

Blackfield 291

Chapter 291: Wouldn't It Be Cool? (1)

Even though the French agents had left an entire hospital room empty for him, Kang Chan still spent the night in Seok Kang-Ho's room.

It was strange. Due to the difference in time zones, it would have made sense for him to experience jet lag, but no matter where he was in the world, he would always wake up at the crack of dawn. Today was no different.

Maybe it was because of the good sleep he got during the trip, but he didn't feel sleepy anymore. Hence, he stood up, went to the bathroom in the hallway, and washed his face.

Creak.

By the time he returned to the room, Seok Kang-Ho was already up too. Kang Chan could see his eyes now.

"How do you feel?" Kang Chan asked.

"Hungry," Seok Kang-Ho replied.

"Fucking idiot."

Seok Kang-Ho stretched his lips to what resembled a smile. As he did, Kang Chan realized that Seok Kang-Ho was starting to get wrinkles around his eyes and mouth.

"You don't have any cigarettes?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"I already said I don't!" Kang Chan exclaimed.

"You're making me sad."

"Just drink water instead."

Kang Chan dipped three pieces of gauze in water and squeezed them over Seok Kang-Ho's mouth. Until Seok Kang-Ho could raise his upper body, it would be best to use gauze to drink water. Otherwise, they would risk choking him.

"Can you raise the bed for me?" Seok Kang-Ho requested.

"Hang on."

Kang Chan moved to where Seok Kang-Ho's feet were and pressed a button.

Whirr.

"That's good," Seok Kang-Ho said.

Click.

With his upper body raised, Seok Kang-Ho turned to Kang Chan in a more comfortable position.

"How many are dead?" he asked.

"A little over half the men. Um Ji-Hwan is alive," Kang Chan answered.

Seok Kang-Ho looked apologetic and angry.

Creak.

Just then, the medical staff, an interpreter, and a French agent entered the room. The interpreter would relay Seok Kang-Ho's condition to the French agent, and the French agent would then deliver that to the medical staff.

After checking up on Seok Kang-Ho through that complicated process, the medical staff changed his IV drips and blood packs. They then added some injections to the medication before leaving with the interpreter.

Seok Kang-Ho's eyelids grew heavier due to the new medication.

After a while, Kang Chan headed over to Cha Dong-Gyun's room.

Creak.

When he opened the door, Kwak Cheol-Ho stood up from the chair next to Cha Dong-Gyun's bed, then greeted him.

"It's okay. Sit down."

Kang Chan dragged over a chair to sit with them. As he did, they smelled greasy food and heard wheels rolling along. Breakfast was probably being distributed.

"Reinforcements will be coming from Seoul tonight," Kang Chan stated.

Kwak Cheol-Ho glanced at Cha Dong-Gyun, then looked back at Kang Chan.

"Kwak Cheol-Ho, gather the men who can fight. Let me know who's coming by lunchtime. Don't let Daye find out about this," Kang Chan instructed.

"Understood," Kwak Cheol-Ho replied.

"I'm coming too," Cha Dong-Gyun said with a frown as he forced himself up. His eyes blazed so fiercely that they looked as if they had been set on fire.

Kang Chan's gaze shifted to the bandages on Cha Dong-Gyun's stomach. If they were in combat, Kang Chan would definitely have handed him a gun, but now that Cha Dong-Gyun had received treatment, that would just make the pain even worse.

"Are you sure?" Kang Chan confirmed.

"Of course."

However, Cha Dong-Gyun would just suffer from an entirely different kind of injury if Kang Chan ordered him to stay behind while the thoughts of his dead subordinates weighed down his heart.

Creak.

After a while, the interpreter opened the door.

"Here you are. What would you like to do about breakfast?" he asked Kang Chan.

“I’ll eat here,” Kang Chan said.

“Understood.”

While Kwak Cheol-Ho moved the table to the middle of the room, a French agent brought their food over.

Cha Dong-Gyun pulled up the bedside table and put what looked like baby food on it. Meanwhile, Kang Chan and Kwak Cheol-Ho were served plates of meat and bread.

“When will we execute the operation?” Kwak Cheol-Ho asked as he dipped his bread in the steak sauce.

“Let’s wait for our reinforcements before we decide. If they arrive tonight, they’d probably suffer from jet lag, so tomorrow night would probably be best,” Kang Chan replied.

“What’s our target?”

Chatting about this over bread and meat made it feel like they were on a picnic.

“While we’re at it, I’m sure a little noise is fine,” Kang Chan said with a grin.

Cha Dong-Gyun looked up from his soup.

“I heard there’s an oil rig on the outskirts of Al-Aziziyah. Wouldn’t it be cool if it exploded?”

Hearing that made Cha Dong-Gyun look satisfied.

The aircraft from South Korea landed at the Athens Airport ten minutes past seven local time.

Kang Chan and two French agents walked onto the tarmac and waited for the soldiers. It took another fifteen minutes for the plane to stop and the trap to be attached. During that time, two buses and an employee from Greece came to Kang Chan’s side.

They flew over in a small civilian aircraft and disguised themselves as tourists. However, when the doors opened and Oh Gwang-Taek stepped out, he still looked like a thief who had come to steal Greek artifacts despite the suit he was wearing.

Oh Gwang-Taek pursed his lips and walked down the stairs. He then showed his passport, which had a completely wrong name, to the Greek employee. Since the name wasn’t on records, this procedure was just for formalities. The National Intelligence Service could handle tasks like these.

Oh Gwang-Taek had lost a lot of weight even though he was already pretty lean. His eyes and body language reeked of the military.

Clunk. Clunk.

Oh Gwang-Taek and all the agents with him were each carrying a bag as big as they were. If anyone learned about what was in there, all the tourists in the airport would probably run away.

After getting his passport stamped, Oh Gwang-Taek headed over to Kang Chan.

“You son of a bitch,” Oh Gwang-Taek greeted with a big smile. When Kang Chan smirked back, he pulled him into a hug.

Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek then watched the agents disembark. They nodded at Kang Chan in greeting before boarding the waiting bus straight away.

Seeing Choi Jong-Il get off the plane made Kang Chan smile. When Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee walked out after him, he couldn't have felt more relieved.

Clunk, clunk.

Choi Jong-Il walked straight to Kang Chan.

“Thank you for calling me over,” Choi Jong-Il said.

Behind him, Woo Hee-Seung and Lee Doo-Hee bowed their heads slightly in greeting.

“Let's talk later,” Kang Chan told him.

“Understood.”

The three went onto the bus.

Yoon Sang-Ki—yet another face that he was glad to see—also greeted him. His eyes glinting in anticipation, he gave Kang Chan a slight bow before hopping onto the bus.

Strangely, Kang Chan kept smiling uncontrollably.

The last person to get off the plane was Kang Chul-Gyu. He looked so healthy that Kang Chan couldn't even remember how weak he used to be.

“You already knew Director Kang before all this, didn't you?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

Kang Chan glanced at him only to find a nauseated Oh Gwang-Taek looking back at him.

“Why?” Kang Chan asked.

“You know why.”

Having never received military training before, Oh Gwang-Taek seemed quite impressed by the man. Kang Chan supposed not just anybody could go on a mission and get a nickname like that.

Clunk, clunk.

Kang Chul-Gyu merely glanced at Kang Chan before stepping on the bus. He didn't seem to want to put any pressure on him. However, Kang Chan didn't miss the happiness and gratitude that briefly flashed across his eyes.

“Let's go,” Kang Chan said.

“Alright.”

Once Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek also hopped on, the bus hit the road.

The National Intelligence Service provided them with rooms at the Central Hotel.

Kang Chan had to admit it. This was the National Intelligence Service's capacity right now.

Ten agents from the National Intelligence Service including Choi Jong-Il, ten soldiers from Jeungpyeong including Yoon Sang-Ki, and sixteen men from Mongolia including Kang Chul-Gyu and Oh Gwang-Taek.

The National Intelligence Service couldn't possibly keep the movements of a group this large a secret.

"It's up the seventh floor," a French agent said. Once everyone had stepped off the bus, he guided them to a freight elevator, which was located outside the emergency exit at the back.

Clunk, clunk, clunk.

Angular jaws, piercing eyes, muscular figures, and powerful gaits.

No matter how one looked at them, they didn't look like tourists one bit. Hence, Kang Chan couldn't help but be grateful for having access to another entrance.

When they reached the seventh floor, they found a French agent waiting for them. The doors at the sides of the hallway were open.

"Each room can accommodate two people. Dinner will be served in the conference room at the far end of the hallway in half an hour," Kang Chan said, relaying the French agent's explanation to Oh Gwang-Taek and Choi Jong-Il.

They spoke as little as possible and moved quietly. All that could be heard in the hallway were creaks and doors slamming shut.

"Deputy Director-General, the Director-General is waiting for you," the French agent quietly informed Kang Chan while watching the men go into their rooms.

Kang Chan knew that the director would be paying attention, but he didn't expect him to come here himself.

The agent led him into the innermost room. As he entered, Romain stood up from the table set beside the bed. Kang Chan noticed two disposable cups filled with coffee on the table.

"Monsieur Kang," Romain greeted as he held his hand out. Contrary to how quiet he had been in front of Lanok, he now exuded an air of authority.

After a brief handshake, Kang Chan sat down opposite Romain.

"Strong coffee energizes you," Romain said as he gestured to the coffee. "I used to be able to fly for twenty hours a day for a whole week, but now I need to rely on caffeine."

When Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee, Romain did as well.

After wiping the drink's residue off his lips, Romain called Kang Chan again. "Monsieur Kang."

"Are you thinking of attacking the oil rig in Al-Aziziyah?" he asked.

Is there anything that these people don't know?

Since Kang Chan had only said his plans out loud to Cha Dong-Gyun today, Romain was likely only speculating on the situation.

“That’s correct,” Kang Chan admitted.

“There’s one thing I’d like to ask you.”

“Go ahead, sir.”

“Does it not occur to you at all that you can die in this operation?” Romain asked.

Unable to tell the intentions hidden behind the question, Kang Chan did not respond.

Romain continued, “Let’s take the other countries out of the equation for a moment. Have you thought about how this might change the situation for France and South Korea?”

He showed no hesitation in voicing his concerns.

“If you die in this operation, Russia would not think twice about turning its head on the other countries, and South Korea will have to pay the price for standing up to Saudi Arabia and the United States.”

It was difficult to read Romain’s expression. Kang Chan couldn’t even tell if he was asking him all this out of concern or as a threat.

“It won’t end there. If you die after the construction of the power plant begins, South Korea will be forced to go to war.”

Kang Chan tilted his head, unable to understand what he meant.

“Let’s keep it simple. What would be the best way to get rid of a power plant and its researchers? The only thing the United States, Russia, and Saudi Arabia can agree on is war.”

At that moment, Kang Chan came to a realization. “Is that the reason the first facility is being built in South Korea? Because it will be easy to destroy if it fails? Because it’s adequate for war?”

Romain’s expression didn’t change, but the awkward silence that followed was answer enough.

Kang Chan pressed on. “Will you look for another country if I refuse now?”

“Your involvement has sped up the development of this new energy source by thirty years,” Romain answered.

“So you mean there won’t be any issues with the development even without me.”

“Even so, with you at the center, South Korea is apt for establishing the facility. If France were to announce the construction of our own plant, Russia would be the first to complain.”

Kang Chan smirked.

“The decision is entirely up to you, but if you’re planning to create an organization, at least make one that can keep you alive until the power plant is built and even long after that. Without you, South Korea will crash back to the 1950s.”

Kang Chan now knew that it was a threat, but it was hard to refute his words.

Romain looked down and pulled out some papers, which had been folded twice, from the pocket of his jacket. He then put them on the table.

“Consider this my way of expressing my gratitude for saving France from the earthquake. Moving forward, I may have to refuse your demands. After all, I have to devote all the power of the DGSE to protecting you and the High Commissioner.”

Kang Chan glanced at the document on the table. He didn’t expect the DGSE Director-General to give him papers folded so poorly.

“Those documents contain information and the location of the Sunni leader in Al-Aziziyah. There are approximately one hundred fifty people if you count his bodyguards,” Romain explained.

When Kang Chan raised his gaze, he found Romain looking as if he had decided on something.

“You have all the makings of a hero, especially your refusal to hide behind anyone’s back.”

Kang Chan met his words with a wry smile. Romain stood up, having already said everything he needed to.

“Monsieur Kang.”

Kang Chan also stood up and took the hand that Romain held out.

“I will support you as much as I can, but if France’s honor is harmed...”

Facing each other head-on, Romain smiled faintly, and Kang Chan smirked. Finding no need to finish his sentence, Romain instead told Kang Chan to take his time and left the room first.

Kang Chan didn’t get to figure out if Lanok ordered Romain to visit him today, but it was clear that the situation around him was becoming increasingly complex and tense.

He picked up the document on the table and checked its contents. The first page was blank, and the next was a schematic map of Al-Aziziyah marked with numbers all over. It was clear enough to him what the marks meant. When he flipped to the next page, he found names next to numbers in the upper left corner.

I knew it!

1. Mohammad Zrif

Under the name was a big picture of a bushy-bearded man. Below it was a description of his bodyguards and their equipment.

Kang Chan couldn't move his eyes from the bottom section.

- Head of UIS Libya
- Ordered the killing of the South Korean National Intelligence Service agents
- Ordered the counterattack against the South Korean special forces

Kang Chan wished for an organization like this—one that could gather information about a target with such accuracy.

He needed stable power and a proper organization before the construction of the power plant began. Otherwise, South Korea would have no choice but to act meek before France, Russia, China, and the UK. Having to walk on eggshells around those four nations would defeat South Korea's feat of escaping from the tight grip of the United States and Japan.

Kang Chan let out a quiet sigh and left the room.

The Korean team, dressed in black suits, walked down the hall to eat dinner. He recognized the agents, soldiers, and members of the Mongolian team.

Walking inside the conference room, they saw chairs around a large round table and about two dozen dishes set out buffet-style.

Click. Click.

The men must have talked about the two failed operations on the plane. Even if they didn't, they were bound to at least have a gist about what happened. With the added tension of knowing they would leave for an operation soon, the room's atmosphere was naturally heavy.

"Let's go over there," Oh Gwang-Taek—the only one wearing a happy face in the room—said with a bright smile. He looked like he could be from one of those PSAs on the back of the Seoul City buses about always being happy.

Click, click.

"Is it okay to talk here?" he asked, seemingly worried about someone eavesdropping on them.

Oh Gwang-Taek was the only one who had received military training from a cultist—no—as private lessons.

Kang Chan thought if someone was tapping into their conversation, their ears would hurt first, then they would get dizzy.

"Yes. This place should be safe," Kang Chan replied.

The DGSE wasn't so easy to get around.

Everyone nearby heard him.

“Hyung-nim, I never thought we’d get another chance to work for South Korea again,” someone said from the Mongolian team’s table, which was on the other side.

“I’ve already done as much as I can for the country,” Kang Chul-Gyu quietly stated. His resolve seemed different from the rest of the men’s. As all eyes turned to him, he continued, “I only fight for my dead son now. It doesn’t matter whether it’s Mongolia or Libya. If it’s what my dead son wants...”

Oh Gwang-Taek shuddered as he looked at Kang Chan. What the hell happened in Mongolia for this stubborn bastard to be so scared?

Kang Chul-Gyu had a talent for making people curious about him.

Chapter 292.1: Wouldn’t It Be cool? (2)

Before Kang Chan’s watching gaze, Kang Chul-Gyu calmly ate his food.

Dinner was just about over now.

Soldiers and agents alike chose their favorites from the selection of refreshments on one side of the room and then sat back down at their respective tables. The majority of the men seemed to have chosen coffee.

With the day slowly progressing to its end, outside the window, the lights of the shops, cars, and street lamps began to light up the road.

After a while, Kang Chan asked a French agent if there was still a room available.

“You can use the room you were using and the three other rooms around it, sir,” the French agent replied.

“Should I be worried about eavesdroppers?”

