

## **Blackfield 241**

Chapter 241.1: Even If My life Is Filled With Tears (2)

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

The enemies were still five hundred meters away from them.

Clouds of dust rose and disappeared all over the wilderness between the base and the enemies.

“Hold your fire!” Kang Chul-Gyu shouted loud enough for even those who were inside the barracks next door to hear. “Get some cover!”

Even as hostiles walked to the front of the truck, Kang Chul-Gyu stayed as much as he could at the back of the barracks and kept ordering the soldiers not to shoot. He smirked as he stared at his enemies, who were taunting them.

The moment his men raised their heads to take aim, enemy snipers would immediately shoot them down. Nevertheless, Kang Chul-Gyu stood tall, seemingly telling their enemies to come and get him. He stood at the very back of the barracks on purpose.

The enemy snipers were most likely going out of their minds right now. Considering the distance between them and the South Korean team, they could shoot Kang Chul-Gyu in the head with ease if they just peeked out and brought their sniper rifles up to shoot. However, no sniper would do something so reckless, especially not those from the Spetsnaz, now that they knew how good of a shot Kang Chul-Gyu was.

It was difficult to determine where the snipers were since they were covered with ocher-colored fabrics that were ripped into pieces to form a Ghillie suit[1], which also served as proof that they used to be members of the Spetsnaz.

However, Kang Chul-Gyu was the DMZ King.

Creating that kind of legend in this day and age was difficult now since close-quarters combat at the DMZ no longer existed. Attacking guard posts was also considered taboo now.

Kang Chul-Gyu quickly scanned their surroundings.

In his prime, Russia’s Spetsnaz and China’s White Wolves were deployed at the DMZ multiple times. Part of their special training involved slitting the necks of their enemies.

Kang Chul-Gyu let out a huff of laughter.

He remembered his superior asking him not to kill people like them.

‘What about the men on our side? Are you telling me to just watch those pitiful people over there get their necks cut off?’

‘Do I really have to spell out why I’m telling you this? They have ordered us to just leave them be! As your commanding officer, I order you never to leave the barracks today. You are not allowed to go there, do you hear me?! You’re going to get yourself either injured or killed at this rate! If you disobey this order and cause Russia and China to kick up a fuss, I won’t be able to protect you!’

Kang Chul-Gyu could still remember the look on his superior's face when he yelled and pounded his desk so clearly that it was as if it just happened yesterday.

Back then, he smiled the same way as he did now.

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“It must be nice to work furthest from the frontlines! It's the safest over there!”  
The rescue officers in the DMZ yelled to the soldiers protecting the cease-fire line.

The men at the DMZ and the North Korean soldiers had secured a path that they could all use to get through the area that was filled with landmines. However, the shitty North Korean soldiers secretly buried landmines in that path at night.

Kang Chul-Gyu's heart pounded whenever their enemies did something like that. Without fail, he would find the landmines.

However, people were sometimes sent on mine detection missions without him, resulting in some of them returning with their ankles or knees blown off. That was why he didn't have time to rest.

Kang Chul-Gyu's heart furiously pounded whenever the Spetsnaz and the White Wolves infiltrated their territory. If he couldn't go on operations on those days, then two or three of his men would have their necks slit or their heads blown off, leaving only their bodies behind.

His superior was telling Kang Chul-Gyu to stay at the barracks even though he knew what was going to happen.

The Spetsnaz would stab the ears of Kang Chul-Gyu with an awl as proof that they had completed their training. The White Wolves would behead his men with ease and give their heads to the North Korean soldiers before leaving.

Hence, seeing his men's corpses was enough for Kang Chul-Gyu to know exactly who killed them. That wasn't all.

North Korean special military officers and the Airborne Corps of the People's Liberation Army Air Force would stab his men's hearts and slice through their Adam's apples, stopping only when their heads were finally dangling lifelessly.

Resting for a day would mean allowing their enemies to slit the necks of his men with a knife, stab their hearts, pierce through their ears with an awl, or behead their corpses. It was such a common occurrence that they could almost say with certainty that it was inevitable.

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't pretend that he didn't notice that his men, who had just turned twenty, looked happy whenever they saw him even though they were very nervous.

Their search party consisted of career soldiers and ordinary soldiers.

“Inspect your firearms!” Kang Chul-Gyu ordered.

*Clank!*

His men pulled the breechblock of their weapons, then returned their gaze to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“What’s the password!” Kang Chul-Gyu exclaimed.

“– – that’s all!”

Although Kang Chul-Gyu wanted to make sure they knew the password, they uttered it so quietly that he couldn’t even hear it.

They passed three cease-fire lines without a single word. When they finally got out, he had a smoke with his squad.

“Thank you for your hard work,” they told Kang Chul-Gyu.

How could he comfortably stay in the barracks and leave people who approached him so welcomingly to fend for themselves?

At the time, Kim Tae-Jin was one of the second lieutenant greenhorns who brought over cigarettes for Kang Chul-Gyu.

Not long after, the nightmare began. Now that Kang Chul-Gyu thought about it, his superior seemed to have had a rough idea about what was going to happen that day.

“Please, Chul-Gyu! You’re really going to die if you go out now!”

Kang Chul-Gyu could also remember how his superior sounded as he clung to him and called out his name. His memory of it was still so clear that it was as if it just happened yesterday.

Back then, despite being ordered to stand down, he still followed the warning that his heart was sending him. He dashed out of the barracks and slit the Spetsnaz and White Wolves’ necks.

When he returned to the barracks, all covered in blood, he found his superior crying in silence.

“I’m sorry,” his superior said. It wasn’t enough, though.

That night, they were put on emergency standby. Kang Chul-Gyu ran to the situation room only to discover that a guard post was attacked and five of his men were taken captive.

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Kang Chul-Gyu frowned, suddenly feeling stinging pain at the back of his head.

Even though some of their brothers were taken away and they were now on emergency standby, they didn’t get any orders to mobilize and rescue them.

“What are we doing?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“They only ordered us to be on emergency standby! Kang Chul-Gyu, come here.”

His superior dragged Kang Chul-Gyu by the arm, bringing him out of the situation room. He then handed him a cigarette.

*Chk chk. Chkk!*

They lit up their cigarettes with a zippo lighter.

“They’ve probably created this entire situation to catch you. Russia and China pressured South Korea to stop our men from taking action, and now they’re

provoking you, so don't go out there today. My ass will be on the line if they discover that I told you this, but I can't just abandon you," his superior said.

He clung onto Kang Chul-Gyu, seemingly having forgotten that he was smoking. "They put out this bait to get you. Have those fuckers ever taken captives before? I have no doubt in my mind that a lot of our enemies are targeting you right now. Look, we didn't get orders to mobilize because those fuckers know you. Just endure it only for today! Please!"

That day, at that moment, Kang Chul-Gyu smiled at his superior like always.

"Fucking bastard!" his superior yelled.

How many people could say that they saw a soldier looking angry and as if he found the situation unfair?

His superior had that exact look on his face.

"The people who were in that guard post all came here to fulfill their duties to their country. You're telling me not to save them even though they are about to die just because they're powerless and aren't well-connected when they joined the military?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"What about you? Your newborn son? Your wife?"

"They're the family of a soldier."

The last thing Kang Chul-Gyu did to his superior before leaving was smile at him.

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

The wind violently slapped his cheek as it blew past him, leaving behind three to four dust devils in its path.

It was hell.

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't even count the number of enemies that he had stabbed in the neck that night. He killed Spetsnaz, White Wolves, North Korea's special forces officers, and the Airborne Corps of the People's Liberation Army Air Force.

Bullets from rifles rained down on him. They even threw grenades at him and planted claymores all over.

Covered in blood, Kang Chul-Gyu dragged out five of his men. When a grenade was thrown at them, he wrapped his arms around his men, covering them.

*BANG!*

The back of his head, his neck, and his back hurt so much that he felt as if he was being ripped apart.

"Run, you fuckers!" Kang Chul-Gyu yelled.

Kang Chul-Gyu swung his bayonet like a demon, drenching him in even more blood. He then returned to their base with the people he rescued.

After getting past the iron fence and handing his men over to fully armed soldiers, Kang Chul-Gyu collapsed to the ground.

However, the soldiers weren't the only ones waiting for him.

The military police held out handcuffs.

*Clank!*

His superior took out his pistol, and the soldiers aimed their rifles at the police.

“Why don't you leave for today? If you move even an inch closer to him, I'll put a bullet in every last one of you. I don't care if you're from the military police or some other bullshit. Go back. I'll hand him over to you myself tomorrow,” his superior said.

After the ruckus, Kang Chul-Gyu lay down inside the barracks.

His superior smiled as he handed him a cigarette.

“You're giving a cigarette to a severely injured patient?” Kang Chul-Gyu joked.

“You're not going to die anyway.”

*Chk chk. Chkk!*

“Phew! I'm going to be fired,” his superior said after exhaling cigarette smoke.

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't even ask why. It was already too obvious, after all. He ignored orders, went out to save his men, and slapped the fuck out of Russia and China before going back to base.

“The men you saved signed an absurd statement. Don't be upset by it,” his superior continued.

Kang Chul-Gyu smiled painfully.

“I'm going to be fired, and you're going to be discharged as a Private.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the cigarette in between his superior's fingers. The way it was burning in vain reminded him of himself.

“I'll pay your hospital bills,” his superior offered.

“I have money.”

“Not another fucking word, you fucking idiot! If you were going to pretend to be considerate, then you shouldn't have done what you did last night.”

“You've gone through a lot,” his superior continued with a pained smile on his face.

Kang Chul-Gyu gradually fell unconscious as he listened to him talk.

## Chapter 241.2: Even If My Life Is Filled With Tears (2)

When he regained consciousness, he found himself at the National Medical Center. His superior—who told him that he was going to be fired—had been imprisoned.

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't even get surgery. It put him in a new hell.

He was in nonstop pain and had horrible hallucinations.

Kang Chul-Gyu knew that he was finally home, but that didn't stop him from seeing the Spetsnaz, the White Wolves, and the North Korean military officers rushing toward him.

He had to survive the fight.

By the time he was done fighting for his life, his wife and young son were already on the ground, covered in blood and crying. His child didn't even know that his father used to be a soldier, yet Kang Chul-Gyu still couldn't find the time to feel even a hint of guilt.

All he could do was hope that the pain would stop and that he would be able to escape from this hell.

*I'm sorry, honey. I'm sorry, Channy.*

Kang Chul-Gyu sighed softly.

While his wife wasn't around, Kang Chul-Gyu went to the kitchen and took a knife. He was in his right mind at the time, but he still couldn't stop thinking that he didn't want to be a burden anymore.

*Screech.*

His wife remained calm even when she opened the door and saw the knife in his hand.

"Please don't do this," his wife softly said. She quietly reached over and took the knife. Her hands were covered in callouses due to her work.

"Please keep living even if you have to rely on alcohol and drugs. I'll endure this for as long as I can. I was proud of you."

Of all things, why did he remember how his wife looked when she visited him in the middle of his difficult training sessions and her eyes and white teeth when she smiled brightly at him?

Even though she told him to live, the last memory he had of her was her hanging on the ceiling.

His wife fell into a trap where she couldn't do anything. She probably wanted to tell Kang Chul-Gyu to come to his senses and that their son became a soldier and died in some foreign country.

That day, Kang Chul-Gyu stopped drinking and getting high on drugs. He offered his neck to the hallucination that rushed toward him every night.

'Kill me! Please kill me!'

However, after some time, the hallucinations would disappear, leaving him alone with pain even more horrible than before.

“There’s lead inside the back of your head, and it has probably started to rust. You’re lucky you’re still alive,” a doctor said, then shook his head. “Unfortunately, it’s embedded in an area that’s too dangerous to operate in.”

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Kang Chul-Gyu sharply scanned their enemies.

Kang Chan had entrusted him with this task.

For some reason, Kang Chan’s smile and eyes made Kang Chul-Gyu wonder if his son would look like Kang Chan if he was still alive. Kang Chul-Gyu even felt as if he was talking to his kid as he apologized and as Kang Chan told him to make an excuse for his actions.

The Spetsnaz? The Russian Mafia?

*Sons of bitches. You dare target Kang Chan in my presence? You little chicks wouldn’t know about me, but your superiors probably remember the Korean words ‘DMZ King.’*

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked as he sharply looked ahead.

Kang Chan was so skilled that Kang Chul-Gyu couldn’t do anything for him.

Hence, even if their enemies had the capability to kill Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu decided that he would not back down. Kang Chan was the most reliable person he knew when it came to finding his son’s remains and mementos.

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Kim Tae-Jin sat on the sofa in the barracks and raised his head to look at Kang Chan, who was sitting across from him. The satellite video receiver wasn’t picking up anything in their surroundings.

“It’s not showing anything. Shouldn’t we assume that our enemies don’t have any supporting units that would follow up their initial attack?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“This means they’re going to attack us at night.”

Kim Tae-Jin looked unconvinced.

“They’re just stalling long enough to tire us out. Once we’re overcome with fatigue, some other group will launch a night raid,” Kang Chan added.

“Are you sure about this?”

“You’re going to get your answer at night.”

“If that’s the case, we should ask for help!”

Kang Chan shook his head. “If we contact anyone right now, the Mongolian border control will definitely come here. If they cooperate with the mafia, we’ll be wiped out.”

Kim Tae-Jin looked surprised. He seemed to be demanding further explanations, but he chose not to say anything.

“Everything will make sense when you factor in the reason they ran away this morning and why Vasili used those fuckers to try forming an agreement with us. If the Mongolian border control approaches us, we won’t be able to shoot them on sight. If they unleash chaos once they’re inside the base, we won’t have any chance against them,” Kang Chan explained.

“They would do that even though China and Russia are watching?”

“They’ll just blame everything on the mafia. The Mongolian border control will be satisfied with taking everything worth any money here.”

“Phew! I was too naive,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

“No matter the place, this happens often in combat.”

“Does it happen in Africa too?”

Kang Chan nodded.

“I’m going to die from hwabyeong[1] someday because of how curious I am about your identity,” Kim Tae-Jin complained.

“We have to get through today first for that to happen.”

Kim Tae-Jin laughed, finding Kang Chan’s answer absurd. Looking at him, he asked, “Is there a way to defeat them?”

Kang Chan didn’t reply, but Kim Tae-Jin believed his fiercely glinting eyes were more than enough to answer his question.

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‘I’ll spare no effort in finding you and having you rest next to your mom,’ Kang Chul-Gyu thought, making a promise to his son as he glared at their enemies.

He couldn’t help but want to apologize to his son for liking Kang Chan, whom he felt as was walking over him in his son’s stead. He was glad that his son met someone who would get angry about his death as if it were his business.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s gaze on their enemies sharpened further as he got rid of all useless thoughts and feelings.

This was one of the Spetsnaz’s old-fashioned tactics. They would send an advance party to engulf their opponents in chaos and put them on edge for an entire day. At night, reinforcements would go around the back and invade their opponents’ positions.

*So much time has passed. Why are they still using this old-fashioned?*

Kang Chul-Gyu discretely looked behind him.

Their base was in the middle of nowhere. It looked so out of place that it seemed as if someone just randomly dropped it here.

‘It’s happening tonight.’

Their enemies would definitely raid them once darkness had fallen.

No matter how much he explained it to others, they wouldn't understand how it felt to have a heart that pounded to warn him of danger.

Kang Chan also appeared to have instinctively realized that their enemies would be raiding them soon, which was probably why he was trying to check the satellite video.

They were going to put an end to this whole situation tonight.

If so, then Kang Chul-Gyu had to do whatever it took to get rid of the Spetsnaz as cruelly as possible. That would demoralize their enemies enough to make them give up or open up negotiations.

He would fight relentlessly until Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin found his son's remains or mementos. It didn't matter if he died. Kim Tae-Jin would bury his son near his wife anyway.

Kang Chul-Gyu never got to see his superior again after he was imprisoned.

*I hope he's not upset. Is he still even alive?*

The man was probably dead already. He smoked too much.

After tonight's battle, Kang Chul-Gyu hoped that Kang Chan would finally agree to help him find his son.

This was his first time seeing a real soldier since he was given a dishonorable discharge.

*If someone like him was around back then...*

He shook his head.

Considering his superior couldn't protect him at the time, Kang Chan probably would've just been kicked out from the military in a similar manner as well.

Kang Chul-Gyu suddenly wanted to see his son. He didn't care if his son swore at him or slapped him in front of a crowd if it meant he would get to see him just one more time.

*Clank! Taang!*

Kang Chul-Gyu held up his rifle as fast as lightning and pulled the trigger.

The enemy sniper who was lifting his gun to shoot hurriedly lowered his head. The South Korean team looked at Kang Chul-Gyu with surprise.

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked.

*Now that you've lowered your head, stay like that at least until this evening... at least until Kang Chan finishes planning out the operation.*

Kang Chul-Gyu glanced behind him, feeling as if Kang Chan would know the meaning behind the shot he just made.

*Did you bastards want to get on our nerves?*

*Clank! Taang!*

The enemy in front of one of the vehicles taunted them but soon wobbled and fell to the ground. From the way he behaved, he was likely hoping to provoke them, which proved to be a fatal mistake..

*How can Kang Chan shoot them in the forehead from this distance, though?*

Kang Chul-Gyu thought it was just a coincidence at first, but the fight this morning made him realize that it was all intentional.

*Whoosh! Whoosh!*

The final battle would be tonight.

*Badum badum. Badum badum.*

Kang Chul-Gyu looked around him. His heart was beating like crazy, sending him multiple warnings that he had to get out of this place.

However, he paid it no heed.

Kang Chul-Gyu would protect at least Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin tonight even if it cost him his life. He would make sure that they could bury his son's mementos near his wife in his stead.

He could end up meeting his son tonight, but it would be meaningless. After all, he lived a life of blood and tears just to die on a battlefield in Mongolia's wilderness, surrounded by rough winds.

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked.

Chapter 242.1: It Takes More Than Just a Glance (1)

A gust of wind lashed out at the two men as they stepped out of the barracks, blowing dust and soil at them.

Kim Tae-Jin turned his head away to avoid being peppered. He then looked at Kang Chan, who was walking next to him. Kang Chan's menacing gaze, shocking but brilliant judgment of situations, and outstanding combat skills... the first thing Kim Tae-Jin felt from those traits of his was a sense of security, assuring him that he could rely on Kang Chan. However, it was followed by a tense urgency telling him that a devastating battle was waiting for them up ahead, and it was evidenced by the glint in Kang Chan's eyes.

"I'm going to go deliver this," Kim Tae-Jin informed Kang Chan.

"Please do."

Kim Tae-Jin picked up the satellite video receiver and headed to the mess hall., where he would pass it on to Oh Gwang-Taek and ask him to keep an eye out for anyone approaching the barracks.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan headed straight to the barracks where Kang Chul-Gyu was holding the base down, hearing two gunshots on the way to it. Based on the long echoes of the gunshots, he deduced that Kang Chul-Gyu was the one who fired them.

*Swiiiiish! Swiiish!*

As Kang Chan ran up the iron stairs, Kang Chul-Gyu and the agents turned toward him. Kang Chan looked at Kang Chul-Gyu first, who had kept the enemy snipers and the other hostiles from making any moves. Kang Chul-Gyu had protected their men as well as Kang Chan had expected.

However, due to how Kang Chul-Gyu looked, Kang Chan's eyebrows furrowed as he turned his attention to their enemies. The wrinkles at the corners of the old man's eyes, his haggard, hollow cheeks, and the traces of his painful life along the corners of his mouth and jawline kept flashing through Kang Chan's mind.

