeting appearance as she rushed over their heads.

The majority just let her be, but the highest-ranked warriors of the Flame Wing Tribe were a little different.

“Huh? Wait! Isn’t that the Light of Eternity?!”

The problem was the repeater, which was shaped like a short sword, dangling from her waist. Constantly receiving power from the Light of Eternity, the repeater released streams of enormous power. The Light of Eternity was a power originating from the Flame Wing Tribe’s homeland. These warriors, who prided themselves for being the sole possessors of such power, couldn’t disregard the Light of Eternity’s power emanating from Lee Jinhee.

“Hey! Wait!”

Flame Wing Tribe warriors flew over from every direction and stopped her.

“Why do I sense the Light of Eternity from you?”

One said coldly as he obstructed her path. When she looked at these meddlesome fellows stopping her, she realized that each and every one of them seemed to be highest-ranked warriors. The type

of warriors who believed themselves to be intrinsic to the alliance.

“Hup!”

Obviously, Lee Jinhee didn’t plan on replying. Without slowing down, she stomped down with her foot. Bearing her will, her karma ignored inertia and changed directions. Lee Jinhee zigzagged vertically and rushed past the Flame Wing Tribe warriors.

“Huh?! Block her!”

The warriors shouted.

Other warriors in the crowd leaped up one after the other.

“What is it? What’s going on?”

Warriors from other tribes stretched their heads out to look at the sudden commotion as they whispered to each other.

The Flame Wing Tribe warriors were proud of being members of the Flame Wing Tribe, more than their rank or position. When a few famous warriors shouted to chase Lee Jinhee, other warriors who didn’t know what was going on jumped on the chase.

Flames erupted amongst the noisy crowd. Various colored flames spread out like a net and blocked the white stream of light flying through the air. However, this stream of light didn’t stop and zigzagged around the flames. More flames surged up whenever she did, and sometimes, they fell after exploding intensely.

“What’s going on…? Fireworks…?”

The warriors who weren’t aware of the situation were taken aback, their mouths agape.

“Haa, haa…”

From the Light of Eternity to the Tower of Warriors, Lee Jinhee traversed this not-so-short distance in an instant. Even when faced with the Flame Wing Tribe’s obstruction, she flew in the air at such a speed that those watching could only describe it with a

‘Whoosh! Bababaam!’

She was already gasping for breath when she began to see the Tower of Warriors. As she didn’t possess the power to deny other people’s karma like Choi Hyuk, the karma emitted by the other warriors put a burden on her. Having charged her way through the massive crowd at full speed while being blocked by the Flame Wing Tribe, she was as exhausted as a swallow that had forcefully pushed its way through a typhoon.

There were still a few persistently chasing Flame Wing Tribe warriors behind her.

Glancing at them, Lee Jinhee gritted her teeth.

“I consumed a lot more stamina than expected… But this is the end.”

Lee Jinhee looked at the Tower of Warriors with shining eyes. The Exalted Wings were gathered there. It was the place currently concentrated with the most military power in the alliance.

The security guards were at least at the highest rank, and those who stood protecting the entrances were at the transcendent level.

Just standing there, they made her feel like a vast galaxy separated her from the door. No matter how outstanding she was as a highest-ranked warrior, transcendent warriors were on a different level. If they were whales, possessing fates acknowledged by the great universe, she was simply a sardine.

However, even a sardine could ascend if it leaped through the dragon’s gate! No… Was it a salmon? Moving on…

A thrilling smile hung on her lips.

“Let’s go!!!”

‘Lee Jinhee’s Vow’ shined brightly. This Sword of Vow, which was created from her vow that she wouldn’t die before Choi Hyuk, could open a path to Choi Hyuk regardless of the situation. She saw

a thread-like line passing through the entrance. Choi Hyuk was inside, and if Choi Hyuk was there, even transcendent warriors wouldn't be able to stop her.

She felt hot. Having squeezed her karma beyond its limits, her ankle and thighs felt like they had evaporated. The entrance, which had seemed a vast distance away, appeared in front of her as though it had been compressed.

"Hmm?!"

Having felt something, the transcendent warriors moved. They swung in the air as their blades brushed past Lee Jinhee.

Even transcendent warriors couldn't stop Lee Jinhee as it looked like she had been compressed into a dot and was being sucked through the entrance.

Jjoong!!!

The shockwave that exploded behind her flung the chasing Flame Wing Tribe warriors away.

Baaang!

Lee Jinhee smashed through the door and then rolled on the floor.

She saw Choi Hyuk who had just unsheathed his sword with calm eyes and then the Exalted Wing's dumbfounded expressions. When she saw their faces, she recalled the peaceful day on which the recruit training had abruptly started. She didn't know that such rage had been hidden within her.

'We killed each other. We were killed by the suddenly appearing monsters without being able to resist. Yeah, these damn bastards. Now it's your turn.'

She raised the short sword shining with mysterious patterns up in the air before stabbing it into the ground.

Kiing!

A powerful energy spread from it and activated the karma freezing devices, which had been installed beforehand.

“Touchdown, you bastards!”

She shouted fiercely as she stood up.

From what I can tell, ‘leaping through the dragon’s gate’ originated from Chinese mythology, and it refers to how one can become successful if he or she is persistent. Here, Lee Jinhee forgets that carps are the ones featured in this story.

Chapter 201: That Day (4)

"... Huh?"

Flame-Thorn made a noise reminiscent of a sigh or a shout. Her flames hissed and swayed in ridicule.

Rather than being angry, her reaction showed that she was taken aback. It had been a long time since they had participated in real battle, and people would normally bow their heads and wait for orders. The Exalted Wings were so unfamiliar with and taken aback by this current situation that they didn't know how to react.

They didn't even notice the presence of the Light of Eternity, which the highest-ranked warriors on the streets recognized. Familiar with safety and authority, they momentarily paused when faced with an attack despite possessing amazing computing capacities. By the time they thought, 'Ah, is this a fight?', they were in no state to enter conflict.

The first one to react was not an Exalted Wings but the Tower of Warriors.

Crrrk.

While the first-floor hall looked like a normal building for symbolical purposes, the Tower of Warriors was in actuality an enormous accumulation and whirlwind of past karma weapons. As soon as the karma freezing devices activated, the smooth walls solidified with weapon fragments before crumbling down.

"Keuk!"

Leviathan, who windingly laid his body around, passing through walls, crashed into the Tower of Warriors when he lost his karma. Every time he wriggled his body in pain, the tower would crumble even faster.

Kiing!

All this time, the energy output of the repeater Lee Jinhee had stabbed into floor gradually became larger. No one could block this enormous flow of energy once it started. The Light of Eternity, which maintained the entire city, continuously flowed into the repeater. From there, it powered the karma freezing devices hidden throughout the Tower of Warriors, which made strange noises as it covered the entire city.

Whiiik!

Whiii!

Every time the glass crabs whistled, various towers built by the glass crabs shined in a blue light as they spread the karma freezing device's power out. These glass towers had been set up under the guise of increasing the city's defenses for the funeral.

The karma freezing devices dropped the levels of all warriors near the tower to the no-star level. While the devices' effect lowered as you moved towards the edge of the city, even if you stood at the very edge of the city, it would be difficult to use power beyond that of the three-star level.

The fight between the Exalted Wings, Choi Hyuk, and Lee Jinhee became as cruel and primitive as the 'Throne Game', which took place in the gymnasium.

"Just why?!"

"Choi Hyuk? Are you crazy?!"

Some were curious while others were shocked, but they soon didn't have the leisure to be. The Tower of Warriors had already begun to collapse, and they raised their blades to kill them.

Thud! Thud!

The Tower of Warriors gradually collapsed and crumbled as broken weapon fragments rained on the floor.

The weapon fragments sprinkling from the tower made people

become dizzy when hit by them.

Choi Hyuk drew his sword at the Exalted Wing closest to him, Flame-Thorn.

Kaang!

Flame-Thorn took out a handgun as long as her forearm and blocked his sword. It normally was a ‘Gun of Conclusion’, which shot karma, but currently, it was no different from a hard rod.

Choi Hyuk chased after Flame-Thorn, who was pushed a few steps back from their exchange.

Not recalling his extended sword, Choi Hyuk pushed her gun down and twisted his blade to pierce her throat. Sparks flew out where his sword and her gun clashed.

“Euk!”

Flame-Thorn turned her head to dodge Choi Hyuk’s attack again. Choi Hyuk’s hand shot out after her head and eventually grabbed her hair and tugged it towards him.

Crunch!

“Kaak!”

His abruptly crashing knee shattered her face. Unable to maintain her flames due to the karma freezing devices, Flame-Thorn’s body had become hard and smooth like a vase and warm like a heated floor. Dark red watery liquid smeared on the floor. Choi Hyuk grabbed her collar and attempted to stab her throat.

Puk!

However, Armor-Desert charged forward with his shoulders in front and slammed into Choi Hyuk’s stomach. As if being flipped up by a charging bull, Choi Hyuk’s body floated in the air before rolling on the ground. Weapon fragments narrowly missed where he rolled.

Rushing at him while deflecting the weapon fragments, Armor-

Song swung his hand, which had turned into a blade, at Choi Hyuk.

While the start was good, the situation was disadvantageous for Choi Hyuk and Lee Jinhee.

Choi Hyuk couldn't plant anyone on his side in the hall as the Exalted Wings' guards were personally in charge of the first-floor hall's security.

This meant that Choi Hyuk and Lee Jinhee had to fight two-versus-twelve, maybe even more, until the Berserkers dispatched outside the tower could make their way in.

Clang! Claang!

"Whooah"

The Square of Warriors was in complete chaos. Three concentric circles were engaged in a free-for-all.

Choi Hyuk, Lee Jinhee, and the Exalted Wings were in the very middle. Around them, the highest-ranked and transcendent warriors, the personal guards of the Exalted Wings, made up the first concentric circle. Outside of that were the Berserkers and Kundle Tribe members dispatched as security. They were doing their best to prevent the Exalted Wings from escaping while making their way through the Exalted Wings' guards to support Choi Hyuk. Finally, the last concentric circle was made up of warriors who had gathered for the funeral. Having noticed the change, they attempted to push past the Berserkers and Kundle Tribe members. These crowded warriors were stabbed and hit to death, and some even fell and were eventually crushed to death.

Whish!

Sensing a chill on his neck, Choi Hyuk ducked down as Armor-Desert's blade-hand brushed past his hair.

Whoosh!

While he avoided his blade-hand, his body was suddenly lifted into the air and he saw the ceiling raining with weapon fragments. Armor-Desert had grabbed Choi Hyuk's waist and tackled him down while he had momentarily looked away. While he was being flipped backwards, Choi Hyuk pressed down on Armor-Desert's head while raising his sword.

Thud!

Kiririk!

"Keuk!"

The heavy impact from being crushed by a bulky, solid machine-human rang out from his spine. Armor-Desert wasn't completely fine either. The moment Choi Hyuk fell on his back, he had extended his sword and slashed it between Armor-Desert's neck and shoulder.

The tough Armor-Desert didn't even groan, but his body was honest. Electricity sparked from Choi Hyuk's slash, and he lost strength in his arm, which was holding Choi Hyuk. Choi Hyuk slammed his elbow onto his head and wriggled out from his grasp. When he looked up, he felt a chill on his forehead. Armor-Song was close. His hand had turned into a matte black sword and was stabbing towards his forehead.

Baang!

Just as Choi Hyuk twisted his body the best he could in order to stab back, Armor-Song was slammed by Leviathan's tail and flung into the distance.

Of course, Leviathan didn't do this to help Choi Hyuk.

Writhing in pain, he roared like a beast,

"Kuaaaah! Choi Hyuk! Why?!!"

Once karma froze, Leviathan's gigantic body worked against him. From the start, it was impossible to sustain his body without

karma. His bones and muscles were crushed, and his dark blue body rippled severely.

Thud! Bang! Thump!

Leviathan had no choice but to be hit by the falling fragments as his body was too large. His body was tough even without karma, but the falling karma weapon fragments were also tough and sharp. His strong dragon scales cracked and shattered like worn wooden boards.

Red blood splattered like rain, drenching the hall.

Leviathan couldn't recover his senses due to the pain and simply struggled and flailed around. Of course, his struggles were like a tidal wave to the Exalted Wings, Choi Hyuk, and Lee Jinhee, who had all likewise lost their karma.

Lee Jinhee avoided the writhing Leviathan, stepping on a puddle of blood, and jumped up into the air. Behind her, Dark-Resentment's sword slightly brushed against her calf while Flame-Fog's burning hand burnt the tips of her hair from the front as she hastily ducked her head.

Lee Jinhee was surprised by the heat.

"Isn't your karma sealed?"

"I control my own karma weapon."

Even though he had no reason to reply, Flame-Fog frowned while replying to her question. His wrists were densely covered by white and blue string bracelets. The long threads from the bracelets fluttered above his wrists and hands, creating flames.

It looked like Flame-Fog felt proud of being able to create flames using his karma weapon in this situation. Taking a neutral stance between Flame-Rain and Flame-Hell, he was a proud warrior who took his training seriously. He was currently incredibly angry at Lee Jinhee, who left a scratch on the tip of his nose during a surprise attack.

“I don’t even care about your reason… I’ll give you a gruesome death.”

Flame-Fog charged at her while saying such chilling words. Dark-Resentment quietly followed behind him.

Thud!

Leviathan’s massive tail fell down behind her as she stepped back. At this moment, she had nowhere to dodge. She gritted her teeth and ran forward while swinging her short sword. She deflected the flames, however, a blade sliced her side and half a shield fell on her shoulder before she managed to roll on the floor. Ignoring the pain, she jumped up in order to observe the situation.

Blood, Leviathan, weapons falling from the tower, and warriors fighting like hell. It was complete chaos.

She suddenly heard a noise behind her.

“Charge!”

While it would have been great if they were Berserkers, it wasn’t a language from Earth. The Exalted Wings’ guards began pouring into the hall. They had been busy stopping the Berserkers from pushing in from the outside, yet it seemed they judged settling the inner situation was more important even if they overexerted themselves as ten transcendent warriors joined the fray.

“Daaamn it!”

She looked like she was about to cry as she shot forward again. When she used all her strength thanks to the chilling possibility that she might die, she was able to jump past Dark-Resentment and Flame-Fog without any injuries. She stepped on Flame-Fog’s head while she was at it before grabbing and climbing over Leviathan’s shaking tail.

“Tsk!”

Flame-Fog raged as he chased Lee Jinhee, crawling on Leviathan.

Just as he was about to climb over his tail, Lee Jinhee charged at him like a beast on all fours and stabbed his chest. She didn't completely climb over and instead clung and hid in a blind spot while waiting for an opportunity. Her hands were dyed red after having clung onto Leviathan's shattered scales.

Crack!

Lee Jinhee enjoyed the pain riding up her arm in recoil.

When she pulled her sword out at an angle, Flame-Fog rolled down like a piece of trash. Normally, his body would turn into flames as he died, but as his karma was sealed, he slammed onto the ground like a porcelain doll filled with liquid, shattering and spilling liquid everywhere.