“For as long as you’re on the seventh floor, you can rest easy, sir.”

That was enough for Kang Chan.

“I’m going to have a quick word with a few people,” he said.

“Sure,” replied Oh Gwang-Taek.

Kang Chan stood up and headed over to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“Come with me for a minute,” he requested.

Without a word, Kang Chul-Gyu stood up and followed suit.

“Choi Jong-II. Yoon Sang-Ki.”

Kang Chan brought the three over to the room across the hall, which was where he met Romain earlier. They moved the tables next to the bed and grabbed some chairs from the other rooms so they could all sit down.

“Have you met the old man?” Kang Chan asked.

“We did in the plane. I’m sure everyone from our brigade knows the name ‘DMZ King,’” Choi Jong-II responded. Yoon Sang-Ki nodded in agreement.

“Good. Then take a look at this,” Kang Chan said, pulling out from his breast pocket the map and documents that Romain had given him. For Kang Chul-Gyu’s sake, he told him a summary of what happened.

“This is Tripoli Airport.” From there, he moved his index finger along the roads and drew a circle around another area. “This is Al-Aziziyah, our target. My initial plan was to destroy the oil rig here in Tarabulus, but...”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked up from the map in surprise.

“What?” Kang Chan asked.

“Wouldn’t the Libyan government be forced to react against us if we do that? We don’t have enough people to take on the entire Libyan army, do we?”

“Libya will condone this operation in exchange for the US’ support of the anti-Gaddafi regime.”

Kang Chul-Gyu looked as if Kang Chan had just slapped him right in the face. A short moment of silence fell upon them.

Kang Chul-Gyu prodded on, breaking the lull. “I don’t know too much about foreign languages, but wasn’t that French you were using to speak to the agents outside?”

“The DGSE is the one handling our security in this hotel and the support from Greece.”

Kang Chul-Gyu chuckled in disbelief. “Sorry about that. I didn’t mean anything by it. I’m just shocked that the United States and France are cooperating with us even though South Korea still has to act so timidly around China and Russia.”

Kang Chul-Gyu dropped his gaze to the map again. He then let out a sigh, expressing a lot of his emotions.

Kang Chan didn’t have time to worry about him right now. He simply returned his attention to the map as well.

“The DGSE gave me these documents. You can take a closer look at it later. For now, just take a look at this guy,” Kang Chan unfolded the documents and put them on the table, making sure Mohammad Zrif’s face was at the front and center. “This is Mohammad Zrif, the head of UIS Libya. This asshole and six others ordered and led the massacre of our agents.”

“Each of the locations that were marked on the map on the other page corresponds to these numbers. These are the estimated number of hostiles per area, and these are their equipment.”

“How many tangos are there in total?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“About one hundred fifty.”

Kang Chul-Gyu glared at Mohammad Zrif’s picture.

Kang Chan continued, “We’ll split our forces into three teams. Old man, you will lead the DMZ team. Choi Jong-Il, I’m putting you in charge of the National Intelligence Service agents, and you, Cha Dong-Gyun, will be commanding the Jeungpyeong special forces team.”

“Are you sure you’ve recovered enough to join this operation, Lieutenant Cha?” Yoon Sang-Ki asked worriedly.

“If we don’t let him, he will probably break out of the hospital and follow us,” Kang Chan answered before looking back at the map. “I’m thinking of sending over the Jeungpyeong special forces team to destroy the facilities in Tarabulus and having the DMZ and the National Intelligence Service teams focus on eliminating the enemies.”

Kang Chul-Gyu, Choi Jong-Il, and Yoon Sang-Ki all nodded at the same time.

Kang Chan added, “Mohammad Zrif has about fifty men whose only order is to protect him at all costs. Choi Jong-Il and I will move in on the target. Old man, I want you and your team to neutralize these six remaining areas.”

“How much time do we have?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

“No more than five hours at most. We have to include the time it takes for us to get there, so we’ll have about three hours to actually eliminate the target. Any more than that and the Sunnis and other UIS forces in Libya could reach the scene.”

“Hmm.”

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded in understanding, lips pressed together.

“Old man, you’ll start taking them out from number eight here. I’ll start with this asshole and make my way down the other numbers,” Kang Chan stated.

“Who will show us the way?”

“The DGSE will provide us with guides and camouflaged trucks.”

“Copy. When will you give everyone the full briefing?”

“The operation is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, so we’ll do it after lunch. The special forces will have arrived from the hospital by then,” Kang Chan answered.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. He looked like he didn't have any other questions.

“Determine how many and what weapons your team needs and plan the logistics beforehand. Considering we'll have different travel times to each of our target areas from the airport, the resistance will probably be strongest in the area you're assigned.”

“I don't see the need for an all-out attack.”

“I agree. The quieter we can do it, the better.”

Kang Chul-Gyu carefully peered at the numbered map, seemingly working something out.

After exiting the conference room with Moon Jae-Hyun, Go Gun-Woo gestured over to a secretary staff member.

“What's next on the president's agenda?” he asked.

“The President of Peru is waiting in the second reception room,” the staff member replied.

The two spoke to each other while walking to their next destination.

“What about the announcement about the talks?”

“We will make an official announcement as soon as we hear of the outcome.”

In the meantime, Moon Jae-Hyun had entered his office and sat down at his desk. He quickly scanned the stack of documents in front of him.

Go Gun-Woo and the secretary staff member waited for him at the side. After barely reading the large headings on the front pages and three or four lines of outlines at the top, Moon Jae-Hyun looked up.

“Is this really how we should move forward?” Moon Jae-Hyun questioned.

“It will all be over as soon as you give your signature,” Go Gun-Woo replied.

“But we don't know the results yet,” Moon Jae-Hyun countered with concern.

“The assistant director will take care of it and return with victory in his hands. The director reported that France, Russia, and China have more faith in him than we do,” Go Gun-Woo stated firmly.

Soon after, he spoke up again to urge Moon Jae-Hyun to make haste. “The president of Peru is waiting for you, sir.”

Back at the hospital, Kang Chan gave the interpreter cup noodles and instant coffee, which Choi Jong-Il had given to him a while ago. The interpreter held the instant noodles with tears in his eyes.

Since there was no hot water inside the hospital rooms, Kang Chan made two cups of instant coffee outside before heading into Seok Kang-Ho's room.

Creak.

Seok Kang-Ho's eyes widened as he looked at him. With the swelling finally halfway gone, he looked human again.

"What's that?" Seok Kang-Ho eagerly asked.

Kang Chan set the cup down on the table and raised Seok Kang-Ho's bed up a bit.

"Where did you get this?" Seok Kang-Ho asked again.

"You're not feeling well, so I went to great lengths to get it for you," Kang Chan replied with a grin.

He then pulled up the bedside table and put the cup on it. While watching Seok Kang-Ho take it with his left hand, Kang Chan sat down beside the table.

"When is it?" Seok Kang-Ho abruptly asked.

"What?"

"With that temper of yours, there's absolutely no way in hell are you heading back to South Korea without doing anything about this," Seok Kang-Ho said.

He had unshakable conviction in his words.

Kang Chan had planned on keeping this entire operation a secret, but now that it had come to this, he decided that it would be better to just be honest with him.

"You've been gone all evening and suddenly brought me instant coffee. I can smell the ramyeon outside too. The men are already here, aren't they?" Seok Kang-Ho asked.

"Yeah," Kang Chan admitted.

"When will the operation start?"

"Around tomorrow evening."

Seok Kang-Ho drank his coffee with his head bowed deeper than his cup was raised.

"Holy fuck! This is delicious!" he exclaimed.

Kang Chan couldn't help but grin.

Turning to Kang Chan, he said, "Once all of this is over, let's have cup noodles together."

After having breakfast, Kang Chan left the hospital with Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, Um Ji-Hwan, and six other soldiers.

They took a van that the DGSE had provided for them.

Kang Chan grinned as he looked at Cha Dong-Gyun. The man looked like he was trying his best not to show that he was injured, but he was already breaking out in cold sweat.

The hotel was half an hour away. When the van finally pulled up behind the building, Cha Dong-Gyun gritted his teeth and got out of the car. Kwak Cheol-Ho and Um Ji-Hwan peeked glances at Kang Chan, but Kang Chan just kept an impassive expression as if to show that there was nothing to worry about.

As soon as they reached the seventh floor, they were greeted by the National Intelligence Service and DGSE agents waiting for them by the emergency exits and in the hallways.

“Take these men to Choi Jong-Il and Yoon Sang-Ki,” Kang Chan instructed.

Chapter 292.2: Wouldn't It Be Cool? (2)

After leaving the seven soldiers to the agents, Kang Chan went to the empty room further down the hallway with Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho.

“Take a seat,” he offered.

Cha Dong-Gyun sat down next to the table with a stiff expression.

Just like his meeting yesterday, Kang Chan pulled out the map and documents that the DGSE had given him to brief them about what he had already told the others.

“I want the special forces team to destroy the oil rig here in Tarabulus. It's an hour's drive away from the airport, and then we'll have to go through mountains and plains. The commander will be—”

“I'll stay behind,” Cha Dong-Gyun said grimly before Kang Chan could finish. “If it was just urban warfare, I would have insisted on joining, but I doubt I can handle the transportation and having to move around rough terrains like those.”

With a devastated expression, he stared at Kang Chan. “You already knew that I wouldn't be able to make it all the way there when you were planning this operation, didn't you? Why did you say I could go with you, sir?”

“Because you're the commander.”

Cha Dong-Gyun couldn't seem to understand what Kang Chan meant.

“This will happen over and over again to whoever's in charge of Jeungpyeong's special forces team. Every time you lose your men—every time you fail an operation—there will be moments when your will overpowers your reason. When it does, remember this day. Be a commander who's just as capable of making logical judgments as he is winning wars.”

Cha Dong-Gyun didn't respond. Kang Chan couldn't blame him, though.

“The skills of a commander in combat aren't the only ones that will be passed down to his men. His experience in things like these will be as well. This will

make sure that, even if you divide your men into groups of two or three, they would still be able to rationally operate among themselves.”

“Understood,” Cha Dong-Gyun finally replied.

Kwak Cheol-Ho, who was next to him, also seemed to have steeled his resolve.

Afterward, Kang Chan gave Kwak Cheol-Ho a detailed explanation of the plan and answered several questions.

“I know what to do now,” Kwak Cheol-Ho finally said, looking up from the map.

“There will be a full briefing with everyone after lunch. I need you to talk to Yoon Sang-Ki and divide up the teams and the weapons you’ll need before then.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Since it’s already lunchtime anyway, why don’t we just head over to the conference room now and wait for the others?” Kang Chan suggested.

There was no need for the three of them to be alone in the room, twiddling their thumbs. Hence, they soon walked out. When they stepped into the hallway, they found the soldiers already standing in front of the entrance of the conference room.

Yoon Sang-Ki was the first to run up to him. He faltered as he attempted to salute Kang Chan, causing him to lower his head at Cha Dong-Gyun and Kwak Cheol-Ho instead. Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung then came over to greet them. The last to approach him was Oh Gwang-Taek, who was watching the men.

“Seriously, what the hell are you?” Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

“What are you talking about?” Kang Chan responded.

Oh Gwang-Taek seemed to be one of those people who sobbed their hearts out first before asking who died. This punk hadn’t said anything in the past, yet he suddenly asked him such a question right before the operation began.

“I mean, the more I learn about you, the more I don’t understand,” Oh Gwang-Taek argued.

“Oh Gwang-Taek.”

“What? Why the fuck are you calling me by name?”

“We’ll be facing a lot of more fights like this, so watch and learn closely. I want you to be the first one I can ask for help in the future.”

Oh Gwang-Taek nodded, his eyes full of confidence. “Ha, you punk! Leave it to me!”

Kang Chan was grateful. However, he also made a mental note never to send this guy to negotiate with anyone.

Over lunch, Kang Chan told all of them to gather at the conference room by three. The lunch favorite was the cup noodles that Choi Jong-Il had stacked to the side. They ate greasy Greek-style fried rice with the cup noodles and washed it down with instant coffee.

Once done with his meal, Kang Chan spent about an hour talking to Hugo of the DGSE and Sherman of the CIA. He also gave Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook a call.

Outside the windows was the mythical world of Athens. If Kang Chan wanted to, he could easily go to the airport and head straight back to Seoul. However, a world that wasn't as visible was holding him back. He told himself that he was only going to be doing this for a little longer—that he was just doing this to protect his people—but when he looked around him, he found himself right in the middle of a vortex.

Something like this happened in combat too. One could be standing in the middle of a hail of enemy fire with all of their exit routes blocked, leaving them no means of escape.

In such a situation, they were left with only one option—killing all the enemies in sight.

“The DMZ team will be led by Director Kang Chul-Gyu, the Jeungpyeong special forces by Kwak Cheol-Ho, and the National Intelligence Service agents by me,” Kang Chan directed.

With solemn expressions, the men seated facing him remained focused on his explanation.

“The UIS drew first blood when they killed our agents. In this operation, it does not matter what comes our way. We will respond to any enemy we encounter. Any questions?”

Kang Chan spoke with formality, something he normally didn't do, out of respect for the people on the DMZ team.

One of the members of the DMZ team raised his hands from the middle of the tables. When Kang Chan looked at him, he began to speak.

“The National Intelligence Service and Jeungpyeong's special forces team are national organizations, so there's no question about their presence here. However, under what pretext are we, the DMZ team, participating in this operation?”

It was an unexpected question. As all eyes turned to him, the man, with a determined expression, continued, “I came all the way here to be loyal to my country, but what Kang sunbae said yesterday got me thinking. If we die in this operation, what kind of treatment will we receive?”

To be honest, Kang Chan hadn't thought about that.

“I'm sure there will be compensation from the company. Even if there isn't, I'd still be honored to have served with Kang sunbae,” the man quickly added, seemingly sorry to have asked such a question.

Unfortunately, those words didn't make it any easier to answer.

Kang Chan could easily come up with a response regarding monetary compensation. However, when it came to the recognition they would receive, he couldn't come up with anything.

There was still a lot he had to learn. If he wanted to build an organization, he would have to pay attention to things like this.

For the first time in so long, Kang Chan was rendered speechless.

At that moment, Kang Chul-Gyu raised his hand, drawing everyone's attention. His gaze met Kang Chan's. Soon after, he stood up with a firm expression.

"I'm Kang Chul-Gyu, commander of the DMZ team."

Everyone participating in this operation already knew who he was, but Kang Chul-Gyu still took the time to introduce himself.

"I know this is a matter that I should be talking to my team about, but I'd like to give everyone an explanation for yesterday's incident anyway."

What are you trying to say now, old man?"

Kang Chul-Gyu slowly looked at each of the members of his team.

"All of you, including me, have had unhappy times. I'm sure you all remember what I said at dinner last night. I did not decide to join this operation with the intention of serving my country. Even now, I still stand by those words."

While Kang Chul-Gyu spoke, the members of the DMZ team, followed by the Jeungpyeong special forces team and the National Intelligence Service agents, all straightened their backs. Their respect for the DMZ legend and their special forces senior seemed to come naturally to them.

"Let's not forget the commitment we made before heading over from Mongolia. When we decided to go on this mission, we said that we wouldn't be doing it for the country. We said we're doing it out of the satisfaction of helping our proud juniors, who are now doing what we couldn't do."

Kang Chul-Gyu's eyes, words, and expressions dominated everyone in the room.

"We're not stepping up for South Korea. Therefore, I believe it's shameless of us to hope for the nation to give us something in return. Kwon Yong-Hee!"

"Sir!" Kwon Yong-Hee, who had asked the question earlier, answered loudly, straining his upper body.

Even though he was probably already in his forties, he still replied like an obedient soldier talking to his commander.

"As emphasized earlier, this is a dangerous operation. We don't know how many of us will return with our lives or as corpses. I heard that more than half of our juniors who went there before us were killed in action."

With a fierce glare of determination, Kang Chul-Gyu continued, “Even if we die over there, we still likely won’t be buried in the national cemetery. Does that make you want to abandon this mission and head back home?”