*This fucking idiot! You should've at least lived a good life after you pushed your son to death and made your wife commit suicide, you fucking asshole! Stupid shit!*

Kang Chan was looking ahead when Kang Chul-Gyu suddenly dropped to his knees. He seemed to have been waiting for this moment.

*Thud!*

“Argh!”

Kang Chul-Gyu hunched over and leaned his head forward. The back of his head and his right arm, which was gripping his rifle, trembled violently. The agents quickly looked back and forth between Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu, but they didn't dare stand up first.

The enemies likely had a clear view of this scene as well. Hence, Kang Chan just gave Kang Chul-Gyu a brief glance before turning back around.

*What the hell has he been doing all these years that deteriorated his health to this point?*

Irritation surged through him before pity.

“Please...!”

Kang Chan groaned with frustration. He had no idea what the old man wanted.

Kang Chan just kept glancing at Kang Chul-Gyu. He felt sorry for him and was also annoyed with him, but he had to prioritize keeping an eye on the enemy.

“Just one day! Just one day...!” Kang Chul-Gyu cried desperately. Immediately after, blood began to drip from his nose.

*Click! Baaang!*

*How dare that bastard raise his head?*

The enemy sniper who tried to straighten up quickly ducked behind cover again, startled by Kang Chan's shot.

Kang Chan couldn't recall ever seeing Kang Chul-Gyu in such a state in the past. He did remember the old man suffering in pain, but he never trembled like this back then. He never had a nosebleed either.

It was the first time Kang Chan felt sorry for Kang Chul-Gyu and felt a sense of pity for him.

“Do you want some morphine?” Kang Chan asked.

“Kegh!” Kang Chul-Gyu groaned as he quickly shook his head.

*Fuck it! Fine, then! Keep suffering!*

In the middle of it all, Kang Chan heard someone coming up the stairs, and Kim Tae-Jin soon appeared. His eyes widened in surprise as he looked at Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu.

“The enemy’s sniper has us in their sights. You should get down and move behind me, sir,” Kang Chan advised.

There was only a small space behind Kang Chan. It was right between the ledge, and it was just big enough for him to drop down in the blink of an eye. Nevertheless, Kim Tae-Jin quickly acted, grabbing Kang Chul-Gyu by the shoulders to look into his face.

“Sunbae-nim!” Kim Tae-Jin exclaimed.

“I’m fine! I’m fine...” Kang Chul-Gyu protested, raising his gaze as if he were waiting for this exact moment. His eyes were bloodshot, and blood was trickling down to his lips.

“Hup!” he sniffed as he wiped his nose with his sleeve, smearing blood across his cheek.

“You should head back down. Let’s get you some painkillers and morphine,” Kim Tae-Jin suggested.

“No, I can’t,” Kang Chul-Gyu refused, shaking his head.

“How about we go back inside just to get a bit of rest, then?”

As Kang Chul-Gyu lifted his gaze again, Kang Chan coldly issued an order. “Don’t distract the agents. Go down with the Director.”

In response, Kang Chul-Gyu stood up without any argument. He was well aware that in situations like this, contradicting Kang Chan and insisting on staying would bring them no good. Kang Chan was more capable than Kang Chul-Gyu anyway, which meant his presence here wasn’t needed.

*Clunk, clunk.*

Kang Chul-Gyu descended the stairs, albeit with a lot of difficulty. Kim Tae-Jin followed after him. They then headed to Kim Tae-Jin’s barracks.

*Creak.*

They entered as soon as the door opened. Kang Chul-Gyu sat down on the sofa, and Kim Tae-Jin put water from the kettle on the stove.

“Are you sure you don’t need to take any medication?” Kim Tae-Jin offered again.

“Taking pills makes me hallucinate. What would you do if I pulled the trigger in the wrong direction at this place?” Kang Chul-Gyu grimly asked.

“Have you always been like this?” Kim Tae-Jin asked, concern evident in his voice.

“No,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied as he grabbed a tissue and covered his nose with it. “I don’t know if it was the plane ride or the weather, but it suddenly got worse. I’m having bouts of pain more frequently and started getting a bad case of nosebleeds.”

When the water began to boil, Kim Tae-Jin prepared two cups of instant coffee. He poured the remaining water into a paper cup before heading over to the table.

“Here, drink this for now,” he said as he held out a cup. He then tore off a handful of toilet paper from a roll and soaked it with water. “Let’s wipe all that blood off you.”

Kang Chul-Gyu didn’t turn down the help. On the contrary, he slightly leaned over like a little child so Kim Tae-Jin could wipe his face more easily.

“Do you have any cigarettes?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“There are probably some around here,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

“Would you mind getting me one?”

“Will do, sir.”

As Kim Tae-Jin headed further inside to get some of the cigarettes that the agents had left, Kang Chul-Gyu took a sip of his coffee.

“Here you go,” Kim Tae-Jin said as he held out a cigarette and flicked the lighter on.

*Click.*

“Hoo,” Kang Chul-Gyu stared at the cigarette in his hand as he exhaled the smoke. “They’re most likely going to raid us tonight.”

“Kang Chan said the same thing,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

“I knew he would make the same prediction.” Kang Chul-Gyu raised his cigarette to his mouth again. “Hoo, I have a favor to ask.”

“Go ahead, sir,” Kim Tae-Jin replied.

“No matter the outcome of our battle today, if you’re still alive, I want you to find my son’s remains and bury them beside my wife.”

“Why do you say that?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s lips curved into a smile. “No reason in particular. I just want to have a little peace of mind when I’m facing the enemy. And as you can see, I’m not in the best health either.”

Kim Tae-Jin let out a low sigh. “If I’m still alive by then, I’ll make sure to get it done. Since Kang Chan knows your son too, I doubt your request is impossible to do.”

“All right. Thank you,” Kang Chul-Gyu said, expressing his gratitude. He put his cigarette in his paper cup and then stood up.

“You should rest a bit more.”

“No, this is more than enough.”

Looking as if he had no other choice, Kim Tae-Jin followed after Kang Chul-Gyu. Considering the situation they were in, it was difficult to argue against him. Moreover, he still found it difficult to talk back to Kang Chul-Gyu.

They cut through the rough winds and dust. When they made it back to the barracks, they climbed up and found Kang Chan still in the same position where they left him.

Kang Chul-Gyu slung his rifle over his right arm and stood beside him.

“Director, we have to cut down the agents’ rotation to half-hour shifts. We should take turns eating as well,” Kang Chan said.

“We only have two agents per barrack. We don’t have enough manpower to do that,” Kim Tae-Jin responded.

“Well, we can start by letting the two agents here rest,” Kang Chan countered.

Kim Tae-Jin glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu, then nodded. “All right.”

*Swish! Swiiiish!*

As Kim Tae-Jin ordered, the agent who had his rifle at the ready and the agent manning the Mistral retreated. They had been out here in the freezing cold since after breakfast. Hence, they were grateful to get even just a thirty minutes’ worth of rest.

“You should rest with the agents too, Director Kim. The old man as well,” Kang Chan said.

“Got it,” Kim Tae-Jin replied. He knew that this wasn’t the time or place to refuse out of courtesy.

More importantly, their two monsters, Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu, both predicted that they would have a raid on their hands later tonight. It would be wiser to give at least one of them the time to rest rather than to stall for time.

Chapter 242.2: It Takes More Than Just a Glance (1)

The sun was now right on top of the barracks. The clouds of dust, intense sunlight, mad banshee wind, and the bone-chilling temperature felt as if they were starting to loom over Kang Chan’s head.

“There’s going to be an ambush from the enemies at night,” Kang Chul-Gyu said quietly, his gravelly voice coming through with only the two of them left in the barracks. “I heard you’re also expecting an attack.”

Kang Chan glanced at Kang Chul-Gyu and saw he was glaring sharply at the enemies with a firm expression.

“I want nothing more than to find my son’s remains and have him rest beside my wife,” Kang Chul-Gyu continued.

“What is it you’re trying to say?” Kang Chan asked in annoyance.

Kang Chul-Gyu turned around to face Kang Chan.

“I know you don’t like me, so let me ask you this with peace of mind. I don’t know if it’s because of the plane ride or because of the cold weather, but my health has suddenly taken a turn for the worse. I’ve been told that if I get a nosebleed, I should consider it an emergency since I have a shrapnel in the back of my head,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

Even as Kang Chan conversed and looked at Kang Chul-Gyu, he didn’t forget to monitor their enemies.

“I’ll go out during the night,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

Kang Chan’s gaze sharpened, but Kang Chul-Gyu didn’t break eye contact. Without missing a beat, he continued, “I’ll deal with whoever comes. If I can stop the raid tonight from happening, will you find my son’s remains or at least belongings and give them to Kim Tae-Jin?”

“Are you offering to take down the incoming enemy forces by yourself?” Kang Chan asked in disbelief.

“Yes.” Kang Chul-Gyu replied. Seeing Kang Chan’s wry smile, he self-depreciatingly added, “Even if I fail, you’re just down one old man who’s about to die anyway. It’s not that big of a loss, is it?”

“Does Director Kim know about this?”

“He’ll do anything to stop me if he learns about this plan, so let’s keep this between us, Captain,” Kang Chul-Gyu responded as blood began to leak from his nose again. He wiped it with his left hand, then looked at the stain it left on his hand with a grin.

“As you can see, I don’t have much time left. Please give this to me. It’s my last chance to atone,” he pleaded. His eyes glinted as fiercely as Kang Chan’s.

“I just need you to help me find my son’s remains. In the name of the DMZ King, I promise I’ll deal with whoever tries to attack us at night. Even if I can’t stop them all, I’ll at least make sure to demoralize them,” he continued.

“Go back down,” Kang Chan ordered.

Kang Chul-Gyu gave Kang Chan a questioning look.

“Rest until the evening. Then you can go out or do whatever.”

“Will you do me the favor?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked in surprise.

“Do you think I like you enough to tell you to get some rest otherwise?” Kang Chan shot back.

“Thank you.”

Kang Chul-Gyu locked gazes with Kang Chan before climbing down the stairs.

*Swiiish! Swiiish!*

The wind whipped up dirt and dust with ease, scattering it all over the place.

Kang Chan looked ahead of him as he rested his index finger on the trigger of his rifle.

*Was that old man ever happy? I heard he ended up like this because he took care of his men as if they were his life. Was he happy back then?*

Kang Chan couldn't stop thinking about Kang Chul-Gyu's wrinkled face and the blood dripping from his nose.

*He wants me to send him alone tonight? Damn it! How low does he think of me?*

Kang Chan suddenly terribly missed Seok Kang-Ho.

*That motherfucker!*

Seok Kang-Ho was always so helpful to him in situations like this.

Kang Chan leisurely scanned his surroundings. As he did, he heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Kim Tae-Jin soon came into view head first.

“Why are you running all over the base so busily, sir?” Kang Chan asked.

“I just came here because I was worried about you being alone,” Kim Tae-Jin responded.

“There's no need to worry about me,” Kang Chan said. “Just take care of the old man instead. He's the only person we can trust to stand guard this evening. He should have lunch and get some rest until nightfall.”

Kim Tae-Jin gave Kang Chan a look of suspicion. “You said there's going to be an ambush during the night, didn't you?”

“We will be splitting up the team. Our defensive forces will take care of the enemies while the other half goes out to greet whoever else comes our way. We'll be using the satellite video receiver to determine where they're coming from.”

“Are you sure you don't want to call for help?”

“We've caught the end of the Eurasian Rail here. If we start to accept help now, they will have a hold on us forever. We should at least take care of the mafia on our own.”

Kim Tae-Jin nodded. He then headed down the barracks.

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- They're completely isolated out there. Even the soldiers from the Mongolian border patrol have deserted them.

Lanok pressed the receiver to his ear as his gaze alternated between the satellite imagery and their maps. The TV on the wall in front of him displayed footage of the Mongolian base.

“What about Monsieur Kang?” he asked.

- From the looks of it, he seems to be planning to handle it all by himself. He hasn't asked even South Korea for help yet.

Lanok glanced at the footage.

- The positions of China and Russia will heavily change depending on which of those two countries the railroad from South Korea will go through. Right now, both nations are desperately waiting for Monsieur Kang's request for backup, but the situation is taking quite a strange and unexpected turn.

“Vasili must be frustrated to death right now,” Lanok mused. “He likely planned to extend an offer to help after turning down Kang Chan's request, but the Mongolian border patrol has gone and stolen the Mobile Base Station.”

- We failed to take that possibility into consideration as well. However, there is still a chance that Vasili would use a satellite phone to contact him.

Lanok grinned. He picked up the teacup from his desk. “If does that, then he will essentially be admitting that he was the mastermind behind this entire situation.”

His lips curved to an odd smile before taking a sip of his tea. He then continued, “What is South Korea's response to all of this?”

- They are preoccupied with the deployment of their special forces.

Lanok nodded, finding their priorities completely understandable.

- On another note, the team in Mongolia is accompanied by a man named Kang Chul-Gyu, whom the United States has labeled a target for elimination. We found an interesting bit in his record when we looked into him.

This report was news even to him.

- The name of Kang Chul-Gyu's son is Kang Chan. He was a soldier of our Foreign Legion's 13th Regiment Special Unit when he died.

Lanok stiffened but recovered just as quickly. “Who else is aware of this?”

- All information regarding Deputy Director-General Kang has to go through me first.

“Then destroy those records.”

- Understood, sir. We've also received intel that Russia and China have special forces teams waiting on standby.

“I see. Be ready to contact me as soon as you receive any updates. Stay on your toes. The pace has picked up too much. If both Vasili and I are caught off guard, then any number of unexpected variables could occur,” Lanok ordered.

He put down the receiver and glanced at the TV in front of him. A moment later, he pressed the intercom button on his desk.

“Raphael, I’m going to Russia. Arrange a flight for me.”

- Understood, Mr. Ambassador.

After hearing Raphael’s confirmation, Lanok leaned against the backrest of his chair and turned his attention back to the TV.

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Two hours had passed. During that time, the agents got to rest in 30-minute intervals. Kang Chan and the others ate rice balls instead of having lunch.

“Are you not going to rest?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“I’m fine. I’m young,” Kang Chan nonchalantly replied as he took a sip of his hot coffee, which he got from the kitchen. It was probably scalding hot when it was made, but by the time it reached him at the top of the barracks, it was already only lukewarm.

“Come on. Why don’t you switch places with Sunbae-nim for a while so you can get some rest?” Kim Tae-Jin suggested.

“The moment I leave this role to an old man with a nosebleed, someone who falls to his knees like he did earlier, will be the moment we meet our end.”

“What about the other agents?”

“None of our agents can shoot that far. They’ll be shot in the head by the enemy sniper before they know it.”

Kim Tae-Jin groaned softly. He then took the cup that Kang Chan was holding out for him.

“Is the old man doing any better?” Kang Chan asked.

“He’s gone off to sleep saying he has to if he wants to be able to move later tonight. He asked me to wake him up when it’s time for his rotation,” Kim Tae-Jin answered. Glancing over at Kang Chan, he added, “Can I ask you a favor?”

*Are these men taking turns to ask me for favors?*

Instead of giving a verbal answer, Kang Chan just silently looked back at Kim Tae-Jin.

“You have no idea how many people he saved. Even right before his career ended, he ran out of the base knowing he was charging right into death’s embrace,” Kim Tae-Jin began. He had a smile on his lips, but sadness was written all over his face. His heart went out to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“He’s probably planning on spending his last days here, especially with what he asked me to do during the day. Given his personality, I’m sure he’ll leave the base alone tonight to launch a preemptive attack. Can I ask you to put us on the strike team tonight?”

Kim Tae-Jin stared right into Kang Chan’s eyes.

“He saved my life so many times but I’ve only remembered all about it now. That man ran out to save his men despite knowing he wouldn’t come back alive. I can’t let him charge into battle alone again knowing it’ll be his last, can I?”

Kim Tae-Jin’s eyes were glinting.

“When the DMZ King disappeared, Section Chief Jeon and I took after his lead. Maybe it’s because the times are different, but I knew I couldn’t have done what he did back when the Spetsnaz and the White Wolves were still training at the DMZ.”

“You could die. What about the family and employees you’ll leave behind?” Kang Chan asked.

“He ran out to save five soldiers in the same situation. We’ll handle the night raid. I just want you to find his son’s belongings and bury them beside his wife. If you do that for me, will follow him into battle with a grateful heart,” Kim Tae-Jin finished solemnly.

*Swiiiiish! Swiiiiish!*

The wind swept past Kim Tae-Jin and Kang Chan, rushing toward the enemy.

Chapter 243: It Takes More Than Just a Glance (2)

Kang Chan found the situation somewhat unfair.

Kang Chul-Gyu made his life difficult, and his mother in his previous life died as miserably as she lived. Even so, he felt as if everyone around him only supported Kang Chul-Gyu.

At the rate things were going, it would be better to forget about their plan to ambush their enemies at night. The consequences that would come from one soldier failing to control his emotions would be difficult to handle. To make matters worse, the two people who heightened their mission’s chance of success the most were trapped in a complicated relationship. Moreover, they were burning with so much sense of duty that they could end up doing something reckless.

A commander getting worked up in this situation would be no different from asking all of them to die. Hence, while glaring at their enemies, Kang Chan caught his breath and calmed down.

“Mr. President, do you recognize me as the commander of this base?” he asked.

“No matter what happens, we will never go against your orders.” Kim Tae-Jin answered, looking upset and embarrassed.

“When you wake up the old man, please bring him here with you,” Kang Chan replied as he looked at Kim Tae-Jin coldly.

“Understood.”

Perhaps it was because of the question that Kang Chan asked, but Kim Tae-Jin climbed down the stairs in silence.

That afternoon, Kang Chan stood alone on top of the barracks. The wind blew violently against him.

He would always take the worst-case scenario into consideration when planning an operation.

That could consist of choosing the locations of points alpha and beta or comparing two plans and choosing to execute the one with the higher chance of success.

*Huff. Huff.*

Taking into account how the two key members of the night operation were doing, Kang Chan decided to proceed with his backup operation instead.

*Should I just do as they wish and only send Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin?*

Kang Chan scanned his surroundings as he smirked. As a commander, he would never issue such an order.

If Seok Kang-Ho was here, Kang Chan would’ve entrusted the security of the base to Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin, then preemptively strike their enemies with Seok Kang-Ho. Unfortunately, the bastard wasn’t around.

*Whish!*

The wind rushed toward Kang Chan, bringing clouds of dust with it.

*Fine! Now that things have led to this...*

Kang Chan held up his radio.

*Chk.*

“Every agent on break—get into position,” he ordered.

Not even a minute after he put down his radio, Kang Chan heard footsteps and rifles clanking behind him.

The soldiers at the top of the barracks looked nervous.

Kang Chan heard people coming up the stairs. Two agents crouched down as they approached him.

“As soon as I start shooting, fire the Mistral at the vehicles,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

One of the agents went prone near the edge of the barracks’ rooftop and pulled out a thermal scope. At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin climbed up and joined them.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked much more at ease.

*When did he get this old? Why didn't he age well?*

Kang Chan looked away from Kang Chul-Gyu and focused on the enemy ahead of them.

“We’re changing our plan. As soon as we’re ready, we’re taking out the hostiles out front.”

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chan with surprise.

“Consider the mementos taken care of. I’ll see to it myself,” he added.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s cheek twitched. He seemed to be gritting his teeth.

“I’ll take down the snipers. Old man, your targets are the tangos in the vehicles, which the agents will blow up using the Mistral. Once we’ve eliminated them, I will run out to that side with the old man and President Kim. I’ll be leading the charge, so I need you to cover my left, old man. I’ll leave my right flank to you, President Kim.”

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin didn’t answer.