She avoided Dark-Resentment and the ten personal guards, who were chasing after her, and began running again. An agonizing pain ached from the scratch left on her calf by Dark-Resentment. Her regenerative ability disappeared when her karma froze. Her bloody calf felt like she was wearing a tattered red knee-high sock.

'I can't die first...'

Biting down on her lip, Lee Jinhee jumped over Leviathan's body. Right below her, she saw Armor-Song fighting Choi Hyuk.

She immediately flung forward and stabbed her sword into the back of Armor-Song's neck.

Kiririk!

Even though the impact of her fall was added to her full-strength blow, her sword only penetrated halfway.

'Damn it... So you're a machine-human, is that it? Tough even without karma.'

Instead, she rolled backwards after being hit by Armor-Song's aggressive arm swing.

"Peh."

Lee Jinhee spat out a glob of bloody saliva before standing back up. It felt like her rips were broken as cold sweat ran down her spine and her legs gave out from the stinging pain. It might have been fortunate that she wasn't slashed by a sword.

Using the opening Lee Jinhee made for him, Choi Hyuk flung himself at Armor-Song. Armor-Song's body had already been dented and now an electric current flowed from the injury on the back of his neck. In the end, Choi Hyuk's sword almost sliced his head off.

Flame-Thorn had been repeatedly stabbed by Choi Hyuk and was dead in a pool of watery liquid.

Armor-Desert squirmed on the floor as there were holes between his neck and shoulder and through his knee.

Armor-Song had just died after having his head almost sliced off.

Flame-Fog died from being stabbed in the chest by Lee Jinhee.

Light-Walk and Light-Path couldn't maintain their figures once their karma froze, scattering as individual speckled lights, and ended up being crushed by the falling fragments and drowning in a pool of Leviathan's blood.

Leviathan no longer seemed to have the strength to struggle as he growled and stopped moving.

In the short while since the fight started and the hall fell into a state of chaos due to Leviathan's writhing, seven Exalted Wings were either killed or gravely injured.

Flame-Hell, who climbed over a now still Leviathan, had a dumbfounded expression as he observed the current situation. With an enraged face, he warned,

"If you surrender now, I'll spare your lives."

The five surviving Exalted Wings and the ten additional guards surrounded Choi Hyuk and Lee Jinhee and were slowly closing in

on them. Even though they all didn't have karma, as transcendent warriors, they were experts in combat.

"Ha!"

Yet, the one who snorted out of reflex was Lee Jinhee.

"Do you know what pisses me off the most?"

It seemed Flame-Hell wasn't serious about letting them surrender as he didn't answer her and simply pulled their encirclement closer.

Lee Jinhee smiled fiercely.

"It's that you guys don't even know what you taught us."

They had fought fellow classmates and colleagues to the death on a peaceful day. People who had gone shopping had to fight monsters to survive. After being named Consumables, they were tossed into a battlefield with a 1% survival rate.

From the start, she didn't consider something like this as a crisis.

As if infected by Lee Jinhee's smile, a fierce smile hung on Choi Hyuk's lips as well. His smile was more exaggerated and crazier than Lee Jinhee's.

"There's no karma here. The ones who should be trembling are you."

Lee Jinhee declared.

"Kill. Only then can you kill. Isn't that right?"

Choi Hyuk responded as he wielded his sword.

Lee Jinhee swung her sword as well.

"Director!"

Alexei led two other team leaders, who had also followed her from the Light of Eternity, as they burst into the hall. There were originally five, but two had died while trying to force their way past the guards.

Without a sliver of hesitation, blades tangled and bodies clashed once more.

Chapter 202: That Day (5)

The two team leaders and Alexei were only the start. Not long after, Baek Seoin, leading the main force of the Berserkers, forcefully pushed his way through the guards' defensive line. After that, everyone fought mixed together, disregarding battle lines.

Choi Hyuk slashed the guards blocking his path again and again as he chased and killed the Exalted Wings. Stepping on their corpses, he would look for his next target.

Due to the warriors pushing the Berserkers from the outside, the battlefield slowly became more confined and cramped. Corpses were pushed and piled together, and weapon fragments fell down and embedded themselves in them. Warriors pushed and pulled on top of the hill of weapons and corpses as they targeted their enemies. Covered in fragments, blood, and fluids, they now looked like strange lumps fighting each other.

"Haak! Haaak!"

Rough pants shook his ears. He could no longer tell if those breaths were his or others, or if the world itself was growling at them.

The world of red, blue, yellow, lumpy, hard corpses and fluids was wet, sticky, and prickly.

Though almost all the karma in his body was frozen, the reason why he, an earthling, could survive in this unfamiliar and distant universe was because the karma that made up his body had already changed it. His bones and muscles remained the same even under different environments, and sufficient energy was supplied to his veins.

However, it seemed he had reached his limits now. It hurt.

No matter how big his breaths were, what entered his lungs wasn't oxygen, and his joints creaked under Alliance City's gravity

as it became more and more unbearable. His body had reached its limit like the collapsed Leviathan, whose body was too much to handle without karma.

Still, Choi Hyuk moved to kill.

“Haa… Haa…. Got you.”

Choi Hyuk revealed his teeth and raised his sword. Covered in various fluids, all that stood out were his shiny teeth.

“St… Stop. Just why? Why?!”

His body was short but rough-looking. His height and width were the same length. Unsuited for his muscular build, his arms trembled as he raised his hammer. He was the only one amongst the 14 Exalted Wings who didn’t have his own species. The only Exalted Wings who didn’t belong to the top four species were Leviathan and the ‘Blacksmith’ in front of him.

He was the sole survivor of his species, and he introduced himself as the ‘Blacksmith’, saying he had no name after losing his species. As the top blacksmith in the alliance, he was accepted as an Exalted Wing as a symbol encompassing minor forces under the banner ‘One Alliance’ and for being a political pushover with no force of his own.

He was the ‘Blacksmith’, who silently raised his hammer for the alliance while bearing the pain of his past.

Even during final moment, what he raised was not a weapon but a forging hammer. Regret, fear, and dejection filled his heart.

“Th-there’s no need to kill this blacksmith as well, is there?!”

He pleaded to Choi Hyuk, whose eyes and teeth were all that stood out.

Choi Hyuk mocked,

“Why are you asking me that? This is a game you guys started. After making species that were living fine on their own kill each

other... Why? As the Blacksmith, do you not know? You didn't participate in that decision?"

"That... That's because there was a reason! The earthlings weren't the only ones! Isn't the entire universe in a war right now?!"

"Then I probably have a reason too."

The 'Blacksmith' swung his hammer and Choi Hyuk swung his sword.

Thump!

Exhausted, Choi Hyuk couldn't avoid the hammer. He simply curled his left arm and pressed it against his ear, receiving the strike fully on his arm. The impact shook his head and his bones ached in pain.

Pscht!

Still, the sword in his right hand precisely burrowed into the Blacksmith's bulging chest. Feeling the sensation of ripping flesh, breaking bones, and drawing blood, Choi Hyuk grabbed his sword at an angle and pulled it out. Blood gushed into the air with a ripping sound.

The Blacksmith slumped down with powerless eyes.

Choi Hyuk looked down at his corpse and mumbled,

"Now... Is Hell the only one left?"

Everyone was dead.

Choi Hyuk had personally killed Flame-Wind. A loyal subject of the old king, he was always in favor of Flame-Rain, which was why he had also treated Choi Hyuk favorably. Yet, in reality, he didn't have any influence, having been kept in check by Flame-Hell. Unable to believe Choi Hyuk's betrayal, Flame-Wind died, cursing him before worrying about Flame-Rain and then mumbling her father, Flame-Sky's name.

The sword expert, Dark-Resentment, and the close-combat expert, Dark-Tooth, were killed under the combined attacks of Alexei, the two team leaders, Lee Jinhee, and Baek Seoin. Alexei died during the fight. The boy who joined the Berserkers at fifteen because he admired Lee Jinhee. Nicknamed Lyosha, he was closer to being Lee Jinhee's personal soldier than a Berserker. He saved Lee Jinhee, who was in danger due to exhaustion, by receiving Dark-Tooth's fist at the last moment. Put romantically, love was what killed the boy. Besides that, his death wasn't special. This battle was far too intense for a middle-ranked team leader to handle. This wasn't limited only to Alexei as most Berserker team leaders fell in battle.

Choi Hyuk heard Lee Jinhee's cry.

Only Flame-Hell overcame this crisis, sometimes hiding and sometimes assassinating skilled Berserkers to survive. However, the battlefield was slowly closing in. He wouldn't be able to find a place to hide or escape on top of the hill of corpses and weapons.

Just as he thought this, Flame-Hell showed himself on his own. He crawled his way up the mountain of corpses and weapons and stood at the top where everyone could see him.

'He made it easier for me.'

Choi Hyuk dragged his heavy feet and walked towards Flame-Hell.

Their gazes met. Flame-Hell was above and Choi Hyuk was below.

Looking up, Choi Hyuk saw the Tower of Warriors, still maintaining its structure, as broken karma weapons fell.

Flame-Hell revealed his teeth as he smiled. His smooth face, which was difficult to differentiate between that of a middle-aged man or a youth, was contorted like an old man's due to the bloody battle and malice.

“Choi Hyuk! And all you insects! The moment of your judgment has come!”

Madness shined in his eyes.

Whoong!

The shattered and dull karma weapons of the dangerously standing Tower of Warriors slowly realigned. They possessed a faint golden light. Following this, the scattered karma weapons on the ground and in corpses began to rise.

Murmurs erupted on the battlefield.

“But karma was frozen?”

“Wasn’t karma frozen?”

“What about the frozen karma?”

Various questions left warriors’ mouths.

Flame-Hell’s body trembled as if he found this thrilling.

“If you are a truly great warrior and if you are a warrior who knows your own fate and soul, you will be able to squeeze out a little strength from your karma weapon in a world devoid of karma! Also, I am the chairman of the Exalted Wings! The entire Tower of Warriors is no different from my karma weapon! Now I will retake control!”

Accompanied by his ringing declaration, a portion of the fallen karma weapons flew back up and joined the Tower of Warriors.

While its strength was incomparably weak compared to normal, a strength unimaginable in this situation where karma was frozen swept through the Tower of Warriors.

“Now, it’s too late. Choi Hyuk and you trivial insurgents. As a filthy bunch of ash, turn to ash like you belong!”

Thinking about how he shouldn’t accept groups without roots and would have to investigate their qualifications more strictly

when rebuilding the alliance, Flame-Hell spread his arms.

Exhausted and seemingly in despair, Choi Hyuk replied while standing rigidly in the middle of the mountain of corpses.

“Ah, really?”

Grkk.

His body twisted with a terrifying sound. Squeezing out all his strength, he poured it into ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’ and pointed it at the sky. Around the blade, a black snake of emptiness opened its maw, seemingly ready to devour everything.

“Wh-what? Your karma?”

“The words you said just now, did you forget them?”

Just as Flame-Hell recalled his words about great warriors, souls, and so on…

Puhwaaak!

Choi Hyuk swung his sword and the Tower of Warriors, which had just began operating, scattered like sparks. He ‘denied’ its magnificent power and the spent-up weapon fragments fell down to the ground.

Flame-Hell hastily dodged the falling fragments before rolling down the mountain of corpses. Coincidentally, what he saw when he stopped rolling were Choi Hyuk’s feet.

Choi Hyuk turned around and said to the Berserkers near him,

“See? The special training was worth it. I told you we could never know what the Exalted Wings would do.”

Flame-Hell trembled in shock.

“You, you crazy… Just what did you do? Even if you used the strength of your karma weapon, how could you…!”

Then, as if he realized something, his eyes widened. He realized something facing death.

“Crazy… It became your fate… Does your soul possess ‘denial’? Do you know what kind of power that is? You’re going to die! Soon, even your soul will be denied!”

Choi Hyuk lowered his sword, aiming it towards Flame-Hell, without much emotion.

“Aah, I already threw away such foolish thoughts long ago. I only have a few days left.”

“Keuk!”

At the frightening killing intent, Flame-Hell unconsciously retreated back. He had never imagined that he would die.

The Flame Wing Tribe was the strongest tribe in the universe, and he, born of the highest nobility, had never been in a situation where his life was at risk. He had also fought countless battles, but they were all battles that he would inevitably win. To him, fighting battles he could win was a source of pride, and it was proof of his shining strategic decision-making ability.

When Flame-Sky died while possessing immense power, he had inwardly clicked his tongue.

Yet, for the first time in his life, he was in front of the god of death’s blade. A death god who had climbed up from the depths of hell.

“Just why?”

He asked in despair.

“Choi. Mi. Yeon. You don’t know who that is, right? My mother. Who passed away during the recruit training. That day, I vowed to kill and kill until the day I killed all of you.”

“Revenge? You did all this just for revenge…?”

It seemed his pride was hurt as this was all because of revenge. His eyes were filled with enmity and madness.

“That was appropriate for Earth! Inhabitants who hadn’t awoken

karma, who pushed all the killing to the minority as the majority lived in their false sense of peace! An underhandedness that persecuted the weak when you were so powerless you couldn't hunt a beast! A selfishness that thought first of personal benefit even in situations where you needed to work together! And a cowardice, so much so that it was rare to find anyone willing to sacrifice themselves! You know it as well! Weren't you an executive of the alliance? What can we do with a species like that? You were destined to be annihilated by the monsters if it wasn't for the alliance! The alliance didn't always use methods like that. To species of value, we assigned them non-combative missions too! It was the case for the Speckled Light Tribe and the Seo Tribe in your galaxy! But the earthlings? There was even a method where you could have escaped the 'Ring of Rebirth' without killing anyone! Yet, you guys killed each other on your own!"

Flame-Hell swore as he recalled the report he received several years ago. Choi Hyuk's gaze was cold.

"And who are you to judge the earthlings, to judge me? You were mistaken. And it's time to pay the price."

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' was aimed at Flame-Hell's neck.

"Wait! Wait! Flame-Rain! Flame-Rain's on her way! If that happens, do you think you'll live? Hostage. Take me as a hostage!"

Flame-Hell made a last-ditch effort.

Choi Hyuk was cold.

"Do you think you have value as a hostage to Flame-Rain? Also..."

He glanced at the sky. With karma frozen, Alliance City's sky simply reflected the dark, murky universe. There were only a few stars. It was peaceful.

"Flame-Rain won't come."

With this chilling remark, 'Choi Hyuk's Denial' harvested Flame-

Hell's neck.

The 13th head fell and rolled on the ground. Flame-Hell's eyes remained glaring fiercely.

Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers stood motionlessly as though they were offering a silent prayer to the avengers of Earth who fell along the way. Shadows were cast beneath their feet from the faintly shining Light of Eternity.

It was strange and quiet.

As if they had a premonition, those who were intensely fighting outside the tower slowed before coming to a halt. One after another, they glanced at the tower which was turning into a pile of weapon fragments before fixing their gazes on it.

'The fight has ended.'

They sensed this.