“No, sir!” Kwon Yong-Hee replied so loudly that the Jeungpyeong soldiers’ eyes widened.

“My dead son... I will be fighting for my son whom I failed to take care of. He would want me to help and protect our juniors. The unfortunate times are ours to bear. My goal is to make sure our juniors will not be treated the same way they treated us and to help them succeed in operations like this.”

Everyone focused on him with nervous expressions.

After a brief pause, Kang Chul-Gyu smirked and turned toward the members of his team.

“Who protects the DMZ?” he asked.

“We do!”

Their powerful answer thundered across the room.

“What do we fight for?”

“Our country and our fellow men!”

There was no mistaking it. These chants had to be the ones that they used to shout while they were still serving at the DMZ. It was a bit tacky, and the cries of the older men were heartwrenching, but there was something poignant about it.

“What’s our motto?!”

“I’m sorry, my dearest family! I gave my life for my country and my comrades!”

At the end of the chant, Kang Chul-Gyu sat back down. An inexplicable somberness filled the room. The special forces team of Jeungpyeong all gritted their teeth with renewed resolve.

Chapter 293: On a Different Level (1)

Kang Chan arrived at Athens Airport an hour before evening. Once he had settled into his seat in the civilian plane from South Korea, they began to prepare for takeoff. They drove down the runway and ascended to a cruising altitude before the seatbelt sign was turned off, signaled by three beeps.

Following Kang Chan's lead, all the agents stood up and began unpacking their large bags, which contained everything they needed—military uniforms, helmets, radios, night vision goggles, vests, and essential weaponry like rifles, pistols, magazines, grenades, and knives.

Click! Click!

Dressed in his usual light-gray military uniform, Kang Chan, as always, strapped a pistol to his right waist and left ankle, then his knife to his right ankle. He put two rifle magazines at the back of his waist and four in his vest along with grenades. Afterward, he put pistol magazines on the sides of his waist and vest.

Kang Chan then looked around, finding Kang Chul-Gyu already done preparing, his rifle casually slung by his side. He was armed with a K7 submachine gun fitted with a silencer and a 30-round magazine.

Both Lee Doo-Hee and the Jeungpyeong special forces armed themselves with sniper rifles, but the Jeungpyeong special forces team also brought C4s, grenade launchers, and specialized equipment with them. This was Kang Chan's first operation alongside the DMZ team. Unlike the others, they had fastened leather straps around their left shoulders so they could arrange their knives for quick draw, evoking the image of warriors from Chinese films.

Kwon Yong-Hee, the one who had asked the question earlier, pursed his lips tightly, his gaze intently fixed on the South Korean flag attached to the lower part of the leather strap on his left forearm. It wasn't just him either. Their entire team regarded the South Korean flag in their arms. Some were even gently caressing it gently.

"While the search and rescue teams wore red unit markings and the South Korean flag, we have never gotten the opportunity to wear anything like that until now," Kang Chul-Gyu quietly explained, locking eyes with Kang Chan.

Fully armed and wearing military uniforms, the DMZ team now emitted a sharp, domineering aura. However, they still had one reason for concern among their ranks—Oh Gwang-Taek.

"Woah! To think I would finally get to wear a South Korean flag... Damn!" Oh Gwang-Taek commented.

Although it was only a murmur, everyone still heard him.

Fortunately, Kang Chul-Gyu's gaze was telling Kang Chan not to worry. They seemed to have suddenly gotten unexpectedly close, but under the circumstances, this level of camaraderie was acceptable.

Drrrrruk.

Lee Doo-Hee and Um Ji-Hwan wheeled two carts of food to the front. Their dinner, composed of white rice, mildly flavored kimchi, and bulgogi, could be considered luxurious. The portions were generous enough for many to have seconds.

After the meal, most of them enjoyed canned coffee except for Kang Chan and Choi Jong-Il, who opted for instant coffee they prepared themselves. Darkness had enveloped everything outside the plane. Considering they'd be heading out into operations as soon as they landed, the atmosphere of the cabin was naturally heavy.

"Can I smoke?" Choi Jong-Il asked.

"Anyone wanna stop him?" Kang Chan replied, giving his tacit approval.

Receiving a nod from Kang Chan, everyone comfortably lit up their own cigarettes. Kang Chan then gestured at Choi Jong-Il to come with him. Together, they headed to the galley at the front.

"Draw the curtains," Kang Chan instructed.

Whoosh. Swish.

He then added, "Give me a cigarette."

Having been in a hospital, it had been a while since he last fully enjoyed the pleasure of smoking.

Click.

Oddly enough, Kang Chan found comfort in drinking instant coffee and smoking with Choi Jong-Il.

"Is it because of Kang sunbae?" asked Choi Jong-Il. When Kang Chan gazed at him, he nodded in understanding. "Given the age difference, we do feel a bit hesitant to smoke around him."

Damn!

They were on their way to an operation right now. They didn't even know who would make it back alive. Fussing over age differences when it came to smoking now of all times seemed pointless to Kang Chan.

If it was an issue, it would have been better not to join the same operation in the first place.

Unfortunately, Kang Chul-Gyu was his father. How could he comfortably smoke in his presence? The French, at least, understood how to enjoy a cigarette without concern.

Whoosh.

The curtain was suddenly pulled open, and Oh Gwang-Taek walked in.

"What are you doing here?" Oh Gwang-Taek asked.

"Just smoking," Kang Chan casually replied.

Oh Gwang-Taek glanced back and then moved closer to Kang Chan.

"I came for some coffee. Got any instant ones?" Oh Gwang-Taek sheepishly asked as he peered at the table. He still seemed to feel a bit awkward around Choi Jong-Il.

Choi Jong-Il swiftly prepared a cup of instant coffee for him. "Here you go."

"I'll be outside, sir," he then added before exiting into the cabin and drawing the curtain behind him.

Kang Chan fetched some hot water and made himself a cup of instant coffee as well. Afterward, he and Oh Gwang-Taek each took a cigarette.

Click.

The flame of a lighter always brought Kang Chan comfort.

"Hoo. I've got a favor to ask," Oh Gwang-Taek began. When Kang Chan looked at him, he exhaled another long stream of smoke. "Even if I die, my wife and daughter will have enough to live on."

Kang Chan took a sip of his coffee as he listened intently.

"Still, if you can, please check in on them from time to time. Make sure they aren't bullied for not having a dad."

Kang Chan smiled faintly, causing Oh Gwang-Taek to frown. The latter rubbed his cigarette in a paper cup.

"I know, I know. A thug taking care of his kid? Crazy! Even so, my daughter's innocent. I left that life behind for her."

"Oh Gwang-Taek," Kang Chan called.

"What?"

Sizzle.

After extinguishing his cigarette in the paper cup, Kang Chan looked up.

"Don't stray too far from Director Kang."

"Who do you think I am—"

"It's not about being cowardly. You have to watch how he moves according to the situation and how he leads the team. Learn everything you can from him," Kang Chan said.

A sense of duty showed in Oh Gwang-Taek's expression.

"There's only a few like him in South Korea. Director Kim Tae-Jin and even the Presidential Security Service acknowledge him, so do your best to learn. Survive no matter what happens so that next time, you can lead the younger ones."

"Hoo... got it," Oh Gwang-Taek replied with a nod. He then looked beyond the curtain.

He clearly was not the kind of man they should send to a negotiation table.

Although Oh Gwang-Taek had returned to his seat, Kang Chan remained leaning against the serving table. He had handed maps with the target locations marked to Kang Chul-Gyu and Kwak Cheol-Ho and ensured that they knew how to get there. They would also be assigned a guide who could speak Korean upon arrival at the airport.

Moreover, he had also advised them to either turn back or hold their ground if they ever felt as if something was off about the operation. Was there anything else he had missed?

Kang Chan slowly went over everything once more.

Abibu hung up the phone with a troubled expression. The United States had completely turned its back on them, citing the transfer of funds to Brandon's account as the reason.

The Quds, Iran's special forces team, had virtually dried up in Africa, not because they needed help but rather because they needed to provide it. Abibu was annoyed by South Korea, a small country which was an unexpected obstacle as they willingly bowed deeply and tried to lure in oil supply and construction contracts.

They needed a solution—a way to maintain at least a shred of dignity...

Vrrrrr. Vrrrrr. Vrrrrr.

The phone rang, interrupting his thoughts.

"Hello?" Abibu answered.

- It might be best to turn a blind eye this time.

The voice, seemingly trying to soothe him, forced a difficult choice upon Abibu.

- The Tyrrhenian Sea is under France's watch, and the Mediterranean is under the US'. Moreover, as I'm sure you already know, Algeria is France's domain.

"What about Egypt?"

- The UK and Israel are pressuring them due to the Suez Canal situation.

"Chad? Sudan?"

- The Foreign Legion's special forces team has assembled right next to Congo. Pretending to help Libya alone could change the regimes in those two countries. Remember, their commander is Gérard.

Abibu sighed softly. This was the first time the golden decor and goblets on his table felt so powerless.

"What if I offer more money?"

The person on the other end of the call paused for a moment before responding.

- Lanok and Sherman are practically holding hands. Sometimes conceding is not a bad option. Russia, the UK, and Germany also have special forces teams on standby, ready to go to war if anyone intervenes.

"We only killed a few intelligence agents," Abibu stated, clearly infuriated.

- The problem isn't the death of the South Korean agents. It's the fact that you attacked the rescue team that the God of Blackfield sent.

"Is there no other way out of this than letting our warriors get killed?"

- It could have ended with just a few casualties back then. Now? We'd be lucky if this ends with only the death of the key UIS personnel in Libya.

"They have less than fifty Korean soldiers! I heard twenty of them have already retired!" Abibu yelled in frustration.

When the person he was talking to didn't reply, he quickly added, "Hmm, I apologize for raising my voice."

- I understand.

The voice over the phone was still soft.

- The God of Blackfield, their commander, is what makes those less than fifty Koreans frightening. Should he decide to see this all the way through, the US would bomb Libya, and France would swiftly take over.

"Kill him. I will pay whatever it costs."

- Do you think you can buy us with money?

Abibu was rendered speechless.

- In the not-so-distant future, Korea will become a battlefield. It would be best to conserve your resources and forces for now.

"We've already lost Quds in Africa. If I don't help our warriors either, how would I be able to justify it?"

- Sometimes, gold offers more comfort than words.

The call ended in a soft but final tone, informing Abibu that this matter had already been concluded.

- We will bear good news soon.

Before Abibu could even respond, the caller hung up. Abibu's pride, which he had tried so hard to protect, had been shattered.

Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding.

The seatbelt sign flashed on with four beeps. The plane banked left, giving the people on that side a good view of the sparsely lit city.

It was almost time to disperse.

Click. Click.

Kang Chan walked toward the middle seats where Kwak Cheol-Ho and the agents were sitting.

"Let's end this with a bang," he said, playfully patting Kwak Cheol-Ho's helmet.

Tap. Tap.

Following their ritual, Kwak Cheol-Ho reached out and tapped Kang Chan's helmet in return. Despite the low morale, Kang Chan went around doing the same thing to the entire Jeungpyeong special forces team, encouraging them to return it.

The last he patted was Yoon Sang-Ki.

"Make sure you walk back this time."

"I'll wipe them all out, sir."

These battle-hardened warriors had been together in France, China, North Korea, and Afghanistan. The trust between them would be a source of great strength for them during critical moments.

Behind Yoon Sang-Ki was the DMZ team.

Kang Chan looked up and locked eyes with Kwon Yong-Hee.

"It's a good sight," Kwon Yong-Hee murmured, a mix of envy and regret in his voice.

Smirking, Kang Chan sidestepped to stand next to him.

"Please avenge our people who suffered unjust deaths," he said.

At the same time, he extended his arm to tap Kwon Yong-Hee's helmet. Kwon Yong-Hee, in his mid-forties, cautiously responded. He looked a little awkward doing it.

The soldier sitting next to him was the one who had asked in Mongolia if it was okay to raise the South Korean flag.

"Show the UIS the terror of the DMZ team," Kang Chan said.

He then reached out to the soldier's helmet. The soldier returned the gesture more naturally than Kwon Yong-Hee did.

Starting with Kwak Cheol-Ho, the Jeungpyeong special forces team stood up and began to follow Kang Chan. The National Intelligence Service agents lined up behind them.

"Sunbae-nim! After this is all over, we'll treat you to something nice."

"You people are our hope. You all better be alive when we get back."

Kwon Yong-Hee, with reddening eyes, tapped Kwak Cheol-Ho's helmet.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

While smiling and tapping each other's helmets, they exchanged a variety of encouragements and engaged in banter typical among close acquaintances.

"You bastard! How do you come up with this stuff?" Oh Gwang-Taek joked as he, too, joined in on their ritual.

Amid the emotional stir, Kang Chan's gaze met with Kang Chul-Gyu's, who was sitting at the back.

Kang Chan took a step to the side, then another. He could feel awkwardness spreading through him, almost as if ants were crawling up his back. He didn't know how the mission would turn out—who would die and who would return alive. For all he knew, this might even be the last time he and Kang Chul-Gyu would exchange words.

"Old man," Kang Chan called.

Kang Chul-Gyu smirked softly, his expression showing gratitude for the mere attempt at conversation. Seeing his face, which seemed to refuse to ask for more, Kang Chan suddenly remembered Kang Dae-Kyung.

Perhaps Kang Chul-Gyu laughed, considering the hope for a safe return as perhaps too optimistic. What he truly aimed to express was a simple wish—to live and remain cautious.

With Kwak Cheol-Ho tapping helmets with Oh Gwang-Taek, Kang Chan's time to step aside drew nearer. Until the very last moment, Kang Chul-Gyu refused to avert his gaze.

In the end, Kang Chan reached out and tapped Kang Chul-Gyu's helmet.

Tap. Tap.

‘Come back alive.’

Instead of returning the favor, Kang Chul-Gyu just smirked again.

This old man! I went through all that awkwardness and embarrassment from extending my hand just to receive a smirk in return? So damn stubborn!

Kang Chan turned away and moved aside, letting Kwak Cheol-Ho follow him to the front. The alarm rang four times as the plane began its descent. At the same time, the lights dimmed, prompting everyone to finish their greetings and take their seats.

Grrrrrrr.

The flaps of the wings began to fold, decelerating the plane as it prepared for landing.

Vrrrrr. Vrrrrrrrrrr!

Whoooo-ang!

Amid the vibration of the runway and the engine roars, the plane finally began to slow to a stop. Soon, the lights turned back on.

Click. Click. Click.

Immense tension filled the plane as everyone conducted a final check of their weapons. As soon as they disembarked, they would be splitting into the teams they were assigned to. In order, the Jeungpyeong special forces team, DMZ team, and National Intelligence Service team would descend the stairs, board the vehicles waiting for them, and depart immediately.

Whoooo-ang!

As the plane slowly turned at the end of the runway, Kwak Cheol-Ho's voice, filled with metallic vigor, rang out.

"Sunbae-nim! We will see you all again for sure! Your juniors are proud of you!"

The older members of the DMZ team turned to Kwak Cheol-Ho.

"Show our sunbaes our resolve!"

Kwak Cheol-Ho rallied the soldiers and agents behind him.

"What's our motto?!"

"If I can!"

Whoooo-ang!

The plane had almost stopped now.

"Protect my country with my blood!"

Kwon Yong-Hee, with tearful eyes, stared at everyone before him.

"I am happy!"

Although it might have seemed somewhat childish, a warm and fervent spirit was shared among them, eliciting a curse from Oh Gwang-Taek.

"Damn it!"

Whoooo-ang!

The plane finally jerked to a stop.

Chapter 294: On a Different Level (2)

The solemn resolve that filled the airplane spilled out through the open door. The darkness, tepid wind, and distinct earthy smell of Libya greeted the soldiers and agents.

Kang Chan was the first to descend the ramp to the ground. CIA agent Kevin was waiting for him below.