“Mr. President, I want you on standby downstairs. As soon as you hear gunshots, start the jeep that we hijacked yesterday and put all of our AK-47s[1] in its back. Radio in when you’re done.”

“Got it.” Kim Tae-Jin immediately answered when Kang Chan sharply glared at him. Kang Chan was acting so perfectly as their commander that Kim Tae-Jin was rendered speechless.

Kim Tae-Jin quickly climbed down the stairs.

“Old man, when we go down, climb into the left side of the jeep and cover President Kim,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Copy,” Kang Chul-Gyu answered. He looked as if he had something he wanted to confirm.

“I already told you I’ll find your son’s belongings, didn’t I?” Kang Chan said.

“Thank you.”

“Take charge of the base for a moment.”

"Got it."

Kang Chul-Gyu turned his attention to their enemies. Kang Chan took off his thick winter clothes and took out the bayonet in his sleeve. He then slid it in his right boot just enough to leave its handle and handguard peeking out.

“If any of you have extra magazines, pass them to the back one at a time,” Kang Chan ordered.

The agent manning the Mistral and the one next to him did as instructed.

Kang Chan put a magazine into his coat pocket. He then glared at the wilderness out front.

“Get your magazines,” Kang Chan ordered.

Without complaint, Kang Chul-Gyu took off his layers of thick clothes like Kang Chan and packed enough bayonets and magazines.

*Huff. Huff.*

Kang Chan looked to the side as he became conscious of the sound of breathing.

“Old man, I’m taking command. Don’t do anything that would upset our rhythm and make sure you properly cover us,” Kang Chan said.

"Got it."

*Shouldn't he be saying 'Leave it to me' or 'Don't worry' at times like this?*

Kang Chan shook his head, ridding himself of useless thoughts.

He interfered to protect the agents and Oh Gwang-Taek’s men. Now that his mind had cooled down, he realized creating meaningless tension with Kang Chul-Gyu would cause problems to the operation they were trying to flawlessly execute.

Even though Kang Chan had no medical knowledge, Kang Chul-Gyu was in critical condition.

However, no one in this place was as skilled as Kang Chul-Gyu. If Kang Chan had to force himself to think of one more reason to rely on him, it was that he wanted to give Kang Chul-Gyu one last chance to fight properly while he still wasn’t suffering from health complications.

Kang Chul-Gyu soon finished preparations. He slung the straps of his rifle over his right arm.

*Chk.*

“We’re ready,” Kim Tae-Jin radioed in not long after.

The hostels on the other side of the trucks seemed busy. They were likely discussing countermeasures to Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, Kim Tae-Jin, and the agents taking action.

Kang Chan held up his radio.

*Chk.*

“We will commence our operation to take down the enemies in front of us. The old man and I are going to shoot first. As we do, fire the Mistral at their vehicles,” Kang Chan ordered.

The agents turned toward Kang Chan.

“The moment we leave the base, I need everyone to provide us with cover until we return. While we’re out there, fire another Mistral. Your target will be the trucks at the front,” Kang Chan continued.

“Yes, sir,” the agent in front of Kang Chan firmly answered.

*Chk.*

“If by any chance all three of us are killed, then everyone is to use all our other cars to attack. Until then, you are to never abandon your positions. Any questions?” Kang Chan asked.

As Kang Chan was looking at the barracks that were on the side...

*Chk.*

“What should we do if only the agents remain standing because the three of us and the enemies all died?” Kim Tae-Jin asked. It was as if he was asking in place of the agents.

Kang Chan held up his radio as he was smirking.

*Chk.*

“After the agents get rid of the enemies, they are to take the car that we hijacked and leave the base no matter what. If they bargain with the Mongolian government on the satellite phone, they’ll be able to leave Mongolia.”

Nobody said anything after Kang Chan answered on the radio.

Perhaps it was because Kang Chan took off his outerwear, but it felt like the cold wind was digging into his skin.

Kang Chan looked at Kang Chul-Gyu.

‘Are you ready?’

Kang Chul-Gyu briefly nodded instead of answering.

*But at that moment...*

*Huff. Huff.*

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu looked at each other, and both of them looked perplexed. They felt each other counting the number of breaths they were each taking.

Kang Chan never felt something like this before. Both of their eyes were glinting, they looked slightly arrogant, and their breathing allowed them to feel everything—including their enemies—perfectly.

*Why did I feel something like this right now out of all occasions!*

Even after Kang Chan gritted his teeth and looked towards their enemies, Kang Chul-Gyu still looked perplexed.

*Click!*

But after Kang Chul-Gyu saw Kang Chan lifting his rifle, Kang Chul-Gyu controlled his expression soon after.

“Get ready!” When Kang Chan yelled loudly, the agent that was in charge of firing the mistral glanced behind him.

*Click!*

Kang Chul-Gyu raised his rifle.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Soon, Kang Chan opened fire, and Kang Chul-Gyu followed suit. The enemy sniper ducked, and the windows of the vehicles exploded.

*Whoosh! Pew!*

At the same time, a Mistral rose into the air, leaving behind a trail of white smoke in its smoke. A ball of fire engulfed the car it hit, sending it soaring up as the ground shook.

Gunshots echoed all over the battlefield as Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu went down the stairs so fast they were almost sliding. They then jumped into the jeep, which immediately drove off.

*Vroom!*

Right before they left the base, Kang Chan picked up an AK-47 and slung its strap over his shoulder, leaving it dangling diagonally across his body.

*Bang! Ta-da-dang! Ta-da-dang! Bang! Bang! Ta-da-dang!*

Kang Chan started shooting at the enemy sniper. He couldn't give him even just a bit of time to fire back. After all, if the bastard managed to get just one clear shot, then Kim Tae-Jin was dead meat.

*Du-du-du-du! Pew! Du-du-du! Pew! Pew!*

Their enemy's fierce retaliation made sparks fly from the hood of the jeep.

Kang Chul-Gyu's suppressive fire was perfect. He fired in bursts of three so that their enemies couldn't properly target Kim Tae-Jin. It also allowed Kang Chan to focus on the sniper.

*Bang! Ta-da-dang! Bang! Ta-da-dang!*

*We're still five hundred meters away from our enemies!*

The jeep sped toward their enemies, leaving a foggy cloud of dust behind. However, they were so far away that they had trouble getting closer.

*Whoosh! BANG!*

At just the right moment, another Mistral flew toward the enemy line, the explosion sending a truck upward. It fell back down shortly after.

*Vroom!*

*Bang! Bang-bang! bang-bang!*

Losing sight of their enemies because of the rising flame, Kang Chan was forced to rely on his intuition.

Kang Chul-Gyu threw his M16 to the side and picked up an AK-47.

*Du-du-du! Du-du-du-du! Du-du-du!*

*How is my teamwork with Kang Chul-Gyu this good?*

Keeping in mind when Kang Chan would shoot, Kang Chul-Gyu would only open fire in between Kang Chan's shots. Kang Chan did the same. They were so in sync that Kang Chan felt as if he was with Seok Kang-Ho.

*Damn it!*

However, Kang Chan found it strangely uncomfortable.

*Vroom!*

They were only about a hundred meters away now.

*Du-du-du! Du-du-du! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Kang Chan fired thirty more bullets. While he still had enough ammo left, Kang Chul-Gyu picked up another AK-47.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Now that they were closer, their opponents kept hitting the front end of the jeep.

To avoid the bullets, Kim Tae-Jin drove while almost lying down.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Click!*

Kang Chan took out a magazine from his pocket and switched it with the one in his gun.

*Bang!*

Snipers required some time to aim and reload. If they could just stop those bastards during that brief time, they would be safe.

With only thirty meters left to cover, Kang Chan shouted, "Step on it!"

Kim Tae-Jin glanced at him. They were all going to die if they stopped here.

They were so close to their enemies now that the agents had even more trouble covering fire.

Considering how the hostiles shot back, Kang Chan estimated less than three Spetsnaz among them, snipers included.

*Du-du-du! Du-du-du-du-du! Du-du-du-du! Click!*

Kang Chul-Gyu emptied his magazine on their opponents.

*Bang!*

The jeep, still going at high speed, drove into enemy territory and crashed into another car.

*Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Kang Chan shot every living soul that came into view as Kim Tae-Jin sat up and Kang Chul-Gyu picked up a new rifle.

*Du-du-du! Du-du-du-du! Du-du-du!*

When Kang Chul-Gyu started firing back again, Kang Chan threw his M16 as he jumped out of the jeep. He then pushed the AK-47 he was carrying over his shoulder to his front.

*Du-du-du-du! Pow-pow-pow! Du-du-du! Pow! Du-du-du-du!*

*Fucking mafia my ass! None of you are worth shit!*

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin ran behind Kang Chan, covering his left and right flanks respectively.

*Du-du-du! Bang! Du-du-du-du! Du-du-du! Bang!*

Smoke rose from the burning car and truck, engulfing the area with an acrid smell.

The three quickly dominated their enemies so quickly that they grew suspicious.

*Click! Clank!*

Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, and Kim Tae-Jin aimed at the directions they were in charge of as they prepared for hostile reinforcements rushing toward them.

*Huff. Huff.*

They were in the most danger during moments like this.

Kang Chan had told the soldiers not to run over earlier just in case their enemies had planted explosives in the area.

Battles were quite strange. Whenever their nerves were on edge, how coldly and quickly they reacted decided their survival.

*Bang!*

The moment Kang Chul-Gyu pulled the trigger, one of the enemies on the ground moved. He likely either did it to make sure the man was dead or because he saw him flinch.

Kang Chan aimed to his left, finding Kang Chul-Gyu gritting his teeth and blood oozing down his nose. Considering he saw him trembling at the top of the barracks, he was probably experiencing a lot of pain right now. However, he seemed to be trying to overcome it.

*Click!*

Kang Chan turned his muzzle to the side a little faster.

They just had to search two cars to put an end to all of this.

*Du-du-du-du! Pow-pow-pow-pow! Du-du-du! Pow-pow-pow! Du-du-du-du!*

Kang Chan shot the car door, then took two steps toward it.

*Ting.*

They heard a metallic sound.

Kang Chan's heart sank, and he got goosebumps all over his body.

It was a grenade.

*Where is it? Why didn't my gut warn me?*

In Kang Chan's eyes, everything appeared to slow down. He could see the car they shot, the smoke that was coming out from its side, the back of the truck, and... an old-model lemon grenade[2] rolling toward them.

They all saw it at the same time. As soon as they did, Kang Chul-Gyu pounced on Kang Chan as if he was attacking him, and Kang Chan reflexively held onto his chest and twisted to the side.

Their eyes met in the short moment that he was turned and pinned underneath Kang Chan, allowing Kang Chan to see his surprised and dejected expression.

*Whish!*

Kang Chul-Gyu fell to the ground.

‘Why did you do that? All I wanted was to find my son’s mementos!’

‘Stop talking nonsense!’

Kang Chul-Gyu was slammed into the ground. Kang Chan then covered him.

*Bang!*

Kim Tae-Jin jumped away from the grenade. While prone, he began opening fire.

*Du-du-du! Du-du-du-du!*

Kang Chan blanked out. He felt as if someone hit him on the back of his head with a baseball bat. Burning pain then coursed through him.

Kang Chan could feel Kang Chul-Gyu trying his best to sit up, but he couldn’t do anything right now.

*Damn it, old man! You’re alive, aren’t you?*

Kang Chan saw the blood under Kang Chul-Gyu’s nose.

*How dare you try to cover me and die on my watch! Are you trying to make me feel sorry for the rest of my life?*

“Why...?” Kang Chul-Gyu forcibly sat up and wrapped his arms around Kang Chan. Blood trickled down his chin and fell onto Kang Chan’s face and neck.

“Old man...”

“Why did you do this?!”

“I’m... the commander. Move... your face... away from me,” Kang Chan replied, but Kang Chul-Gyu didn’t listen.

*Clank!*

Kim Tae-Jin stood near the two as they talked, keeping a cautious eye on their surroundings.

Kang Chan kept blinking to focus on Kang Chul-Gyu’s face.

“Old man,” Kang Chan called again.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s blood dripped onto Kang Chan’s face and neck.

“Live... don’t hide like a coward. Keep living...” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chul-Gyu couldn’t say anything.

How was he supposed to express his emotions and accept that he was genuinely starting to care for the young man in his arms as if he were his son?

He felt apologetic for his dead son and their young, dying commander.

“Damn it... your blood is getting all over me!” Kang Chan exclaimed, albeit with difficulty.

Kang Chul-Gyu wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

Chapter 244.1: Let's Fight Together (1)

“Ugh!” Kang Chan groaned. A moment later, he pushed himself up, causing Kim Tae-Jin to shoot him a worried gaze.

“Are you sure you can get up?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“Whew! I'm not new to this line of work, you know,” Kang Chan jokingly replied. Despite Kim Tae-Jin's concern, Kang Chan just focused on getting up.

Kang Chul-Gyu grabbed Kang Chan's arm to help him.

“Old man, search the area for any weapon that we can use,” Kang Chan instructed Kang Chul-Gyu.

Kang Chul-Gyu examined Kang Chan, concern evident on his face.

“What? Are you sad that I'm not dead?” Kang Chan snarked.

“Of course not. Never,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied. He then went to work.

*Damn it! I shouldn't have looked him in the eyes.*

Kang Chan couldn't stop thinking about the emotions that filled Kang Chul-Gyu's eyes in that moment of crisis. It kept tugging at his heart.

Those eyes were the eyes of a soldier who acted out of instinct, not logic—the eyes of a soldier who couldn't let himself see his comrades die even if the alternative was losing his life.

It was because of these selfless actions that Kang Chul-Gyu's wife and son died grim deaths, yet he still didn't change.

*It was only to find his son's belongings? Bullshit.*

It was a ridiculous excuse. Kang Chul-Gyu probably would have covered Kang Chan even without that condition.

Kang Chan staggered toward the jeep.

*If I was in the same situation, what would have I done?*

In truth, he would also have taken the soldier in his arms to protect him.

*Click, clunk, clunk.*

Kang Chul-Gyu soon returned to them with a rifle and an almost ludicrous number of other weapons slung over him.

“Let’s get going,” Kang Chan stated.

Kim Tae-Jin stepped into the driver’s seat. Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu stood in the back.

*Vroom! Vroom. Clunk! Vroooooom!*

Their battle had ended.

As the jeep turned back, the agents standing on top of the barracks gradually came into view.

*Thud, thud, thud!*

Maybe it was out of concern for Kang Chan’s injury, but Kim Tae-Jin kept a moderate speed. Even so, Kang Chan still felt as if his back was killing him, but he didn’t bother telling the others about it. Fortunately, he wouldn’t have to fight anytime soon since no enemy was close enough to attack them right now.

“Old man,” he called.

Kang Chul-Gyu turned to him. The Blood under his nose had frozen.

“I’m thinking of going out again tonight, the three of us.”

“With those injuries? Are you sure you can?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked, worry evident in his voice.

“It’s not like you’re doing any better than me in that condition.”

*Vroom! Clunk! Rattle!*

When the jeep lurched forward, Kang Chan grimaced in pain. As he recovered, he asked, “Do you think you’ll survive the raid tonight?”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked confused. He couldn’t even answer.

“If you want to atone for the sins you committed against your family, do your best to live and survive. Unless you can promise me that much, I’m not letting you join us in the ambush,” Kang Chan continued.

The engine was so loud that it didn’t seem as if Kim Tae-Jin could hear them.

“I…” Kang Chul-Gyu trailed off.

This was the first time Kang Chan saw Kang Chul-Gyu hesitate to speak. He never hesitated when they first met at the airport. He didn’t either whenever he used honorifics to talk to him now that they were in Mongolia.

“How am I supposed to be shameless enough to try moving forward when I failed to make up for the sins I committed against my wife and son? No, even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t be able to live such a life anyway due to my condition. Please just give me a spot in our operation tonight,” Kang Chul-Gyu pleaded.

*This damn old man.*

Kang Chan noticed a change in Kang Chul-Gyu's eyes. If Kang Chul-Gyu looked at him with these eyes in the past, he might not have gone to France.

"Give me your word as a man, and I'll look for a way to get you the surgery you need. Otherwise, you're not joining the ambush," Kang Chan replied with conviction.

The jeep slowed down a bit now that they were close to the base.

"Why are you suddenly acting like this?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

As they drove past the gates, Kang Chan looked straight at him. "I believe that's what your son would have wanted."

The jeep came to a stop in front of the barracks.

"Are you okay? Shit! What the fuck happened to your back?" Oh Gwang-Taek shouted as he rushed forward. He held Kang Chan's arm and helped him out of the vehicle.

Kang Chan stepped out of the jeep. Kang Chul-Gyu remained dazed as the agents and Oh Gwang-Taek's subordinates unloaded the rifles.

Meanwhile, Kim Tae-Jin's gaze alternated between Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu. He had no clue about what just happened.

"Extend the range of the satellite video receiver as much as you can and reduce the number of agents on guard duty to two so they can get enough rest," Kang Chan ordered.

"Understood, sir," an agent responded before heading to the mess hall.

Kang Chan started for the barracks.

*Creak.*

The moment he opened the door and stepped in, a wave of warmth and pain rushed at him at the same time.

Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek helped Kang Chan take off his upper garments. One of the agents then wiped his back with disinfectant.

"What if some shrapnel managed to get in there?" Kim Tae-Jin asked worriedly.

"I'm probably fine. I didn't feel anything when I moved around," Kang Chan nonchalantly replied.

Kang Chan's attitude bewildered Kim Tae-Jin. Unfortunately, he had no choice but to trust him right now. After having the area disinfected and getting it wrapped with a bandage, he changed into new clothes and sat down on the sofa.

“You should get some rest too, Director Kim. We’re going to head out again tonight,” Kang Chan said.

“You’re going out in that condition?” Kim Tae-Jin asked in disbelief.

Kang Chan simply responded with a smirk. No one could stop him anyway.

Kim Tae-Jin shook his head and stepped out of the barracks.

“Would you like some coffee?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“Yes, please. Some cigarettes too,” Kang Chan replied. Hearing that, an agent immediately went to the kitchen.

“I’ll handle it, so just focus on resting up. From what I heard, you’ll have to fight again tonight, won’t—hey! Just fucking go already and get some rest!” Oh Gwang-Taek scolded the agent, quickly chasing after him and preventing him from entering the kitchen. He practically kicked the agent out of the barracks. When he got back, he put the kettle on the stove. He then walked over to Kang Chan and offered him some cigarettes.

*Click!*

Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek lit up their cigarettes together.

“It’s pretty tough, huh?” Kang Chan asked sympathetically.

“Are you going to keep me holed up in the mess hall at night too? I don’t mind dying. Just give me a chance to fight,” Oh Gwang-Taek grumbled. A complex mix of emotions was in his eyes. “Hey! Are you even listening to me?”

“Okay, okay,” Kang Chan replied. His eyes glinted so much that they seemed to be exuding a bright light. “Join us in the battle tonight.”

“You son of a bitch! I’ll make you the tastiest coffee in the whole fucking world.”

“It’s just instant coffee, though,” Kang Chan scoffed.

Oh Gwang-Taek grinned at him.

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After washing his face, Kang Chul-Gyu returned to his barracks with Kim Tae-Jin. He then changed into more comfortable clothes.

“Sunbae-nim, here’s your coffee.” Kim Tae-Jin handed Kang Chul-Gyu a paper cup. He also set down a cigarette next to it and pulled out a lighter.

“I’m not going to smoke,” Kang Chul-Gyu said as he picked up the cup.

“Understood.” Kim Tae-Jin set down the lighter and cautiously examined Kang Chul-Gyu’s expression. Out of worry, he asked, “Are you okay?”

“Of course. You should start drinking yours, too. It’s going to get cold.”