Choi Hyuk climbed up the mountain of corpses and weapons with exhausted steps before looking down and shouting,

"As of this moment, the 13 Exalted Wings excluding Flame-Rain are all dead."

The shock on everyone present was almost visible. A few actually lost their balance and faltered.

What was going to happen now? What about the war against the monsters? Did Flame-Rain not know of this situation?

With no one to answer, these questions burst out from here and there like cracks on a thawing ice rink.

Choi Hyuk gave them the answer they wanted,

"And I, in second place in the alliance ranking, will now go kill the monster queen."

Choi Hyuk was ranked first amongst the warriors, fifteenth overall, and currently, with only Flame-Rain left, he was ranked

second. But... what did he say?

“The alliance is facing a crisis. If we drag things on, the alliance will be annihilated by the monsters. The only method is launching a sudden attack on the monster queen right now and killing her. If we kill her, the monsters are just beasts, nothing to worry about.”

“And who was the one who created this crisis?!”

“Who was the one who killed all the Exalted Wings?!”

The raging crowd shouted.

“So? It’s already done. I’m the only transcendent warrior left.”

Silence abruptly hung in the air.

Well, if Choi Hyuk deactivated the karma freezing devices right now, all the warriors gathered here wouldn’t be a match for him.

“I am going to kill the monster queen now. I’ll probably die there. It won’t be so bad for you. But, after that? If you aren’t confident in dealing with the war against monsters, then follow me. Support me in the final battle.”

While brazen, he was the only hope for the despairing warriors.

Choi Hyuk looked up at the sky and thought for a moment before saying,

“Yeah, for your life and freedom.”

There was a great commotion. Though enraged, this was the undoubted acceptance of the warriors of different affiliations and species.

Someone raised their voice and asked,

“What about Exalted Wing Flame-Rain? Does she know about this?”

Choi Hyuk smiled as he said,

“Flame-Rain is currently busy. She’s going to open up a path for us.”

‘Open up a path.’ As he said this, Zero, who was dispatched to the monsters’ universe, was dying. Holding his deteriorating body, Guardian Bae Jinman wailed,

“Why? Why? Why did you?!”

Bae Jinman had lived on while being thoroughly exhausted life. Although he was prepared to die during the final battle, he was dispatched to the monsters’ universe instead of the Tower of Warriors. Still, he stood as the vanguard, prepared to die, though he had never done it before. Yet, Zero saved him and was dying in his place.

While dying, Zero forced himself to take deep breaths and said in a calm voice,

“Isn’t this the final battle? When the war ends, blade-carriers like me will be useless, but healers like you should continue to live and help rebuild the world. That’s... (Haa) Overseer Richard’s desire. He dreamed for the survival and prosperity of earthlings.”

Dispatched to Flame-Rain’s stronghold, their duty was to invade deep into the enemy territory and flock monsters to the stronghold.

The stronghold appeared and disappeared constantly throughout the monsters’ universe and dealt blows to the monsters. When its precise location was known, the monster queen dispatched a large army. Even after Handke and Leah had successfully baited the monsters and returned, Zero and Bae Jinman remained as vanguard in order to bait even more monsters, notifying the monsters of the fleeing stronghold’s location in real-time.

As a result, Flame-Rain, who was about to advance to Alliance City, was caught up in this, the monsters near the monster queen were sent to the border, and Zero, who was Richard’s right-hand man, died.

Although Choi Hyuk didn’t know about Zero’s death, no, though

he predicted it when they were dispatched, he calmly ended his speech,

“Then I’ll consider this as all of you participating in the final battle.”

There was no other choice.

These warriors who were caked in blood from trying to kill each other not long ago raised their swords as allies.

The alliance’s final assembly of the strongest elites. That was what people later called them.

Chapter 203: That Day (6)

They gathered the scattered warriors and hastily created troops.

They decided to leave the corpses alone as they didn't have time to spare.

A mountain of corpses was also discovered at the Light of Eternity. This was proof that the Berserkers and Kundle Tribe members had laid down their lives to defend the Light of Eternity.

They didn't have a moment of mourning. As they would lament with their lives.

{I'm deactivating the karma freezing devices. Prepare for the shock.}

An announcement went live from the broadcasting device and a storm of karma swept over them.

Those who had obtained enlightenment during the intense fight and those who had accumulated retribution by killing those much higher ranked than them instantly reached the highest rank and transcendent level. The scattering karma of the dead and the surging newly obtained karma mixed together to create a storm.

After this gale swept over them, they all felt awkward.

While it was welcome because it would be useful in the final battle, there were some who felt empty or sad because it didn't feel like their own strength for some reason.

The Sword of Vow 'Lee Jinhee's Vow' used the power of the transcendent level to transform into the Sword of Conclusion 'Lee Jinhee's World'.

The Sword of Sentiment 'Baek Seoin's Premonition' became the Sword of Conclusion 'Baek Seoin's Stronghold'. Always saddened about how his Intuition only protected his life, Baek Seoin's wish of protecting others was forged.

Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin were the only ones among the Berserkers to reach the transcendent level, but before they could express their emotions of reaching the peak of the alliance in strength, their jaws dropped when they saw Choi Hyuk.

“Wh-what the hell? Leader? Is he even human?”

“... Huh.”

It was so shocking that Baek Seoin, who was always respectful to Choi Hyuk, couldn’t help but say, ‘Huh.’

Although the highest-ranked warriors couldn’t sense it, the transcendent warriors could see the mighty flow of fate surrounding Choi Hyuk.

Choi Hyuk’s fate of denying everything in his path had been achieved when he took down all the Exalted Wings, who maintained order in the alliance. His fate was so overwhelming that it could be called more of an incarnation of the great universe than its will.

Would a god among gods look like that? Even the karma of transcendent warriors seemed to bow in front of him.

‘Denial’ became his soul itself and the Tower of Warriors, which had turned into ruin because he denied it, became his flesh and bones, in other words, his karma.

Could Flame-Sky, who was at the peak of the transcendent level and the strongest warrior in history, be able to face off against him? Everyone shook their heads inwardly. There was no way that was true. ‘That’ couldn’t be categorized as a warrior. Wasn’t it more appropriate to call him a ‘phenomenon’?

Grrk.

Choi Hyuk clenched his fist. He could clearly sense the universe hanging from his five fingers.

‘In my current state, couldn’t I deny even the universe?’

However…

Falter.

Choi Hyuk almost collapsed from the dizziness pounding his head.

Karma didn’t stop flowing. Even though he had obtained god-like powers, it continued to surge.

Blood almost ripped through his veins as it circulated and pounded his head, and the surging energy heated his body. His vision became blurry and it became difficult to breathe.

“Huu…”

Still, Choi Hyuk managed to hold onto his knee and straighten his body. Though he only moved slightly, his hand felt hot like it was on fire and so strong that he almost smashed his own knee.

‘This isn’t a power I can control.’

Choi Hyuk realized this.

Denial had already encroached inside him. The moment he couldn’t rein it in, he himself would be denied. His insides were already a mess as the blood that filled his head, nose, and stomach repeatedly regenerated.

Although it was godly, it wasn’t his. Although he could wield it, he couldn’t put it down. A single slash. That was the amount of time granted to him.

Choi Hyuk collected his breath as he looked at the surprised Baek Seoin and Lee Jinhee. Though he was previously taken aback by the sudden changes, he was used to it now. He would be able to move for now.

In a calm voice, he only said what was needed,

“I can’t use my strength until I reach the monster queen. You two need to open up a path.”

Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin understood without needing a detailed explanation. The moment he used his power, which was like holding the entire universe in his hands, it would explode immediately like the Big Bang which created the universe and could no longer be stopped or used again.

“W-wait. Then leader… No, never mind.”

Having a hunch regarding the future, Lee Jinhee was about to hastily ask Choi Hyuk, but she swallowed her words in the end. She knew as well. No matter what, Choi Hyuk was going to die, and that was his fate.

However, if Choi Hyuk replied to her question ‘Are you going to die?’, she felt like it would no longer be reversible. In the end, Lee Jinhee swallowed her boiling emotions. It hurt like her stomach and esophagus were being burned. Enduring the pain, she gritted her teeth.

‘Just watch. I vowed, didn’t I? I won’t watch you die before me.’

Her eyes shined with a blue light.

**

“I finished our mission. I’ll join you.”

Guardian Bae Jinman was waiting for them when they crossed over to the monsters’ universe. Choi Hyuk had told him to stealthily join them at the rendezvous point if he became a transcendent warrior, but even Choi Hyuk didn’t know he would actually come.

Though he didn’t see Zero, he didn’t say anything.

He simply announced his final order.

“It’ll be a lightning-fast battle. No one will fall behind. If you do, you will continue to advance while killing the monsters. Today will be the day of the complete eradication of the monsters.”

The warriors advanced towards the heart of the monsters’

universe.

It was similar to falling into a confusing dream.

Worlds possessing different laws were ripped away and spread around in this surreal world.

A gigantic tree that looked like the home of fairies and a metal skyscraper that looked like someplace the Terminator would jump out from connected together like a work of Escher. The third, fourth, and fifth dimensions all tangled together at the same time, making it difficult for one to figure out what was up and what was down and whether they were even standing at all. It felt nauseating as though they were on a rollercoaster.

Nightmares, meaning monsters, were hidden in this dream-like world.

The only reason why they didn't lose their way was thanks to the karma they had brought over from their own universe.

Facing the monsters' universe, which twisted and bent as if saying this chaos was its order and law, the warriors raised their own order. They pushed back the space-time as if it was a jungle and advanced while picking up speed.

Like how you would fall from walking through a cliff painting on the floor in the movies, there was a sense of disharmony amongst the scenery they walked. It clearly showed that they were unwelcome guests in this universe.

Choi Hyuk was very well aware of where the monster queen was, having led the reconnaissance team previously.

The army took the shortest path and the monsters, weakened from chasing Flame-Rain's stronghold, couldn't stop them. The various worlds in this universe gradually brightened as if they were expecting to be released from this nightmare of being crushed and violated.

However, the army soon scattered. The army, which had been

traveling like a comet, became as thin as a shooting star and as small as an ice pellet. Like how rocket boosters would fall away from rockets, weaker warriors fell behind and each began their own lonely battle in this unfamiliar universe.

The ones who remained until the end were the small number of transcendent and highest-ranked warriors.

What they faced was a cocoon as big as the Sun which spread its nervous system throughout the universe.

The cocoon pulsed like it had a beating heart and its nervous system flickered as though it was firing neurons.

The heart and the brain of the monsters' universe, without a doubt, it was the monster queen.

"But how is that a queen? It's just a monster lump. Why did they call it the queen from the beginning?"

Lee Jinhee grumbled.

"That's not the queen."

Shocked by Choi Hyuk's words, Lee Jinhee looked at the cocoon again and felt its overwhelming presence.

"That's not the queen? If that's not the queen, then what could possibly be the queen?"

"... The queen is inside it."

Choi Hyuk said while grimacing. His chest was rising and falling quickly along with his fast breathing.

He hadn't participated in a single battle all the way here. Simply holding onto his explosive strength and maintaining a speed where he wouldn't fall behind was difficult enough.

Lee Jinhee's eyes narrowed.

"Meaning we have to slice it open?"

She took action. Since Choi Hyuk wasn't in any condition to

command, Lee Jinhee took command all the way here.

“Baek hyung. Guardian. Please guard the leader and enter. Baek hyung can sense danger and Guardian can heal. Now, the rest of you will slice that monster lump open! If you can, follow the leader in since we don’t know what’s waiting for us inside.”

The warriors stood at the front. There were three transcendent warriors including Lee Jinhee. Ten highest-ranked warriors. They looked quite unmatched against this gigantic cocoon that was comparable to a demise-ranked monster.

The air was tense.

They thought that this could be the end.

“Lee Jinhee.”

Baek Seoin called her. When she turned, her short hair fluttered, contrasting the monsters’ universe behind her.

“What?”

Hearing her blunt reply, such empty farewells like ‘See you on the other side’, ‘Don’t die’, ‘Thanks’, or ‘I actually…’ disappeared from his mind.

As if trying to help her relax, he lightly asked,

“Ah, I’m suddenly curious. What’s the skill of your Sword of Conclusion?”

“… I don’t know.”

Lee Jinhee turned her body away as if trying to hide her sword.

Her vow to protect her friends became stronger and was now complete. Her sword would find its way towards anyone precious to her, even if a dimension lay between them. That was ‘Lee Jinhee’s World’. Her precious friends were her world. And since one of them was Baek Seoin…

‘He’ll be surprised if I say something so fluttery.’

Lee Jinhee couldn’t say it even if she died. Since Choi Hyuk was insane, it didn’t matter, but wasn’t Baek Seoin a crafty guy?

Still, seemingly less tense than before and moving more fluidly, Lee Jinhee stared at the pulsing cocoon. Her flesh and blood felt as tense as a drawn bow.

Just then, she shouted,

“Let’s go!!”

The gigantic cocoon spread its tentacles like wings as it faced Lee Jinhee. Warriors followed behind her.

There was a sudden flash. The tentacles devoured them like a tidal wave. Screams erupted.

Although Lee Jinhee told the warriors to follow Choi Hyuk in if they could, it didn’t seem like that would be possible. Baek Seoin clenched his fist at this tense battle.

After a tense, nightmarish period of time, Lee Jinhee slashed a part of the cocoon. Drenched in blood and slashing the tentacles shooting towards her, she shouted,

“Now!”

Baek Seoin held Choi Hyuk and Bae Jinman, who weren’t as mobile as him, under his arms. At some point, Choi Hyuk’s body began getting worse rapidly.

“Then.”

He shot forward.

The warriors blocked the tentacles targeting them with their lives.

Leaving the blood-soaked Lee Jinhee, who was grinning as she kicked a tentacle away, when he entered the cocoon, it felt like he was diving into water.

Chapter 204: That Day (7)

The sight inside the monster lump was completely unexpected. It wasn't made of flesh or blood inside.

It was completely filled with a silver fog. Rather than a monster queen's dwelling, it was like a beautiful and shiny fairy queen's abode.

Although the moisture in the air was fresh and pleasant when inhaled, after a little bit of time, they became dizzy and felt yucky in their stomachs.

Silver cocoons rested in every place that shined beautifully, but inside of each were ferocious monsters.

"This is..."

Baek Seoin said in a trembling voice.

Far into the fog, he saw a shining lake. A coiled body, with skin shining with a white, gentle glow, floated in the center of the lake. Every time this lifeform, whose body stood out as it ignored concepts of space and depth, took a breath deep enough for its soft fur to sway, ripples would spread out on the lake and shake the silver fog. The silver cocoons, which likely contained monsters, also exhaled at the same time.

Choi Hyuk came out from under Baek Seoin's arm and stood holding his sword.

Although it was his first time seeing her, he was certain that this lifeform with surprisingly soft fur was the monster queen. He was emotionless even at the prospect of killing something so beautiful.

"Please wait."

Baek Seoin grabbed Choi Hyuk's shoulder as he prepared to launch forward. Cold sweat dripped from his chin. Baek Seoin's Intuition, which could detect danger to his life, activated. Ignoring

his body which screamed not to walk forward, he took the lead.