"Hello, sir," greeted a Libyan man in his thirties as several trucks carrying huge piles of logs drove over to the plane. His Korean accent was tinged with Arabic.

He continued, "The logs are hollow inside. Your men can hide in them while I guide you to Tripoli."

When Kang Chan sharply looked at Kevin, the latter quickly identified the man. "He's a CIA special agent."

"Hurry up. We only have five hours," Kang Chan urged.

Kevin glanced at the rifle slung over Kang Chan's right shoulder as he handed over three compact radios. The message behind the gesture was so clear that no words had to be said.

Chk.

"Kwak Cheol-Ho."

Kang Chan summoned Kwak Cheol-Ho through the radio attached to his helmet.

Click. Click. Click.

The soldiers descended the ramp.

"There's space hidden behind the trucks. Get in there," he commanded, then turned to Kwak Cheol-Ho. "We can communicate using these radios but don't forget that the CIA can intercept its frequency. Use it only when you really have to."

As Kwak Cheol-Ho accepted the radio, the soldiers disappeared into the hollow logs.

Brrrrrrrung!

As the engines roared to life, Kwak Cheol-Ho briefly nodded at Kang Chan before climbing into the back of the truck.

The trucks soon departed.

Brrrrrrrung! Brrrrrrrrrung! Click! Brrrrrrrung!

"DMZ team, move out," Kang Chan radioed.

Led by Kang Chul-Gyu, the DMZ team headed down to the ground. At the same time, two more trucks and a new guide approached Kang Chan.

"There's space for everyone behind the trucks," Kang Chan quickly explained as he handed over a radio to Kang Chul-Gyu. "Keep in mind that the CIA can intercept this device. Use it only when necessary."

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded and took the radio as Oh Gwang-Taek and the DMZ team jumped into the two trucks. Next were the National Intelligence Service agents.

Much to his surprise, before Kang Chan could press the radio button, he heard Kang Chul-Gyu say, "Take care of yourself."

Kang Chan turned his head toward Kang Chul-Gyu, but the latter had already walked away, blending into the darkness.

As Kang Chul-Gyu stealthily put his hands on the back of the truck, he turned back one last time. With a swift motion, he then vanished into the cargo bed.

That old man! Can't he at least give me a chance to respond?

Brrrrrrung! Brrrrrrrrung! Click! Brrrrrrung!

As the two trucks drove off, the last truck and guide took their place.

Chk.

"Choi Jong-Il, you're up."

On Kang Chan's command, the National Intelligence Service agents quickly made their way down the ramp.

"There's space at the back of the trucks. Climb up there."

The agents did as instructed.

The Arab guide, appearing to be in his thirties, introduced himself to Kang Chan.

"I'm Abdul."

"You are aware of the destination, right?" Kang Chan asked.

"Yes, I do," Abdul affirmed.

"Good luck," Kevin said to Kang Chan.

Kang Chan gave Kevin one last glance. He then shook Kevin's hand before moving to the back of the truck.

Climbing into a truck isn't something to fuss over!

Once Kang Chan had gotten in, Um Ji-Hwan pulled down the tarp above to hide them.

Brrrrrrung! Brrrrrrrrung! Click! Brrrrrrung!

Facing each other on the cargo bed were long seats similar to the ones in military trucks. Unlike actual military trucks, however, the vehicle they were in had logs stacked around the exterior, forcing them to sit directly facing each other.

Brrrrrrung. Thud. Thud.

From the airport, the truck didn't stop once. With an hour's drive ahead of them, Kang Chan pulled out a map and photos from his pocket, deciding to scrutinize their final destination and target one more time.

Clunk!

The truck suddenly jolted, making all the agents inside sway.

Clunk! Thud!

"Hyung-nim," Yoon Sang-Ki called Kwak Cheol-Ho, who was sitting across from him, as he steadied himself from all the shaking. "Did you see the seniors' eyes when they chanted our motto?"

Kwak Cheol-Ho nodded in reply.

"Whew! Why did I get so choked up back then..." Yoon Sang-Ki wondered.

"I never imagined we'd be working with the legend of the DMZ," the agent sitting next to Kwak Cheol-Ho chimed in.

"Some say that back in our seniors' day, North Koreans would desert their outposts whenever the King of the DMZ headed out into battle. Those days were apparently their golden era."

Yoon Sang-Ki nodded. As if recalling what happened in the airplane, he replied, "Ah

, to think such a person is prepared to die just to support us. I was seriously touched."

Clunk!

The truck jerked violently, making the agents inside sway.

"This is completely different from our era," Kwon Yong-Hee muttered, regaining his balance.

Vrooom! Thud. Thud.

"That young man is remarkable. He has probably surpassed what our sunbae-nim has achieved at his peak, perhaps even more." Casting a puzzled glance at Kang Chul-Gyu, he added, "I've never seen you smile like that before, sunbae-nim."

"Perhaps he's happy to be on a mission with us," suggested the soldier next to Kwon Yong-Hee.

The others began to join the conversation as well.

"That man? In Mongolia and again recently, he stopped an American stop dead in his tracks."

"Right? Back in our day, American scoldings intimidated us more than our ancestors' curses."

"Our juniors chanting their motto stirred my heart. Knowing there are people out there who want to harm our juniors makes me want to take the fight to them."

"Wasn't protecting them our duty in the DMZ? I was so mad when I heard that we lost half of such promising juniors. It was so painful to see them fight so bravely."

Entering his office, Moon Jae-Hyun sat down at his desk. Go Gun-Woo followed closely behind him.

"I've finalized the agreement."

"Is that so? Shall we take a short break and discuss this further, then?"

With Go Gun-Woo in tow, Moon Jae-Hyun shrugged off his weariness and led the way. They proceeded to a small meeting room connected to the office.

Once they were seated, a secretary served them two elegant cups of omija tea[1].

"With this, we've completed all the necessary agreements, haven't we?"

"Yes, sir," Moon Jae-Hyun affirmed, smiling.

"I'm honestly impressed that Japan will sign the agreement before it's even finalized."

"It shows their trust in the assistant director's capabilities and perhaps also means that they've come across some crucial information."

"What about Russia?"

"After your announcement, Russia decided to issue an official government statement. As for France and China, we've already secured the basic agreements with them through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs this morning."

Reaching for his teacup, Moon Jae-hyun said, "Haa! This makes me feel like a heartless father, trading away his child for my own benefit."

"Are you worried about the assistant director?" Go Gun-Woo asked.

Moon Jae-Hyun sighed sharply, letting the sigh speak for him.

After a brief silence, he softly added, "South Korea has gained a lot in return for Mr. Kang's sacrifices. Today's agreement is for our country, for our people. I get that. Still, thinking of him, our agents, and our soldiers out there in the field makes it feel almost sinful to even drink water."

He sighed deeply once more. Go Gun-Woo just remained silent.

"What about the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, and the Prosecutor's Office?" Moon Jae-Hyun asked.

"The opposition is formidable," Go Gun-Woo replied.

Moon Jae-Hyun nodded in understanding.

"If the assistant director doesn't return safely, it'll be challenging for me, the Prime Minister, and the director to hold our positions."

"Why do you exclude Section Chief Jeon?"

"Ah! Of course," Moon Jae-Hyun chuckled softly. "I have no regrets, but for South Korea's future, I hope Mr. Kang comes back safely."

"He will return," Go Gun-Woo stated firmly. "I have no doubt about it."

Kim Hyung-Jung took one last look around the six-story luxury villa in Hannam-dong. Designed as a duplex, it could accommodate three households and came equipped with an underground parking lot and a 70-pyeong[2] garden. From the living room, one could enjoy an excellent view of the Han River.

However, the villa's prime advantage was that it was located on the foot of a high hill, shielding it completely from view. Beyond the hill, it stood as the tallest structure. The rooftop was not only cleverly camouflaged but also housed two 30mm machine guns and two Igla missiles, ready to defend against most helicopter attacks.

Twenty agents occupied the first and third floors. Needless to say, it was also outfitted with state-of-the-art CCTV and security systems.

"Hoo."

Kim Hyung-Jung, standing in the living room on the third floor, gazed down at the Han River in contemplation.

They had a sniper positioned on the rooftop, looking out for any missile launchers in apartments or buildings across the Han River, and binoculars on the third-floor living room, subjecting the opposite shore under constant surveillance. If, for some reason, hostiles decided to ignore all these precautionary measures and still rain down bullets on them from across the Han River, the bulletproof glass in the living room would act as their last line of defense.

Now, there was only one thing left to do.

Screech!

After more than forty minutes on the road, the truck abruptly stopped. Kang Chan gestured toward the rear curtain of the truck with his index and middle fingers.

Um Ji-Hwan and Lee Doo-Hee quickly aimed their rifles at the entrance. The other agents prepared to spring into action as well.

They were navigating through the night, with some distance left to cover and no immediate threat of an enemy attack. Nevertheless, Kang Chan remained vigilant.

Tap, tap.

At that moment, someone tapped the truck twice from the driver's seat, putting them on combat alert.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Kang Chan's gaze sharpened as he slowly made his way to the entrance of the cargo bed.

Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.

Despite the noises coming from the truck's engine, they could still hear the distinct footsteps on the earth.

"Noider[3]?" one man, armed with an AK-47, shouted toward the driver's seat while another advanced toward the rear. Clank! Thud. Thud.

Choi Jong-Il quickly glanced at Kang Chan for instructions.

Swoosh.

Kang Chan deftly drew the knife strapped to his right ankle, strategically positioning himself at the right rear of the truck.

Thud. Thud.

Through a narrow gap in the logs, they saw the distinctive Islamic attire of an enemy, complete with a bandolier across their chest, a turban, and an AK-47 in hand.

Kang Chan gave Choi Jong-Il a composed thumbs-up, then swiftly flipped his hand, pointing his thumb downward in a silent command.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

He then raised both hands to shoulder height.

Whoosh!

As the curtain was swiftly drawn back, Kang Chan decisively stretched out his left arm.

Clutch! Swoosh!

Covering the enemy's mouth and nose with his hand, Kang Chan immediately thrust his knife into the nape.

Gurgle.

Meanwhile, Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung descended and kept watch by the truck's rear.

Fizz! Fizz!

Right after two sparks flew, they heard an enemy hit the ground. Led by Kang Chan, the agents disembarked as Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung vigilantly secured the front of the truck.

Experience was certainly invaluable. Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee, with their rich history of operations across Switzerland, China, and Africa, exchanged meaningful glances, seamlessly coordinating their moves without verbal communication.

Caught off-guard, the guide looked noticeably flustered.

"There used to be no guards here."

"Pull out a map."

The guide took a map from his pocket and pointed to their current location.

"We're around this area. It's all downhill from here. Follow this road for about twenty minutes and we should reach a building with a broadcasting tower."

They had been racing along a mountain road on the outskirts of Al-Azizia.

Setting up a perimeter here meant that the enemy had prepared for them. They might have even seen the flashes from the rifle earlier.

"Head back, Abdul. We'll take it from here," Kang Chan stated firmly.

"Contact us on channel 2 of the radio Kevin gave you. I'll stay as close as possible."

As Kang Chan nodded, Lee Doo-Hee and another agent dragged their enemies' corpses off the road.

Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Hee certainly worked seamlessly together.

Vrooom! Vrooom!

Skillfully maneuvering, the truck rocked back and forth a few times as it changed direction, then made its way back along the path it had come.

"Our enemies seem to have prepared for our arrival." Kang Chan gathered the agents and spread out a map. "Drill that hill in the back into your minds. That's point Alpha. The hill on the right here on the map will be Beta. Regroup at these two points if we ever have to retreat from the engagement. "

Kang Chan then turned his head toward the right side of the road.

"From here on out, we'll be racing along this ridge," he ordered.

In the distance, the lights of a truck flickered as it approached.

"The sight of light from a rifle means we're under surveillance. Stay vigilant. Woo Hee-Seung, I want you in the center. Choi Jong-Il, cover our six. We should reach our destination in twenty minutes," Kang Chan finished.

"Let's make our seniors proud," Choi Jong-Il declared to the agents, his gaze intense and unwavering.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Thud! Thud!

With each pull of the trigger, Kang Chul-Gyu sent an enemy to the ground, their head snapped back. As if a barricade at the entrance of Al-Azizia had burst open, enemies poured out in unimaginable numbers.

"Take three and go around to that building!"

"Yes, sir!" Kwon Yong-Hee responded through gritted teeth.

Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh.

As if on cue, Kwon Yong-Hee and three others unsheathed the knives on their shoulders.

Fwoosh! Crack! Fwoosh! Crack! Fwoosh! Crack!

As if engaging in mere target practice, Kang Chul-Gyu easily shot enemy after enemy in the head. In response, enemy fire concentrated on him.

"Now!"

Along with that command, he raised his upper body and sent out a hail of bullets.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Tuduk! Tuduk! Tuduk!

Following his lead, the agents also rose and opened fire. The scene mirrored how they fought in the DMZ. Under their comrades' cover fire, an agent, wielding a knife, would plunge into enemy lines, decapitating foes in his path.

Tududuuk! Crack!

Soon, one of the DMZ members fell backward.

Tuduk! Pffft! Tuduk! Crack! Tuduk! Pffft!

The enemy's counterfire came all at once.

Crouched behind a low wall, Kang Chul-Gyu cradled his subordinate, finding a bullet wound on his chest. Blood spurted from his nose and mouth.

"Sunbae-nim..." the soldier, with blood-soaked teeth, called. His condition suggested he wouldn't return home. "Our precious juniors... What if... they're under attack..."

"We'll go to their aid as soon as we've cleared this area, so fight hard," Kang Chul-Gyu urged.

The soldier painfully smiled as his head slowly fell limp. "Thank you for always saving me... Please look after... the juniors..."

Crunch.

With the soldier's head now resting on his right arm, Kang Chul-Gyu looked up into the dark Libyan sky.

Chapter 295.1: The National Flag They're Proud Of (1)

Click! Click! Click! Click!

Kang Chan and his team climbed and ran across a ridge that only offered a few trees as cover.

Huff huff. Huff huff.

Um Ji-Hwan breathed heavily, his mouth hanging open like a carp out of the water.

He was a gym rat and a great runner. Moreover, as a former member of the 606, he had experience running in the mountains. Hence, no matter how big of a distance they'd have to cover, he was confident that he could easily keep up with the others. However, when they started sprinting like madmen, his confidence was soon shattered.

Kang Chan, the one controlling their pace, ran like a track and field athlete competing in a hundred-meter race. They were moving even faster than the truck that was quickly approaching them. They were going so fast that the enemies' truck that they had passed a while ago still hadn't caught up with them yet.

At the rate they were going, Um Ji-Hwan couldn't help but fear that he would fall behind the others and hold them back.

The smell of dirt from the darkness and the ridge filled his lungs, making it impossible for him to take deep breaths no matter how hard he tried to inhale.

Huff huff. Huff huff.

He didn't want to lag behind his colleagues and burden them just because he was lacking. For the sake of the agents who had been killed in an alley and the soldiers who had died in battle a few days ago, he had to do whatever it took to endure this and avoid disgracing Han Jae-Guk, who, together with his seniors, protected him using mere pistols against people who were shooting at them with AK-47s. He would never forget how they yelled at him to go ahead as they stayed behind to fight off the enemies.

"Ugh! Urgh!"

It was unclear if the sound that came from Um Ji-Hwan was a cry or a scream.

"They already know we're coming!" Kang Chan yelled from the front of their formation.

Completely focused on getting air into his lungs, Um Ji-Hwan couldn't spare a moment to worry about what they should do if their enemies heard them.

“Haah haah! Haah! Haah!”

“Jeungpyeong special forces team!” Kang Chan shouted into the radio. He sounded as if he was also running out of breath. “The DMZ team is in danger!”

Click. Click. Click. Click.

Without slowing down even a bit, he continued, “The faster we run, the more lives we'll be able to save!”

Um Ji-Hwan kept dashing forward even though he couldn't breathe anymore. At some point, Kang Chul-Gyu's confidence, sharp gaze, resolute way of speaking briefly flashed in his mind. The chant that the DMZ team had yelled also played in his mind.