“Will do.” Kim Tae-Jin took a sip of his coffee.

After some time, Kang Chul-Gyu began, “You know, it might be cowardly of me to say this, but...”

“Yes, sunbae-nim?”

*What is he trying to tell me that’s making him so hesitant?*

Kim Tae-Jin stayed alert and put all his focus on Kang Chul-Gyu.

“If I manage to survive the battle tonight, can you look into a hospital that can perform the surgery I need?” Kang Chul-Gyu carefully asked.

Kim Tae-Jin never thought he would ever hear those words from him.

“Do you think it’s too difficult?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked glumly.

“No! I’ll do whatever I can to find a hospital!” Kim Tae-Jin replied, feeling something hot blaze and rise inside him.

“Thank you.” Kang Chul-Gyu nodded as he expressed his gratitude. “I feel very sorry and guilty for what happened to my wife and son, but if I’m still allowed to live on, then I would like to try my best at it.”

“Thank you, sunbae-nim,” Kim Tae-Jin said as emotions welled up inside him.

Kang Chul-Gyu simply gave him a pained smile in response.

Chapter 244.2: Let’s Fight Together (1)

Kang Chan picked up the satellite phone and dialed a phone number that consisted of mostly zeroes.

- Anne speaking, Monsieur Kang.

“Are you aware of the situation here?” Kang Chan asked.

- Russia, China, the United States, and England also know about the ongoing fight.

*Those motherfuckers!*

Kang Chan downed all of the coffee left in his cup. He then continued, “We have a man here who has a shrapnel stuck in the back of his head, and he needs urgent surgery for it. It’s been in there for quite some time now, and it’s lodged somewhere near a sensitive area, which means the procedure will most likely be dangerous. His doctor said it’s going to be difficult, but I don’t care. I want to save him.”

- I will have it prepared, sir.

Anne agreed to his request far more swiftly than Kang Chan expected.

“Anne.”

- Yes, Monsieur Kang.

“Is there anything that I don’t know about this base?”

This time, however, Anne failed to give an immediate response.

“When you go out into battle, you start sensing some things with your gut. Is this really the operation I was told about during the first briefing or is there something more to this? Today’s fight made something clear to me. There’s something under all of this that I’m not aware of,” Kang Chan stated.

There was still no response from the other side of the line.

“When we went out looking for a fight today, we eliminated the enemies I ran into too easily. That’s enough for me to know that those people were abandoned and left behind for something else. Even if the mafia is comprised of ex-Spetsnaz soldiers, their hostility still won’t be enough to explain that. That leads me back to my question: is there something going on that I don’t know about? Or is this a difficult topic for you to talk about?”

- Monsieur Kang.

“Anne, before you say anything, let me tell you one more thing.”

Kang Chan was already nearly certain that the gut feeling he had earlier was right. Anne’s response—or lack thereof—did nothing but help him confirm it.

“If you can’t give me an honest answer, just tell me you don’t know. I would understand. At the very least, I would rather not be disappointed in you or the ambassador.”

- According to the reports that I’ve been given, Vasili is somehow related to the mafia’s aggression toward you. Moreover, both Russia and China are waiting for you to reach out to them.

“What? Why?” Kang Chan asked, suddenly confused.

- They are hoping that you would ask for their help.

“Are you saying they want me to be indebted to them?”

- Yes. I believe that’s their goal.

Kang Chan finally understood the situation. He had to trust what Anne was telling him out of respect for her and her father. It was the least he could do.

“Thank you, Anne,” he replied, then paused for a moment. “I need a way to transport a patient out of here and get him surgery. Use my authority if you have to. Please lend me your and the Ambassador’s influence as well.”

- An order from you is much more effective for matters like this.

“Then, could you do that for me?” Kang Chan requested.

- I’ll be in touch again in five minutes.

“Thanks, Anne.”

After hanging up, Kang Chan glared sharply at the empty paper cup left on the table and the satellite phone.

*These assholes are treating me like a complete idiot! They sent me here giving me all that bullshit about denadite and the borders, but they were just actually doing all these bullshit calculations behind my back?*

Since Kang Chan got help from China when he went on the recent operation to Afghanistan, it was only proper that he returned the favor. However, that didn't make it acceptable to hide things like this from him.

Now that he was aware of the situation, it would only be fair for him to handle this as he saw fit.

Yang Bum and Vasili were the leaders of China and Russia's intelligence bureaus. Taking South Korea's national power into consideration, it would be difficult to go against them. That didn't mean that they could just play him like a fool, however. He had no intention of letting them have their way.

There was something else to all of this—something that probably made Russia and China resort to these cowardly tactics. Something disadvantageous to South Korea, which always had to powerlessly stand down even at the simplest frown from the two countries, or something that put Kang Chan in danger.

He had to know what it was to avoid being played like this again in the future.

*Beep. Beep. Beep.*

After some time, the satellite phone began to ring. Kang Chan picked up the receiver and pressed the answer button.

“Allo?” Kang Chan greeted.

- It's Anne again. A helicopter from France's DGSE will reach the base within an hour.

“Thank you, Anne.”

- On another note, the ambassador has landed in Russia. I believe it's now safe to say that the mafia will not be launching a night raid today.

“Is his presence over there related to the matter that I don't know about?” Kang Chan asked.

- Monsieur Kang, answering that is beyond my capabilities.

He could at least understand that much.

- The patient will be transported to Seoul. Dr. Kim Wan-Gyu of the Seoul National University Hospital is one of the world's top surgeons in brain surgery. I suggest arranging a schedule with him through South Korea's National Intelligence Service if you want to proceed with this.

“All right. I'll figure that part out myself. Thanks, Anne,” Kang Chan said.

Kang Chan hung up the phone and picked up his cigarette. Once suspicious, always suspicious. Now that he started to doubt the intelligence bureaus, he was starting to feel suspicious about the French DGSE's helicopter coming to the base as well.

For now, however, he had to get his priorities straight. After all, he had far more urgent matters to attend to.

Kang Chan picked up his radio and called for an agent. A moment later, the agent who was staying in the same barracks as Kang Chan entered his quarters.

"Do you have Manager Kim Hyung-Jung's number? Kang Chan asked, to which the agent answered with a nod. He then followed up, "Can you put me through?"

The agent pressed a few buttons on the satellite phone. Afterward, he handed the phone back to him.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking.

"Manager Kim, it's Kang Chan," Kang Chan greeted.

- Mr. Kang Chan!

"We're doing well. I believe we're mostly in the clear here. Anyway, I have a favor to ask."

- Go ahead.

"We would like to transport a man named Kang Chul-Gyu back to South Korea. A helicopter will arrive at our location in about an hour. I will get all the details about it and relay them to you at a later time, but he is in a bad condition. Please make the necessary arrangements to get him surgery from Dr. Kim Wan-Gyu of the Seoul National University Hospital as soon as possible," Kang Chan requested.

- Wait! Just to clarify, you said Dr. Kim Wan-Gyu of the Seoul National University Hospital, correct?

Kim Hyung-Jung seemed to be writing memos.

- Please rest assured that we're already on top of it.

"We will have the situation over here completely cleared out by tonight. I'll contact you again once we're done."

- The second team is set to leave in two days. They'll be taking more cell stations and other necessary supplies with them.

It was a much earlier departure date than what Kang Chan heard. However, he supposed it would be stranger if the date was any later now that Kim Hyung-Jung had gotten involved.

"What about the deployment of the special forces team?"

- They are also leaving in two days as well.

It was just obstacle after obstacle for them.

Just like how he felt about the whole Mongolian base operation, Kang Chan couldn't help but sense that there was something else going on with this matter as well.

"We'll go through the night first. I'll call you again once we're out of the woods," he said.

- Understood.

Kang Chan stood up after hanging up. He then got out of the barracks and headed to the one Kim Tae-Jin was assigned. The trucks and the jeeps that they had stolen were parked in the spaces between the buildings, making their base look more like a camp in the middle of a warzone.

*Creaaak.*

When he opened the door and stepped inside, he saw Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin sitting on the sofa.

"What brings you here?" Kim Tae-Jin asked.

"I've got something to tell you," Kang Chan replied.

Kim Tae-Jin thought it was probably something urgent. Nevertheless, he kept a relaxed expression.

"Come sit down. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"I already had some." Kang Chan sat on the single couch next to Kim Tae-Jin.

"A helicopter will arrive in approximately an hour."

"What?" Kim Tae-Jin asked in confusion.

"Old man. There will be an appointment ready for you at Seoul National University Hospital. Go back to South Korea and get the surgery you need."

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kim Tae-Jin's expression seemed to be asking him what in the world he was saying.

"Don't worry about the ambush or the raid tonight. We will still have to wait for further updates about it, but they're negotiating with the Russian Intelligence Bureau right now. At the very least, they have informed me that we shouldn't worry for now. Anyway, get ready to go to Seoul."

The two were understandably shocked. However, Kang Chan didn't really expect that Kang Chul-Gyu would show such a surprised yet stupid expression.

"On another note, the second team will be departing from South Korea in two days. I'll leave all the preparations for their arrival to you, Director," Kang Chan said. After informing them of all the intel he got earlier, he immediately stood up from his seat. Kang Chul-Gyu's surprised and flustered face was starting to make him uncomfortable.

However, Kang Chul-Gyu immediately followed him out.

“There’s something that I’ve been meaning to ask you,” Kang Chul-Gyu began.

Kang Chan turned around. Kang Chul-Gyu was staring right at him, now wearing a far more complex expression.

“Please answer me as a man. Are you absolutely sure that the mafia won’t be raiding us tonight?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked dubiously.

*Why did he become so pitiful when he got older?*

Kang Chul-Gyu was supposed to look like a devil. However, he just looked like an old soldier now. He still had his combat abilities, but his eyes and face did nothing to hide the hard life he lived all this time.

“I don’t play games or joke about the safety of my men, old man,” Kang Chan solemnly replied.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s mouth opened in an attempt to speak but his hesitation made it close again not long after. Nevertheless, Kang Chan already felt as if he knew what the man was going to ask.

“I think your dead son would have also wanted you to get the surgery. Be strong and make sure you come back alive from all this,” Kang Chan declared.

Kang Chul-Gyu’s eyes widened.

“Survive the procedure, then come back to protect this place, got that? That’s what your son wants. I doubt you want someone to call you father now. Am I wrong, old man?”

As Kang Chul-Gyu gritted his teeth, blood started oozing out of his nose again.

“I don’t ever want to see some damn fucking blood coming out of you either! And I’m sick of seeing your weak eyes and expression! The next time we meet, you better be a bit more dignified and a little cooler. That’s what your dead son wants! Also—!” Kang Chan took a moment to breathe to catch his rushing emotions. “If you die in the hospital, I’m never going to forgive you.”

“Yes, sir,” Kang Chul-Gyu responded.

“And drop those fucking honorifics!” Kang Chan barked.

“Got it,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

The two of them glared at each other like they were arguing.

Chapter 245.1: Let’s Fight Together (2)

Lanok entered the barracks looking indifferent to everything, a trait peculiar to French people.

“Welcome,” Vasili greeted and gestured to the sofa. He poured him a cup of black tea, the smell wafting out and spreading all over the room. Afterward, he filled a small glass with vodka and walked over to the sofa as well.

*Click.*

As Vasili put the glass down on the table, Lanok took out a cigar case from his inner chest pocket. It was just big enough to have space for two cigars.

*Chk chk.*

The ember at the end of the cigar grew stronger with each puff from Lanok. However, it disappeared just as quickly.

“Whoop,” Lanok exhaled, making sure to turn his head to the side beforehand out of courtesy.

Vasili watched the smoke rise as he downed the vodka.

“The vodka tastes strangely sweet today,” he commented before standing up and walking to one side of the room. A moment later, he returned with a bottle of vodka.

“Vasili,” Lanok called.

Refilling his glass, Vasili replied, “I know. I’ve already called it off. The mafia won’t go after our hero’s head anymore.”

“I’ve always despised the ‘Just trust them and let them do whatever they want’ phrase the most. I don’t even believe signatures on documents. Documents are useless,” he added, then downed his second glass of vodka. “I’m not doing this because I’m afraid of dying.”

Lanok smirked, seemingly finding Vasili funny. “The thought never even crossed my mind. I doubt the legend of the Spetsnaz would fear death. All I’m saying is that we should accept the fact that we’re old now.”

“Kang Chan is still too young.”

“You’re still saying that even though you’ve watched him all this time?”

Vasili looked as if he was challenging Lanok.

“Do you really think the Spetsnaz can kill Monsieur Kang if you send them over as members of the mafia?” Lanok asked.

“It’s a possibility.”

“Whoop.” Lanok exhaled more smoke. “Are you aware that Monsieur Kang has the DMZ King on his side?”

“What?”

In an instant, one question from Lanok made the confidence in Vasili’s eyes wane.

“Monsieur Kang is that kind of man. The only person the Spetsnaz failed to destroy—the very same who gave your special forces the worst humiliation they’ve ever suffered—is working under him. What do you think of that?”

Personally, I believe Russia should just accept by now that Monsieur Kang will never fail.”

“Fucking South Koreans!”

“I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that.”

Unlike Lanok, who still seemed relaxed, Vasili looked as if he found everything unfair.

“People who are about to succeed always display two signs before they do. Good people flock to them, and...” Lanok trailed off.

“Opportunities are given to them on a silver platter,” Vasili finished.

“At this point, you should just admit that Monsieur Kang is going to succeed.”

Vasili swiftly filled up his glass again and drank it.

“Do you wholeheartedly trust Monsieur Kang?” Vasili asked.

“Whoo!” Lanok exhaled the smoke again. “Wouldn’t I have gotten rid of him already if I didn’t?”

“Who would know what a wicked French like you thinks?”

“Our wickedness is more effective than the recklessness of a Russian.”

Vasili sighed as he shook his head. “I’ve dreamed of moments like this. Each time, I was always the protagonist. The one in the spotlight. I didn’t expect to just be one of the supporting characters constantly keeping an eye out for the protagonist’s mood.”

“You’re the second most important supporting character. Be proud of that.”

“I can’t believe I’m still being overshadowed even among the supporting characters, and by some wicked Frenchman no less.”

“Would you like to join the fight now?” Lanok asked.

“I should.”

Lanok held up the cup of black tea, his cigar in between his long fingers. “Once this whole situation is over, the door to hell in the world of intelligence is going to swing wide open, Vasili.”

“I hope you’ll still be alive the next time we meet.”

“I’m going to live longer than a reckless Russian. I’ll make sure to live until it’s time for me to put flowers on your coffin.”

Vasili smirked as he prepared another glass of vodka. “The battle will start in Africa, won’t it?”

“There’s no better place for our hero’s legend to begin. After all, that’s where his codename was made.”

“God of Blackfield? No wonder I hated it as soon as I heard it!”

Vasili downed the vodka once more.

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*Du-du-du-du-du.*

Kang Chul-Gyu didn't expect he would find helicopter noises comforting.

On this battlefield, he was fighting alongside National Intelligence Service agents who used to be part of the special forces. He also had Oh Gwang-Taek and his people, who dominated Gangnam.

None of them would be afraid of being attacked at night.

Nevertheless, the noises coming from the helicopter made them feel relieved and even slightly excited.

They had grown tired of the endless wilderness, the horizon that made them feel as if they were going to get motion sickness, the wind that made their teeth chatter, the bone-chilling cold, the horrible clouds of dust, and the wolves that ate human corpses.

Perhaps that was why Kang Chul-Gyu missed mountains, trees, and plants. He missed kimchi, soju, and crowds of people. Fortunately, he would soon hop aboard the helicopter. Even if they were planning to take the shortest route to Seoul, they would still have to stop by Ulaanbaatar, which would be filled with people.

Men with dirty faces turned their heads to Kang Chul-Gyu, mixed emotions evident in their expressions.

“Sunbae-nim, please come back quickly,” Kim Tae-Jin said.

“Thank you.” Kang Chul-Gyu picked up his bag, which felt light, and looked around him.

The sunset would always dye the rugged land blood-red during hours like this.

Kang Chan was on top of the barracks, standing before the wilderness with his rifle slung over his right shoulder.

*I was hoping Kang Chan would look me in the eye.*

*Du-du-du-du-du.*

“Mr. Director! Please bring back a few bottles of soju when you come back!” Oh Gwang-Taek approached Kang Chul-Gyu. He was covered in a lot of dust.

*Du-du-du-du-du.*

Not long after, the wind from the helicopter blades swept through the base.

They heard Kang Chan speaking French with the pilot through the radio, but no one understood what they were saying.

The helicopter landed right in front of the base.

Kang Chul-Gyu held out his hand, and Kim Tae-Jin shook it with all his might.

‘Please come back.’

‘Thank you. Thank you so much.’

Through the look in their eyes, they conveyed emotions not even a hundred words could.

Kang Chul-Gyu didn’t want to leave a terrible impression, so he tried his best to ignore Kang Chan as he headed to the helicopter. Perhaps it was because he was in a desolated plain, or because he had just fought in combat after so long of being inactive, but he felt confused.

However, it didn’t matter. No matter the reason, he decided to accept what he was feeling.

When Kang Chan told him to come back alive, he felt as if Kang Chan truly was his son.

*Du-du-du-du-du.*

The helicopter soon took off, giving Kang Chul-Gyu a view of the red sunset. Despite his resolve to ignore Kang Chan, he ended up scanning the area and looking for him. When he looked down, he saw Kang Chan standing on top of a barracks with an agent.

He shouldn’t hope for more. Getting to see Kang Chan already made him thankful beyond words. He shouldn’t hope for Kang Chan to look back at him.

*What right do I have to hope for things?*

Gritting his teeth, Kang Chul-Gyu was about to look away when Kang Chan turned toward him.

He didn’t know that their eyes could still meet from this distance.

‘Come back alive!’

Kang Chan’s gaze was engraved into Kang Chul-Gyu’s heart. Now, he didn’t have anything else to wish for.

*I’m so sorry! And thank you! Thank you so much for looking at me!*

Kang Chul-Gyu looked away and took a deep breath.

*Du-du-du-du-du.*

The helicopter flew toward the sunset.

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“Honey, why can’t we call him?” Yoo Hye-Sook asked Kang Dae-Kyung.

“They probably have a valid reason for it. They said that Mongolia is vastly different from South Korea, which probably means he won’t get any cell service the moment he goes even just a bit away from the city.” Kang Dae-Kyung calmed Yoo Hye-Sook—who was staring at her phone—in a relaxed manner.

“Didn’t we promise not to worry about him?” he asked.

“I miss him so much that it’s making me worry about him anyway. Don’t you miss Channy?”

“I do.”

Yoo Hye-Sook looked so surprised. Kang Dae-Kyung never answered honestly whenever she asked him that question in the past.

“If I could, I would tightly tie him up and lock him in my office,” Kang Dae-Kyung added, the absurdity of his response making Yoo Hye-Sook burst into laughter. He then asked, “Do you remember when Channy came back home and surprised us last Christmas?”

“Yes. What about it?”

“I burst into tears when Channy smiled at me.”

“Honey!” Tears welled up in Yoo Hye-Sook’s eyes, seemingly remembering how Kang Chan acted back then.

“Even since Christmas, he’s been looking like he’s having a hard time. He still had the same look on his face when he left for Mongolia, didn’t he?”

“That’s right! That’s one of the reasons why I’m even more worried right now.”

“You know, even though he seemed to be going through difficulties, Channy still worried about you more than me.”

Yoo Hye-Sook’s lips trembled.

“He would even visit and call me several times because of that. Channy also told me about moving the offices of my business and your Foundation first. No matter the news, he would always discuss things with me first because he was afraid that you would get surprised or worried,” Kang Dae-Kyung continued.