“It’s still far away. I’ll escort you to a distance where you can kill her for sure.”

The shining lake was shockingly cold. Baek Seoin lightly soaked his hand in the water before saying that there weren’t any problems. Then he began walking on it. Ripples spread out from Baek Seoin’s steps. Bae Jinman supported Choi Hyuk as he had lost control of his karma and couldn’t even walk on water.

Splash. Splash. Ripple.

The sounds of their splashing footsteps and rippling water shook the silver fog.

Bae Jinman seemed to have felt something strange.

“I feel like we’ve become adventurers in an unknown world.”

The monster queen lit the world with a faint light like the moon, and those ferocious monsters were asleep in their soft cocoons. Though it was a new world, the fog possessed an air of malice and as they walked through it, their bodies tensed as though they were looking for a treasure or hunting a dragon. Bae Jinman thought about Indiana Jones and War of the Ring he had read in his youth. An adventure filled with danger and excitement.

The shining lake was quite suspicious, but nothing happened. Was the monster queen truly asleep? Bae Jinman spread his karma out to carefully read his surroundings. As a support type, he had obtained various skills when he reached the transcendent level. Before, he could connect to his allies’ minds and use skills like ‘Get up!’ to imbue them with courage. Now, he could examine the monster queen’s thoughts and read fragments of her memories.

Like Gandolf who told stories of the past, he told Choi Hyuk, who was leaning against his shoulder, the fragments of memories he saw. Choi Hyuk wasn’t particularly interested in it, but he closed his eyes and let him be as he was already having a hard time

controlling his rampaging karma.

“The queen of the monsters… is an evil influence of demise. She was born as a tool when a world’s fate reached its end and was faced with demise. She deceived the world with her divine beauty and led everyone to their demise at the decisive moment.”

Splash, splash. After taking a few steps, he continued,

“Since she had fulfilled her mission, she would have died and disappeared, but she awakened a desire for life. A type of mutation. In order to survive, she looked for and brought demise to other worlds and extracted their fates. She also brainwashed still arriving fates of demise and used them as dimension attacking weapons. Those were the demise-ranked monsters we encountered.”

Ah, so that was how it was. Thinking about it while leaning on Bae Jinman’s shoulder, Choi Hyuk found this story interesting.

Splash!

Baek Seoin, who was leading in front, seemed to have taken a wrong step as his foot submerged into the water. Ripples spread out. He stood still. It wasn’t because of Bae Jinman’s story.

Baek Seoin’s back was drenched in cold sweat. As if sighing, he said,

“Ahh, is it here?”

He didn’t have the capacity to listen to Bae Jinman’s story. Warnings squeezed his head without rest. Although he had stepped on the boundaries of life and death a few times, he had never felt such a powerful warning before. Its meaning was clear.

‘I’ll definitely die if I take another step.’

From the pain that gnawed on his entire body, he wanted to throw it all away and run. Baek Seoin glanced at the monster queen still quite a distance away before glancing at Choi Hyuk who

was leaning against Bae Jinman. Choi Hyuk, who was taller than Bae Jinman, was being dragged along with his feet submerged in the water.

He felt conflicted.

Was the danger he felt coming from the monster queen herself? Or was there something else? If the monster queen was personally going to move, then Baek Seoin didn't have to fight, but if there was something else, then Choi Hyuk could not be allowed to fight.

He was sweating cold sweat even now.

Standing still, Baek Seoin thought about it before shaking his head in the end.

'What are you thinking about? At times like this, you have to act with the assumption that there's something else. The final trap activates the moment you are about to get your hands on the treasure.'

He turned around and said,

"Guardian, I'll leave the leader in your care. Also, leader, I pray for your good fortune."

Smiling, he took a step forward. Without even seeing what happened, he scattered his karma in all directions.

**

To Bae Jinman, Baek Seoin's back suddenly seemed as large as a giant's.

The karma released by a warrior determined to die covered Choi Hyuk and Bae Jinman in a sphere.

Ting, ting, ting! Pscht! Thud! Crrrrk!

Reflecting sounds, sounds of something piercing and breaking. It was terrifying.

The fog seemed to shake as black objects shot up from around

them. The peacefully swaying cocoons they had passed and had yet to pass all ripped apart and monsters burst out of them. As larvae, they were used as one-use ranged weapons.

Choi Hyuk shut his already closed his eyes tighter. He knew that this wasn't the attack of the monster queen herself. That was why he had to endure it.

Sounds of something breaking and ripping continued like a rain shower before suddenly stopping.

"Cough..."

Baek Seoin spat blood.

Choi Hyuk barely managed to open his eyes as he saw Baek Seoin's arm covering his right. Though the attacks were shot at a transcendental speed, the Sword of Conclusion 'Baek Seoin's Stronghold' predicted and reflected all of them away from Choi Hyuk and Bae Jinman as it now lay broken and Baek Seoin's arm was twisted at a strange angle. Three peculiar spears made of crushed monsters were embedded in his elbow. No, his entire body was covered in countless monster-forged spears, making it difficult to tell if it was Baek Seoin or a new type of monster.

Splash!

Baek Seoin lay on top of the lake. With his stomach bleeding his severed insides, he laughed hollowly as he floated on the water face up.

"Is this how I go...?"

It seemed he could no longer see as his eyes couldn't focus.

He opened his dry lips and said with a cough,

"Go. (Cough) Go. Leader... There... isn't anything dangerous left... (Cough)"

However, as if nailed in place, Choi Hyuk couldn't take a step forward.

The lake shined in a red light, dyed with Baek Seoin's blood. Choi Hyuk's eyes wavered.

He was okay when Alexei died and considered Zero's death within circumstances.

Would Baek Seoin be different? But he was. When he saw Baek Seoin dying in front of him, Choi Hyuk could no longer maintain calm. He was someone who had aided him throughout his long, difficult journey. If it wasn't for him, nothing would have been possible.

Though he had to move, though he needed move and though he would move, he couldn't move his feet right now.

"Why... are you looking at me like that? It doesn't suit you."

Would a flame blazing for the last time before it died out be like him? Baek Seoin's face looked peaceful for some reason. His voice was calm as well.

"I'm fine. You're the one who saved my life anyways... I'm repaying that favor. Ah... Right... Lee Jinhee. I still owe a lot to her... The day we first met her, she saved my life... Once this was over, I wanted to give the rest of my life to her... Like how I followed you without question all this time... I wanted to do... whatever it took for her dream... Ah, that... That's... a shame. A shame... a shame... truly...."

His calm voice quickly began to die out. Baek Seoin's speech became gradually became slower like someone on anesthetics and his eyes closed.

In his final moment, Baek Seoin suddenly opened his eyes and glared at Choi Hyuk.

"Go, Choi Hyuk."

He said in an impolite speech.

"You know, right? I did as much as I could for you..."

Then he closed his eyes.

…

After a moment of silence, Bae Jinman's exhausted voice spoke.

"He fell asleep."

"… So… In the end, his fate… What?"

Bae Jinman shrugged his shoulders while supporting Choi Hyuk. Thanks to that, Choi Hyuk's body moved up and down. It felt like drowsiness was escaping him.

"He fell asleep. As a healer at the transcendent level, he won't be able to die easily in front of me. Though it will take a while for him to recover completely."

Choi Hyuk gave Baek Seoin a sharp gaze. Looking at it now, he saw a golden light lingering inside Baek Seoin's ripped stomach.

"Then… The reason why Baek hyung's face became calm was the 'light before the sunset'…"

"Yes, it was because I began my healing. After that, it was because he was sleepy."

Haa.

Choi Hyuk's shoulders drooped as he got off Bae Jinman's shoulders.

His submerged feet stood firmly on top of the water.

He looked at Bae Jinman.

"Guardian, thank you until the very end."

"I truly thank you as well."

After looking at each other for a while, Choi Hyuk took a step forward.

Thuddd!

Even though it was a light step, the lake split and created a path.

As soon as his suppressed karma began to release, he couldn't stop it.

Choi Hyuk gazed at the monster queen floating in front of him.

She was awake from the start.

Her fur was a soft as a fox's. A fine crack ran up her gently curved back, and then she opened her red eyes. Eyes possessing an unmatched wickedness opened on the peacefully sleeping divine's back.

Her vigor was overwhelming. Since she was a 'phenomenon', no, the universe itself since long ago. Yesterday, he would have thought, 'How could I defeat something like her?' and groaned, but it was currently wary of Choi Hyuk's power.

Choi Hyuk's lips hung crookedly.

"Apparently, you're a mutation that desires for life?"

Grrrk.

He tightly held his sword handle like it was almost about to break. The monsters' universe was clutched in his grasp as it shrieked. The silver fog became dyed black.

"That desire, I'll deny it."

Choi Hyuk shot forward.

'Choi Hyuk's Denial' devoured the monster queen.

The world became dark and peaceful.

**

"Woooaaah!"

Slicing the tentacles crowding and chasing her until the end, Lee Jinhee suddenly lost her balance and faltered when the universe suddenly rocked.

'Euah, I'm going to die. I'll die.'

She quickly raised her head in case she would be hit by a new tentacle while she lost her balance. She saw the enormous cocoon burst and run amok.

“Wh-what?”

While she was taken aback, the world rocked once more.

“Retreat! Retreat! We need to leave! We’ll return to our own universe!”

Flame-Rain shouted at the top of her lungs. The monsters that had crazily chased after her stronghold suddenly became more frenzied as they started killing each other and committing suicide.

That wasn’t all. The entire universe shook. It squirmed like a stomach ready to vomit.

Sensing an ominous vibe, she ordered her warriors to retreat to the stronghold.

“The process to open the gate has begun! It’ll take an estimated one hour!”

“That’s too slow!”

She screamed.

The squirming universe seemed like it would crush them at any moment.

“… Did he win?”

A warrior who followed Choi Hyuk but fell behind and fought on his own mumbled as he saw the monsters become frenzied.

The world shook like it would collapse, but he didn’t care. He had already joined this fight, determined to throw his life away.

“Still… He saved us.”

The war that had begun even before his grandfather’s grandfather was born had finally ended.

“This damn world will face its demise.”

The warrior mumbled, full of emotion, as he saw the collapsing universe. A faint smile hung on his lips.

Just then, the universe covered them. Accompanied by an unpleasant squirming sensation, they couldn’t see anything.

When they opened their eyes again, they had returned to their own universe.

Chapter 205: Closing (End)

The fog was dyed black, and even this black fog was devoured by his sword and disappeared.

The world kept getting smaller and smaller following the path of ‘Choi Hyuk’s Denial’ which devoured even space itself.

Soon, the blade was devoured by denial and the perceivable world disappeared.

This world where one’s sacrifice was ‘inevitable’. Yet, this same damn world repeatedly asked, ‘Why are you doing this?’ after doing so. Directed at this world, Choi Hyuk’s Denial completely extracted his soul and shot it out as though he was ascending into the heavens.

Killing everyone. Devouring everything.

Only ‘denial’ was left as it pointed at the remaining universe and roared.

“Yeah, yeah, eat that.”

Choi Hyuk said as if he was coaxing a beast as he continued to swing his sword, of which only a handle remained.

The monster queen’s desire for life, which had become a universe onto itself after consuming countless of others, was devoured like a slender deer as it was denied.

Splash!

Choi Hyuk fell into the lake.

{...Ahh!}

{Heuu... How...}

{Kuaaah!}

...

...

When he woke up after fainting for a moment, the still living monster queen was going insane. Its divine appearance had disappeared without a trace, and instead, a wrinkly, furless beast was rolling in the lake shrieking.

{Aahhhh.... How can this be! Ridiculous. For a regular lifeform that isn't even a demise-ranked monster to possess such power... So this is my fate... No! What am I saying! I'm not dead! I won't dieeee!!}

This was what its telepathic messages meant if he were to translate it.

The monster queen, who had waited for an intense battle against Choi Hyuk, found it unfair that it had fallen from one sword strike. No, was this retribution?

{It's fair... For what I stole to be stolen from me... What has to come to end must end for new life to be born... I know that but...

{I was aware of it! Your sickening fate! I refuse! Forever! I'll... probably never be able to steal it from you, right? Euaahhh! What am I saying?}

The monster queen resisted and resisted but couldn't overcome Choi Hyuk's Denial in the end. Her long-time desire for life disappeared after being denied, and having lost that desire, she began to die as predicted on her birth.

"Really... You suffered a lot. Now rest."

Exhausted, Choi Hyuk lay down in the middle of the lake as he saw the entire process.

{I don't know. I don't know... But for this to be the end, I'll accept it. Yeah, so you were my end.}

The monster queen, who had revealed her fiendish obsession with her hideous body, seemed to have now given up as she writhed, submerged in the lake. The red eyes on her back looked exhausted as they closed like those of someone dying of old age.

She slowly submerged into the lake when, at the last moment, she suddenly raised her head and stared at Choi Hyuk. Even as her chin, nose, and the top of her head submerged in the lake, she ridiculed him in her pitiful appearance.

{My end… Ha! Poor fellow. Your brilliantly shining soul is going to die with me… Still, since my life was long and yours was short… I win…}

“What’s this dead person saying?”

Choi Hyuk clicked his tongue. Though, after he said that, his mouth felt bitter for some reason.

{…}

Thuud!

The moment the monster queen ceased to exist, the universe became frenzied. The various fates she had devoured from other dimensions began to explode. The universe was collapsing.

Choi Hyuk barely managed to open his eyes and look to where Bae Jinman and Baek Seoin were before dropping his head.

Although he knew they had yet to escape, he wasn’t worried. For some reason, he instinctively understood what was going on right now.

From the beginning, the fates that filled this universe were all from different worlds and were different in kind. When the monster queen, who mediated these fates, disappeared, the universe lost its laws and order. The released fates crashed into each other, attempting to assert their own nature, but none of the fates gave up on this universe. Although they had come from different worlds, they now wanted to acknowledge this one as their own.

“They are fighting on such a grand scale.”

The shaking would continue until these fates acknowledged each

other's existence and found their place, meaning until new laws and order gained control over this universe. Also, it would spit out the fates from other worlds that had no intention of participating in this struggle. The warriors would return to where they came from.

That was why Choi Hyuk relaxed as he watched the battle of titans. He didn't even have the strength to lift a single finger anyways.

The karma of denial had completely consumed him now. His body was disappearing from the inside. He no longer had the strength or will to sustain himself.

Watching the collapsing universe as he died was more emotional than he thought.

Becoming teary, memories flashed through his mind like a kaleidoscope.

His childhood and the first time he killed a person. The searing pain he felt when he saw his mother's tears. Also, the days he spent acting like a fool. Still, the time he spent with his mother was his hearth. Even as a child, his mother looked unfortunate and weak to him. She smiled and told him it was okay and cried alone at night. When he pestered his mother to buy him something, she felt even more tormented than him.

Yes, his dream was to be an architect then. Influenced by his mother, who was a designer, he wanted to become someone who created. Though he was now the best destroyer in the universe.