Not long after, he remembered what his senior had yelled at him. The memory was still so vivid that he felt as if he could hear him shouting right beside him.

‘Go! Run! Run!’

It hadn't been that long since Um Ji-Hwan had become an agent. Considering his experience and capabilities, that alley should have been his grave.

Why did he do that? Why did he take up the rear and cover me when he knew it would kill him?

“Urgh! Ugh! Urgh!”

He refused to slow down even though he had tears running down his face and couldn't breathe properly—no, he was at least starting to feel as if he could breathe properly again.

Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew!

“It's the regular army!” Yoon Sang-Ki yelled as he ducked behind a boulder.

Ratatata! Pow pow pow pow! Ratatata! Pow pow pow pow!

The 20mm machine gun sent a beam of death toward the South Koreans. Beside it were countless rifles riddling their position with bullets.

Whoosh!

Pew! Pew! Du du! Pew! Du du du du! Pew! Pow pow pow!

Kwak Cheol-Ho stood up and pulled the trigger twice. However, their enemies immediately returned fire, forcing him to crouch back down. Taking advantage of their inability to respond properly, their opponents began inching toward their location.

“Yoon Sang-Ki! Take Team Two and secure that hill!” Kwak Cheol-Ho yelled. “Take their machine gun out with our snipers, then provide us with some suppressive fire!”

Yoon Sang-Ki thought Kwak Cheol-Ho's decision was cold. That plan would require having some of them stay behind and draw their enemies' attention. However, if they decreased the number of soldiers here, one mistake was all it would take for Kwak Cheol-Ho and his team to get killed.

"Fuck! When have we ever had it easy in combat?!" Kwak Cheol-Ho exclaimed. It wasn't like him to curse.

Du du du du! Du du du! Pew! Pew Pow pow pow!

"I'd like to see our seniors again, but even if it means our death, we have to blow up that factory and the sons of bitches in it! Isn't that right, Yoon Sang-Ki?!"

Seeing Kwak Cheol-Ho's bloodshot eyes and clenched jaws, Yoon sang-Ki's face crumpled like an angry cat.

"Team Two! Get your ass on that hill!" Kwak Cheol-Ho ordered.

Yoon Sang-Ki, who was still crouching, moved so quickly that it looked as if someone was dragging him across an icy field with a string.

"Yoon Sang-Ki! Do whatever it takes to kill all those motherfuckers, you hear me?!"

Whoosh!

Kwak Cheol-Ho raised his body to shoot.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Following his lead, the members of Team One all simultaneously stood up and opened fire, sending the enemies running toward them to the ground. However, not long after, those still in the enormous factory behind them began suppressing the South Korean special forces team.

Ratatatata! Ratatatata!

The enemy machine gun sent another heap of red light toward them. The onslaught of bullets soon hit their cover.

Clank!

Kang Chan raised his rifle above his shoulder.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow pow!

Woo Hee-Seung and Choi Jong-Il were with Kang Chan during the battle in China and Africa. However, this was still Woo Hee-Seung's first time witnessing him miss.

They immediately threw themselves to either side of Kang Chan and opened fire.

Pew! Pew! Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! Pew!

How could Kang Chan see their enemies? How could he figure out where they were while running at full speed? How could he secure and attack from an advantageous position in such a short period?

Pew! Pew! Pew!

While trading blows with the enemy, Um Ji-Hwan spat out the saliva lodged in his throat.

Kang Chan aside, the postures and attitudes of Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, and Lee Doo-Bum surprised him. Much like him, they, too, choked and gasped for breath. However, their eyes still glinted.

Du du du! Pew! Du du! Pew! Du du du! Pow pow pow!

Chk.

They were still dazed when Kang Chan began barking orders through the radio.

“It’s the regular army. Lee Doo-Bum! Get into position at the hill to our left! Um Ji-Hwan! Cover him!”

Whoosh!

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Kang Chan stood up and let a couple of bullets loose.

PEW! Pew! Pew! PEW!

The agents beside him followed suit.

Right after, Lee Doo-Bum nudged Um Ji-Hwan’s shoulder. He then quickly headed to his newly designated position.

If Um Ji-Hwan hadn’t trained for scenarios like this numerous times, he never would’ve been able to follow Lee Doo-Bum. Urgently trailing behind him, he finally realized that Kang Chan and the others were buying time for Lee Doo-Bum.

‘But they didn’t even say anything,’ Um Ji-Hwan thought.

Thud! Clank!

Lee Doo-Bum threw himself to where Kang Chan had ordered him to go, then immediately went prone and began shooting every enemy he could see.

Is this what experience does to a person? Is this how a veteran is supposed to act? Is this why they can be so damn calm all the time?

Following Lee Doo-Bum’s lead, Um Ji-Hwan also dove to the ground and went prone. He then gritted his teeth, realizing that he had not yet learned how to fight as mechanically as the others.

I’m going to learn! Just like how I was saved by one of my seniors, I’ll be the one rescuing the agent next to me in a dangerous situation someday!

Pew! Clank! Pew! Clank! Pew! Clank!

Lee Doo-Bum shot down their enemies like a machine.

Chk.

“We’re going to push toward our enemies! Woo Hee-Seung, take charge of our left flank! Choi Jong-Il, our right! I want everyone else covering us!”

Despite the loud gunshots, they still clearly heard Kang Chan’s orders through the radio.

Whoosh!

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung charged onward almost the same time.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

Lee Doo-Bum and the five agents whom they had left behind immediately shot at the enemies that were hiding.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Even though he could only see their turbans, Kang Chan, while running, embedded bullets into the foreheads of their enemies.

Amid the darkness of the night, with each pull of the trigger, the sparks from his rifle’s muzzle momentarily illuminated his glinting eyes.

After some time, they finally reached the small hill where their enemies were hiding.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Kang Chan fired three more shots, clearing out any hostile that could still hold a gun.

“Ugh.”

Rustle. Rustle.

Clank!

Grasping their shoulder, the enemy in front of Choi Jong-Il staggered back. Sparks soon flashed from his rifle as he buried three bullets in their forehead.

It didn’t take long for them to realize that half of their opponents’ corpses were wearing military uniforms. The other half were wearing Islamic clothing.

Chapter 295.2: The National Flag They’re Proud Of (1)

Chk.

"Gather ‘round,” Kang Chan radioed in.

As ordered, the agents quickly made their way to him.

Click!

Holding his rifle in his right hand, he fiercely turned to the area ahead of them.

This was the border on the outskirts.

Sherman, you son of a bitch!

CIA Director Sherman had told him that the United States was working with the anti-Gaddafi regime. However, in reality, they seemed to have failed to stop the Gaddafi regime’s military.

Since there was no way the CIA would've been unaware of this, it was likely that while the CIA was going to help Kang Chan and his team, it would still be better for them if all of the South Korean soldiers died here.

The agents stood behind Kang Chan.

"There's the steel tower," he said.

Light-gray buildings flanked the road at the foot of the hill. The steel tower he mentioned was on the rooftop of a building that was behind three or four other establishments.

As Kang Chan unmovingly glared at the steel tower, his subordinates silently examined their surroundings, cautiously ensuring that there were no other threats around them.

The DGSE doesn't know about this?

Could Romaine, the Director-General of the DGSE, really be unaware that the soldiers of the Gaddafi regime would be waiting for them even though he had photos of Mohammad Zrif and had even figured out how many would be guarding him?

Romaine likely wants us to die here too, just like Sherman does. They probably find it distasteful that South Korea, which hadn't really done much until now, is suddenly acting cocky just because it found a treasure.

Keeping his glare fixed on the darkness, Kang Chan called, "Um Ji-Hwan."

Only when Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung looked at him did Um Ji-Hwan barely managed to respond with a "Sir?"

Kang Chan turned his head toward him. "Do you think you can move here the same way you did when we played jokgu?"

That's not fair!

In this situation, no one would be able to immediately get what Kang Chan was getting at and answer such a question accordingly. Hence, Um Ji-Hwan only blinked in response.

"You and I are going to go into that steel tower. The border on the outskirts is broken, but those fuckers are choosing to hold their position anyway because they're waiting for us to go inside. We'll circle around the back while Choi Jong-Il and the agents draw their attention," Kang Chan explained, pointing to the right side of the downhill road with his right index finger.

'Does that mean I have to run again?' Um Ji-Hwan thought.

"The problem is that we have to go up to the rooftop of that building at the back before we can reach it. You're the only person I know who can do that."

"I'll do it," Um Ji-Hwan immediately answered. He then gritted his teeth, preparing himself for the arduous challenges ahead of him.

"Alright. Choi Jong-Il, I need you to stall and draw as much of the enemy's attention as possible. At least for now, it would be safer to assume that we're up against the regular army. You are to prepare and fight accordingly. The UIS doesn't know how to wait. If we were up against those fuckers, they would have already run over here in groups, and they wouldn't have even bothered being quiet about it," Kang Chan said.

"Yes, sir," Choi Jong-Il firmly answered.

"I'll radio you when we reach our destination. While waiting, I want you to keep pushing forward until you get close enough for our enemies to respond."

"Please leave it to me."

Clank. Click.

Kang Chan changed the magazine loaded in his rifle.

Clunk. Click.

Realizing why Kang Chan was reloading his gun a little later, Um Ji-Hwan swiftly copied him.

"Let's go," Kang Chan said afterward.

He began making his way to their target location. Um Ji-Hwan followed right behind him.

The sniper in Yoon Sang-Ki's team made quick work of the enemies near them. Right after, he took out the person manning the 20mm machine gun, allowing them to breathe much more easily.

Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du! Pow pow pow!

However, they were still yet to make any significant dent on the number of their enemies.

"*Ugh.*"

Kwak Cheol-Ho looked down at the sunken wound on his left shoulder. Due to the skin around it falling off, its size had grown to that of a fist.

Even in the darkness, he could see blood rushing out of his shoulder seemingly in clumps. He could also see the blood seeping into the national flag on his forearm, staining it red.

Those motherfuckers! They think the South Korean Special Forces team is not even worth the dick of some dog, huh?

He couldn't be any gladder for having sent Yoon Sang-Ki away from their position.

"Lee Seok-Jae," Kwak Cheol-Ho called.

Lee Seok-Jae, who was shooting at the enemies from right beside him, quickly looked at him.

"Give me a C-4."

That was an order from his superior officer. Hence, it didn't even occur to him to ask Kwak Cheol-Ho what he needed it for or tell him that it would be dangerous to use it now.

Lee Seok-Jae quickly held out the bag, which he had placed beside him earlier, to Kwak Cheol-Ho.

Du du du! Pow pow pow! Pew! Pew! Du du du! Pew!

Another gunfight soon broke out. Their enemies were beginning to resort to desperate measures to take their 20mm machine gun back, which certainly gave whoever had it a huge edge over the battle.

“Ugh.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho opened the bag, took out a C-4, and secured it into his vest and around his waist. He then inserted electric wires into the explosive and connected them all together. Now, all that was left for him to do was connect the wires to an ignition device.

Lee Seok-Jae glanced at Kwak Cheol-Ho. In what almost seemed like a snarl, he hastily asked, “What are you doing?!”

However, Kwak Cheol-Ho just laughed. *“Phuhu.”*

Ever since he had become a part of the special forces team, he had done nothing but fight to his heart’s content. During his service to his country, they had blown up one of China’s airports and fought against the seemingly endless waves of Quds that had ambushed them in Africa. In both of those missions, they had found themselves in a situation so horrible he thought they would never get out of alive.

Click. Click.

Kwak Cheol-Ho carefully inserted the ends of the electrical wires into an ignition device.

He could set a timer for the C-4’s explosion or simply press the red button strong enough to damage the plastic cover at the bottom. Either way, he would be putting on a fiery show that would start with a *BANG*.

Du du du! Du du! Du du du!

Lee Seok-Jae furiously glared at Kwak Cheol-Ho. However, he soon returned his attention to their enemies, who were still raining down bullets upon them.

Meanwhile, Kwak Cheol-Ho looked to his left, finding the corpse of one of his men. He then turned his gaze to the dark skies above him.

For his plan to succeed, he would have to crawl.

Kwak Cheol-Ho and his subordinates were in an area that Yoon Sang-Ki’s team could easily envelop in cover fire. With their help, Kwak Cheol-Ho should be able to crawl all the way to the front of the enemy lines without being shot down.

After setting the timer, he would hold the button and get as close to their enemies as possible. If he could get inside their ranks, he would be able to deal a heavy blow on them.

He just had to make his way through the defenses right up front. Although their opponents still had a lot of men, Kwak Cheol-Ho realized that all of them were positioned right in front of them. After all, if there had been more, they wouldn’t have taken such a passive approach to this fight. Rather, they would have already surrounded him and his team and unleashed a hail of bullets on them.

With that thought in mind, he decided to proceed with his plan.

Kwak Cheol-Ho laughed again. *“Phuhuhuhu!”*

He wanted to see Cha Dong-Gyun one last time. He also missed Seok Kang-Ho and Kang Chan.

Although only a part of his shoulder had been blown off, he still found himself in unbelievably horrible pain. It made him wonder how Kang Chan managed to hold onto him and Cha Dong-Gyun and rescue them from falling into the pit in Africa.

Whoosh! Slit! Whoosh! Stab!

Kang Chul-Gyu and four of his men unsheathed their knives and ran until they finally got past the enemy lines.

Du du du! Pow pow pow! Pew! Thud! Du du! Pew!

While Kang Chul-Gyu prevented their enemies from shooting them, Kwon Yong-Hee immediately rushed toward his next target. He then stabbed their neck, used his strength to pull the knife out, and then slit the necks of anyone else who were standing in their way.

You motherfuckers! You killed half of our juniors! They were just starting to shine brightly like the stars above! Those amazing people even called me and my fellow has-been DMZ soldiers their sunbaes and yelled that they were proud of us at the aisle of the plane!

Their enemies seemed to have caught wind of their operation, considering they had been waiting for them. That was precisely why Kwon Yong-Hee was doing his best to clear the area as fast as he could. A situation like this wasn't a problem for the DMZ team. After all, they would never back down from such a predicament. However, considering the hostiles in front of them seemed to have been anticipating their sudden attack, Kwon Yong-Hee concluded that their juniors were in danger.

It made him impatient.

Du du du! Du du! Pow! Pew!

'Why are you working so hard to take us down, you sons of bitches?!' Kwon Yong-Hee thought.

Whoosh! Slit!

Kwon Yong-Hee slit another neck open, causing his target's blood to spill all over the ground. Afterward, with his eyes still glinting, he took a few moments to examine their surroundings and keep track of their situation. However, as he did, he spotted an enemy to his left, their rifle aimed at one of the people who were following him.

Swoosh! Bam!

Out of sheer reflex, Kwon Yong-Hee ran over and tackled his colleague away from the line of fire.

Du du! Pow!

Feeling a stiff and burning pain course through him, he looked down at his chest, finding blood gushing out of a gunshot wound.

Whoosh! Stab!

Kwon Yong-Hee heard one of his colleagues stabbing the enemy who had just shot him. At the same time, the man he had just saved rushed toward another opponent.

Thud.

Kwon Yong-Hee fell forward. However, before he could hit the ground, he bent down and knelt instead, pushing past the pain through sheer force of will.

'He said his name was Kwak Cheol-Ho, right?'

He was a really amazing junior. Kwon Yong-Hee found it unfortunate that such a man had to call him 'sunbae.' On the other hand, he couldn't help but be grateful that his junior was proud of him.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Kwon Yong-Hee could hear Kang Chul-Gyu unloading his magazine at their enemies as he made his way toward him. Despite all the years that had gone by, his shooting skills had not changed at all.

Using every last bit of strength left in him, Kwon Yong-Hee turned his head to the left. He gazed at the national flag that they were so proud of—the flag of the nation they would sin against their family to protect—one last time before his head lifelessly drooped down.

Chapter 296.1: The National Flag They're Proud Of (2)

Swoosh! Crack!