“Agh!” Yoo Hye-Sook burst into tears like a child.

“That son of ours cares about you so much that he won’t be able to work in peace if he ever learns that we’re worrying ourselves to death because of him, so whenever we can’t contact him, why don’t we just assume that he’s gone off to somewhere that has no cell service?”

“Do you have to say it like that?”

“My god, madam!” Kang Dae-Kyung reached over and wrapped his arms around Yoo Hye-Sook. “Should we tie him up and lock him in a room when he comes back after all?”

Yoo Hye-Sook giggled, her tears finally stopping. “Wherever he is, I’m sure he’s doing well,” Kang Dae-Kyung added.

“All right.” Yoo Hye-Sook nodded. She sniffled.

Chapter 245.2: Let’s Fight Together (2)

In two days, the South Korean special forces team would depart to carry out a joint operation with world-famous special forces. More importantly, they would be dropping right into the heat of combat.

The adjutant who was put in charge of logistics checked if they were lacking or missing anything so fervently that he looked as if he had gone crazy.

The sun was starting to set behind the mountains. Darkness was slowly engulfing the vicinity of the barracks.

Seok Kang-Ho's eyes had been glinting since yesterday. However, talking to Kim Hyung-Jung made him calm down and relax.

They cut barrels in half, put them all over the field, and lit fires in them. The air around the barracks alternated between hot and cold as a result, making it seem as if they were having a power struggle.

Seok Kang-Ho was blankly standing in front of one of the barrels when Cha Dong-Gyun approached him.

"Here you go," Cha Dong-Gyun said, offering a paper cup which Seok Kang-Ho gladly took. "We're going to grill a pig later."

"Nice!" Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed. He then carefully took a sip of the coffee and watched the flame in the barrel rise.

"Are you thinking of the captain?" Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

"Yeah," Seok Kang-Ho swiftly answered. "I should've pestered him harder so I could go to Mongolia with him. He must be so fucking lonely out there."

He sounded quite disappointed.

"The captain is... lonely?"

Seok Kang-Ho grinned. He tried to down the rest of the coffee but grimaced instead. "Ugh! That's fucking hot!"

Cha Dong-Gyun looked as if he was deceived.

"Got any cigarettes with you?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"I haven't been smoking lately."

"Jeez!"

Seok Kang-Ho's complaint made Cha Dong-Gyun call over one of the soldiers in front of the barracks and bum a cigarette from him.

Seok Kang-Ho lit it up as soon as he received it.

"Does the captain feel lonely too?" Cha Dong-Gyun asked.

"Why are you asking me that? Did you really think that man never gets lonely?"

"For some reason, I just can't imagine it."

Seok Kang-Ho nodded in understanding. “Once you get to know him a little bit more, you’ll start to notice when he’s lonely. That’s the reason he started hating genuinely caring for people.”

Noticing Cha Dong-Gyun’s perplexed expression, he grinned. “You know, I am always a bit surprised whenever he’s around you guys. He talks a lot and does whatever he can to make sure you’re all properly taken care of.”

“To this day, whenever I think about the operations we’ve executed, I still can’t help but feel as if it’s all just a dream even though we’ve already done a handful of them.”

“I feel the same way.” Seok Kang-Ho finished his smoke and threw the cigarette butt into the barrel. “Do your best over in Africa.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Nobody will be able to stop that man if you all die at some random place. We don’t have any countermeasures for when he loses someone he genuinely cares about.”

“I understand.”

Seok Kang-Ho sighed. After a brief pause, he complained, “This is fucking boring! I’d rather be back in North Korea again, running as fast as we did back then.”

“Aren’t you going to meet the captain soon anyway?”

“Aren’t you going to grill the pig?”

Smiling, Cha Dong-Gyun stood up.

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After having dinner, the South Korean team in Mongolia planned the order of the agents’ shifts for guard duty. They then collectively agreed to put Kim Tae-Jin in charge of the training until Suh Sang-Hyun arrived, which would be in two days.

“You should get some rest,” Kim Tae-Jin suggested.

“No, let the agents rest instead,” Kang Chan replied. “Just in case our enemy changes their mind, I’m taking guard duty for the next two hours.”

“You’re staying outside to stand guard with me?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked Kang Chan. He then stood up and picked up a thick coat.

“Hey! There’s still a few minutes before you have to put that on.”

“Are we going outside together or not?”

“We are.”

Oh Gwang-Taek only returned to the sofa when he heard Kang Chan’s answer.

“We’re going to need some weapons,” Kang Chan told Kim Tae-Jin.

“You mean heavy weaponry?”

“Yes. We’ll find ourselves in trouble if we keep fighting armed with nothing but rifles.”

“I’ll talk to Manager Kim later and look for a way to get some, then.”

“The Mongolian border patrol will probably return tomorrow. It’s going to be hard for them to turn a blind eye and pretend they don’t know us once they realize that the Russian mafia has given up.”

“Those sons of bitches!” Oh Gwang-Taek swore.

“You should go easy on them. No matter how we feel about it, we’re in the middle of Mongolian territory. We should play nice until we become so powerful that we no longer have to,” Kang Chan advised.

“Jeez. Fuck!”

“It doesn’t really matter when you’re only with us, but you’re the one in command of this base. Shouldn’t you hold back your anger when you’re in front of the Mongolian border patrol?” Kim Tae-Jin asked.

“Argh! Fine!” Oh Gwang-Taek obediently answered, perhaps because he felt bad for swearing in front of Kim Tae-Jin. He then turned to Kang Chan. “When will you be departing?”

“I’m going to wait for our reinforcements before I leave.”

“I’m jealous.”

“You shouldn’t be. I’m going to go to Africa. It’s going to be far more gruesome over there.”

“Huh

? Aren’t you going to Seoul?”

“If that was my only other option, then I would’ve just stayed here.” Kang Chan smirked.

“Well, isn’t that quite the pity?” Oh Gwang-Taek complained as if he felt bad for Kang Chan. He then gave him a suspecting look.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“What are you really going to Africa for? Do you like black women?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“Jeez. Do you want to get hit?” Kang Chan finally managed to laugh after so long. “Anyway, let’s go outside.”

Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek stood up and wore another layer of thick coat and pants.

A moment later, they headed to the barracks, and Kim Tae-Jin returned to the one he was assigned to.

*Whish!*

The wind rushed toward Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek as if it was happy to see them. Contrary to how it greeted them, though, Kang Chan was quite sick and tired of it.

They told Joo Chul-Bum and the agent with him that their shift was done and to head back into their barracks. They then stood facing the wilderness.

Was it because they were in the middle of nowhere? Even the moon in front of them looked red.

“If you put your mind to it, I bet you can just live a nice, quiet, and comfortable life. Unlike me, you don’t have the cops constantly chasing after your ass. You won’t get arrestest as soon as you make one slipup, so why are you going through this much trouble?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked as he scanned their surroundings the way Kang Chan taught him.

*Why am I doing all of this?*

“I simply like fighting with others, I guess,” Kang Chan answered. If he was being completely honest, he would have said it was because he couldn’t just ignore the people that he genuinely cared about, but he thought saying all that would give Oh Gwang-Taek goosebumps.

Back in Africa, he only really cared about one or two people. However, when he reincarnated in South Korea, he found himself quickly getting attached to far more individuals.

Kang Chan thought that Oh Gwang-Taek was going to mock and laugh at him, but for a moment, he just stayed silent.

“Fuck! This is a gathering of people who like to fight, then,” Oh Gwang-Taek finally commented. He grumbingly continued, “You know, I used to live like an asshole. I was never any good at studying, but due to my personality, I couldn’t bring myself to work for anyone. It didn’t even matter if the alternative was death.”

After a brief pause, he added, “After some time, I started gathering subordinates, and I actually liked it. People only work for money nowadays. When I was young, the world was a far better place.”

Oh Gwang-Taek glanced at Kang Chan. “Don’t you even dare say anything that’s not related to the topic, you fucking bastard! I’m here because I want to quit being a gangster!”

Seeing Kang Chan simply smirk in response, he tilted his head up and stared at the blood-colored moon. “When I was still an underling in Gangnam, I used to live in a one-bedroom apartment. Back

then, I would do nothing but eat until my hyung-nims called me, at which point I would spend the entire day working.”

“There was this one day... I remember being in so much pain that I was trembling and aching all over. At the time, my hyung-nim who lived in Hannam-dong called me, and I used all the money that I had on a taxi just so I could run over to him.” Oh Gwang-Taek looked as if he was talking to the moon. “You know what he did? He ordered me to do his laundry. His tub was full of clothes, and he wanted me to wash all of them by hand.”

*Is this bastard drunk?*

Oh Gwang-Taek looked as if he was being moved by the moonlight.

“I gritted my teeth and washed all of it even though some of them had to be washed with cold water. It took me four fucking hours. I thought I was going to die! When I told my hyung-nim that I was done, all he did was tell me that I did good and that I should go home and rest. Fuck!” Oh Gwang-Taek added. He then turned to Kang Chan, ice all over his face from the cold. “He didn’t even give me a penny for my fare home, so I was forced to walk across the Hannam bridge. It was snowing hard back then, and the wind felt exactly the same as the wind right now.”

“I did all of that just so I could be a gangster. But now? Now I’m doing this to get a chance to live like a decent fucking human being with you, so don’t go around being careless! You better not fucking die when you go to Africa. Just finish what you have to do and come back quickly.”

*Whish!*

The wind rushed in and carried his words away from them.

“I deserve to get at least one chance to fight alongside you in a gunfight, don’t I?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

Kang Chan couldn’t help but smile. He couldn’t believe he was starting to genuinely care for a fucking gangster now as well.

Chapter 246.1: From the Horn of Africa (1)

Two days went by in a flash. They were a peaceful two days, if one could even call it peaceful.

They received news of Kang Chul-Gyu’s hospitalization, the departure of the second team, and the deployment of the special forces team. However, much like the vehicles that the Mistral had destroyed and turned upside down in the distance, nothing affected the life at the Mongolian base.

However, on the morning of the third day, a loud car engine disrupted their silence.

*Chk.*

“It’s the Mongolian border patrol,” the agent on guard duty radioed in.

*Those fucking bastards.*

They were coming on the day of the second team's arrival—and before breakfast, too.

“Let's go,” Kang Chan ordered.

*Click.*

With rifles in their hands, Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek left the barracks and headed toward the base's entrance. The agents keeping watch above the barracks and those who came out with Kim Tae-Jin were all armed with rifles as well.

*Clunk! Clunk, clunk! Creak!*

Bhat stepped out of a jeep that was covered in a thick overlay and immediately walked over to Kang Chan.

“Ask him what's going on,” Kang Chan directed.

The agent spoke in Mongolian, and Bhat answered the question with a brazen smile.

“He says he came to see if there are any problems,” the agent translated.

“What about the Mobile Base Station?” Kang Chan asked.

As the agent interpreted the question, Bhat's expression made Kang Chan feel as if he already knew what he was going to say.

“He says he has no idea what you're talking about,” the agent said.

Seeing Kang Chan smirk, Bhat made a face that seemed to say he was being accused of something he didn't do. Kang Chan didn't know if it was because his acting was horrible or if he just didn't have the desire to hide it, but he was certainly indicating that they should move on from this subject.

*Well, we don't have any evidence, and we can't really do anything about it.*

Bhat said something again, With a look of disbelief, the agent relayed, “He's asking if we're going to have breakfast soon.”

“Son of a bitch!” Oh Gwang-Taek mumbled under his breath.

Pretending as if he didn't hear anything, Bhat turned his head toward the mess hall.

“Ask him if he wants to join us for breakfast,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Yes, sir,” the agent responded.

Kang Chan then turned around to leave, and Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek followed after him. They quickly finished their breakfast and had a break until nine, which was when the morning training session started.

The Mongolian border patrol spent their time scouring the site of the fight against the Russian mafia. Meanwhile, Kang Chan climbed up the barracks with an agent and stood on guard.

The training sessions that were underway were no different from military training, putting extra emphasis and focus on firearms, security, formations, and signals. Fortunately, according to the reports Kang Chan received, the learning atmosphere wasn't too bad because Oh Gwang-Taek dove into the material with determination, which served as a good example for the others.

It was almost noon.

In the distance, Kang Chan could hear helicopters approaching—and there wasn't just one or two of them. The morning training session seemed to have just finished in time, considering Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek had come out to the front of the barracks. The Mongolian border patrol clamored over as well.

Kang Chan immediately came down from the barracks.

“Don't let the Mongolian border patrol touch the cargo!” he ordered, making sure the interpreter knew that he was to translate his every word.

Having received Kang Chan's command in his language, Bhat's eyes flashed with anger, and began to spit words at the agent.

“He says this isn't polite,” the agent told Kang Chan.

*This motherfucker!*

There was only so much one could take.

The helicopters had already come into view. As far as the people on the ground could tell, there were at least ten of them. Taking the amount of cargo and number of people that Kang Chan was expecting into consideration, this was way more than he thought.

“The Mongolian border patrol are all to leave the base,” Kang Chan ordered.

Surprise engulfed Bhat as soon as he heard the interpretation.

“If you do this, then we'll collaborate with the Russian mafia. I'm sure you're well aware why they've been so quiet until now,” the agent relayed.

Bhat now looked at the cargo hanging from the helicopters with a wronged and regretful expression.

It had only been two days since Kang Chan had advised Oh Gwang-Taek to remain on good terms with the border patrol. However, being on good terms with them and being a pushover were two completely different things.

Maybe things could have been different if the bastard returned the Mobile Base Station to them and apologized. Otherwise, this wasn't going to work. He couldn't just burst over unannounced asking them to serve the border patrol soldiers food or believe that he could take whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted.

Kang Chan honestly didn't expect this punk to be so fucking shameless. At this rate, some kind of trouble would eventually break out, and he wouldn't be around by then.

“This is your final warning. Get out of the base,” he commanded.

Seeing the look in Kang Chan's eyes, Bhat hesitantly deliberated.

*Click!*

Kang Chan put his finger on his rifle's trigger, instantly filling the agents and border patrol soldiers with tension. Regret flickered in Bhat's eyes, but he hesitated one last time, casting a long glance at Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek.

*Click!*

This time, Kang Chan raised his rifle.

Bhat raised both hands in the air and began to walk out of the barracks, his face full of regret.

*I'm so sick of these assholes.*

Despite being heavily humiliated, they left their vehicles where they were and just stood waiting outside the barracks.

*Du, du, du, du, du, du, du.*

Only three days had passed since Kang Chan last saw a helicopter, but he still couldn't help but feel beyond happy and glad to see them again, and when he saw the heavy loads of cargo hanging from the aircraft, he felt as if he was the richest person on Earth. However, the Mobile Base Station excited him the most.

More than thirty men stepped off the helicopters, one of whom was Suh Sang-Hyun. They all looked pretty imposing with their sharp eyes, chiseled chins, and strong appearances.

Those with military backgrounds noticeably stood out from the rest. Their demeanor made it clear whether they were one of Kim Tae-Jin's seniors or juniors. However, they were all polite, calling Oh Gwang-Taek, "President Oh."

There was so much liveliness in the air as they unloaded the cargo one by one that no one could hide their smiles. There were mountains of kimchi, the soju that Oh Gwang-Taek was lamenting about, and more than five large boxes of pork belly.

"There's not much to life! Fuck, who would've known that seeing pork belly would bring tears to my eyes? This is like a tank full of treasure driving into a junk shop," Oh Gwang-Taek exclaimed, the emotions in his expression clearly showing how moved he was.

Bhat watched them with greed in his eyes, but the look on his face darkened a bit when the heavy wooden boxes were opened, revealing weapons, ammo, and the magazines that Kang Chan waited so long for. They were filled to the brim with K2 rifles, modified K3 machine guns, HK PSG sniper rifles, and grenades. One of the long boxes even had an Igla.

Kang Chan felt as if his indigestion just cleared out.

*Click! Clunk! Click!*

What satisfied him the most was the natural and skillful way the men picked up, carried, and set up the weapons above the barracks. They did everything exactly as Kang Chan ordered, pleasing him with everything they did.

The agents who arrived here with Kang Chan were tasked with moving the rifles, sniper rifles, and Igla.

Kang Chan had a new spring in his steps. He was so at ease that it seemed as if a protective barrier just enveloped their base.

Lastly, crates of oil came in on a series of handcarts.

“What do you think, sir?” Suh Sang-Hyun asked, his voice filled with pride. The mafia couldn’t even come close to something like this.

“It’s leagues beyond what I was expecting,” Kang Chan replied. “I have to ask, though. Why did professionals like those men take off their uniforms?”

“As the number of battlefields decreased, the soldiers were mostly promoted to operational officers. Since there are limits to how high field and combat officers can climb the ranks, they had no choice but to retire early,” Kim Tae-Jin responded.

Kang Chan could only nod.

“We have finished unloading and setting everything up,” one of the new men said.

“Great. Let’s all go introduce ourselves, then. Since this is a special occasion, why don’t we have a big feast for lunch?” Kang Chan suggested.

“Understood, sir,” the man replied.

The attitude and the tone the man used when speaking made Kang Chan feel as if the Mongolian base completely transformed into a military base.

Kang Chan, Kim Tae-Jin, and Oh Gwang-Taek were about to move out when their interpreter quickly rushed over.

“Bhat says he suddenly remembered he has our Mobile Base Station. He says he took it because he thought it was theirs,” the agent said.

“Why don’t you forgive him now?” Kim Tae-Jin suggested.

“This is as far as I go. From here on out, Gwang-Taek will be making all the decisions,” Kang Chan said.

“Hey! What’s up with you?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked with a flustered expression.

It was certainly a last-minute decision. However, at the rate things were progressing, Kang Chan would likely have to fly to Africa tomorrow. Hence, it would be best to have Oh Gwang-Taek take charge now.

“Oh Gwang-Taek, from here on out, all of this is your responsibility. I can leave for Africa with peace of mind knowing Director Kim, Director Suh, and the rest of the men who arrived here today are with you. Director Kim will take care of the

security issues for now, but you'll be making all the decisions otherwise. That isn't to say that you shouldn't discuss and decide other matters with him anymore, though," Kang Chan said.

They were walking to the mess hall right now. The agents who got here first and the new arrivals were all listening to Kang Chan as he spoke.

"You're going to leave right away?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

"They're in a pretty tight position too," Kang Chan replied.

They entered the mess hall together. After talking about it with Kim Tae-Jin, Oh Gwang-Taek decided to light a fire outside to cook meat for the border patrol soldiers under the condition that they would return the Mobile Base Station by tomorrow.

Chapter 246.2: From the Horn of Africa (1)

The dining hall was at max capacity.

The new men's eyes shone with a sense of duty and determination, making them look no different from the special forces team in Jeungpyeong, who spent a long time looking forward to going into action before they finally got to join an operation. They seemed to be grateful and happy for being given the chance to do what they always wanted to do here in Mongolia.

Why was South Korea letting these kinds of people rot?

In society, the pride of soldiers in what they did and their skills in firearms were even more useless than delivering packages. That was why those who spent their entire lives in the military, those who were more knowledgeable in weapons and combat than anyone else, were looked down upon by the masses. Even though everyone would rely on them the most when the time came, it remained true.

The new men all took turns stating their names, ages, specialties, and, lastly, their goals here in Mongolia. The first group to arrive here did the same.

When Kim Tae-Jin stood up and welcomed them, a wave of excitement and heat coursed through the room. Oh Gwang-Taek stood up to introduce himself as well, followed by his subordinates and the rest of the agents. A few of them were already acquainted with the new agents, which made it easy to create a friendly atmosphere.

Kang Chan's turn came next, but most people seemed to already know who he was.