However, in the end, all he truly wanted was to protect his mother, who had lived honorably without any sins like Superman. Despite only being a normal person, she had always bought Choi Hyuk the items he pestered her for after a month of asking and cried the next night, and had suffered through a lot of hardship as a single mother.

He recalled the teasing writing on the gymnasium window he had kicked while frightened and concerned for his mother.

Yes, get angry.

And angrier.

Kill.

Only then can you kill.

Even thinking about it now…

“Ah, fucking bastards. Yeah, and that’s how I killed all of you.”

Choi Hyuk laughed manically.

He had killed everyone. The Exalted bastards and the monster bastards. He had killed every last one of them and inflicted unforgettable wounds.

He felt refreshed and then sorrowful. He felt sorrowful now.

He recalled Jung Minji. She was the only woman who shined in his grey world besides his mother. He recalled the emotions squirming in his stomach when he heard she died like trash.

He didn’t know he was sad then since rage consumed him. He felt sorrowful only now. He had only been a high schooler.

He recalled Chu Youngjin, Richard, Zero, Alexei, and the mountain of corpses he had killed. When he thought about how his mother, Jung Minji, Chu Youngjin and the others precious to him might be pitifully thrown in that pile, he felt sorrowful again.

He felt sad about the potential that they and perhaps he himself might have had.

Choi Hyuk would now lie in the mountain of corpses he had piled up.

He felt vexed as he recalled how the monster queen had said, ‘I win….’

Damn it, those damn bastards.

One person’s life could be more important than the entire universe to someone...

Whether it was a human or an alien, why couldn’t they understand this through words...?

That was why Choi Hyuk made them understand.

While setting himself on fire in the process.

“Alexei... Was his nickname Lyosha? Now that I think about it, he was quite an amiable guy.”

He had always followed Lee Jinhee around.

“Well, you’re better than me since you protected the person you wanted to protect. That’s better than revenge.”

If you were going to set yourself on fire anyways.

The universe was now shrinking. Spitting out all the different fates, it gathered only those that it would include. The world which couldn’t exist without laws stopped functioning and closed down. The endlessly shrinking universe became a single egg, and the fates inside it mixed together and became one.

The fates shaking inside the egg couldn’t decide on a criterion. They drifted before burrowing into Choi Hyuk’s body. Under the waterfall of fates, even his fate of denial was swept away and dispersed. While he stopped ceasing to exist for now, there wasn’t a fundamental difference from his previous state.

He would soon forget his memories and even the fact that he was Choi Hyuk and would melt and disappear in this universe.

Sensing his impending death, Choi Hyuk lay down and thought about the funeral.

How Lee Jinhee firmly said that they had to do it when he found out about his mother’s death in Marronier Park. The magical moment when awakenees who had lost hope and ostracized each other began comforting each other.

The warmth of Lee Jinhee's hand when she held his.

It might have been then.

The moment when Choi Hyuk's rage, which surged without a target, decided on the 13 Exalted Wings. The moment he hoped for the regeneration of the rest of the world after the demise rather than mutual destruction. The moment a crack opened up wide enough for him to open his heart to Flame-Rain. Although he didn't know about the Exalted Wings or Flame-Rain, it was that day. It was all thanks to the strange funeral on that day.

Thank you.

Choi Hyuk mumbled then forgot that memory.

Everything was being swept away and disappearing into the darkness.

While he couldn't remember it well, he thought that he had lived a not-so-bad life.

He was happy to have met everyone.

If there was another life, he hoped to meet them again.

While mumbling this, he forgot about who he wanted to meet. He didn't even have time to think about whether they wanted to meet him again or not.

...

He could no longer remember anything.

Only thoughts like 'I did it' and 'I did enough' floated in his mind.

No, that was what he thought, but for some reason, he clearly recalled a girl as though she had been engraved into his cornea. The girl's hair would sometimes be long and, at other times, short. She had flames blazing splendidly in the air. She overcame all misfortunes and had stars in her eyes. A 'glory' that brilliantly bloomed within the 'denial' that had wiped everything to

nothingness.

Though he forgot her name, he could be at ease because of her.

It was because he knew she would be able to regenerate the shattered world.

With a glory that would never extinguish.

When he thought about her, rather than feeling sad or being filled with regret...

He felt at peace.

Perhaps, his endlessly burning rage was now looking for a place to rest while recalling a certain glory.

Sensing the swirling fates sweeping his last remaining bit of consciousness away, he closed his eyes.

He turned his body to the side and curled up. He fell asleep.

And didn't wake up.

As expected, was life a mosaic of mismatched fragments? One where you didn't know what would be added next.

Even Choi Hyuk, who felt sorrowful as he lay atop a mountain of corpses, curled up peacefully like a child in the next moment.

Even the monsters' universe, which devoured worlds, reverted into an egg and prepared for a new beginning.

As though all the desperation was an illusion, the entire universe suddenly became peaceful.

Etching a new life.

Waking up the next day, people realized...

That there was no longer an alliance or monsters.

None.

-Sovereign of Judgment End-

**

An emptiness without a sky or ground.

In a place with nothing, a woman's voice rang out.

Choi Hyuk, Choi Hyuk, can you hear me?

Of course, there was no reply.

Was it not time yet...?

I'll come back. Stay well.

Epilogue

Chapter 206: Flame-Rain

"... Was this your decision? Choi Hyuk."

Flame-Rain knew everything when she saw Alliance City, which was now a mountain of corpses.

Blaze.

Her transparent flames burned the bodies. Not even a speck of ash remained.

In front of the corpses burning from her transparent flames, she looked up at the sky. She looked for the section of Earth's sky in Alliance City's sky, which was a plethora of skies from various species' homelands.

"I won't resent you for this, but, Choi Hyuk, why did you go so far...? Huh? Choi Hyuk..."

Her voice was weak as though she was pleading for a response.

"Ah..."

Shiro, the battle puppet who chased Flame-Rain around, begging her to save Chu Youngjin, had also figured everything out as she stood next to Flame-Rain in front of the blazing flames.

Chu Youngjin had assassinated Exalted Wing Dark-Sound.

She felt like all the stars in her universe were being sucked into a gigantic black hole.

Her expression gradually blanked as she collected herself. Her eyes were the eyes of an emotionless machine. Even her gear heart, which had malfunctioned ever since she became close to Chu Youngjin, recovered its steady beat.

No, it occasionally stopped with a clunk.

**

The news of the deaths of the 13 Exalted Wings and the extinction

of the monsters' universe was spread throughout the great universe. Choi Hyuk was the one who killed the 13 Exalted Wings and the one who slew the monster queen. Also, Choi Hyuk was likely dead.

Flame-Rain moved quickly as she arrested the Berserkers, Kundle Tribe members, and the glass crabs who joined Choi Hyuk in his plan. A trial was held, and she invited those with a grudge against them to act as jurors.

Esteemed families of the Flame Wing Tribe, Armored Soul Tribe, Speckled Light Tribe, and the dragon race gathered. Their rage was fierce and heightened.

Lee Jinhee, Bae Jinman, Baek Seoin, Leah, Handke, Moonmoon, and Fragile were tied up and kneeling in the middle of the courtroom. Flame-Rain watched as curses rained down on them. As she tolerated their criticisms, they became even fiercer and relentless. There were even strong opinions that they needed to punish the rebellious species, the earthlings, as a whole instead of just Choi Hyuk's accomplices.

The mood changed when transcendent warrior Mack, who attended as a representative of the dragon race, spoke. She had also been caught up in the disaster when she attended Dark-Sound's funeral and had subsequently become a transcendent warrior.

Her rage was chilling, and she swore at Choi Hyuk's kneeling accomplices.

"Even... Even though Choi Hyuk is a hero for ending our war against the monsters, we cannot forgive him for killing Exalted Wing Leviathan."

All the species attending agreed with her.

They were like Choi Hyuk in some ways. Though they acknowledged that his contributions were enormous, at the same time, they couldn't pardon the fact that he had killed those dear to

them. As a member of the dragon race, who were known for greatly cherishing members of their race, there was nothing more to say.

However, Mack's speech continued.

"But, our dragon race owed him a great debt. Also, Choi Hyuk, the person responsible for this situation, has died in battle. Following this, the dragon race will offset our debt and resentment with his death... and forget about this. The earthlings, Kundle Tribe members, and glass crabs will, like before, interact with us as friends. This unforgivable resentment..."

She tightly closed her eyes before opening them calmly and declaring,

"I will consider the curses and reproach spoken today in this courtroom as repayment. This is our dragon race's will. Then..."

The courtroom bustled with murmurs.

After concluding her speech, Mack stood up and was about to make her leave. Flame-Rain's hand gesture, however, sat her back down.

"I heard you clear. I think your heated heads have cooled down a bit now... I will now listen to other suggestions besides curses and criticism."

"But! He killed Exalted Wing Flame-Hell, Flame-Thorn, Flame-Fog, and Flame-Wind! He is the enemy of our species!"

Dissatisfaction erupted from a section of the Flame Wing Tribe.

However, the other Flame Wing Tribe nobles who noticed the change in mood kept their lips firmly shut.

"However, he saved the alliance. He accomplished something those 13 Exalted Wings couldn't. He was a great warrior."

The one who said this was a noble who had been in the Flame Army led by Choi Hyuk.

“You! You dishonorable, traitorous-!”

There was an intense reaction, but his voice was soon buried under the shouts of smaller species, who had been silent until now.

“The war has ended! Is there anything more important than that? They committed sins, but they made an even larger contribution!”

“Hasn’t the alliance always made sacrifices for the great cause?! Are some sacrifices okay but others not?!”

Their voices erupted like a storm.

“Yo-you…”

The representatives of the noble families expressed their anger at the trivial warriors’ opposition. Yet, voices even they couldn’t disregard joined the fray.

“From the beginning, the alliance’s goal was for our survival and freedom in the war against the monsters. They have achieved this goal. Who can punish them?”

They were transcendent warriors from minor tribes.

They accounted for roughly 30% of the approximately 100 transcendent warriors, but as the majority of the transcendent warriors from the noble tribes had died during the funeral, they were currently a force to be reckoned with.

“… I agree. He had cleared his sins before he died.”

On top of that, the warriors from the noble tribes who had reached the transcendent level after surviving through the funeral also joined in. Since they had fought side-by-side in the end, there was a strange comradery between them.

When the strong ones joined in, no one opposed anymore. A dissatisfied silence hung in the air.

Flame-Rain stood up. She gazed at the few Flame Wing Tribe nobles who couldn’t contain their rage and blazed with flames and

the other members of the noble tribes who felt the same way.

“I heard all your opinions. But, I didn’t simply gather you all here today for this trial. Rather, the trial was an excuse.”

The crowd was taken aback.

Flame-Rain stood on the platform and arrogantly looked around her.

“First, I will introduce myself again. I am the queen of the Flame Wing Tribe, Flame-Rain.”

She referred to herself as the queen. Even dissatisfied figures were shocked as they looked up at her.

Transparent flame wings spread out behind her back. Flames that could purify all evil quietly blazed.

At her terrifyingly brazen words,

Jolt! Drrk!

A commotion arose in the courtroom. All the Flame Wing Tribe members present stood up, even the ones who had expressed their dissatisfaction before. An endless sense of awe and emotion overwhelmed them.

Cheers erupted in the courtroom.

Glory to the queen who has returned!

To other tribes, this was a ridiculous change in attitude, but this was natural for the Flame Wing Tribe.

Born with the birth of the universe, the Flame Wing Tribe’s monarchy wasn’t simply a product of culture. It was something engraved in their very souls. The one who possessed the most pure and beautiful flames was the queen they would lay their lives down for, and Flame-Rain was undoubtedly a queen, whether they looked at it from her origin or her current flames. No, she was the queen. Flame-Hell had hidden this fact. To this tribe who had only now realized this, this trial no longer held much importance.

The other tribes felt left out and tense as they faced this moment of endless grandeur and exclusivity.

An uproar erupted from all sides.

Flame-Rain had traversed from frontline to frontline throughout the great universe because of Flame-Hell's wicked schemes. She was a friend and a hero to all the tribes in the alliance. She, who had always been 'our Flame-Rain', suddenly felt unfamiliar to them.

Flame-Rain calmly said,

"Also... The alliance hasn't dispersed yet. Currently, at this moment, I declare, as the only living Exalted Wing, that the alliance will cancel out the crimes and contributions committed by Choi Hyuk and his subordinates. I will consider that the traitor, Choi Hyuk, has already served their punishment. The trial ends with this."

Those who had been kneeling were brought to a stand and their chains burned and disappeared. Although there were many who were still dissatisfied, they kept their mouths firmly shut, perhaps because they saw the power of those siding for their acquittal.

"Finally... the alliance, having reached the end of its reason for existence, will be disbanded. The war has ended. I respect all of you who have worked hard for the alliance and pray that those who laid down their lives may rest in peace."

She bowed her head in silent tribute.

The crowd, perplexed by the sweep of decisions, bowed their heads and participated in the silent tribute without realizing it.

'Really? So easily?'

Though some people thought this, who could say otherwise when the only Exalted Wing said so?

Raising their heads after the silent tribute, they still felt

perplexed.

While they had expected it, they couldn't help but be in disorder after actually hearing about it. What was the point of their acquittal if the alliance no longer existed? People would personally attempt to get revenge, and the universe would be in anarchy.

What would happen to the universe?

Was Flame-Rain acting for the benefit of the Flame Wing Tribe?

Flame-Rain opened her mouth as if to comfort those in a state of confusion and fear.

"Now, let me, Flame-Rain propose something as the queen of the Flame Wing Tribe. While the war with the monsters has ended, our survival and freedom are still at risk. Knowing each other's existence, species may start killing and enslaving each other. Which is why I am proposing a new species coalition. The coalition will mediate conflicts between species and will work for the prosperity of the universe as a whole. We will take measures so that we can be prepared for invasions from other dimensions, which may occur at some point. However, this coalition will be completely different from the alliance. First, we will not interfere with the internal affairs of species'. More people will also participate in the making decisions. There will be no discrimination between tribes, and most importantly, there will be no such thing as 'Consumables'."

As expected, she hadn't changed. It felt like her each and every word was being nailed into their minds.

"Who will join?"

She asked.

"I will join."

"I offer my sword."

The transcendent warriors who had sided with Choi Hyuk's

party scrambled to show their intentions of joining.

“The dragon race will join you as well.”

“The 104-quasarlings will also join.”

“… I’ll return to the Dark Tribe and review this optimistically.”

Species with a clear system of command decided to join on the spot while species that didn’t promised to discuss it. The number of species joining this coalition would undoubtedly increase in the end. With Flame-Rain at the helm, no one could disregard the coalition’s influence. Also, she mentioned the possibility of an invasion from other dimensions.

Everything proceeded smoothly like a script.

The dissatisfied group understood they were an absolute minority.

She was the strongest warrior in the universe. A queen who had proved her purity through Flame-Hell’s trials.

The universe was on her side.

Flame-Rain’s gaze landed on Lee Jinhee, Baek Seoin, Bae Jinman, Leah, Handke, Moonmoon, and Fragile, who all stood in the middle of the courtroom.