With a swift jerk, Kang Chul-Gyu twisted his target's head to the side, breaking their neck. When they fell low enough for him to see the top of their head, he slit their neck with his bayonet.

Slice!

He then grabbed onto his enemy's lifeless body and silently laid them on the floor.

Executing the same tactics that they used at the DMZ, Kang Chul-Gyu and his men scattered after relentlessly launching attacks on their opponents. Once they went past their defenses, they snuck around like cats in the night, cutting open their enemies' throats.

Kang Chul-Gyu didn't know how many enemies they had collectively killed. If they were in a forest like the battlefields back at the DMZ, they would have had far fewer casualties.

Unfortunately, despite how weak their enemies were, the light-gray buildings around them made it hard to conduct guerilla warfare, which would have allowed them to take out their targets undetected.

Kang Chul-Gyu lowered his rifle. Using his gaze, he gestured to the window on the other side.

Rustle. Rustle.

Oh Gwang-Taek's movements made a lot of noises, but Kang Chul-Gyu didn't seem to mind.

During his days as a gangster, Oh Gwang-Taek used to live in dorms with his colleagues. He had also experienced being the youngest member of a gang and participating in small and large armed fights. Later on, he took over and ruled over half of Gangnam, the most important part of Seoul.

In other words, he had lived completely prepared to die at any moment. However, that mindset began to crack in Mongolia, then finally broke into pieces here in Al-Aziziyah, Libya.

Every time Oh Gwang-Taek looked at Kang Chul-Gyu and the others, he always got a feeling of what life was like for those who were truly prepared to die. He was not merely among such courageous people. They also respected him and called him 'President Oh' even though Kang Chul-Gyu could easily twist and break Oh Gwang-Taek's neck if he really wanted to.

If these people suddenly decided to turn into gangsters, it wouldn't take long for them to secure a territory and live in luxury for the rest of their lives. Instead, they were out here feeling moved by the national flag on their forearms and spending their final breaths asking others to look after their juniors.

Based on distance alone, Kang Chul-Gyu's DMZ team should reach their target location before Kang Chan's National Intelligence Team would since the latter was headed to the other end of Al-Aziziyah. The special forces team that was running to the Tripoli district would be the last to arrive.

That was why the DMZ team fought with no regard for their lives. They didn't even have to explain themselves. Their eyes and actions were all that were needed to show their determination to eliminate their opponents and help their juniors.

They were fighting against an army that numbered around a hundred and fifty. Nevertheless, only four of the DMZ team had been attacking them and paving the way for the others. When everyone else joined in, their enemies' counterfire dramatically weakened.

Kang Chul-Gyu flinched.

Like a stray cat caught trying to steal a fish, Oh Gwang-Taek stopped moving when he noticed Kang Chul-Gyu had crouched down a little.

They didn't even hear or see anything, yet Kang Chul-Gyu stopped walking right in front of the back door, preventing them from going outside. He then reached his left arm forward.

As Oh Gwang-Taek briefly exhaled, seemingly trying to be quiet, a man wearing Islamic clothes suddenly walked through the door.

Swish! Crack!

The enemy had their gun at the ready, its muzzle pointed in the direction of Kang Chul-Gyu and the others. Nevertheless, although they certainly had their guard up when they entered, Kang Chul-Gyu still managed to break their neck before they could react. Oh Gwang-Taek didn't even notice him move his left hand.

The enemy did see Kang Chul-Gyu, but he didn't give them the chance to pull the trigger.

After pulling their corpse toward him and laying them down against the wall, he slit their neck deep enough for about half of it to open. Dark-red blood gushed out from the long cut.

Kang Chul-Gyu stood up and headed toward the door once more. However, before he could enter, another person walked out. When he instinctively unsheathed his bayonet and swung it toward their neck, his target also drew the weapon attached to their shoulder.

The blade of Kang Chul-Gyu's bayonet was already pressing against the man's neck by the time they both stopped. Fortunately, they didn't hurt each other.

Right in front of him was the soldier who had said it was painful to watch their juniors chanting their motto. With a look from Kang Chul-Gyu, he quickly came inside.

"We're almost done clearing the area," the man explained.

Oh Gwang-Taek was stunned. Their team of only fifteen men had already killed most of their enemies.

The soldier continued, "Dong-Sik's team has already surrounded our target building, sir."

'Considering Kang Chul-Gyu alone has killed more than forty soldiers, I shouldn't be so surprised that we're almost done here,' Oh Gwang-Taek thought.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded at his subordinate, then turned to Oh Gwang-Taek. "Let's remove the safety pins on the grenades and then toss them over."

Rustle. Rustle.

Even though they were all walking to the same destination and in the same manner, only Oh Gwang-Taek was making noises.

Once they had gone past the back door of the building, the soldiers hiding behind the light-gray walls greeted Kang Chul-Gyu with respect.

"Our enemies seem to have assigned all of their men to defense. Since they don't appear to be here anymore, why don't we just head straight in?" one of the soldiers asked.

"I want you and Il-Gyu to head inside with me. We'll blast our way through with grenades." How are things upstairs?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked Dong-Sik.

"We have already sent two men over. They are standing by right now," Nam Il-Gyu quickly answered.

Click.

Kang Chul-Gyu held up his rifle.

The two other soldiers with him removed the pins on their grenades and then quickly approached the building.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Kang Chul-Gyu swiftly shot down the two enemies who had stuck their heads out of the windows on the second floor. They then threw their grenades into the windows and crouched behind a wall.

BANG!

Along with a powerful explosion, intense vibrations coursed through the building. Debris were blasted out the windows.

Whoosh!

Before the debris even hit the ground, the two held onto the window frame and jumped inside. Kang Chul-Gyu then kicked open the door and ran inside the building.

Terrifying gunshots from their rifles rang out. After a while, silence fell on the area.

Pew! Du du! Pew! Pew! Du du! Pew!

The sparks from their rifles flashed through the windows.

Holding his breath, Oh Gwang-Taek wondered, *'What happened?'*

Screech.

The door soon opened, and Kang Chul-Gyu walked out. Four soldiers followed right behind him, holding a man in Islamic clothes.

They had come in with only three people but somehow came out with five. It took Oh Gwang-Taek a moment to finally realize that the two soldiers that they had said were standing by upstairs had actually been on the roof of the building.

Thud!

The four soldiers made their captive kneel on the ground. Kang Chul-Gyu then took out some documents and quickly flipped through them, searching for a picture of the man.

The man, sporting a curly beard and a turban, glared at Kang Chul-Gyu as if to say that he would never surrender to them or divulge any crucial information that could lead to the downfall of their organization.

"He's one of the targets. Get rid of him," Kang Chul-Gyu ordered.

Following his order, Nam Il-Gyu obediently unsheathed his bayonet.

Stab!

"Urgh!"

Slice! Thud!

Oh Gwang-Taek tried hard not to frown.

Nam Il-Gyu stabbed the man in the neck. With the blade still inside, he swung his bayonet around thrice before finally cutting through to the side. By the time he was done, more than half of the man's neck had been split open, and the muscles inside it had been brutally ripped apart.

Rustle.

Kang Chul-Gyu folded the photo of the dead man in half, then slipped the documents back into his chest pocket.

"What's next?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"The men are already standing by inside the building," one of the soldiers responded.

"Let's go."

The soldiers did as instructed.

Oh Gwang-Taek watched them climb up the roof. He wondered if they should be moving so carelessly. However, he soon shook his head, dismissing the thought.

With their rifles at the ready, the soldiers on the roof constantly changed positions, watching out for potential danger. Standing guard below them was Kang Chul-Gyu, who boasted superhuman shooting skills.

Oh Gwang-Taek was scared. Never in his life did he expect to meet individuals whose skills revolved around killing people who were trained to fight.

"Hey! Yoon Sang-Ki!" someone yelled.

"Fuck!"

Du du! Du du du!

After Lee Seok-Jae radioed in what was happening, Yoon Sang-Ki quickly ran over and pulled away the electrical wires wrapped around Kwak Cheol-Ho, tearing them off the explosives.

Pew! Du du du! Pew! Du du du! Pew!

Despite the gunshots that were endlessly ringing around them, Yoon Sang-Ki just kept glaring at Kwak Cheol-Ho.

"I don't care if you shoot me in the head for not following your orders or send me before a court-martial after this! I need you to remember that we're South Korea's best special forces team!" Yoon Sang-Ki yelled. "We are more than skilled enough to kill all of those sons of bitches and blow up the factory without having to resort to something like this!"

"Did you really just say that to my face, motherfucker?"

"What do you think the captain and the lieutenant would say if they saw you acting like this? What would you do if I was the one planning to sacrifice myself? What about our sunbaes, huh? Have you already forgotten what they said back on the plane? They said they're proud of us, man! Do you really think this stunt of yours would do their feelings justice?! You're the commander of this team, for fuck's sake! How are we supposed to act when our leader is acting like this?! You didn't fight so hard for your life in Africa just to do this!" Yoon Sang-Ki exclaimed.

Chapter 296.2: The National Flag They're Proud Of (2)

PEW! PEW! Du du du! Du du! PEW! Du du!

While Yoon Sang-Ki convinced Choi Jong-Il to abandon his self-sacrificial plan, their sniper swiftly eliminated the enemies rushing toward the 20mm machine gun.

"We have to do whatever it takes to survive and accomplish this mission! If we get backed into a corner and find ourselves with nothing left to lose, then I would be more than willing to charge out into the enemy's line of fire with you! But right now, hyung, you better look around you! None of these bastards would think you're cool for sacrificing yourself!"

Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! PEW!

Gunshots continued to echo

Chk.

"Things are starting to get busy! Bring over the C-4 already! I'll bring it right in the middle of enemy lines!" someone said.

Chk.

"Fuck! I've already been shot anyway, so send me instead!" another responded.

Chk.

"You crazy fuckers! You're giving the second lieutenant a hard time!"

The soldiers kept talking on the radio.

Chk.

"I'm sorry, my family!" one of them shouted. Although it was out of the blue, the rest of the special forces team continued the motto anyway.

"I gave my life for my country and my comrades!"

"Heard that?! Let's keep fighting until we draw our last breath! That's what the special forces are made of!" Yoon Sang-Ki yelled like crazy.

Perhaps surprised by the shouts, their enemies suddenly stopped attacking. Heavy silence filled their surroundings.

Kwak Cheol-Ho laughed. "*Huhu. Huhuhu!*"

"*Hehehe!*"

"*Hahaha.*"

"*Phuhuhu!*"

Laughter burst from all around them.

"Alright! Fuck it! Let's fight until the end!" Kwak Cheol-Ho yelled.

"Fucking hell! You're finally acting like the hyung I respect," Yoon Sang-Ki responded.

"Shut it, you bastard!"

Yoon Sang-Ki smirked, then went back to his position.

"Let's clear this place up already and help our sunbaes! This place is such a mess that I can only imagine how hard they have it on their end!" he shouted.

Considering the situation and their enemies' numbers, Yoon Sang-Ki sounded quite absurd. However, no one argued against him.

After running for ten minutes, Kang Chan finally reached the back of the building. He then aimed his rifle behind him.

"*Haa. Haaa.*"

Um Ji-Hwan sounded as if he was trying to be quiet, making his breathing all weird.

"See that building? We'll go up to its roof and jump toward the building with the steel tower," Kang Chan explained.

Perplexed, Um Ji-Hwan turned to Kang Chan. "Pardon?"

We're going up together? I thought that I was going up to the roof alone.

"Ready?"

"Yes," Um Ji-Hwan replied.

Seemingly unaware that Um Ji-Hwan was looking at him in confusion, Kang Chan's eyes glinted.

'Who was the insolent little fucker that got on the truck like that and drove off before we could get this far?' Kang Chan wondered.

He remembered a truck driving past them after his team had killed the guards at the border. Considering it still hadn't returned yet, their enemies had likely sent it out to transport someone or something out of the area.

Kang Chan was at least sure that Mohammad Zif didn't escape. That man would rather strap bombs to him than leave. Even if they were driven to a corner, a UIS executive would never run away. After all, according to one of their commandments, disgracing a holy war meant not going to heaven. Their organization wouldn't ever forgive them either.

The building that they targeted had the frames that divided its floors going around its exterior.

To climb the building, they would have to jump and grab onto the frames first. They would then grab onto the window frame on the second floor and continue to go up from there.

Once Um Ji-Hwan was ready, Kang Chan pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

"We're going up the building from this side. Lee Doo-Bum—keep an eye out for potential enemies on the roof. Shoot on sight."

Chk.

"Yes, sir."

Chk.

"Choi Jong-Il, act according to the situation. If you and your team make your way through the siege ahead of us, you are to enter the building with the steel tower immediately."

Chk.

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan crouched down and looked at Um Ji-Hwan. He then led the way to their target location.

After two minutes of nothing but darkness and the smell of dirt, they finally reached a wall. They pushed through the nervousness that made their hair stand on end.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Soon, muzzle flashes lit up Choi Jong-Il's position.

Du du du! Du du du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du! Pew!

Kang Chan jumped toward the frame in the middle of the building.

Swish! Bam! Swish! Bam!

Like a cat, Um Ji-Hwan followed Kang Chan and dangled on the frame. Now filled with spite and a sense of duty to complete this operation, he no longer hesitated.

The two pulled themselves up the frame and secured their footing on it. They then jumped toward a window and dangled just below it. After making sure the coast was clear, they climbed onto it.

Pew. Pew. Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du!

‘*Ugh.*’

Rustle.

As they propped their arms on the protruding frame of the window, they heard Lee Doo-Bum opening fire. Not long after, an enemy collapsed on the roof with a resounding *thud*.

Chk.

"The roof is clear," a soldier reported.

Kang Chan quickly held onto the bars of the window and went up the building.

Um Ji-Hwan moved like some kind of wild animal. Quick and flexible, he took different approaches to their climb. Soon, he had grabbed onto another window frame and started his ascent to the roof.

Bam! Bam!

They held onto the edges of the roof, their bodies swaying in the air.

‘*Hnghh.*’

Kang Chan pressed his elbows against the railing of the roof, then pushed against it to raise himself up. Afterward, he stepped down from the railing and landed next to the corpse of an enemy that had a hole in his head.

Du du du! Du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du!

Sparks lit up the area below them with every gunshot they heard. Kang Chan could even see the red and white traces of the bullets both sides were sending toward each other.

Clank!

Kang Chan aimed his rifle ahead of him, then used his index finger to point Um Ji-Hwan to his position.

Whoosh!

After confirming that Um Ji-Hwan had hidden himself at the end of the rooftop, he immediately jumped to the building next door.

Click!

Once he had regained his balance, he swiftly made his way to the edge of the building that was across from where he had just jumped from. He then bobbed his index and middle fingers forward twice.

Clatter!

Using his agility to his advantage, Um Ji-Hwan easily moved to his new position, which was a little further from Kang Chan.

Despite having already jumped from building to building thrice, they still hadn't come across any enemies.

Du du du! Pew! Pew! Du du! Pew! Pew!

The loud gunshots from the rifles below concealed any noise they made. However, it couldn't be used as an excuse for their enemies' extremely weak defense, especially when taking into consideration the fact that they were assigned to guard a large perimeter.

On the other hand, this could simply be proof that they were not expecting Kang Chan and his men to go up to the roof or that they didn't have enough troops to split into groups to begin with.

Those sons of bitches!

Either way, this showed that they treated the South Korean soldiers as rebels that they could easily throw into disarray by simply defending the frontlines.

Contrary to their beliefs, however, Kang Chan and Um Ji-Hwan was already on top of the building right next to the one with the steel tower.

Swoosh.

Quietly, Kang Chan pushed forward and leaned against the wall of the rooftop. He then raised his head and took a peek at the roof of the next building.

Du du du! Pew! Pew! Du du du du!

The area was guarded by two people. However, they seemed distracted by the battle that was currently underway just below them.

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

After taking them out, Kang Chan jumped over the one-meter distance in between his building and the next.