"Welcome," Kang Chan began as he slowly met the gazes of the determined men before him. "The special forces shed a lot of blood for us to get here."

Everyone around him was a soldier, and each one used to be active at the DMZ. Every word he uttered made their blood rush.

"This mission pits us against Russia and China, which means we may have to pay with our lives and blood," Kang Chan declared. "I will do whatever it takes to bring the railroad here, but even if I succeed, I ask you to continue protecting this base—to remain here in the heart of Northeast Asia."

*Clap, clap, clap, clap.*

The clap started with just one person, but it soon erupted into a thunderous round of applause. When Kang Chan turned his gaze, he saw Oh Gwang-Taek's eyes glinting brightly.

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*Rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble!*

The plane lurched and tilted to change direction. Including the brief stop in Dubai, the flight was thirteen hours long.

*Ding, ding, ding.*

When the transponder signaled that they were only an hour away from their destination, a small buzz of excitement ran through the soldiers. This was their second official deployment that was given by South Korea.

Even Colonel Park Chul-Su, who was leaning off to one side, had a look of excitement on his face even though he had put Seok Kang-Ho in command.

It was forty minutes past twenty hundred in local military time.

Waking up from a long nap, Seok Kang-Ho washed his face with bottled water that Kwak Cheol-Ho poured for him. He then began to gulp some down.

“Whew!” Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed, shaking the drowsiness off in his characteristic gruff voice. Someone then handed him a paper cup filled with coffee.

They were now in Africa—the land where his life ended and everything began again.

Seok Kang-Ho could feel Kang Chan's absence now more than ever.

“Would you like a cigarette?” Kwak Cheol-Ho offered.

“Yeah, that sounds like a good idea,” Seok Kang-Ho responded.

Kwak Cheol-Ho handed him a cigarette and flicked a lighter on for him.

“You have a different look in your eyes,” Kwak Cheol-Ho remarked.

“Do I?” Seok Kang-Ho responded with a wide grin. Taking a sip of his coffee, he coughed and twisted away due to its taste.

Kwak Cheol-Ho chuckled.

“Listen up!” Seok Kang-Ho began, his expression far more solemn than ever before, as he looked at each of the soldiers with him. “If you get into a fight with another team, don't let them push you around. Trade blows with them, show them how much you want to win! Once you're done, you let me or Colonel Park know. You can also use your bayonets but don't kill or use any firearm. Not even handguns.”

Although they had trained with foreign teams before, this was their first time hearing this advice. Park Chul-Su also gave Seok Kang-Ho a questioning gaze.

Thuuuud.

As if something touched the floor of the plane, they felt a mild vibration, followed by the roar and rumbling of the engines.

“I’m sure you all saw what happened during our operation in Afghanistan. There are always people out there who would want nothing more than to break your spirits. Even the captain was worried about that when we spoke yesterday,” Seok Kang-Ho added.

“Will we really find ourselves in battles that would require us to use bayonets?” a soldier asked.

“Yes! And if we lose that fight, then we’re going to be left with the most dangerous part of the operation,” Seok Kang-Ho answered.

“Don’t we have a command center? Won’t they stop it from happening?” Park Chul-Su asked in a formal tone.

“The UN command center only provides administrative support. All the tactical decisions will be made by the teams that are deployed on these missions. That’s why it’s a shame that we don’t have the captain here. If we had him, it would all be over in a single blow.”

“Aren’t you experienced enough to do that as well, Mr. Seok?”

Seok Kang-Ho grinned. “In missions like this, no one can match the way he takes care of his team. It’s hard to explain, but you’ll know what I mean once you see it for yourself later.”

Cha Dong-Gyu nodded in understanding, recalling the way Kang Chan poured jet fuel all over the Chinese airport. There was no way Kang Chan would let another team push them to take on the riskiest mission. It was absolute dog shit.

“As soon as you arrive, you better keep your guard up. The captain isn’t here to warn us this time around, which means you can die before you even know it,” Seok Kang-Ho continued. “It can happen when we’re changing locations or even on your way to the bathroom. Somalia is a Sunni world, but the SSIS and SISS are both operating in it as well. It will only take a split second to kill you.”

After drinking the rest of his coffee, Seok Kang-Ho put down his paper cup and looked at Kwak Cheol-Ho. The time had come to arm themselves.

*Creaaaak!*

When the weapons trailer pulled up, everyone stood up and grabbed everything they needed. They no longer had to be instructed. Seok Kang-Ho strapped his bayonet to his shoulder and looked at the military uniforms that were hung inside.

He didn't feel the same excitement he felt when he and Kang Chan collected their weapons together. His eyes, which should have been glinting in eagerness after swallowing his nervousness like it was a piece of cake, were now only glistening with nervousness.

Seok Kang-Ho sighed quietly. He couldn't even imagine the pressure that was weighing down on Kang Chan's shoulders.

When they flew to France, Kang Chan ordered everyone to get out of the helicopter, and in Afghanistan, he changed the direction of the truck to some abandoned buildings instead of their original destination.

If he had missed either of the two, half of the men in front of Seok Kang-Ho right now would have been dead by now.

*Pft.*

Seok Kang-Ho shook off the thought and holstered handguns to his waist and ankle. He then put on his vest and put ammunition in each of its pockets.

'Hurry up and come over already!'

If it wasn't for the special forces team, nothing could have stopped Seok Kang-Ho from following Kang Chan to Mongolia. But since he was here, he would protect the men before him until Kang Chan arrived.

By the time they armed themselves to the teeth, the soldiers' eyes were already flashing with eagerness.

Even Cha Dong-Gyun, who was lying down due to his injury, looked as if his eyes emitting light.

*Ding, ding, ding, ding. Rumble, rumble, rumble, rumble!*

The airplane descended as if it was plummeting precariously.

*Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Du, du, du, du, du, du!*

A moment later, it started tumultuously driving down the runway.

*Fwoosh!*

The plane then finally came to a stop, and the doors opened.

*Creaaaak!*

A gust of hot wind and acrid odors rush toward the soldiers.

"Let's go!" Seok Kang-Ho commanded.

A red-backed Chinook, a helicopter provided by the UN, was waiting on one side of the airport for them. They would be taking it to transfer to another location. When an interpreter confirmed that they were free to board over the radio, they immediately stepped in.

"Kwak Cheol-Ho!" Seok Kang-Ho called, leaving him in charge of guarding the front of the helicopter. While the rest of the soldiers were climbing on, he quickly scanned the area with his rifle pointed forward.

They were at an airport, which normally meant he could relax to some extent, but this damn continent didn't allow even a moment of slack.

“Hurry up!” Seok Kang-Ho shouted. As instructed, the soldiers picked up the pace.

It would have been easy and simple if they just had to hop on and be done with it, but they had extra weapons and equipment that had to be loaded onto the aircraft as well.

When all the soldiers were aboard the helicopter, Cha Dong-Gyu aimed his rifle outward from the door before jerking his thumb back toward the entrance. Kwak Cheol-Ho and Seok Kang-Ho jumped in, and Cha Dong-Gyun got on last.

*Du, du, du, du, du, du, du.*

The bulky helicopter began to take off.

Twenty minutes after they took off from the Mogadishu airport, they found themselves in pitch-black darkness. It would've been similar to Afghanistan if not for the hot wind.

Two members of the crew clung to the entrance and pointed their rifles downward. Seok Kang-Ho then peered out, his eyes glinting.

He felt frustrated. It was as if he was jumping into enemy territory with his eyes shut.

The deafening sound of the helicopters, the hot wind rushing at him, the smell of wet animals in the rain—they were all bearable enough. However, he wasn't sure he could fill the void that Kang Chan left.

As he mulled over his thoughts, an image of Kang Chan smirking at him suddenly flashed in his mind.

*Du, du, du, du, du, du, du.*

“Fuck! We just have to hold on until the captain arrives!” Seok Kang-Ho shouted to himself.

*Pft.*

His lips curved into his signature smile as he glared at the view outside. Like a tasty meal, he had finally swallowed his nervousness.

Chapter 247.1: From the Horn of Africa (2)

Their reinforcements brought thirty-three more people into their group. The two groups ate together for lunch, consuming a lot of pork belly and kimchi. However, they didn't touch the soju.

What surprised Kang Chan the most was the behavior and attitudes of Kim Tae-Jin's sunbaes. He was expecting them to stand up against authority or act cocky, but they all actually patiently waited and followed orders. Their attitude toward Oh Gwang-Taek was no different.

Even if they were behaving this way out of their sense of duty or because they wanted to express their gratitude for being given this opportunity, it was still difficult to understand.

After the first hearty lunch they'd had in quite a long time, they all left the mess hall. Even the Mongolian border patrol looked satisfied, their mouths glistening with oil from the pork belly.

With a lot of new faces joining their base, Kim Tae-Jin and Suh Sang-Hyun decided to move to the barracks where Kang Chan was staying. Afterward, they assigned everyone to their respective quarters.

“Can we hang the national flag here?” a man with deep eyes asked.

Kim Tae-Jin looked at Kang Chan.

“Sure,” Kang Chan answered.

The man nodded. They seemed to have already talked about doing this before they even got here.

Three men quickly went up the barracks that they were using to keep watch and straightened the pole. They then waved their arms to those below them.

“A-tteen-tion!” someone yelled, causing everyone to face the barracks.

“Salute the national flag!”

In unison, the agents clicked the heels of their military boots together as they snapped to attention.

Oh Gwang-Taek, who was about to put his hand against his chest, copied the agents instead, awkwardly saluting the flag.

It was already past lunchtime. Kang Chan didn't know if this followed the regulations, but nobody would blame them for saluting the flag either way.

The national flag fluttered in the wind as it was slowly raised up the pole.

The new agents used to be soldiers until they were kicked out of the military even though they were still young enough for active duty. Kang Chul-Gyu was one of the people who were given that treatment, forcing him to live one of the most miserable lives of them all.

Nevertheless, these men still put the national flag above everything else.

Their determination and passion enveloped the base as they saluted, reaching even Kang Chan.

“At ease!” someone ordered.

Still staring at the fluttering national flag, they put their hands down. At the same time, the man with deep eyes approached Kang Chan's group again.

“I heard you took care of Kang Chul-Gyu sunbae. On behalf of everyone, I would like to express my deepest gratitude. From now on, you no longer have to worry about this base,” the man said. He then nodded and turned away.

*Damn it!*

Kang Chan wasn't expecting to meet passionate people in a base built in the middle of nowhere even though he was the one who made all this possible.

*Whish!*

The wind blew roughly, seemingly jealous of their relationship. For reasons Kang Chan couldn't quite understand, he felt emotional. Choosing not to pay any attention to it, he went into the barracks with Kim Tae-Jin and Oh Gwang-Taek.

“An hour from now, those men will take over our security. The workers who will be building the factory will arrive tomorrow,” Kim Tae-Jin explained as if he was reporting to Kang Chan.

“Now! Let’s talk while drinking this!” Oh Gwang-Taek said as he put cups down on the table, having made the most delicious coffee in the world. Like a child who had just come home from playing with marbles out in the winter cold, his hand was covered in windburns.

“I’ll leave with the helicopter that’s bringing the workers here tomorrow, then,” Kang Chan told Kim Tae-Jin.

“Are you planning on heading straight to Africa?”

“No, I’m thinking of talking to Manager Kim first before flying over. I don’t even know which flight I should take.”

“Fair point. Oh, right! I was told that Kang sunbae will be undergoing his surgery tomorrow morning.”

“Good to hear.”

They drank coffee as they discussed every pressing matter at hand.

“Get some rest before you leave. President Oh’s new and old employees will be spearheading the training and the security in pairs, so you can definitely relax a bit now,” Kim Tae-Jin told Kang Chan.

“Alright.”

Since Kang Chan was going to be leaving soon anyway, he thought he should no longer interfere unless absolutely necessary. Hence, he just obediently agreed.

“I heard that people become patriotic when they leave their country. I didn’t expect my fucking heart to beat faster while looking at the national flag, though,” Oh Gwang-Taek commented.

*I wonder who’s better at swearing, Seok Kang-Ho or this fucker?*

Kang Chan looked at Oh Gwang-Taek as absurd thoughts filled his mind.

“My blood boiled while I was listening to you at the mess hall earlier. I’ll do my best with my training. I’m not going to let anyone stop me from building a factory here, so you better come here with the rail soon,” Oh Gwang-Taek told Kang Chan.

“You’re not going back to South Korea until then?”

“Hmm. That doesn’t sound good, does it?”

Kang Chan and Kim Tae-Jin let out a huff of laughter when Oh Gwang-Taek took a step back.

After a while, Kang Chan went into his room and rested, which he hadn't done in a long time, so he could stop himself from interfering with all the matters related to this base.

Using this peaceful time to call back home, Kang Chan gave Kang Dae-Kyung a call before anyone else.

The dial tone rang twice before it was answered.

- Hello? Is that you, Channy?

“Yes.”

- How are you?

Kang Dae-Kyung immediately bombarded him with questions.

“I'm doing well. What about you and Mother? What have you two been up to lately?”

- We're doing well. Your mom got very worried when we couldn't call you. Can you give her a call?

“Yes. I'll call her right after this.”

Kang Dae-Kyung was Kang Chan's father. Meeting Kang Chul-Gyu again didn't change the way he felt toward Kang Dae-Kyung even in the slightest.

Kang Chan's conversation with Kang Dae-Kyung lasted for about five minutes. When they were done, he immediately gave Yoo Hye-Sook a call.

- Channy!

“Mother! Is something wrong? Why do you sound like that?”

- It's nothing! I'm just happy to hear your voice again.

“You're not lying to me, are you? Did people come to your office again and harass you?”

- No! People like that don't even come to my office nowadays.

Kang Chan had such an amazing mother. Just hearing her voice through the phone was enough to warm his heart.

After reassuring Yoo Hye-Sook, he talked to her for about ten more minutes.

- When are you coming home?

“I have to see how things go first, so I might have to stay here a little longer.”

Now that Kang Chan was done with his business in Mongolia, he would soon be heading to Africa. Considering he didn't know how long he would be staying there, he just made it seem as if he would be in Mongolia for the entire duration he was away from home.

He couldn't tell his parents that he would be going to Africa now that South Korea had officially announced that it had sent soldiers over there. He wasn't sure about Yoo Hye-Sook, but he knew Kang Dae-Kyung would have a hard time if he learned that his son was in such a dangerous place.

After talking to Yoo Hye-Sook, Kang Chan plopped down on his bed and stared at his phone.

*Should I call Kim Mi-Young? Won't that just make things difficult for her?*

It was strange, but he was making her wait even though he didn't intend to.

He was hoping to see her smile before going to Africa.

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The South Korean special forces team arrived at the Berkad base at around eleven in the evening local time. When they disembarked from the helicopters, they were greeted by a local and a staff member sent to the base by the United Nations. They seemed to have been waiting for their arrival.

The base had nine barracks built around an open area. The UN flag and the national flags of France, Russia, the United States, the UK, and South Korea hung above each front door.

"You can use this barracks. We'll be eating at the mess hall over there. You just have to follow the basic rules that are written here," the staff member said as he handed them a document. He then guided the soldiers to the building with South Korea's national flag. "You should rest for today. We'll officially introduce you to the other teams tomorrow."

The soldiers walking to the barracks brushed off the heavy atmosphere and the body odor irritating their noses.

"Daye!" Gérard walked over to them, accompanied by a chick from his team.

While Seok Kang-Ho was looking for the soldier who was assigned to interpret, Gérard held out his hand and shook hands with Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho. He then hugged them as he pounded them on their backs.

Soon, the army interpreter quickly approached them.

"Where's the captain?" Gérard asked Seok Kang-Ho.

"He'll be here in a few days."

Gérard nodded. "The Spetsnaz and the SBS are acting unusual. They seem to be waiting for an opportunity to pick a fight. You and your men should keep your guard up for now."

"Those motherfuckers!" Seok Kang-Ho exclaimed.

"Tell the Korean soldiers about it too."

"Alright. I'll head back out after dropping our bags inside."

Seok Kang-Ho went inside the barracks after closing off their conversation only to be met with a strange atmosphere. Everyone was standing in place and staring in the same direction.

Quickly following their gazes, he soon realized that Park Chul-Su was behind the quiet commotion.

Seok Kang-Ho didn't know when Park Chul-Su prepared it, but he had put a framed photo of Choi Seong-Geon on the table at one side of the barracks.

"General, these men are being acknowledged as a world-famous team," Park Chul-Su said. "I'll watch over them myself, but I hope you can see them as well."

Seok Kang-Ho didn't know that Park Chul-Su, who was usually cold and looked as if he was a bad person, had such a side to him.

"A-tteen-tion!" Cha Dong-Gyun ordered softly.

"Salute!"

Their military boots clicked as they brought their heels together.

Seok Kang-Ho suddenly really missed Kang Chan.

"At ease!"

Seok Kang-Ho grinned as he headed back out.

Chapter 247.2: From the Horn of Africa (2)

"Do you guys need anything? Since you've just arrived, I can bring over things like coffee if you need them," Gérard offered Seok Kang-Ho.

"I'd like to get some smoke."

The army interpreter quickly passed on what Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard said to each other.

The two sat at a bench in front of the barracks as they lit up a cigarette.

"Some fucker named Andrei is leading the Spetsnaz. It seems like he knows the captain, though," Gérard said. "I was also told that the bastard who had his helmet taken away from him, the one who looks like a gorilla, is the commander of the SBS! He's called Tyler or some shit. I can't believe we're stuck here with people we already have bad blood with."

"Whoo!" Seok Kang-Ho exhaled cigarette smoke. "Well, that's to be expected. Men of this caliber, especially the ones part of world-famous special forces that would be joining operations like this, all know each other."

"Right. Either way, be careful. This whole place is giving me a bad feeling."

"What's wrong?" Seok Kang-Ho asked as he stepped on his cigarette, having finished smoking.

"I'm not exactly sure, but something is definitely up. We should be able to figure it out when the captain arrives."

"Alright. Let's talk about the rest tomorrow," Seok Kang-Ho said, then stood up from the bench.

“I’m sure you’re already well aware of the unwritten rules between the special forces teams, but I should warn you anyway. You and your men will probably be assaulted since this is the first time the South Korean special forces are participating in a joint operation,” Gérard quickly said as he stood up. The army interpreter nervously waited for Seok Kang-Ho's answer after interpreting Gérard's words.

“See you tomorrow,” was all Seok Kang-Ho replied, however.

“Yeah, see you.”

Seok Kang-Ho went back into the barracks and assigned two men to night duty. The day ended soon after. Tired from the long flight, everyone slept soundly despite the six-hour time difference.

They woke up at six in the morning.

Soldiers from different countries came out to the open area in the middle of the barracks and either lightly warmed up or smoked and drank coffee. However, when Seok Kang-Ho and the South Korean soldiers walked out of their barracks, the atmosphere instantly grew heavier.

Although their eyes showed caution, they were also looking down on them. The Spetsnaz and the SBS’ were even glinting, making them look as if they would be picking a fight at any moment.

Seok Kang-Ho sat on the bench with Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho.

“Hnggh!” Seok Kang-Ho stretched. As he did, a soldier came over with a mug of instant coffee. Its smell was distinctly different from brewed ones.

“Daye! Get me coffee as well,” Gérard said as he walked over to them. The scar on his cheek had been twitching all morning.

A soldier poured coffee into another mug and handed it over to Gérard.

“What an amazing atmosphere!” Seok Kang-Ho sarcastically remarked. He then took a sip of his coffee.

“There’s a team briefing after breakfast. Who will be representing the South Korean team?”

“We have an officer in the barracks.”

“Just to be safe, send two dependable soldiers with him.”