“And what about you?”

The current mood made it difficult to refuse. They bowed slightly and replied,

“We will join.”

Handke then bitterly added,

“If you pay well…”

Flame-Rain nodded and then closed her eyes.

‘This is something I’ve been dreaming about my whole life… But it’s so easy. Choi Hyuk. Did you think it was fine if you just paved the way for me and disappeared?’

She suppressed her surging emotions.

‘Like how you achieved your goal in life, I will too. Even without you.’

She recalled her dream she had even before meeting Choi Hyuk. A universe where all species coexisted peacefully and prosperously.

Opening her eyes, she took her first step.

“With this, I officially declare the establishment of the Great Universe Coalition.”

This was the moment the Flame Wing Alliance ceased to exist and the Great Universe Coalition was born.

Lee Jinhee was appointed as the commander of the knight squad, which represented the coalition’s military strength, and Baek Seoin became her vice-commander out of his own will.

Bae Jinman traveled throughout the universe as a healer of the coalition and saved those who were dying.

Leah became a diplomat in charge of trade in technology between species and contributed to the prosperity of earthlings.

Handke became a researcher organizing the coalition’s karma skills for a while before quickly resigning. He later returned to the restored Earth and lived happily as a local influence.

Moonmoon and Fragile raised the statuses of their species as members of the coalition.

Though conflicts arose everywhere, no one crossed the line.

When conflicts couldn’t be easily resolved, duels were used to settle grudged under the coalition’s approval. Duels could only be requested by those who insisted they were victims, and as even weaker forces won a significant number of duels, it was difficult to act unjustly without care.

Even Lee Jinhee, who held a public position, received a few duel requests, but she won every one of them and left her challengers

alive.

Some called these duels ‘Choi Hyuk’s Rule’.

Earthlings from the past might see this as uncivilized, but this was civilized for the universe, which had experienced an even more uncivilized era.

Later, people would call the period of time Flame-Rain was the first chairman of the coalition as the ‘Era of Glory’.

{Epilogue – Flame-Rain End}

Chapter 207: Chu Youngjin

A while after the coalition was founded.

Flame-Rain was incredibly busy. There were many species she had to go around, comfort, and gain support from.

Her office was almost always vacant.

In her spare time, Flame-Rain would come back to look at the overdue files waiting in her office while clutching her forehead.

Today, the battle puppet, Shiro, was waiting for her.

The flushed face of a woman in love was no longer present as she watched Flame-Rain enter with an emotionless silver face. She couldn't tell how many days she had been waiting here.

"... It's been a while? What's the matter?"

Flame-Rain didn't know much about Dark-Sound and Shiro's relationship. All she remembered were the past days where Shiro clung to her and asked her to heal Chu Youngjin. She thought she had given up because she didn't see her for a while, but she already felt a headache coming.

"Chu Youngjin."

Shiro opened her stiff lips.

"Please heal him."

As expected, Flame-Rain clenched her forehead.

Chu Youngjin. He was someone that weighed on her mind. However, she couldn't save him now.

"I already told you. He's already considered dead by the karma medical examination. All I said was that I, not as a karma medical practitioner, think that he could be saved... I have no idea if I really can save him or how long it'll even take. Sorry... But I don't have to the spare time to do that."

Flame-Rain said objectively.

Her expression didn't change as Shiro said once more, "Please heal him."

It was as if she didn't hear her refusal.

Her request stabbed at Flame-Rain's heart. Chu Youngjin, he was Choi Hyuk's comrade. When she thought this, she also wanted to save him. However, she couldn't, at least not right now.

Flame-Rain closed her eyes then nodded.

"... Okay, I'll save him because he's been weighing on my mind. I promise. But I can't right now. I'll do my best to heal him once the coalition stabilizes."

Shiro shook her head.

"Then it will be too late."

Though she didn't know the specifics, she could tell that the chances of success would drop as time went by even if Flame-Rain took special care.

Flame-Rain sighed. She really didn't want to say this but...

"You know, right? That he's the worst rebel who assassinated Dark-Sound. The reason why we were able to bury the issue with the Berserkers was because he, and other key individuals, died. But you want me, the chairman of the coalition, to save him while abandoning my duties? Maybe later, but I can't do it right now because of my political position. Really... I don't have the energy to spare."

Flame-Rain said pitifully as if she was pleading her to stop.

Shiro closed her cold eyes and then opened them.

She asked herself why she wanted to heal Chu Youngjin. Was it for revenge? No, that wasn't it. Then...

"I don't have anything to lose anymore. If he dies, then I..."

Shiro’s eyes became grim.

“I’ll become a terrorist.”

Flame-Rain’s jaw dropped.

It wasn’t that she couldn’t bear it if he died or that she would die as well, to say that she would become a terrorist… ‘As expected of a battle puppet.’ While thinking this, Flame-Rain had a headache.

**

When he opened his eyes for the first time in a long time, the first thing he saw was Flame-Rain’s inhospitable face.

‘… Princ… ess?’

Although he moved his lips, his voice wouldn’t come out of his parched throat.

“You’re awake? You’re awake. I’m finally free from that damn woman. Congrats on surviving. Camilla will explain the situation. Now I got to go since I’m busy.”

Flame-Rain hurriedly left as though she was done after seeing him wake up.

‘Just… what…’

He had definitely died. Yet, he was alive.

Camilla calmly started speaking,

“Even though she acted like that, she suffered a long time without sleep trying to save you. She also has a lot of political burdens as well. Be grateful.”

‘Be grateful?’

He felt a surge of anger. He couldn’t live. He thought he could finally rest, yet she wanted him to start his damned life again? Also, above all!

If he survived, how was he supposed to see Shiro’s face again…

He had thought he had smoothly gotten away, but he was captured. Yet, she wanted him to be grateful?

Even though he wanted to express his rage, he couldn't move his tongue, let alone his fingers.

"Flame-Rain personally ignited a flame in your extinguished soul. She also replenished your spent karma with the Flame Wing Tribe's Flames of Beginning... To be honest, rather than a treatment, it's more accurate to call it a recreation. This is a miracle only possible through Flame-Rain. Currently, you are part Flame Wing Tribe member and part earthling. It's like you were reborn. Your level has completely disappeared. You aren't even a lowest-ranked warrior... Maybe at the 1-star level? Perhaps it's due to the fragments of your already destroyed soul, but it won't be easy for you to reach your peak level again. It's still lucky that you kept your memories. Ah, you remember me, right?"

'Camilla...'

While his voice didn't come out, Camilla seemed to have read his lips and smiled.

"You have to work hard on your recuperation."

**

Meals arrived at constant intervals, but he couldn't eat.

He couldn't live like this. However, he couldn't die now either.

Yet, there was nothing for him to do while alive.

When one didn't have a direction in life, time felt heavy and dark like the depths of the ocean. Unable to breathe and crushed by the pressure, he felt like he would die soon without trying. If he died like this, wouldn't it... be a completely worthless death?

'Why did she save me?'

His resentment surged multiple times a day.

Uncertain of how many days had passed and how many meals he

missed, Flame-Rain scolded him after seeing how he was curled up on his bed.

“Are you crazy? If you die like this, I worked hard for nothing! And Shiro, that bitch, will probably shout up a storm saying that she’ll become a terrorist! What are you telling me to do?! No, Shiro, that bitch, why hasn’t she shown her face after begging me to save you?”

His mind jolted.

‘Shiro did? Why? Did she not know I killed Dark-Sound? There’s no way…’

Even though he tried not to listen to Camilla while he lay in bed, he heard her.

Though it didn’t matter now, the 13 Exalted Wings were killed as well as the monster queen. Choi Hyuk had died in battle as a rebel and a hero. He succeeded.

The only one who didn’t die when he was supposed to and was crumpled up like this was him.

There was no doubt Shiro knew as well.

What his final mission was.

He had killed Dark-Sound, who was no different from her father, with his own hands. Yet, why did she save him?

Thump.

He couldn’t stay lying down due to the stuffiness in his chest. He didn’t know how much time had passed, but Flame-Rain, who he thought was mumbling next to him, was no longer there. His room was dark.

Clothes Camilla had picked out for him were hanging on the hanger. He got up and then grabbed and wore some.

Staggering, he went outside, grabbed someone and asked, “Shiro. Where is Shiro, the highest-ranked battle puppet?

**

Shiro was living in the ‘Garden of Doors’ in Alliance City. It was the place the now disbanded ‘Event Horizon’ Troop lived in.

She didn’t know what she was thinking. She didn’t know what to say or what she would hear.

However, like a crazy person, she floundered in front of the ‘Garden of Doors’.

She stood at the front gate. Her face was somewhat pale.

She came out with her things, seemingly ready to leave far away, when she froze after seeing Chu Youngjin.

Her pale cheeks flushed, seemingly in anger.

“… Shiro.”

“Stop. Go back.”

She said while suppressing her anger.

“Shiro, I-“

“Go! Go back!”

She screamed with a red face.

“How brazen are you to come find me? Why? Did you think I forgave you because I saved you? Are you crazy?!”

It wasn’t her usual, formal manner of speech. She couldn’t contain her emotions and shouted.

But, rather than these things, her ‘Did you think I forgave you?’ stabbed his heart.

He tried to speak, but his voice wouldn’t come out.

‘No, of course not…’

Yet, he did. Although he didn’t know it until just moments before, now it was clear. Coming to find her while unsure why, he did… hope that she might have forgiven him.

As soon as he realized this, he felt even more pitiful.

How… pathetic was he?

Chu Youngjin lowered his head.

Shiro's words stabbed into him like nails.

"Don't misunderstand. The reason why I saved you was because bastards like you shouldn't have a peaceful death. Do you think I'll allow you to have an honorable death?"

Her eyes were filled with malice. It was a gaze she had never shown him before.

"Go back. If you come looking for me again, I'll really kill you."

She turned around and entered the 'Garden of Doors.'

Chu Youngjin stood frozen in place before quietly returning.

**

"Hey, Chu Youngjin. Pull yourself together! I heard you're not eating and recuperating?!"

Lee Jinhee and Bae Jinman had come to visit him.

They broke through the door and came in even though they were informed he didn't want visitors.

Although Lee Jinhee was in a frenzy, Chu Youngjin stared at the ceiling and didn't say a word.

'I'm exhausted…'

He thought.

Even though things were like this, he didn't want to die so worthlessly while being a burden. Yet, his hands wouldn't move. Now that he thought about it, he had forced his body to move since long ago.

When Lee Hyejin died, his heart had already been crushed but he continued to fight to repay Jung Minji, who had saved her.

When Jung Minji died, he really didn't have any attachment to the world, but he got up again and continued to fight to get revenge on those who played with Lee Hyejin's death.

It was a long battle. It was so long that he lost his reason and a strange woman named Shiro ended up standing by his side. However, he threw that all away in the end. He had thrown everything away and ended it like he originally planned... Yet morning arrived for him.

It was tiresome and pathetic.

'Shiro... You might have really taken the best revenge...'

Puk!

Lee Jinhee swung her fist at the blank-eyed Chu Youngjin.

"This is why the young ones are so... Hey. High schooler. You first-love-crazed bastard. You did enough for your girlfriend, yet you're still going to act so wimpy? Live a little. Your first love isn't everything. Even though it feels like there's nothing right now, things will come. Why there's even that machine woman who saved you!"

She mentioned Shiro in the end.

Chu Youngjin mumbled,

"Dying like this... is probably her revenge."

Puk!

Lee Jinhee kicked him this time. Her shin slammed into his chin and neck and shook his brain. As he was current weak, fallen to the 1-star level, even her playful kicks were fatal.

Chu Youngjin collapsed on the floor and looked up at Lee Jinhee with a swollen lip.

"Yeah! I heard you guys caused quite the drama in front of the Garden of Doors or something! After being rejected there once, you're going to crumple up and die? Hey, you crazy bastard. If

you're a crazy bastard, act like one. What crazy bastard gives up after being rejected once? If you're sorry, repay her by living. You're good at following people, aren't you?! Like how you followed Jung Minji! Like how you followed Choi Hyuk! Go follow her! Repay her with your life!"

Lee Jinhee grabbed the meal tray left in the corner and scooped a spoonful.

"Are you not going to eat? Do you want this nuna to open your mouth and feed it to you?"

She seemed like she would actually force-feed him, yet Chu Youngjin slapped her outstretched hand away. It seemed he even used his karma as there was a low rumble.

Examining his gaze, which had become sharp as in the past, Lee Jinhee grinned.

"Now you look a bit more like your normal self. I'll visit again. I'll kill you if you aren't eating and recuperating."

She briskly walked out of the shattered doorway.

Bae Jinman awkwardly looked at her disappearing figure before whispering in Chu Youngjin's ear.

"That miss. She's still at the 'Garden of Doors'. I asked around... It seemed she was originally going to leave Alliance City? But after you came, she's still staying there... If I were to give you some advice as an adult... Don't make her wait too long. She doesn't know her own feelings right now either."

Bae Jinman patted his shoulder and then left.

"... Just what is everyone thinking?"

Chu Youngjin sat vacantly for a moment before suddenly wolfing down his meal. He put on some clothes and headed for the Garden of Doors.

**

He opened the door and went in. The doors erected in rows stood like trees in the ‘Garden of Doors’ Inn. Today’s concept seemed to be the currently trendy ‘Earth style’ as snow fell from the sky.

He found Shiro on a bench.

“… Didn’t I tell you I’d kill you if you came looking for me again?”

She said coldly.

“Then kill me.”

He shrugged.

Shiro’s eyes sparked.

Puk!

Chu Youngjin’s eyes sparked as well.

Shiro was a highest-ranked warrior. He couldn’t even see her move. His mouth was in tatters.

“How can you kill me like that? You know I fell to the 1-star level, don’t you? How weak was your punch just now?”

He brushed himself off and stood up like it was nothing.

Her gaze was malicious.

“Do you… think I won’t kill you?”

“Then kill me.”

Her shoulders trembling, she turned around as if she was leaving. He said to the back of her head, “If you can’t kill me, take responsibility. Since you saved me. I’ll come every day.”

Shiro’s eyes wavered when she heard his shameless declaration.

“Yoou!”

Puuuk!

As though the next moment was edited, Shiro, who was standing far away, suddenly stood right where he was while Chu Youngjin

was stretched out on the snow.

“Get up.”

He couldn’t tell if she was growling or speaking coldly.

He innocently stood back up.

Thud!

He got hit again and rolled on the floor.

“Get up!”

Puk!

He was hit whenever he got up.

Chu Youngjin tried his best to endure without falling back, but he couldn’t help but fall and roll on the ground due to their sheer difference in strength.

Puk! Puk! Bang!

Unsure of how many times he was hit, Chu Youngjin attempted to get up but couldn’t put strength in his limbs. He fell back when he tried to get up again and again. In the end, he flailed around on the snow. The blows he had suffered had long since exceeded the limits a 1-star warrior could endure.

Though Chu Youngjin couldn’t see it, Shiro’s face had become tearful at some point. Her emotionless face was now nowhere to be seen. Her face was flushed. It looked like tears would fall on her white and red cheeks at any moment.