Haah. Haah.

His nerves were completely on edge now.

Kang Chan ordered Um Ji-Hwan to guard the entrance of the rooftop he was on, then headed to the wooden door on the rooftop.

Kang Chan riddled the door with bullets, then shot the door handle as well.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Crash!

As he did, they heard someone tumbling and crashing down the stairs.

Bam! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Kang Chan fiercely kicked the door open and sent a bullet flying into the forehead of the person running down the stairs. Afterward, he quickly took cover.

Ting.

If Seok Kang-Ho was with them right now, Kang Chan would've already thrown a grenade. Unfortunately, Um Ji-Hwan still lacked experience.

Swoosh!

Ting. Ting.

As Kang Chan took out his second grenade, Um Ji-Hwan held his first grenade.

BOOM!!

The powerful blast flung debris out to the door.

Swish! Swish!

Kang Chan and Um Ji-Hwan threw another grenade each.

The explosives rolled toward their enemies before blowing parts of the interior off the building.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

With their opponents still disoriented, Kang Chan and Um Ji-Hwan ran inside, finding its interior a mess. The furniture were scattered all over the place, including a broken wooden table. They also found five unconscious people completely covered in blood.

Du du du! Du du!

Soon, they heard people running up the stairs from the floor below them.

I can't believe these bastards managed to do this to us! If they didn't overwhelm us with their numbers, they would've been no match against us!

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Ting!

Kang Chan shot three more people in the forehead. At the same time, Um Ji-Hwan removed the safety pin of a grenade and threw it.

Swish!

Having developed a bit of chemistry, they now worked well with each other.

They heard someone yelling in Arabic, followed by a deafening blast and powerful vibrations. It would be stupid to stall during moments like this. Hence, Kang Chan immediately ran down the stairs.

Whoosh!

Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow! Pew! Pow!

Bursting into the floor below, he found a man writhing in pain, his hands gripping his stomach, and another leaning against the wall with his rifle propped up against his leg. There was also another person who seemed to have fallen unconscious. Kang Chan shot all of them in the forehead.

Clatter. Clatter.

Going up to the floor above them again, he found Um Ji-Hwan waiting for him. He seemed to have flipped over all their foes with his foot.

Son of a bitch!

Kang Chan glared at the man closest to the wall.

It's Mohammad Zrif!

Covered in blood, Mohammad Zrif spoke to them in Arabic. His eyes were filled with intense fury.

Kang Chan smirked in response.

Click!

The muzzle of his gun flashed five times, lighting up the dark room. Three more followed.

Chapter 297: End like this? (1)

Whoomp! Boom!

As the grenade blew up and sent debris flying in every direction, the DMZ team members dove through the window.

Bang!

Kang Chul-Gyu burst through the door and charged ahead.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Rifle gunfire erupted, soon followed by even more shots and the echoes of grenade explosions. Amid their climactic situation, the soldiers stayed true to their custom, apprehending the UIS officer, their target, and forcing him to kneel on the street.

From the shadows, the enemy observed Kang Chul-Gyu and his men with a complex gaze.

"Is that the bastard?"

In truth, their captive's actual role mattered little. Guilty or not, he had been marked for death. Nam Il-Gyu was simply verifying if the man was indeed an officer. At the very least, he strongly resembled one. He also had a defiant air about him, but Nam Il-Gyu's fierce expression and tone involuntarily made him cautious.

Rustle.

Kang Chul-Gyu took out and looked through some documents. Glancing at the man, he then tilted his head.

"Yes. Get rid of him."

Nam Il-Gyu unsheathed his bayonet and slit the enemy's throat, nearly decapitating him with one swift motion.

Thwack!

"Gurgle. Grrk."

Swoosh. Slice! Snap!

Thump!

The enemy drooped lifelessly, his head hanging at an unnatural angle. The sight left a chilling finality to the scene.

Whoosh! Thump! Whoosh! Thump!

As they slit their target's throat on one side of the road, gunshots and people dropping to the ground echoed from the rooftops around them. Nevertheless, no one showed any sign of tension or bothered to turn their heads. If an enemy found them, Kang Chul-Gyu would simply aim and shoot before they could react, ensuring a clean end.

"Let's hurry. We've got two more to go," Kang Chul-Gyu commanded.

"Yes, sir," Oh Gwang-Taek responded.

Following Kang Chul-Gyu had taught him the reason they sent four men ahead during their first encounter with the enemy. The moment they penetrated the enemy's vanguard, the DMZ team demonstrated force so tremendous that it left him wondering if anyone could even stand against them.

Is this what they call gorillas? Gestapo? Gaira...?

The exact terminology wasn't important. All that mattered was that they only had two targets left. The team picked up the pace.

Tap-tap! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Both friendly and enemy gunshots, accompanied by flashes of light, continued reverberating from the rooftops.

Whizz!

A moment later, a white figure crashed on the ground from the building ahead.

Thump!

The person's fall was followed by a chilling silence that raised the hair on the back of everyone's necks. An enemy dressed in Islamic attire had just hit the opposite wall of the alley, his neck and arms twisted grotesquely.

Did he fall from being shot?

Oh Gwang-Taek glanced up.

"Aaagh!"

A desperate scream tore through the night as another man in Islamic clothes plummeted from the rooftop.

"Aah! Aaaggggh!"

The victim this time was alive.

Thud! Whoosh! Bang! Whoosh! Bang!

Nam Il-Gyu fired two dispassionate shots into the body that had slammed into the ground. They walked for about a minute more. This time, they came across one of their men. He was squatting in front of a window, waiting for Kang Chul-Gyu.

Click-clack! Click!

As Nam Il-Gyu approached the window, Kang Chul-Gyu, who had just reloaded, nodded.

Whisk. Whisk. Boom! Boom!

After two explosions, three men charged in and riddled anyone they saw with bullets.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Tap-tap! Whoosh! Snap! Whoosh!

Clunk.

Moments later, the door was forcibly swung open. Kang Chul-Gyu, holding a rifle in his right hand, and Nam Il-Gyu, bleeding from his forehead, were the first to exit.

Screech.

Two soldiers followed behind them, dragging a man covered in blood across the floor. Kang Chul-Gyu looked away from the documents, finding the enemy's head, although only by chance, facing away from him.

Crack!

"Ugh!"

Nam Il-Gyu kicked the enemy's cheekbone, breaking it and turning the head around. The pain caused the seemingly dead man to regain consciousness. Although covered in blood, his face was still at least half-recognizable.

"Get rid of him," ordered Kang Chul-Gyu.

Swoosh! Thwack! Thwack!

Oh Gwang-Taek turned his gaze away this time.

"Fucking bastards! I will chase anyone who dares touch South Korea and challenge this Taegeuk flag to the ends of hell and kill them on sight!"

Nam Il-Gyu wiped his blood-stained knife on the corpse and stood up. As if on cue, Kang Chul-Gyu then headed to the last building.

'Why were the enemies just waiting for grenades? Shouldn't they at least try to return fire?'

However, Oh Gwang-Taek's thoughts were short-lived. The team had surrounded the building, and the soldier who had just been under a window was missing.

Is this the wrong place?

As Oh Gwang-Taek turned his gaze, Yang Dong-Sik quickly walked over to Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Sunbae-nim, since this is the last one, please let us handle this our way," Yang Dong-Sik requested.

When Kang Chul-Gyu nodded, Yang Dong-Sik gestured toward the rooftop. He then looked down and turned to Nam Il-Gyu.

"Let's go."

The two men ran toward the wall.

Step. Step.

Meanwhile, despite not having thrown any grenades, Kang Chul-Gyu casually walked toward the entrance.

Staring at Kang Chul-Gyu and the two other men's backs, Oh Gwang-Taek wondered, '*Isn't that dangerous?*'

Whoosh! Tap-tap! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

As he did, gunshots echoed from the second floor.

Whizz! Whizz! Crash!

Seemingly signaled by the noise, Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik immediately leaped through the window. At the same time, Kang Chul-Gyu kicked the door open and rushed inside.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Rat-a-tat-tat! Whoosh!

Muzzle flashes and gunfire erupted from all over the building. Momentary but inevitable stifling silence then followed.

Creak.

The door opened once more. Kang Chul-Gyu emerged first, followed by five soldiers, each one dragging an enemy whom they had incapacitated with gunshot or knife wounds.

Did they intentionally capture them alive?

Oh Gwang-Taek now genuinely considered Kang Chul-Gyu and the soldiers as beings from another world.

Kang Chul-Gyu walked over to Oh Gwang-Taek. "We are about to demonstrate what happens to those who mess with our soldiers or agents. It would be better for you not to watch this, President Oh."

"*Aaaaggggh!*"

Before he could finish, Nam Il-Gyu had already thrust his knife into the ear of an enemy he was holding by the head.

"Did you have to mess with our juniors, you fucking bastards?!" Nam Il-Gyu shouted.

"*Aaaaaaah! Aaaah! Aaaah!*"

Swoosh. Slice!

"Does this... actually help?"

As far as Oh Gwang-Taek knew, cruel retribution often led to far more brutal retaliation.

"This warns our enemies not to start at all unless they're prepared to be subjected to at least this much torture."

"*Aaaah! Aaaah! Aaaaggggh!*"

Amid the horrific screams, Kang Chul-Gyu continued, "All nearby enemies and sympathizers will hear this scream. From here on out, they'll always remember it whenever they think of harming someone from South Korea."

"Aaaah! Aaaah!"

"This gruesome corpse, too."

Oh Gwang-Taek inadvertently looked at Nam Il-Gyu, then quickly shifted his gaze back to Kang Chul-Gyu.

"This is retribution," Kang Chul-Gyu finished.

After eliminating the enemies beside Mohammad Zrif, Um Ji-Hwan came down.

Tap-tap! Splatter! Tap! Splatter!

Now, the enemies were facing Choi Jong-Il and Kang Chan from the front and the back.

Whoosh! Bang! Whoosh! Bang! Rat-a-tat-tat! Whoosh! Bang!

The tide of the battle had completely turned. Neither the Libyan military forces nor the UIS remnants stood a chance against the agents from South Korea's National Intelligence Service, especially since they only outnumbered them two to one.

Ten minutes later, the battle ended.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Following Choi Jong-Il's orders, the agents ensured that they had killed all of their enemies, a tactic he learned while facing Quds in Africa.

Kang Chan took out the radio he had received from the CIA and changed its frequency to channel 2.

Rrrrrr.

The radio's buzz sounded different from what he was used to.

"Abdul. It's the God of Blackfield. What's your current location?"

Rrrrrr.

- We're five minutes away from your drop-off point.

Rrrrrr.

"Head straight to the target location."

Rrrrrr.

"Yes, sir."

Choi Jong-Il remained on guard while the agents confirmed that their enemies were dead. In the meantime, Kang Chan switched the channel to 1.

Rrrrrr.

"Mission accomplished here. What's the situation?"

Rrrrrr.

"Aaaaggh!"

The scream made Kang Chan look at the radio. He immediately put it back to his ear.

"The situation just ended," Kang Chul-Gyu's firmly answered.

Rrrrrr.

"Damage report."

Rrrrrr.

- Two dead. Requesting permission to head straight to Tripoli."

Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk.

Rrrrrr.

"Granted. We'll reconvene in Tripoli," he responded confidently.

Rrrrrr.

"We're on our way."

After their conversation, Kang Chan immediately contacted Choi Jong-Il.

The drilling rigs were enclosed by a three-meter fence crowned with barbed wire, which were coiled in a spring-like fashion. Nearly a hundred people and a 20mm machine gun were blocking the entrance.

Kwak Cheol-Ho believed sending Yoon Sang-Ki and Team Two to the hill was a brilliant move. After all, it led to them securing an M20, giving them a bit of a breather. As a result, although one of them had been killed and three were injured, their nine-man team had eliminated the nearly forty hostiles concentrated around the M20.

Nevertheless, they were still anxious. Time was their greatest adversary. Subtracting two hours of travel from the five total hours they had to accomplish their mission, they only had three hours to clear the area and blow up the facilities.

Chk.

"Looks like we have to make ourselves more enticing to lure our guests," Yoon Sang-Ki radioed in.

Ever since the team had shouted their motto, their enemies had concealed themselves, their determination palpable.

Chk.

"You want to draw them out?"

Chk.

"Dragging this out can only put us in a worse position, can't it? Their silence is unsettling."

While Kwak Cheol-Ho was scanning the enemy's location, lights pierced the darkness from behind them.

Flash. Flash.

Playing to Yoon Sang-Ki's worries, vehicles were advancing toward them, their headlights cutting through the night. The team's expressions hardened, and a heavy silence fell among them.

Kwak Cheol-Ho, unable to use his left hand, awkwardly reached for the radio on his helmet with his right.

Chk.

"Sniper, maintain surveillance on the M20. If that truck has also been fitted with a machine gun, it could present us with an opportunity. Let's seize it."

The weapons of his men clicked and rattled as they checked on their magazines. Not long after, they heard a crackle on the radio, notifying them of an incoming transmission.

Chk.

"This is Kang Chul-Gyu from the DMZ team. We're in the two trucks approaching your location. I repeat. This is Kang Chul-Gyu from the DMZ team. We are in the trucks heading toward you."

'The seniors are already here?' Kwak Cheol-Ho thought.

Chk.

"Sunbae-nim, this is Kwak Cheol-Ho. We believe we have already cleared the area behind us, but we'll cover you anyway just to be sure."

Chk.

"Thanks."

The trucks were only fifty meters away now. Every flash of the headlights illuminated the facilities hidden in the darkness.

Tap-tap! Whizz! Tap-tap! Splatter!

Finally making sense of the situation, the hostiles desperately charged toward the M20.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Gunshots from their sniper immediately followed.

Whoosh! Tap! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Tap-tap! Whoosh!

Would they really let the M20 be taken now? Especially with the legendary DMZ King and his men charging in?

Having parked the trucks at a distance, Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team lowered their stances and rushed forward.

Click! Click! Thud! Thud!

A few moments later, Kang Chul-Gyu reached Kwak Cheol-Ho. Perhaps because the special forces team had been reinforced, the enemies quieted down and buried their heads behind walls again.

"Glad to have you here, sir," Kwak Cheol-Ho greeted.

"Considering how heavily outnumbered you were, you've held up extremely well," Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

After looking at their fallen brother, he refocused on Kwak Cheol-Ho's shoulder. Nam Il-Gyu took out a bandage from his pocket and wrapped it around the wound.

"You've already completed your objectives?"

"Our target location was so poorly guarded that we didn't have much of a problem," Nam Il-Gyu replied.

Oh Gwang-Taek, who was nearby, turned his head toward the two, surprised that they would describe battles like this as smooth.

"This way!"

Yang Dong-Sik and about half of the DMZ team positioned themselves beside Yoon Sang-Ki.

"Great work. You've got quite the beautiful view here."

Yang Dong-Sik quickly surveyed the area ahead of them.

"That's quite a lot of enemies you've been handling."

"No, sir."

"To be able to hold your ground in this situation despite your limited manpower..."

Yang Dong-Sik and the other DMZ team members couldn't help but acknowledge and respect Yoon Sang-Ki and the special forces team's efforts. From their position, they could see the entire facility, including the fence surrounding it and the enemies blocking its entrance. The enemies didn't move, stuck on either side of the 20mm machine gun.

Silence descended upon them once more as Kang Chul-Gyu surveyed the area.

Although they now had enough men to conquer the oil rig, some sacrifices still seemed inevitable no matter how carefully they approached, whether by low crawl or high crawl.

"Nam Il-Gyu," he called.

"Yes, sir," Nam Il-Gyu promptly responded.

"Do you think a grenade launcher, a couple of grenades, and four men will suffice?"

"That would make it worth a try."

"Here we go again," Oh Gwang-Taek mumbled to himself.

Kwak Cheol-Ho looked at them with a puzzled expression.

"Get ready."

"Yes, sir," Nam Il-Gyu answered. He then stepped back.