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at Gérard, stopping halfway through lifting his mug. “Are things that bad?”

“From what I’ve heard, that bastard Andrei is strong. It would be a disgrace if you guys get sent home after getting beaten up in a scuffle. That would also make it hard to get revenge. Don’t forget that South Korea’s national power is still a bit too weak for you guys to exert your influence in a place like this.”

The army interpreter looked nervous even as he interpreted. Seok Kang-Ho nodded.

With food distributed buffet-style, they were able to eat as much as they wanted.

Both rice and bread were available to suit the tastes of soldiers from the five countries. They were served a large variety of dishes as well. Unfortunately, they didn't have kimchi.

The South Koreans naturally felt awkward since it was their first time here. Even so, it was impossible to ignore the soldiers who were looking at them with disdain and thinking of picking a fight with them.

They ate in silence, the clanks from their utensils the only thing they could hear. Fortunately, breakfast ended with no incidents.

Park Chul-Su soon left to join the briefing. Cha Dong-Gyun and another soldier accompanied him. The three came back two hours later, still safe from any trouble.

The briefing was quite formal. It gave them the rundown of the operation that they would soon launch and informed them about a discussion that would be held in a few days. The agenda would mainly revolve around whether they would execute the operation in teams or as a joint force. Either way, they would have to establish a chain of command first.

The South Korean team would need someone to speak for them during that discussion.

Their first day ended on that note. The next morning, things proceeded as expected. South Korea and France teamed up, Russia and the UK waited for a chance to fight South Korea, and the United States just observed the situation.

Nothing special happened that day either. They were just briefed about the current state of Somalia, the movements of the Sunni Muslims, and the SISS and SSIS' responses.

On the third day, they finally had formal introductions and learned more about the functions of the base.

After breakfast, they had their first joint training.

The soldiers put on proper uniforms, complete with a helmet, vest, and even a radio. They then gathered in the open area, finding strange tension in the air.

"They said that we will be conducting the firearms and tactical training in the area at the back," the army interpreter said, quickly passing on the UN agent's words to his fellow South Koreans. "The staff member is telling us to go now."

"Alright."

Seok Kang-Ho looked at Park Chul-Su.

"Mr. Seok, we're still lacking experience. As I've told you before, please feel free to take command. If we ever find ourselves needing to take responsibility for something, I'll gladly do it myself," Park Chul-Su said. He looked exactly like a young Choi Seong-Geon.

"Let's go!" Seok Kang-Ho ordered the soldiers after nodding in response.

*Clank. Clank.*

Metallic sounds rang out from their weapons and equipment with each step.

As they headed to the entrance, the Spetsnaz and SBS rushed over and cut them off. They bumped shoulders with the South Koreans just to get in front of the line.

They didn't get pushed away since the Spetsnaz and SBS didn't push them with a lot of force, but they did get caught off guard.

Seok Kang-Ho grinned as he turned his head. The bastards didn't mess with him.

He was sure of two things now: Russia and the UK were relieved that Kang Chan wasn't here, and they were starting to look for opportunities to attack the South Korean team because of it.

A Humvee and a truck were allocated to each team.

“Cha Dong-Gyun!” Seok Kang-Ho called from the front of the Humvee. With hand gestures, he made three soldiers surround the vehicles and cautiously watch over their surroundings.

Park Chul-Su and Cha Dong-Gyun got on the Humvee.

Each team had their guard up in almost the same way.

*Vroom!*

Seok Kang-Ho got on. The car in front of their formation soon drove off, and the other vehicles followed.

It was still quite early in the morning, but the air rushing into the car was already quite hot.

They drove for about thirty minutes before stopping in the middle of a black and auburn dried-up field with patches of frail grass.

*Rustle.*

*Clank. Clank.*

After the soldiers got out of the vehicles, the UN agent informed them of their goal.

“Rather than seeing it as training, it would be best for you to consider this as an opportunity to warm up and get to know each other a bit more.”

Soon, they began to take turns firing at their targets. Every soldier who joined this training had great aim.

In the middle of the training, Seok Kang-Ho frowned at a Spetsnaz soldier. Although their muzzles should always be pointed at either the sky or the ground during occasions like this, the soldier's muzzle was pointed slightly to the front.

‘What are you going to do about it?’

The man cocked his head at Seok Kang-Ho, and the people next to him chuckled.

Seok Kang-Ho just grinned in response. He had no intention of getting involved in such a childish fight. He could just kill one of them if they ever tried to engage him in a brawl anyway.

After their firearms and tactical training, they headed back for lunch.

“Considering how they acted on our way out of the base and at the training ground, they will most likely try to pick a fight with us during lunchtime. Those fuckers have no reason to hesitate now that they know that the captain isn’t here. Be prepared and don’t ever let them dominate you,” Seok Kang-Ho quietly told his men after putting his equipment down.

The soldiers nodded in response, determination evident in their expressions.

Upon entering the mess hall, they each took a food tray and put food on it.

Soon, the Spetsnaz rushed into the mess hall, and the SBS followed behind. Gérard and the Foreign Legion’s special forces team were the last to enter the building.

*Bam!*

One of the Spetsnaz soldiers bumped into Park Chul-Su’s shoulder, who was putting salad on his food tray, then mumbled something. The people next to him burst into laughter after hearing what he said.

“What are these sons of bitches saying?” Park Chul-Su asked.

As he turned around, another Spetsnaz soldier dumped an entire tray of food on his head.

*Pow! Bam! Bam! Crash! Clang!*

Park Chul-Su and the Spetsnaz soldier immediately engaged in combat.

Everyone just stood in a circle around them. Nobody said anything.

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho were about to pounce in as well, but Seok Kang-Ho gestured at them to stop, preventing them from doing anything but grit their teeth.

The combatants’ hands and feet moved quickly, utilizing every hand-to-hand combat technique they knew.

The fight was gruesome. Unfortunately, Park Chul-Su was being pushed back little by little. The skin on his nose and his lips soon burst open, causing blood to seep out.

The Spetsnaz soldier specifically targeted Park Chul-Su, completely ignoring the implied rule that they shouldn’t target the commander of the other teams.

*Bam! Pow!*

Park Chul-Su got hit on the cheek, then on the pit of his stomach, causing him to bend forward. The Spetsnaz soldier then kned his chin.

*Crack!Crash!*

Pushed back by the force, Park Chul-Su slammed toward the dessert table near the entrance.

Suffocating silence filled the mess hall.

Gérard, who was looking at the entrance, felt his cheek twitch.

*Clank!*

Kang Chan had thrown the plate on Park Chul-Su's chest to the side and wrapped his arms around him.

Nobody could say anything.

Chapter 249: The Operation Begins Tomorrow (2)

Morning in Africa began with blinding sunlight and a heat that was out to get everyone.

Waking up at dawn, Kang Chan left the barracks in shorts and a simple tee. He wanted to go for a run before the blazing sun came up.

The member of the Foreign Legion's special forces standing guard saluted Kang Chan with just his index and middle fingers because Kang Chan wasn't in formal uniform. It was also an indication of how much friendlier they had become.

The track seemed to be approximately six hundred meters. Running any further than that would make them a target, getting themselves killed.

"Haah, haah," Kang Chan panted.

He had only taken a break in Mongolia for a few days, but he was already having trouble running. Kang Chan refused to rest.

No matter the job, one was bound to reach their limit if they didn't train for it enough. There would be times when he would need to be smart and take a break, but he had no reason to stop running. This was something he had always done.

Kang Chan would continue to push through. Perhaps this could be the saving grace of his men at the last minute.

Kang Chan steadily picked up the pace.

He kicked up a cloud of dust with each step on dry ground. By the time he covered ten kilometers, he was already drenched in sweat. This was enough for today.

Kang Chan panted and huffed. He then stretched again.

*Crunch, crunch.*

Upon returning to the base, Kang Chan immediately went inside the barracks to take a shower. He was more than grateful for getting to use as much water as he wanted.

He dried his hair off with a towel as he left the bathroom. At the same time, Seok Kang-Ho came up to him.

"Just finished working out?"

"Yup," Kang Chan replied.

Seok Kang-Ho held out a mug to him.

Kang Chan grinned. He was returning to the ways of his past life in Africa.

"Let's head out. A cigarette tastes the best after a sweaty workout, doesn't it?"  
Seok Kang-Ho asked with a grin.

“You didn’t work out, though?” Kang Chan retorted.

“I sweated while I was making coffee.”

It was strange. Whenever he was with Seok Kang-Ho, he always found himself laughing.

“All right, fine. Let’s go.”

Kang Chan changed into a new pair of military pants and a light cotton shirt before heading to the benches. The soldiers were all standing in front of their barracks, having just woken up.

“Is anything bothering you?” Seok Kang-Ho suddenly asked.

“Me?” Kang Chan asked as he lowered his head to the lighter that Seok Kang-Ho held out for him, aligning his cigarette to the flame.

*Click! Click!*

“Hoo. When I went to Mongolia, I met my father from my past life.”

“What?”

Seok Kang-Ho stopped halfway through lighting his cigarette. He quickly whipped to Kang Chan.

“Ow! That’s hot!” he yelped.

Kang Chan found it impossible to have a serious conversation with this asshole.

*Click! Click!*

“So? What happened?”

Kang Chan gave a summary of his encounter with Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Whoa! So you were born with that kind of blood in you!” Seok Kang-Ho excitedly exclaimed.

“Fuck that! Damn the blood!” Kang Chan swore in annoyance.

“Well, you made the right choice, at least. How did the surgery go?”

“All I’ve been told is that he hasn’t woken up yet.”

Seok Kang-Ho grinned. “So that’s the reason behind the gloomy face, huh?”

Kang Chan wordlessly sipped his coffee. Seok Kang-Ho was probably the only one who could notice these things.

“I’m sure he’ll be fine,” Seok Kang-Ho reassured him as he flicked the end of his cigarette with his index finger.

Amid their conversation, Gérard leisurely walked over to Kang Chan.

“Captain!” he greeted.

“Where’s the army interpreter?” Seok Kang-Ho asked, scanning his surroundings. Not long after, the soldier rushed over to his side.

“What are you doing? We’re only going to be saying good morning,” Kang Chan chided.

“Oh, really?” Seok Kang-Ho replied, then turned to the soldier. “Sorry. Get some rest.”

The agent read the mood before cautiously returning to where he came from.

“The atmosphere’s a lot warmer now that you’re here, Captain,” Gérard said. He then turned toward the Korean team and made a drinking gesture. Caucasian people didn’t find it awkward at all to express their friendliness this way.

“Did you get some rest?” Gérard asked.

“I slept like a rock,” Kang Chan joked.

A soldier brought them coffee, momentarily interrupting their conversation.

“Thank you so much,” Gérard said in awkward Korean, making Kang Chan and the soldier laugh.

Spending time together like this was comforting for their nerves, especially since they didn’t know who could return to the base dead this evening.

Kang Chan interpreted for Gérard and Seok Kang-Ho as they joked around with each other. Not long after, breakfast was served.

The US special forces team came in with pistols, bayonets, and vests. Everyone else was dressed in comfortable clothes.

Special forces soldiers felt a strange bond during moments like this. The fact that they would all soon go from eating together in this mess hall to being under fire on a battlefield overflowing with blood and death connected them.

When the US special forces team walked inside, the soldiers standing in line all took a step back so they could eat first.

*Clunk, clunk.*

The US soldiers loaded their plates, their weapons and equipment clattering. They then nodded at the soldiers who yielded their spots in line, expressing their appreciation.

Cha Dong-Gyun quietly exhaled to suppress how touched he felt.

He could never experience something like this in joint training exercises. After all, such a scene was only possible when out in the field. This couldn’t have happened if Kang Chan didn’t clear up the hierarchy.

Now, no one in the mess hall was being snarky or confrontational.

The US special forces team nodded at the South Koreans as they passed by, thanking them for taking a step back.

Cha Dong-Gyu genuinely and desperately hoped that Choi Seong-Geon was watching them right now.

*Tap, tap!*

At that moment, he felt a comforting pat on his back. When he turned around, he found Park Chul-Su smiling. His eyes were still swollen, and his nose was plastered with gauze.

“I’m sure the General is watching. That’s the kind of man he is. I bet he would get angry if his successor gets emotional over something like this, though” Park Chul-Su joked.

“Understood, sir,” Cha Dong-Gyun replied.

“Let’s go. We should eat as well.”

Park Chul-Su stood in front of Cha Dong-Gyun.

One of the Spetsnaz soldiers holding a plate in line also had a gauze taped to his just-as-bruised face.

Park Chul-Su put a large piece of meat onto his plate. “If that man didn’t come, we would still be having a battle of nerves, wouldn’t we? We wouldn’t even be able to eat properly.”

Cha Dong-Gyun turned to Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Gérard, who were eating together.

If it wasn’t for Kang Chan, the Spetsnaz and the SBS, which had it out for the South Korean special forces team, wouldn’t be so well-behaved right now. Without him, Seok Kang-Ho would have likely ended up fighting the Spetsnaz, and Cha Dong-Gyun would have been the one to deal with the SBS after that.

“Learn, grow, lead the team, and teach your juniors. I will take responsibility for whatever happens afterward if that’s what has to be done for us to join another joint training operation,” Park Chul-Su quietly told him while he put some salad on his tray.

*Clatter.*

“Yes, sir,” Cha Dong-Gyun firmly replied as he took the tongs that Park Chul-Su handed him.

It was strange.

Lunch yesterday had been rough, and dinner had been horrible. However, today’s breakfast was proceeding a lot smoother. Having met the same soldiers thrice now, they were starting to recognize a few of them as well.

Today, the mess hall was filled with random chatter and occasional laughter.

Park Chul-Su and Cha Dong-Gyun sat down next to Kwak Cheol-Ho.

*Click.*

Soon, a member of the French special forces team put down his plate next to Kwak Cheol-Ho and looked at the two of them. Cha Dong-Gyun pointed at the chair opposite of them, and the man grinned and sat on the opposite side.

“Kwak!” the man said with strange pronunciation. “Afghanistan!”

He then pointed at himself with his right index finger. He was probably trying to say that he was in the operation in Afghanistan.

“Afghanistan!” Kwak Cheol-Ho replied as held out his hand. The man took it and pound-hugged him.

*Tap!*

With happiness evident in his expression, the man ate some mashed potatoes.

“Kwak!” Park Chul-Su called this time, imitating the man. “It’s a nice name to use.”

Cha Dong-Gyu laughed so hard that he almost cried. This was the first time he laughed since coming to the mess hall.

“Doesn’t it seem like the others are also adjusting well?” Seok Kang-Ho asked as he stuffed a large piece of meat into his mouth. He looked at Kang Chan, a bit of sauce dribbling down his chip.

Unlike the first day, the soldiers seemed to have shaken off all the tension.

“They definitely don’t lag behind the other teams when it comes to skills. With one or two more experiences like this, I’m sure we’ll become a truly fearsome special forces team,” Kang Chan said with certainty.

Seok Kang-Ho nodded in agreement as he chewed some meat.

After breakfast, Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho took a break on the benches. Kang Chan was telling Seok Kang-Ho about Kang Chul-Gyu and Mongolia when they were suddenly interrupted by a cacophonous sound.

*Weeoo! Weeoo! Weeoo!*

A shrill siren blared throughout the base.

*Swoosh!*

Nearly all the men inside the barracks ran out and gathered at the front of the base. Although a bit confused, the South Korean special forces team followed suit.

*Clunk! Clank! Clank!*

The American special forces teams came out with weapons in hand.

“Good luck!”

Some soldiers wished them luck, and others gave them a thumbs up.

Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Andrei, and even Tyler were all outside as well.

The distinctive sound engine of the Humvee roared, and the American special forces team drove off, leaving a cloud of dust in their wake.

Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho didn't expect soldiers to have send-offs like this. They learned something new again.

"Captain! I'm going to go to the command center for a bit," Gérard said.

"All right, do what you need to do," Kang Chan replied, parting ways with Gérard at the entrance of the base. He returned to their barracks.

"We will also be arming ourselves with basic weapons before resting," Kang Chan ordered.

At his command, everyone put on their full military uniforms and equipped themselves with two pistols and a bayonet. With this much preparation, they would be ready to go at any time since they would only have to pick up their rifles and wear their vests and helmets.

"I'll take Team One with me. Choi Jong-Il, you will be my second. Seok Kang-Ho, you're leading Team Two with Kwak Cheol-Ho as your second," Kang Chan instructed. "The same goes for you with Team Three, Cha Dong-Gyun. Your second will be Woo Hee-Seung."

"Yes, sir," the men replied.

Kang Chan slowly looked at them.

"I don't know if we'll be called out or not, but if another team is ordered to mobilize or until the clock reaches zero-nine-hundred, we will remain on standby."

Since this was their first time out in the field like this, it was more important for them to learn the unspoken rules and traditions than the actual combat.

When the South Korean special forces team came outside, they saw soldiers from the other special forces team all standing by in their uniforms as well.

"Is this customary?" Choi Jong-Il cautiously asked Kang Chan from the side.

"If it was a normal operation, the sirens wouldn't have gone off in such a hurry. We don't gather at the entrance to see teams off when they leave for normal search operations either. That's why we have to be prepared to leave at any time."

Choi Jong-Il and Cha Dong-Gyun nodded, finally making sense of the situation.

They had something similar in the DMZ. All the men in their unit would come out to cheer them on and applaud them when they returned.

"Even if they run out there, it's more common for them to return without accomplishing anything. You might come across an enemy, but unlike what

you've experienced before, there's a chance you'll just find yourself returning to base from a boring standoff."

Kang Chan glanced at Cha Dong-Gyun, then turned toward the entrance again.

"There are also times when the distinction between government and rebel forces blurs. They wear similar clothes and carry similar weapons, so it's hard to tell them apart at a glance. That's when it's especially dangerous."

In the middle of his explanation, he smirked at Choi Jong-Il.

"Teaching these to you won't do you any good, though. You have to encounter these situations to learn about them, so keep your guard up," Kang Chan ordered. "You have to be prepared to respond to the situation as it comes."

"Yes, sir," the men replied, then finally relaxed.

"It's about time for that punk to show up," Seok Kang-Ho remarked, craning his neck around. As if on cue, Gérard walked over.

"Nobility, my ass," Seok Kang-Ho grumbled as Gérard quickly approached Kang Chan.

"Captain, it seems like we're going to be called out," Gérard said.

The army interpreter quickly relayed it to Seok Kang-Ho, allowing the soldiers nearby to understand what Gérard said as well.

"The SSIS is sieging the Somalis, and things aren't looking too great," Gérard added. His eyes were uncharacteristically sharp. "They are unexpectedly well armed, and to make things worse, there are a lot of them."

"They got little kids involved again, didn't they?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

Gérard glanced at the interpreter at the question before nodding.

"They say an Islamic insurgent group of teenagers started an ambush, and several Somalis are among them. That's the strange part," Gérard said. He then turned toward Kang Chan, seemingly asking for his opinion.

Such a large-scale tribal war was unusual.

"Somalia is already under UN and US military control. Since it was colonized by the British and Italians, it's strange that there are so many Islamist insurgents. The majority of the people are Somalis and speak Somali, which should mean they're very tight-knit. I don't understand why they would attack the Somalis."

"What about the US special forces?" Kang Chan asked.

"I don't think they've arrived yet. The situation is adjacent to Mount Surdkad in the Alpha region."

“So there hasn’t even been an engagement yet?” Seok Kang-Ho grumbled.

The men looked back and forth between Gérard and the army interpreter.

“According to the command center, there are too many rebels for the US military to control alone,” Gérard answered.

“Yet they still only deployed the US team?” Kang Chan asked.