Her lips trembling, she said,

“If you come again, I’ll definitely hit you to death.”

‘Since I didn’t die, I’m going to come tomorrow.’

Chu Youngjin wanted to reply, but he could speak after being hit so many times.

Step. Step.

He heard her footsteps as she walked away.

Step. Ste-...

She suddenly stopped.

Without looking back and her shoulders trembling, she shouted loudly, “Really! Do I have to worry about you dying from being hit by me?! Go recuperate!!”

As if she was taken aback by her own words, she panted and then fled to her room.

Chu Youngjin lied there blankly before smiling.

“Is life... worth living?”

White snow landed on his swollen cheeks. The cool feeling on his cheeks felt good. Like her.

He had been a high schooler.

When his heart died.

As expected... Broken hearts were healed through love.

{Epilogue – Chu Youngjin End}

Chapter 208: Choi Hyuk

There was nothing but not.

He was lying down but standing up. He was here but over there as well.

Every different kind of emotion flooded him at the same time until there was nothing in the end.

He continued to dream.

At some point, an annoying fellow appeared.

The fellow used strange things like ‘words’.

He kept ignoring her until he couldn’t endure it any longer and ended up using ‘words’.

Go! Don’t come back.

Right? You’re awake, right? I knew you were.

He pushed the happy fellow away and dreamed again.

However, the fellow kept coming back tirelessly.

…

You came again? Leave me alone…

What are you saying?

Just who are you? I’ll kill you if you keep waking me up.

Who’s going to kill who?

Arg! Leave me alone! I want to rest.

Bear with it for a bit longer. You can’t sleep too deeply.

Why are you doing this?

Do you not remember who I am?

Who are you?

Who do you think? The one you couldn’t kill.

This…!

Anyways, just stay put. It’ll come soon.

What?

The time. And the person you’ve been waiting for.

I don’t have anyone I’m waiting for.

You do.

Ha… Then tell that person to come quickly. Stop waking me up constantly.

Bear with it for a bit longer. We’re almost done.

Do you know how many times you’ve said that?

Hey!

Hey!!

Did that fellow leave again?

Haa… Waking me up when I’m about to fall asleep again and again…

I’ll kill you the next time you come!

**

They observed a ripple in the monsters’ universe’s emptiness that day as well. It occurred once every few years or decades. It was proof that Choi Hyuk’s consciousness was still active.

Waking upon signal, Lee Jinhee shook her head as if to shake away any residual drowsiness and raised her sword. Frost fell from it. Her frozen stiff joints screamed from sleeping so long, but she was already used to it.

The Weapon of Conclusion ‘Lee Jinhee’s World’ shined faintly.

As long as her friend was there, her sword would lead her to him no matter how many dimensions she had to cross and even if that place didn’t exist yet.

Whoong.

There was literally nothing in the place she arrived in. Her faintly shining short sword floated in this place where even darkness didn't exist. Wary of this light, the concept of 'darkness' came into being temporarily.

"Choi Hyuk! I'm back."

Lee Jinhee always loudly called out to Choi Hyuk.

However, his reaction was different from before.

-Lee Jinhee...

He definitely called her by her name.

"Huh?"

Lee Jinhee's eyes widened with surprise. Her pupils trembled within teary eyes.

"You... Choi Hyuk? You remember me?"

-Go back. I'm grateful you haven't forgotten about me, but it's no use. This universe is about to be born. And once it does, the 'me' that is talking to you right now will disappear.

"Wow... It's really Choi Hyuk."

-Everything had already concluded back then. I died that day. You're talking to the dead right now. The only one who'll be unhappy is you if you keep calling out to a dead man. Forget me and go live your life.

When the soft voice attempted to persuade her, a single tear landed and dripped down her cheek without her realizing it. It truly, truly had been a long time. So long that even she found it difficult to believe.

With a firm determination, she said,

"No, I vowed that you will definitely not die before me."

-No, I already told you! I'm already dead!

Choi Hyuk's calm speech suddenly became childlike as though he had become a different person.

"Huh? What are you doing?"

-Ah, I give up. This didn't work either. I said it because I suddenly thought of it... I thought it would work... Ah, this is so annoying!

At a loss for words, Lee Jinhee clicked her tongue.

"Haa... This is depressing. You got my hopes up for nothing. Anyways, you're doing good. It seems that you're at least recovering fragments of your memory. We're actually really close so bear with it for a while longer."

-Hey! Hey!

-Gone again?

-You left early today... I'm bored.

**

"Choi Hyuk, wake up."

The annoying fellow woke him up yet again.

-Go. You're going to leave soon anyways.

"Playing hard to get? Get up. It's time."

-Time?

However, the one who replied wasn't Lee Jinhee.

"Choi Hyuk."

The moment he heard her voice, the void universe squirmed.

Blazing transparent flames. A friendly, kind-hearted person who wasn't suited to her position.

-Huh? What?? Who are you? Why do I know you?

The voice was taken aback.

Lee Jinhee smirked.

“Why are you acting like that when you even remembered me?”

-It’s different. I only recalled it. I didn’t feel any emotion. But you… Why… Who are you?

“Wow, how nice of you.”

Lee Jinhee pouted as if she was upset.

Flame-Rain had a subtle smile as she stepped forward.

After hearing that Choi Hyuk was alive from Lee Jinhee (though whether this was living or not was up for debate), she had waited a long time for this day. Enough to reach the end of one’s life, enough for one’s youth and dreams to have faded away. Until the dead universe was reborn. Until the era of the coalition, which was established after the alliance, changed. She was now older than what Flame-Hell had been. Such a long period of time had passed that Chu Youngjin and Shiro had reached the end of their lifespans and were now gone forever.

However, in a manner a seven-year-old would speak, she said, “Because I want to become your friend.”

The universe squirmed once more at her words.

-Flame…-Rain?

Flame-Rain’s smile grew, but her voice was still nonchalant.

“Well, you can call me that, but what’s the point of names now? That’s from my past life.”

-Past life…?

“During the war, you did your best in your own way and I did my best in my own. Now we need to brush it all off and live our next life. In our next life, let’s become closer friends.”

He suddenly recalled various memories. A sword, fresh blood, corpses, and a girl with petite hands who approached him. Ahh,

were these the memories of the man known as Choi Hyuk?

The voice became more bitter.

-But I'm not the Choi Hyuk you knew.

"And I'm not the Flame-Rain you knew."

There was nothing in this universe, yet it seemed like their gazes were locked on each other.

The voice sounded frightened.

-But this universe will be born. No one can stop it. I have to partake in it and have no choice but to be dispersed into nothingness. It has already been decided since long ago. Now go. You are making me sad.

"That's why I came. We researched and prepared a lot."

Flame-Rain raised her Sword of Conclusion 'Flame-Rain's Glory'. Flames blazed above it. Flames of glory.

The voice naturally understood. Though he had long since forgotten the concept of karma, if it were those flames, that power, then it would be able to trigger the universe's birth instead of him. Yet, he also knew...

-But if you do that, you'll-!

"Lose my power. Maybe even my body. Forever. But it doesn't matter. Didn't I tell you? This is all from my past life."

Flame-Rain said jokingly while raising her sword.

"Then shall we start? In Earth's fashion."

Flames of glory raged around her. Not leaving even a tiny bit out, she contained them all into her sword.

Raising the brilliantly blazing glory, she said, In the beginning,

"Let there be light."

Riip!

Her sword stabbed into the air. It was a world devoid of anything, yet her sword pierced through and embedded itself in it.

-Ah… It's begun…

A blurry shadow appeared in front of 'Flame-Rain's Glory'. Though he was slightly short, Lee Jinhee thought he was definitely Choi Hyuk.

When the shadow placed his hand on the sword, 'Flame-Rain's Glory' turned into flames and melted away.

The brilliant flames, which shot forth endlessly with the 'Glory of Creation', surrounded the shadow, and then dispersed into the universe. Like dark clouds fading in the sky, the emptiness melted away to reveal a vaster universe beyond it.

The universe, which was enclosed in an egg after Choi Hyuk killed the monster queen, was opening once more. Its shell was cracking and a new world unfurled its wings from within.

"Haa… It was a life without regrets."

Flame-Rain closed her eyes as if relieved. Having squeezed out even the karma that made up her body, her body was dispersing as sparks.

Before her hand disappeared, Lee Jinhee tightly held her hand and whispered, "Don't worry, they said the calculations were precise."

When she heard her, Flame-Rain's still-remaining lips fluttered before smiling.

"I'm not worried. I told you. It was a life without regrets."

At this time, flames covered everything.

Like a boat drifting in a storm, only Lee Jinhee watched the birth of the universe by relying on her white short sword.

First, a galaxy was created. The brilliant galaxy was so vast that it could be seen from anywhere in the universe, and each bend was

splendid.

Fragments of stars appeared around the galaxy. Lee Jinhee called them ‘fragments’ because they were completely different from the stars in her universe.

First, they weren’t round. They had edges, were curved and simple, yet were also beautiful and modern (though this was an outdated concept). One by one, or sometimes in groups, they made their appearance. There were some that orbited each other like Earth and its moon, and others that simply floated next to each other.

Some stars were desolate while others had green land and blue oceans. A small star, in particular, looked like one the Little Prince might live on, having blue oceans and green ground.

The first lifeforms were born and soon after spread throughout the universe. Various colored plants grew thick, and in some cases, stars were so close and trees grew so tall that their branches intertwined.

Various species that resembled humans in appearance were born, and as soon as they did, history was created. Although the universe had only just been born, hundreds of millions of years of history had been established as though it was normal when a universe was created.

Sometimes fighting and other times competing and cooperating with each other, these species flourished and climbed the steps of the great galaxy that could be seen anywhere in the universe. Connected between stars, these species climbed up the helix stairway that followed the galaxy upwards. Between each step was a glorious city and temple.

In their mythology, a god and a goddess had created the world. Apparently, they had gone on a long journey after creating the world.

“Huuu…”

“Ah…”

The god and the goddess who had left on a journey returned.

Glittering flames left over from the creation of the world gathered together to form two figures.

Though they looked like high schoolers in puberty, they were Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain without a doubt. They were wearing the normal clothes of the just-born species.

“Oh, you’re here… That’s good.”

The birth of the universe had been marvelous, but Lee Jinhee could finally let out a sigh of relief after watching the process with a nervous heart.

Flame-Rain greeted Lee Jinhee.

Seemingly still finding his body awkward, Choi Hyuk touched his entire body.

After examining himself for a long while, he finally raised his head.

He wasn’t a god but a human. One belonging to this universe.

He had fulfilled his duty of awakening the universe, he was now simply a member of it.

He was Choi Hyuk but not at the same time. Memories of his intense past were faint as though they really were from a past life.

Flame-Rain was right. This was his next life. One where he and Flame-Rain had just been born.

Like an embarrassed boy in puberty who didn’t know what to do, Choi Hyuk asked, “Uh… What do we do now?”

The great galaxy was shining behind him.

It was a galaxy where souls belonging to this universe returned to once they died. Souls who lived a life of regret would gather there,

sit around and drink alcohol together while talking about the things they hadn't accomplished as though they were talking about someone else. One by one, they returned to the world, forgetting what should be forgotten and keeping what should be kept.

There might have been an afterlife in the universe they had inhabited in the past, but if there was a difference, it was that no one knew of its existence there while everyone knew about it here. This was quite a significant difference.

Whoever imagined and made this... Flame-Rain thought that it was a very cute view of the world.

As if she coincidentally happened upon Choi Hyuk, she acted surprised. Then she took a step towards him, raised her head, and stared directly into his eyes.

"Wow, to meet each other here. Since this is quite the coincidence... How about a date?"

She linked her arm around Choi Hyuk's while smiling.

Choi Hyuk awkwardly folded his arm and, as if hesitating, said, "The-then should we?"

Excited, he took a step forward.

His previous life had gone awry since the very beginning.

After reaching the end of his misaligned life, After going around and around,

A completely new world lay in front of them, who had finally met again.

{Epilogue – Choi Hyuk End}

**

Lee Jinhee was taken aback as she saw the two disappear, embracing each other like tied barley bags.

"Yes, yes, you probably have no interest in me. Yes, then good

luck you two. The unwelcome guest will be taking her leave now."

She grumbled before crossing dimensions.

"Damn it... And who was it that repeatedly hibernated for such long periods of time...?"

Finding it unfair, her voice echoed throughout the newly born galaxy.

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Chapter 209: Lee Jinhee and...

A fighting addict.

Severe PTSD.

These were the words that described Lee Jinhee.

Was it because she was the most soft-hearted amongst the Berserkers? When the rest of them brushed off their pasts, she couldn't.

Since she was knight captain of the coalition, it would have been nice if she took a step back on the battlefield, but she always stood at the very front, roaming through the battlefield. She hadn't rested nor had she take personal time off. If she didn't fight a bloody battle each day, she couldn't sleep thanks to her nightmares.

While the coalition was calm when dealing with those who wanted to resolved things with words, they didn't tolerate criminals and groups that suppressed other species. Whenever an incident broke out, the wrongdoers would encounter a blood-soaked Lee Jinhee.

{Euak! Wait! Wait! I was wrong! I surrender! I surrender!}

"You should have said that before meeting me."

Pscht!

Her mission was to enact mercy.

Shaking off her bloody sword, Lee Jinhee sighed. Battle after battle.

Even though a lot of time had passed, it felt like a single long day. A battle that continued since that day.

The only time she took some time off was to visit that sleepyhead who wouldn't listen to a word she said.

“Lee Jinhee…”

“Oh, Baek hyung?”

Lee Jinhee revealed a faint smile when she saw him.

Baek Seoin was in quite a hopeless state. Although he became a vice-captain to support her, but regardless of his intentions, she was a wreck. She couldn’t sleep if she didn’t fight and fought when she wasn’t asleep. Though she was alive, she didn’t have a life. Even though he wanted to help her, she wouldn’t give him a single opportunity.

“Huh? Wait. You!”

Baek Seoin hurriedly approached her and held her cheek.

Blood flowed from her nose. It wasn’t from an injury since there weren’t any enemies strong enough to even touch her. If she got a nosebleed from getting hit, then that in itself was a serious problem.

Tak.

Lee Jinhee pushed Baek Seoin away.

“Ah, this? I’ve been getting them for a while now. It’s annoying.”

Lee Jinhee wiped the blood dripping from her nose as though it was nothing. However, Baek Seoin’s expression didn’t relax. For a powerful transcendent warrior to get a nosebleed for no reason… That wasn’t possible.

“You… Did you go there again?”

The monsters’ universe Choi Hyuk was slumbering in.

Lee Jinhee was the only one who could enter that completely closed off universe. The power ‘Lee Jinhee’s World’ possessed was astonishing because it allowed her to enter worlds that hadn’t even been born yet, but this miraculous feat placed a burden of similar magnitude on her. Even if she only visited for a moment, she would be in pain for an entire day. Then she returned to the

battlefield without sleeping. This had been going on for decades now. Her body had already reached its limit.

