

심판의 군주

1

오늘도요 현대 판타지 장편소설
DONG-A MODERN FANTASY

Sovereign of Judgment

- 심판의 군주 -

**- Episode 9 -
Shackles of Judgment**

**-Author-
TodayAgain
오늘도요**

[Myoniyoni Translations]

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 country-side-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^{1}.

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 friendly,

“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 be 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.



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.

{1} Smaller cities in Korea. 2017, Seoul had a population of 9.9 mil, whereas Hanam had a population of 150 thousand in 2011. (Source: Wikipedia)

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.

1. Trade with Dragonic.
2. 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 unexplored 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^{1} 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.

{1} The drug that worked on those with karma. Lee Kangjin was addicted to it. Chapter 61.

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, businessmen 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 friendlyly 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)

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 aahhhh!"

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?^{1} 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.

{1} 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.”

“Huuuh?”



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^{1} 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 Keusaero’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.

{1} Long-nosed, wide-mouthed aliens seen previously (most recently in Ch 142 – the recruit training evaluation team leader). 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^{1}. 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.

{1} 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.

Zzii...

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.

“Wheek! Whio!”

{{{Whio! Whio! Wheek!}}}

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.

Whoosh!!

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! Whooe. 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!”

Whaaaaah.

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.

{Kiyeeehhh-!}

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 TO 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.

Chiik!

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 a mere 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 blinding 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 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 of Whirlwind Fire or whatever his name was, 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 of flower petals 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.



PDF by: traitorAZEN