“Yes. Many things about this operation are puzzling.”

“We can’t just go out there on our own without a call for backup from the command, can we?” Seok Kang-Ho abruptly asked.

Gérard smiled mysteriously. Only Kang Chan and Seok Kang-Ho, who were familiar with the battlefields of Africa, could recognize the meaning behind it.

The power of Islamist teenage rebels shouldn’t be underestimated. Moreover, considering their numbers, the US special forces wouldn’t be able to handle them. Not with just twenty-four men.

“How well-armed are the Somalis?” Kang Chan asked.

“I’m not sure,” Gérard answered.

“How many are there?”

“Six hundred.”

Kang Chan sighed heavily.

It was difficult for men over the age of twenty to get by here, so the population was mostly women, children, and the elderly. To conserve ammunition and instill fear, tribal warfare was always brutal. The soldiers could end up with six hundred brutally murdered Somalis if things were to go south.

“Let’s wait and see for now,” Kang Chan said.

“Understood. I’ll be with my men,” Gérard responded. He returned to his barracks with a grim expression.

It was hard to understand why they only sent the American special forces to a tribal war. Every hour that passed by without success meant more gruesome corpses.

A rifle shot to the face would usually blow off a cheekbone and turn the entire face in that direction. In the worst cases, Kang Chan had seen bodies with their mouths where their ears should be. There were also times when they threw gasoline on their victims and lit them on fire or impaled children together on a long wooden spear.

They would even spear a live child strapped with a bomb through the shoulder. The moment they tried to save the child or the child squirmed to be rescued, the bomb would explode.

Their deployment itself was strange, too. The UN had never directly requested a special forces team before and never on such short notice. The request for a special forces team from South Korea was also suspiciously rushed through, as was the motion to deploy.

And now the Islamist insurgent forces had started a tribal war? Not just against a few dozen people but against six hundred?

*What are these bastards thinking?*

Kang Chan slowly turned to look at the Russian and the English special forces soldiers sitting on the benches. Were they also aware of it? Or did they just follow the decisions of their higher-ups because they were supposed to?

Thinking about it wouldn't get him answers. Kang Chan couldn't help but admit that this operation was different from what he had seen and experienced in Africa before.

Kang Chan turned back to his men.

He had no idea what the hell was going on, but it didn't change the fact that they were all going to return together.

“Fuck! Why does everything always have to be so hard?” Seok Kang-Ho complained, his eyes glinting. He pulled out a cigarette and put it in his mouth. He then turned to Kang Chan. “Want one?”

*Weeoo! Weeoo! Weeoo!*

Before Kang Chan could answer, sirens tore through their break.

Chapter 250: It's difficult to understand (1)

As soon as the siren blared, everyone made a run for their respective barracks.

*Zip! Clunk! Click!*

The soldiers put on their vests and picked up their weapons. They then sprinted out of the building, grabbing their helmets on the way.

*Click! Click! Click! Click!*

The rifles, magazines, and equipment on the soldiers clanked and clattered as they ran. Kang Chan hopped into a Humvee with Park Chul-Su, and Seok Kang-Ho took charge of the truck.

*Vroom! Rrrrr!*

They left immediately.

The French were the first to go, followed by the Russians and then the English. It was such a close race that it was hard to tell how skilled they were based on speed.

The wheels of their vehicles left trails of dust clouds as they drove.

*Clunk! Clunk, clunk!*

*Chk!*

“This is to inform you that American troops are surrounded. Our objectives for this operation are to rescue them and then protect the Somalis,” the UN agent in the command vehicle, which was leading their formation, said in French over the radio. The army interpreter immediately relayed it in Korean.

At the same time, they heard the jumbled babble of interpreters explaining the situation in English and Russian. The teams could set up their frequencies for private communications and messages, but their radio was set on the common frequency of the joint forces right now.

As they left the base, they were met with a ridge that blocked their way and view. To their right was a mountain.

*Vrooom! Clunk! Clunk!*

Lee Doo-Hee swerved to one side to avoid the storm of dust up ahead.

“Colonel, I’ve divided our team into three squads. Please bring up our rear!” Kang Chan requested.

“Understood! I will join the third squad and support you from there. Please lead our men with confidence!” Park Chul-Su responded. A layer of dust had settled on the gauze on his nose.

There was a hint of nervousness in his eye—the kind that came with being on a mission like this for the first time.

‘The men will be all right, won’t they?’ Park Chul-Su’s eyes seemed to ask.

*Pft.*

Kang Chan made his signature smirk as he turned to Lee Doo-Hee.

“These soldiers have been through North Korea, China, and Afghanistan! Most special forces teams won’t even be able to step up to the plate against these men. You can be confident in them, sir!”

The corners of Lee Doo-Hee’s lips curved into a smile. At the same time, the Humvee roughly bobbed up into the air.

“Hey!” Kang Chan protested.

Lee Doo-Hee grinned as he swerved back. His relaxed demeanor showed that something like this no longer fazed him as much as it used to.

Park Chul-Su looked at Lee Doo-Hee, surprised that he was displaying the same ease that he had during their collaborative joint training with the special forces from other countries.

In the past, the South Korean special forces had to practically beg to be a part of joint training. In emergencies or mock operations, the other special forces always had a leisurely attitude to them. They also seemed to constantly look down on and disregard the South Korean team, which always moved with stiff determination and nervousness.

Unlike the South Koreans, they were noticeably more relaxed even during actual performances. It made Park Chul-Su feel the painstaking difference in their experience.

‘I bet those bastards are just as nervous out in the field!’ Park Chul-Su reassured himself at the time.

Now, Lee Doo-Hee was showing that same relaxed demeanor in this field operation. Kang Chan, who was in the vehicle in front of them, felt tense as well, but he was driving with a grin on his face.

‘When did these punks get so good?’

The Korean soldiers drove alongside the French Foreign Legion’s special forces team, Russia’s Spetsnaz, and the English SBS, which was composed of the SAS’ best elites.

Lee Doo-Hee deftly drove through an opening between the clouds of dust and dirt.

*Vrooom! Clunk! Clunk, clunk!*

While the Humvee vehemently tossed up and down, Park Chul-Su sneaked a glance inside the truck.

To be quite frank, he was bewildered and taken aback when he saw the glint in his men’s eyes while they were putting on their vests and picking up their rifles.

He knew that the soldiers’ eyes and attitudes changed when Kang Chan arrived. However, he didn’t imagine the team would perform at the same level as the foreign special teams that he envied so much.

Park Chul-Su glanced at Kang Chan again.

*Thank you.*

His vision blurred, thinking that Choi Song-Geon could be watching this scene with him.

*General! Do you see this? The South Korean special forces team is just right behind the UN command vehicle and in the very center of our formation. To our left is the Spetsnaz, and to our right is the French special forces team.*

*We always had to chase after the other teams during our past joint training missions. Look at where we are now! Can you see Lee Doo-Hee and the others keeping an eye out on our vicinity from the trucks? Do you see their attitudes and the looks in their eyes?*

*Get yourself together!*

*Yes, sir!*

Park Chul-Su quietly exhaled to calm his emotions down. When he turned around, his eyes met Kang Chan’s.

*Pft.*

Park Chul-Su smiled through his nervousness. Others would probably find Kang Chan’s smirk extremely, but it was very encouraging to those on his side.

*You’ve got nothing to worry about. You have me!*

That was kind of how it made them feel.

*Clunk! Vroooooom!*

Lee Doo-Hee suddenly swerved away, bringing Park Chul-Su back to his senses.

He could hear gunfire and see small sparks coming from inside the mountain.

*Chk.*

“Gérard! Go around the outside from the right! We’ll take the front!” Kang Chan ordered.

*Chk.*

“Got it, Cap!” Gérard responded. On the radio, Kang Chan heard him instruct his men to immediately turn right.

*Chk.*

“Andrei, I’ll take the center! I want you to take the ridge on the left and join the American team there!” Kang Chan suddenly added.

Before he knew it, their interpreter had delivered his order in Korean, allowing the entire South Korean team to understand his command.

*Chk.*

“Oui, Monsieur Kang!” Andrei responded. His answer required no interpretation.

Park Chul-Su burst out laughing, flabbergasted by how comfortable Kang Chan seemed in issuing orders.

Just then, an unfamiliar voice came over the radio.

*Chk!*

“What do you want us to do?”

*Chk.*

“Gentlemen, I need you to provide rear support and handle the enemy’s heavy weaponry. Don’t let the RPGs get to us,” Kang Chan instructed.

*Chk.*

“Copy that,” the man responded.

Having given the British team an order as well, Kang Chan immediately pressed the radio button on his helmet again.

*Chk.*

“As soon as we get off the vehicles, we’re going to rush straight to the US team’s position. I’ll be in the front with Cha Dong-Gyun on my left and Seok Kang-Ho on my right,” Kang Chan informed his team.

*Vroooooom!*

As if in response to the order, Lee Doo-Hee revved the engine.

*Bang, bang, bang! Du du du du! Du du du!*

The gunshots were now getting closer, the bullets causing the dirt around the vehicles to splatter.

*Peww! Ping, ping, ping! Pew! Bang, bang, bang, bang!*

The soldiers fired back from the moving trucks.

*Chk.*

“This is the Green Berets! We heard your comms on the radio! Five of our men are critically wounded! I repeat! We have five critically wounded!”

It was in French again.

The army interpreter delivered it in Korean for the South Korean team perhaps because Seok Kang-Ho was staring at him silently.

*Chk.*

“Understood, Green Berets. We’ll do our best to clear the way and get to you,” Kang Chan responded.

*Chk.*

“Thank you.”

*Creak!*

The Humvees and trucks screeched to a halt in an area hidden by the ridge of the mountain.

*Swoosh! Click! Clank!*

The soldiers dashed forward and hid themselves behind the vehicles.

*Du du du! Pew! Peew! Pew! Bang, bang, bang! Baang!*

At the same time, the vehicles of the Russian and French teams swerved to the left and right respectively, and the SBS positioned themselves behind the South Korean team.

*Chk.*

“Prepare to cover us, SBS!” Kang Chan ordered.

*Chk.*

“Roger.”

*Chk.*

“As soon as the SBS starts covering fire, we’re going to run straight to the bottom of the mountain,” Kang Chan radioed for everyone.

The gruff men who behaved so harshly in the mess hall were all moving as one team now.

*Isn’t it too far?*

Park Chul-Su quickly scanned their surroundings, estimating the distance from the vehicle to the ridge to be at least seventy meters. They wouldn’t have anything that could hide them from the people aiming at them from the top of the mountain either.

*Chk.*

“Now!”

*Chk.*

“Covering fire!” the SBS team member responded.

*Peeew! Clunk! Clunk! Peeeeew!*

White smoke began to rise and fly toward the mountain, leaving a trail of white line behind.

*Du du du du du du du du du du! Du du du du du!*

“Let’s go!” Kang Chan ordered. Leading his men, he charged onward.

*Swoosh!*

*Clunk! Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!*

Seok Kang-Ho and Cha Dong-Gyun sprinted beside Kang Chan. Park Chul-Su began to run as well.

*Pew! Pew! Pew!*

In the meantime, Kang Chan, Seok Kang-Ho, and Cha Dong-Gyun shot in the direction of the enemy.

*Peeeeew! Peeeeew! Clunk! Clunk!*

*Du du du du du du! Du du du du du du!*

This was how they were being supported from the rear? The tremendous show of power felt more like an annihilation to Park Chul-Su.

“Haah! Haah!” Park Chul-Su gasped for air. He was in disbelief.

Did Kang Chan know that the SBS possessed heavy weaponry? Was that why the SBS obediently agreed to follow his command? If so, then did the Spetsnaz and French special forces team also follow his orders because he was asking them to do what they were best at?

Seeing the faces of the soldiers running with him, Park Chul-Su felt a bit embarrassed. Not a single one of them looked like they were even the tiniest bit panicking or scared. He gritted his teeth when he saw the determination and glint in their eyes.

“Haah! Haah!”

He was desperately out of breath, but an unknown strength began to run through his veins.

*Peeeeew! Pew! Thud! Thud!*

*Swoosh! Whoosh! Pew! Pew! Pew!*

Finally reaching their target location, the soldiers took cover behind boulders and returned fire.

*Haah, haah.*

Kang Chan looked at the top of the mountain from where he was. He then pointed his index and middle finger at Cha Dong-Gyun and Seok Kang-Ho. The two nodded in response.

Kang Chan then pointed three fingers at Choi Jong-Il, Kwak Cheol-Ho, and Woo Hee-Seung. The three nodded as well.

“Now!” Kang Chan shouted.

*Pew! Pew! Peew! Pew!*

Gunfire immediately followed his order, providing them with suppressive fire. At the same time, Kang Chan dashed up the mountain.

*Thud thud thud! Pow pow pow! Du du! Pew! Thud!*

He could hear the distinctive sound of AK rifles, but he didn't hesitate to shoot back.

The enemies were wearing black clothes and dark bandanas over their heads, a typical attire of Africa's Islamic rebels.

They were lean and almost as tall as Kang Chan, but behind their bandanas, they looked like teenagers.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Du du du! Du du du du du!*

Shot in the forehead, one of their enemies fell over, managing to fire one last time into the air. No matter their age, it wouldn't be unreasonable to say those who had joined the Islamic rebels had lost their humanity—even more so the ones who fought in tribal wars.

These people had developed a taste for killing. Having no room for even a bit of sympathy, they found killing people in non-brutal ways a shame.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

Every time Kang Chan pulled his trigger, a black-clad man fell to the ground.

These bastards had no professional military training. They were just kids who jumped right into the line of fire after getting to fire a few AK rounds. They weren't even aware of how dangerous it was to peek out of cover to aim or that it made their foreheads stick out in the open. They had probably never even worn a helmet in their entire lives. All they knew was how to kill those who were too weak to fight back.

Kang Chan gritted his teeth as he shot at the hostiles. Unless they killed all the bastards who demonized these kids and gave them rifles, wars like this would never end.

Every now and then, someone would stand up to try to gun them down. If it was just Kang Chan who was running up the mountain, they would have likely gotten lucky enough to at least get a chance to shoot. However, Seok Kang-Ho and Cha Dong-Gyun, who were completely in sync with him, supported him from the back. He also had Woo Hee-Seung, Lee Doo-Hee, and the other soldiers shooting toward them like snipers from below.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

As Kang Chan ran and returned fire, enemies wearing black bandanas flinched and fell down.

*Swoosh!*

He soon threw himself behind a boulder in the middle of the mountain. Seok Kang-Ho and Cha Dong-Gyu followed after him.

*Chk.*

“Green Berets! Do you see us?” Kang Chan asked.

*Chk.*

“We do. We’re located thirty meters above you. The enemy is hiding and waiting for you in between us.”

*Chk.*

“Copy that, Green Berets.”

*Clank!*

Kang Chan reloaded his rifle.

*Chk.*

“SBS! Do you see us?” Kang Chan asked.

*Chk.*

“We have eyes on you.”

*Chk.*

“Unleash hell over the area twenty meters above me.”

*Chk,*

“That could result in friendly fire.”

*Chk.*

“The wounded are running out of time! Hurry!” Kang Chan insisted.

*Chk.*

“Understood.”

When Kang Chan was done giving commands on the radio, someone else spoke up.

*Chk.*

“This is Andrei. We have joined the US team.”

*Chk.*

“Andrei! As soon as an Igla is shot at you, make a push for the bottom of the mountain! We’re on our way up to you!” Kang Chan ordered.

*Chk.*

“Copy!”

Kang Chan looked back at Seok Kang-Ho and Cha Dong-Gyun.

*Peeew! Peeew!*

White smoke began to rise from the bottom.

*Swoosh!*

Kang Chan pressed against the boulder and wrapped his hands around his head. A moment later, the ground rumbled.

*Crash! Booom!*

*Swoosh!*

Without missing a beat, Kang Chan continued his run up the mountain.

*Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! Bang, bang, bang! Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!*

The US special forces team and the Spetsnaz fired in rapid succession.

*Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!*

Seok Kang-Ho opened fire as well, and Cha Dong-Gyun followed right after.

They found no reason to be cautious when providing cover. The two just had to aim for anything that looked suspicious. If there was a target, Kang Chan would take care of it. It wasn't easy to find a team that worked such perfect coordination.

*Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!*

An enemy holding an RPG-7 fell over. Had he been waiting here all this time just to launch a missile at them?

*Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! Peeew!*

At that moment, a series of gunshots came from the right, where Gérard was.

*Haah, haah. Clank! Click!*

Kang Chan quickly scanned his vicinity with his gun to check for any hiding enemies.

*Chk.*

“Green Berets! Come down now!” Kang Chan shouted.

*Chk.*

“Got it!”

A fight had broken out on their right flank. To keep the team at least somewhat safer, Kang Chan headed further to the right.

*Rustle! Clunk! Clunk!*

The US team and the Spetsnaz, who were covering them, soon came into view. Kang Chan gestured to the bottom of the mountain with his head.

The American team had their wounded on their backs. They had ruptured knees and thighs, and one of them had blood all over his chest. None of their injuries were from bullets. They either got caught off guard on the way up by the RPG-7 or hit with a bomb.

*Du du du du! Du du! Peeew! Pew!*

Gunshots were still echoing from their right. Why did so many of the rebel forces come over?

Thanks to Kang Chan and the Spetsnaz's suppressive fire, the US team managed to safely reach the bottom of the mountain.

*Chk.*

"Captain! There are too many civilians over here!" Gérard shouted into the radio, urgency in his voice.

*Chk!*

"The US team is almost at the bottom. Hang on a little longer!" Kang Chan responded.

*Chk!*

"Understood!" Gérard grimly replied.

Kang Chan looked below him, finding the Americans now loading their wounded into a Humvee. He raised his index finger in the air, spun it in a big circle, and pointed ahead.

*Swoosh!*

The soldiers waiting on standby sprinted up the mountain.

*Chk!*

SBS, escort the wounded back to the base. Andrei, head to our right flank and support the French team!" Kang Chan ordered.

*Chk.*

"Copy!" Andrei responded gruffly but firmly.

*Clunk! Clunk! Clunk, clunk!*

A few more gunshots echoed from their right as the soldiers ran over to Kang Chan.

*Du du du! Peeew! Pew! Pow! Peeew!*

"We're going to move forward in groups, taking the enemies out as we go!" Kang Chan shouted. "Make sure you have good cover at all times!"

The soldiers nodded.

"If you see any kids or suspicious people, leave them to me or Seok Kang-Ho!" Kang Chan added. The soldiers who had already experienced something similar in Afghanistan looked back at him in understanding.

Soon, Kang Chan and his team moved out.

*Haah, haah.*

His lack of information about the kind of danger Gérard could be in worsened his sense of urgency. However, he didn't let it rush him. After all, one could never be too sure in a situation like this.

The mountain had a shape that rounded off on the left.

*Rustle! Rustle! Rustle! Rustle!*

Cha Dong-Gyun, who was ahead of them, spun his index finger once in a circle before pointing ahead.

Kang Chan immediately began to head forward.

Choi Jong-Il swiveled the muzzle of his gun to the right, and Seok Kang-Ho moved past him.

*Clank! Clunk!*

*Haah, haah.*

Kang Chan's senses were on edge.

*Du du du! Du du du du! Boom!*

They heard a couple of gunshots followed by an explosion, the tremors it created reaching their location.

*Damn it!*

*Boom!*

They felt another vibration.

Kang Chan quickly raised his left hand to his helmet.

*Chk.*

“Gérard! Talk to me!” he ordered.

There was no response.

*Chk.*

“Gérard! Status report!” Kang Chan frantically repeated.

*Chhk.*

“Captain! It looks like the Somalis are trapped!” Gérard finally replied.