“It’s nothing.”

Lee Jinhee turned away as though she found it mildly annoying. However, her head faltered and her knees bent as she collapsed on the floor.

“Lee Jinhee!”

“Uh… Why am I…?”

She fainted after flailing around for a moment.

“Lee Jinhee!!”

Baek Seoin’s scream pierced through the chaotic battlefield.

**

It’s my first time seeing something like this.

Her karma has declined so much that it’s difficult to believe she’s a transcendent warrior. It’s about to crumble as though it has been eroded for many years.

She needs to be absolutely at rest. At this rate… She won’t last long even if she is a transcendent warrior.

When Lee Jinhee opened her eyes, Baek Seoin, who had been dozing off, jolted to his feet.

“You’re awake?”

“Yeah… What’s this?”

Lee Jinhee blinked her eyes as though she couldn’t understand the current situation before attempting to get up. Baek Seoin hastily laid her back down.

“You fainted! All of a sudden! Stay lying down. They told me you need to rest.”

Lee Jinhee frowned when she heard his words.

“I fainted? Then what about Choi Hyuk? Did he wake up during this time? I need to go see him. If I don’t keep waking him up and starting conversations, he’ll completely melt away!”

She struggled to get back up, but Baek Seoin forcefully kept her down.

Her resistance was so weak that it brought a tear to his eye. He shouted, “Stop! You can’t go there anymore! I’ll talk to Flame-Rain. She’ll understand since she has lamented repeatedly about how groundless it is to try to awaken Choi Hyuk though the birth of the universe.”

“What are you saying? No way. Then Choi Hyuk will die!”

“Who’s worrying about who! Your body’s a wreck! If you keep pushing yourself too hard to enter the monsters’ universe… You’ll die!”

“Die…?”

“Yeah! Die!”

Baek Seoin’s words made her think intently.

“Hmm… If I die, there won’t be anyone to wake him up…”

“Even now you’re-!”

Baek Seoin was at a loss for words.

Unconcerned, Lee Jinhee was simply lost in her thoughts.

**

“What…? Hibernation?”

“Yeah, hibernation.”

Baek Seoin massaged his temples when he saw Lee Jinhee reply like it was nothing.

“For how long?”

“Hmm… A thousand years? Ten thousand years? Maybe even

hundreds of thousands of years? I don't know since it's a matter of the monsters' universe being reborn. Well, I'll go visit you often whenever I wake up. I have to ridicule how much you've aged."

Lee Jinhee innocently continued as though she didn't notice Baek Seoin's complicated thoughts, "Thinking about it, it's not a bad idea. Always fighting or getting nightmares if I don't... Rather than living like this, hibernating is better. I'll be able to sleep well, won't I? When I receive a signal that Choi Hyuk's consciousness is active while I'm in hibernation, I'll wake up and go visit him. My body will recover while I'm asleep. Yup, it seems like a good idea."

"What about it is good..."

As if giving up, Baek Seoin asked,

"Why are you going so far to do this? You did as much as you could for Choi Hyuk. Isn't that right? You've been through a lot... You should live your own life now!"

His seemingly calm voice surged at the end. He couldn't help it because this single-minded woman was so frustrating.

Lee Jinhee looked depressed as she looked out the window.

"You know, Baek hyung... I can't help it. I don't know about other people, but it seems like the fight that day hasn't ended for me. It's still clear in my mind. The corpses that filled Alliance City. The monsters' universe. How you and Choi Hyuk brushed past me. You fought to aide Choi Hyuk and Choi Hyuk fought to end everything... But that wasn't the case for me. I fought to protect my friends. That's why my fight hasn't ended yet. My life stopped there. Until Choi Hyuk returns... I can't take a single step forward."

Baek Seoin could tell how sincere she was by how lonely she sounded.

'I shouldn't stop you anymore if that's what you truly want.'

Baek Seoin made his decision.

After letting out a sigh, he lightly said,

“Okay then. I’ll do that too.”

“What? Why would you?”

Seeing this damn woman widen her eyes as though she didn’t know why, Baek Seoin still continued to speak lightly, “There won’t be anyone you know left when you wake up from your hibernation. You won’t be able to make friends as an old woman either. It’s so sad that I should at least be there to play with you.”

“What the heck are you saying?”

While she thought his words were strange, she didn’t try to stop him. No, in fact, she might have felt grateful and welcomed his idea.

Baek Seoin slept continuously while Lee Jinhee woke up and then hibernated repeatedly.

She would immediately go into hibernation once she visited Choi Hyuk and had reported it to Flame-Rain. That was the only way she could heal her collapsing body. The only time Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin met each other again was when Chu Youngjin and Shiro passed away.

Never recovering to his peak level, Chu Youngjin grew old and died. He looked happy and peaceful. When he passed, Shiro, who was always by his side, lied down next to him and stopped functioning on her own.

Lee Jinhee and Baek Seoin fully awoke after an immense period of time. It was after Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain successfully created their world.

It was only then that the madness that had previously engulfed her began to wane and her time start flowing again.

As expected, the new world she woke up in was unfamiliar, and she didn’t know anyone besides Baek Seoin and didn’t have

anything to do either.

“Yeah… That’s why I waste my time here so much. Not because of you.”

Lee Jinhee grumbled as she chewed on a pickled radish.

“Huh? What did you say?”

Choi Hyuk, the fried chicken restaurant owner who had been passionately venting his feelings, tilted his head.

“It’s nothing. Continue.”

Although she told him to continue, his words come in one ear and out the other like she had been doing until now. He talked about how Flame-Rain would also ignore him on occasion, asked if he did something wrong, wondered if he did, and asked her for her thoughts and hints as a woman… Listening to his clichéd speech was boring.

‘Still, he now fries chicken quite nicely.’

Chewing on the chicken, which was crispy on the outside and moist on the inside, she recalled the day Choi Hyuk declared he would open a fried chicken restaurant.

For that Choi Hyuk to open a fried chicken restaurant… Lee Jinhee felt like she had met an alien disguised as Choi Hyuk, but Choi Hyuk was full of enthusiasm. ‘Earthlings open fried chicken shops when they retire. Since it’s like I’ve retired, a fried chicken restaurant is perfect!’ She rebuked by saying that he was reborn rather than retiring, but no words would get through to Choi Hyuk, who had become as emotional as a middle schooler after being reborn. Though she didn’t know where he read what to fantasize about opening a restaurant so much…

Either way, the first fried chicken Choi Hyuk made was pitiful to no end.

Yet it became sensational.

Lee Jinhee couldn't contain her laughter when she saw the inhabitants of this universe buying such awful fried chicken as they made their way up and down the mystical stairway that surrounded the galaxy.

'Well, if it's this guy, even pupae would have been a success.'

Although they weren't as powerful as they were in the past, Choi Hyuk and Flame-Rain were special. They were existences that received the attention and love of this world.

"Jinhee nuna! Nuna! Lee Jinhee! Are you listening to me?!"

"Yeah, I am."

"No, so what I'm saying is she shouldn't say stuff like that no matter what! To suggest breaking up! How could she decide that by herself!"

Choi Hyuk vented.

Lee Jinhee was about to say something but shut her mouth when she saw his ferocious expression.

'Ah, right, he was the craziest guy in the universe. His temper hasn't changed.'

Deciding not to agitate him further, she poured him a beer to cool him off and change the topic.

"Ah, did you know? I had a dream yesterday? It was a dream where I lived a normal life. No alliance or monsters. It was a dream where I eventually gave up parkour, got a job, and worked like a dog before I died. It was my first time dreaming about something so boring... Still, I felt like it was a shame when I woke up. My parents and my lame friends were there... Choi Hyuk, do you have anyone you think about? Before all that happened?"

When she asked this, Choi Hyuk, who had been flaring up like a child, suddenly calmed. This was Choi Hyuk. Not the Choi Hyuk of the present, but Choi Hyuk of his past life. Although he didn't act

his age because he had turned into a child, inside this childlike Choi Hyuk remained the Choi Hyuk from the past. That might be why she kept coming here. He was her dear friend whom she could talk about that time with.

"For me..."

Choi Hyuk's eyes grew dim as he remembered the past.

"Jung Minji. The Crazy Knight King. You knew her too, right? If I think about it... I'm curious about her. If our normal lives continued, how would she have lived? Even if I don't know, it must be amazing...? Maybe her cursed sympathetic ability might have improved...? Would she have found someone she truly loved...?"

Seeing Choi Hyuk immersed in his own emotions, Lee Jinhee's jaw dropped.

"What? You miss your first love already? Are you crazy? Does Flame-Rain know about this?"

Choi Hyuk looked like he had just woken up. His serious attitude from just moments ago was nowhere to be seen.

"No! Who says she was my first love?! Also, Flame-Rain and I are done! That's what she said! That we should break up!"

Lee Jinhee smirked.

"How laughable. Do you think that's something you can just end because you want to? Do you know how many times Flame-Rain talked about stopping the entire plan while you were asleep? Since she said it like her world was ending, I thought she was serious and wondered if that would be my final hibernation. But when I woke up again, she would keenly ask about how you were. She's that type of person. Although she may seem like an exalted queen on the outside, if it's a matter that concerns you... Haaa..."

Lee Jinhee talked about how sick she was of it, but Choi Hyuk's eyes shined.

“Re…ally?”

Reenergized, he stood up from his seat, left Lee Jinhee there, and abruptly opened the fried chicken restaurant door.

Although he no longer possessed the same level of strength as he did in the past, they had a lot of convenient skills as they were loved by the universe.

For example, when he opened the door…

Thud!

“Oh, you came?”

The place beyond the door would be his destination.

Flame-Rain faced Choi Hyuk, who had rushed in, like nothing was wrong.

“Ah? Uh… Umm… That’s… S-so-“

When Choi Hyuk awkwardly tried to apologize, Flame-Rain quickly went up to him and said, “Wait. You’re trying to apologize right now, aren’t you?!”

Then her soft lips covered his.

Through her lips, her warmth spread throughout his body. His sad heart completely melted away.

After a long kiss, Flame-Rain said,

“Apologies like make me cringe… Anyways, since you came looking for me first, I win, okay?”

Her expression read, ‘Ah, good thing I endured it. I won as expected.’

Various emotions filled Choi Hyuk’s heart.

‘What’s this? This beautiful yet shameless lifeform…’

He chuckled before revealing a smile that seemed to reflect all the time that had passed as he replied, “It feels like we’re normal

lovers like this. Fighting over nothing. Then making up."

"We are normal lovers, stupid."

He kissed her lips as she babbled about how he didn't know that yet.

As expected, it was electrifying.

As though their lips had never separated after they had their first kiss.

{Epilogue – Lee Jinhee and... End}

**

After seeing those two like that in front of the door, Lee Jinhee had a bitter taste in her mouth as she left.

"Damn it... Singles like me should all roll over and die."

When she saw the stairway and the unfamiliar inhabitants making their way up and down it, she felt a little lonely.

"Lyosha..."

Apparently, those who died in this galaxy could meet again and share their feelings. Though it was cruel, this dreamlike story didn't apply to those who died outside this universe.

She repeated the name of the boy who had died for her a few times as she stood still, cherishing his memory. Her small head looked frail in front of the vast universe.

Yet, when she raised her head after a brief moment, her sorrow was nowhere to be seen, instead replaced by the desire of an old woman.

"As expected... I should have eaten him up when he grew up...! He was quite the decent man later on, wasn't he?"

She tried to change her mood, but she only felt more miserable.

"Ha... What am I saying? Am I crazy?"

Shaking her head, she crossed over to the coalition's universe.

Dirik! Dirik!

She received an urgent call as soon as she returned. It was Baek Seoin.

As soon as she answered him, she saw his face full of urgency.

-It's an emergency! Come quick!

His urgency made her question if she was still the knight captain or not.

"Wh-what is it? What happened?"

-I'm bored! Let's go watch a movie. How about <Knight of the Gale, Lee Jinhee> which was released after you went into hibernation? An ancient movie! Though it was a failure, the mysterious movie became an unprecedented hit thanks to your dedicated fans!

Sparks ignited in Lee Jinhee's eyes.

"What? You good-for-nothing!"

You slept straight through it, but I woke up from time to time! Don't you know that I'd be your senior if we were to count the number of meals we've had?

Ah, yes, yes, Jinhee nuna. So what should we eat today?

I don't know! Since Baek hyung is my junior, you lead the way!

Ah, yes yes.

Korean street food – boiled or steamed silkworm pupae.

Author's Afterword.

Though it makes me emotional, the story I have clung onto for around a year has finally concluded.

I sincerely thank readers from Munpia, Joara, and Bookcube who have accompanied me on my releases. It was thanks to you that I was able to end this story.

Not many people died in my previous novel, Dimension & Business... But, for some reason, I have received various forms of slander for being called SlaughterAgain since the start of this novel.

However, despite the countless suspicions that poured in, I wrote this story with the clear aim of having a happy ending since the beginning. I received tons of criticism thanks to the unclear ending of my previous novel...

Yes, living is already tough, isn't it a good thing if stories have happy endings?

Though the concept I had when I started writing Sovereign of Judgment was 'bloody action scenes', 'scheming amongst sovereigns', and 'love for humanity'... There are parts I'm satisfied with and many more that I am not. I felt that the part where the story went from being a survival game on Earth to the alliance's outlook of the world was especially a shame. I had a hard time in the middle since I couldn't continue the 'scheming amongst sovereigns'.

Still, I am very happy since I think I wrote a satisfactory ending.

2.

It was a very difficult time for me during the early stages of writing this novel.

While recovering from my surgery due to problems regarding my rear end, my dear friend departed from this world due to leukemia

on April 24. She was a kindred spirit, very pretty, and 30 years old.

One of my friends departed last year, and now this year… Due to circumstances, I couldn't contact my friends very often.

It was heartbreaking.

As you know, I am an expert at late releases so I didn't reveal my circumstances at the time when I went on a hiatus because I felt they would only be excuses.

If my readers who have accompanied me this far could pray for her, I will be forever thankful.

I am thinking about a concept for a new story.

It's a story about a magician. I think it should be considered a fusion fantasy more than a modern one, but it'll be fun.

I am planning on releasing it sometime in March or April 2017.

While it's brazen of me, I hope that you enjoyed my previous project and will enjoy the new one I will be writing as well.

To my readers who have accompanied me through Choi Hyuk and the Berserkers' struggle, I once again bow my head in thanks.

Then, until next time!

Translator's Afterword.

It's been a great journey. I cannot describe how much I appreciate all the support you have given me while translating this project. When I first began this project, I couldn't even imagine finishing it, yet here we are, 210 chapters of Sovereign of Judgment completely translated.

I would like to thank my editor, Obelisk, for helping me out since the early releases of the project despite his busy schedule. He was one of the two who reached out to us, offering to help edit our chapters. This was before we were officially recruiting at all. ☺

I plan on solely translating Top Management for the time being. Top Management has been my side project for a while now, and the novel has unfortunately been on hiatus at 216 chapters. I hope that the author returns before I catch up.

Once again, thank you all for accompanying me this far! Hope you enjoyed the ride!