Kang Chul-Gyu then turned to Kwak Cheol-Ho. "With your permission, I'd like to send five of my men to breach and cross the oil rig's fence. We would have to provide them with cover."

Kwak Cheol-Ho didn't respond immediately.

While the others had adopted an informal tone, the DMZ King maintained a respectful demeanor toward him. It would be quite strange if he merely said, '*Please do!*' and then passively allowed their seniors to undertake such a dangerous mission.

Kang Chul-Gyu softly added, "This is how we usually do things in the DMZ. Let us handle this. It's the only way for us to maintain our dignity after coming all this way."

Considering he had gone so far as to ask politely, Kwak Cheol-Ho, the one in charge of this location, couldn't bring himself to refuse.

"I'd appreciate it, sunbae-nim," he answered.

Kang Chul-Gyu gave him a brief smile, then reached for the button on his radio.

Chk.

"This is Kang Chul-Gyu. Il-Gyu and four others are crossing. Get ready."

Following Kang Chul-Gyu, Kwak Cheol-Ho also issued a command to his team.

Chk.

"The seniors will breach the fence. Make sure not even one enemy can aim at them."

Rustle.

Moments later, Nam Il-Gyu and four other men walked toward them and requested C-4s.

"Thank you for taking on this difficult task, sunbae-nim."

"You all were the ones who handled the hard work. Honestly, this is nothing. I bet you guys can do this better."

Nam Il-Gyu gently tapped Kwak Cheol-Ho's forearm before heading back to his position.

Everything was ready. At the signal, they would unleash hell on their enemies, who had hunkered down in the oil rig like startled pheasants.

Chapter 298: End Like This? (2)

Close-quarters combat often took place at distances closer than many imagine. An example of it being closer than imagined would be when you're on the rooftop of a two-story structure, shooting at an enemy running in front of the neighboring building's entrance. In simpler terms, one would likely assume that if the enemy was right below, a few pulls of the trigger would be enough. However, the reality was starkly different.

The presence of another enemy aiming at one's head dramatically altered the situation. How could one describe the chilling sensation of bullets destroying the wall they were hiding behind shattering? Had it been just slightly higher, a bullet could have gone straight through their forehead. Survival hinged on quickly aiming, firing, and ducking before an enemy had the chance to respond.

This marked the distinction between special forces teams and regular troops. Special forces teams underwent grueling training that pushed them to their limits, including exercises designed to severely humble them. However, that intense preparation was what instilled a deep sense of pride within them.

Special forces soldiers were often presented with the option to quit.

"If anyone feels unsure, raise your hand now!" they would be told.

That question was the ultimate test for those selected for special forces training. Opting out at this stage meant being relegated to the status of 'il-bbang-bbang'[1] despite the apparent shortcomings of the regular troops' training.

The Jeungpyeong special forces team, composed of soldiers who had excelled in the Airborne division and the 606, stood as South Korea's finest. Hence, witnessing their seniors charge into enemy lines with C-4s made them feel a mix of gratitude, pride, immense regret, and profound frustration.

The DMZ team members, seasoned by their years of experience, resonated deeply with the feelings of the Jeungpyeong team. A unique excitement, better suited for a charge than a firing order, filled the ranks.

Amidst the darkness and silence, everyone awaited their next order. However, Kang Chul-Gyu remained silent for unknown reasons, his gaze intently scanning the enemy's location.

What's happening? Why is he quiet?

Both the Jeungpyeong and DMZ teams looked at Kang Chul-Gyu with concern.

"Do we have a sniper?" questioned Kang Chul-Gyu amid the silence.

"There's one above," Kwak Cheol-Ho quickly responded.

What's going on?

Kwak Cheol-Ho's confusion lingered.

Chk.

"The trees in front of the building," Kang Chul-Gyu directed, prompting everyone to hastily examine the indicated trees.

He continued, "There's no wind, yet they showed movement. Our enemies seem to have camouflaged themselves, waiting for the perfect moment to attack."

Considering they were quite deep into the night already, Kwak Cheol-Ho couldn't help but ponder, 'What do you mean they 'moved' without any wind?'

Wearing night-vision goggles, he scanned the trees but didn't spot anything unusual. Meanwhile, Kang Chul-Gyu claimed to have noticed movement without the assistance of the goggles. As the DMZ King, his observations couldn't be taken lightly. Their entire team could have been wiped out the moment they breached with C-4.

Chk.

"Yang Dong-Sik, I want you and ten others to enter the oil rig separately. Let me know when you're ready," ordered Kang Chul-Gyu.

Chk.

"Yes, sir."

Afterward, Kang Chul-Gyu looked at the structure in front of him.

Smirking, he continued, "We often had to deal with this back at the DMZ. Unfortunately, unlike back then, the camouflage they're using right now doesn't seem to be the ordinary ones."

Kwak Cheol-Ho scrutinized the trees in front of the oil rig once more. "What if our sniper targets them?"

Kang Chul-Gyu sighed softly. "Hmm. We will probably need at least two more snipers, and who knows how many more enemies are hidden in those buildings. We could end up wasting time on them."

"But what about the sunbaes you're sending to the oil rig?"

"They have undertaken missions like this in the DMZ before. You can trust them."

"Yes, sir," answered Kwak Cheol-Ho. He then inadvertently shifted his gaze up toward the area where Yang Dong-Sik was.

Why did South Korea discard and waste these experienced and skilled people?

"Tsk... we need at least two more snipers..."

Hearing regret in Kang Chul-Gyu's voice, Kwak Cheol-Ho swiftly understood the situation. Snipers were needed to support the teams of Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik.

Chk.

"We've got a vehicle approaching us from our six," Yoon Sang-Ki radioed in.

Kang Chul-Gyu and Kwak Cheol-Ho turned around, finding the lights of a truck swaying as it approached.

"Ah, so then the sniper issue is dealt with," Kang Chul-Gyu murmured.

Chk.

"This is Kang Chan. We're in the truck approaching your location," Kang Chan said, identifying himself.

Hearing his name was like a breath of fresh air. Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and the rest of the DMZ team gazed at the Jeungpyeong special forces team with awe. Hearing Kang Chan's voice completely changed the aura around them.

"Seems like we can proceed now," Kang Chul-Gyu murmured to himself again as the truck stopped.

Kang Chan and his team then walked over to their position. Kang Chul-Gyu genuinely smiled at him as he approached.

Click-clack! Click-clack! Thump! Thump!

Kang Chan glanced around the area and then directed Lee Doo-Bum and three of his men to go up the hill. Moving to the spot that Kang Chul-Gyu had moved away from, he examined the oil rig that their enemies had occupied.

"Do you see those trees in front of the buildings?"

"They're camouflaged, aren't they?"

"We think so, yes."

Like Kwak Cheol-Ho, Nam Il-Gyu was astounded.

How did he notice that with just a glance? He's still so young! The blood on his head hasn't even dried yet! [2] Nam Il-Gyu thought to himself.

Oh Gwang-Taek, who hadn't properly greeted them yet, sighed deeply.

"Do you have a sniper in your team?"

"I've sent him up," Kang Chan replied.

"We have two snipers now, then. If you and I take those guys down, we can send our boys in."

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu smirked at the same time.

Feeling as if something was off, their enemies found themselves in so much of a panic that they couldn't bring themselves to move.

Kang Chan pressed the button on his helmet's radio.

Chk.

"This is Kang Chan. Snipers, focus on taking down the enemies near the right of the oil rig first. Once the battle resumes, I want those who will be infiltrating the enemy lines to use their best judgment to move and act. Everyone else, provide cover and make sure the enemy can't retake the 20mm machine gun."

The mood in the area changed with a single transmission.

Choi Jong-Il exchanged glances with Kwak Cheol-Ho and Oh Gwang-Taek. He then prepared with the others.

Click-clack! Click-thud!

After checking the magazine loaded in his gun, Kang Chan firmly pulled back the firing pin, sending a definitive order to attack.

Click-clack! Click-clack! Click-thud! Click-clack!

When Kang Chan took aim, Kang Chul-Gyu and everyone else did as well. At the same time, Kwak Cheol-Ho finally noticed the branches of the trees shaking despite the lack of wind.

Whoosh!

A soon spark burst from Kang Chan's rifle, sending a long white streak of light through the pitch-black night.

Thud.

The tree struck by the light fell sideways and sprawled on the ground.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Woosh! Whoosh! Woosh! Woosh!

Without hesitation, the rest unleashed a volley of fire. One of the camouflaged enemies attempted to retaliate, but they were already too late. Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu, and their two snipers had brought down all the trees they could see.

Their platoon, consisting of the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers, National Intelligence Service agents, twenty battle-hardened DMZ veterans, and a former gangster, proved to be quite formidable.

Whoosh! Bang! Whoosh! Bang! Whoosh! Bang!

Another enemy tried to retaliate against them, but just like those who had gone before him, they swiftly put a bullet in the middle of his eyes, knocking back his head.

"Aaargh!"

Another enemy, grasping their cracked skull, twisted in agony.

Boom! Crash!

All of a sudden, an explosion erupted from one corner of the fence.

Boom! Boom!

A similar explosion then echoed from the opposite side.

Crack! Crack! Whoosh! Bang! Whoosh! Bang!

Their opponents' counterattack had been disrupted and thrown into disorganization. Moments later, bright muzzle flashes lit up the oil rig. Nam Il-Gyu's and Yang Dong-Sik's teams had begun eliminating the enemies who were in hiding.

About five minutes of this one-sided engagement had passed.

Chk.

After about five minutes of their one-sided massacre, the teams inside the oil rig finally radioed in a report.

"This is Nam Il-Gyu. We have cleared the buildings. Should we blow up the place or hit the tangos at the main gate from behind?"

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Kang Chan, signaling him to make the decision.

Chk.

"We're getting our revenge. I want one team setting up the C-4s. The rest are to attack the main gate."

Chk.

"Yes, sir."

Although it seemed like a daunting task, they at least weren't outnumbered, which made it worth the effort.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Crack! Whoosh! Crack! Whoosh!

The dynamics of the battle dramatically shifted. Kang Chan's platoon took cover near the structure and opened fire, prompting a desperate retaliation from the enemies.

Crack! Whoosh! Bang! Crack! Whoosh! Bang!

The more their opponents resisted, the faster they were taken down.

In a flash, several shadows darted into the oil rig.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Even the snipers couldn't help but stop to observe Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu, who were seamlessly taking down foe after foe.

"Cease fire!" Nam Il-Gyu shouted behind the enemy lines.

Click-clack! Click-thud!

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu rushed forward, followed by their team members. Nam Il-Gyu's left arm was bleeding heavily, a bullet having pierced into it.

Bang!

As Kang Chan walked over, Nam Il-Gyu forcefully kicked the person in Islamic attire lying in front of him.

"Ugh!"

"The nerve of this bastard!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!

"Ah, you fucking bitch! You shot my fucking arm!"

Crunch! Bang!

Despite having already subdued the enemy, Nam Il-Gyu kept kicking their chest in frustration, preventing his colleagues from approaching him and treating his wound.

"Huh? Why are you holding that? Why not ask us?"

Nam Il-Gyu fixed his expression and extended his left arm to his colleague. Oh Gwang-Taek didn't find this scene strange at all anymore.

A few moments later, Yang Dong-Sik walked over to them, coiling spare wires around his arm and casually holding the detonator. "The C-4s have been set up. We've also taken eleven prisoners."

Kang Chan turned to Kang Chul-Gyu, questioning what they should do with the prisoners.

"We're here to take revenge, aren't we?"

Kang Chul-Gyu's soft voice reached everyone, including their enemies, who didn't speak Korean.

He added, "Can we do it our way?"

Seeing Kang Chan nod, Oh Gwang-Taek wondered, 'Could it be...?'

"Tie them up," Kang Chul-Gyu commanded.

The group immediately sprang into action. The DMZ team, except for Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik, suddenly charged in.

The sight was so chilling that Kang Chan couldn't help but smirk.

Crunch! Bang!

There was no room for resistance. The DMZ team members started hanging the enemies they had dragged, suspending them upside down from the structure.

"Do we really need to do this? Won't they die anyway when the C-4s explode?" Kang Chan asked.

"The guides who led us here will spread the word. From now on, anyone who wants to cross South Korea will think twice, knowing they will have to confront us first."

Kang Chan sighed softly. He hadn't thought as far as Kang Chul-Gyu had.

"Everyone involved in this will surely be shocked. Despite suspecting an ambush, we pushed through with our operation and eliminated all targets, including this oil rig. More importantly..."

Kang Chul-Gyu paused and quickly scanned the surroundings.

"... we did it with almost no casualties."

At that moment, their enemies realized this was where they'd die. One of them resisted being hanged, but the DMZ team's powerful punches quickly put a stop to it.

Kang Chul-Gyu turned to his juniors. "Once we're done here, people will fear your strength. They'll pause and think twice before confronting you all."

Bang! Thud! Thud!

The brutal scene added weight to his words.

"For as long as you all live, nobody will dare take anyone from South Korea lightly."

Their captives, now hanging upside down, struggled as everyone turned to them.

"The real fight starts now."

The DMZ team lined up behind Kang Chul-Gyu, and the Jeungpyeong special forces team and the National Intelligence Service agents did the same behind Kang Chan. Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu smirked.

Yang Dong-Sik walked around the perimeter, extending the wire wrapped around his arm, and then walked toward the back from Kang Chan's position. With their mouths left ungagged, their enemies, suspended in the air, predictably cried out in agony.

"This is it," Yang Dong-Sik said, inserting the end of the wire that he had unwrapped from his arm into the detonator.

Click. Click.

"Technology has certainly improved."

Although unnecessary, the situation seemed to be demanding a more dramatic approach. Yang Dong-Sik, holding the detonator, looked back and forth between Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu.

"Shall we start the timer and retreat?" Kang Chan suggested.

Yang Dong-Sik's eyes widened as if asking, 'How long?'

"Five minutes should be enough."

"Got it."

Beep. Beep. Beep. Squeak.

After pressing the button, Yang Dong-Sik looked up.

"Hey! Why did you start the timer?" Nam Il-Gyu shouted.

"Huh?" Yang Dong-Sik glanced at the timer in surprise, finding it already counting down. Quickly looking back up, he asked Kwak Cheol-Ho, "Can't we reset this?"

"I switched it to Type A earlier. Pulling out the wire now would spark an immediate explosion."

Kang Chan quickly glanced back. As a safety precaution, they had parked the trucks a good distance away.

"To the trucks! Go!"

The mood suddenly shifted. Four team members carried the injured, swiftly aiding the wounded as they all ran.

The C-4 explosion would send gusts of wind rushing past the nearby empty fields, followed by air being sucked back into the vacuum it would create. It was the reason signs or metal structures sometimes bent toward the explosion instead of away from it.

However, they were in an oil rig. The real danger was not knowing how far the flames rising into the sky would spread.

Rrring.

"Start the engines! Now!"

The sudden intensity of the situation might have seemed laughable under different circumstances, but right now, it nearly drove the soldiers and agents to madness.

Vroom. Vroom.

Kang Chan reached the truck first.

"Get on! Faster!" Kang Chan urged. His subordinates quickly boarded the trucks.

Vroom! Vroom! Clank! Vroom!

They drove off roughly. This likely sucked for the wounded, but they had no other option.

Thud! Thump!

Speeding away, the trucks jolted so hard with each bump that their buttocks were lifted off the seats.

"You should have been a bit more careful!" Nam Il-Gyu scolded.

Yang Dong-Sik nervously scanned his surroundings. "There used to be a red button and another one below it!"

Kang Chul-Gyu remained silent, showing only his signature smile.

Vrooom!

Roaring, the truck exerted more power, causing its speed to surge.

This should be safe enough...

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of daunting explosions soon erupted, illuminating the area so brightly that it looked as if the night had turned into day.

Crack!

The vehicle's windows cracked and shattered into pieces. Their ears rang from the blast. It felt as if the space around them was shaking.

Whoosh! Crash!

The vehicle was thrust high into the air before crashing back down.

Whish!

A blindingly fierce wind then swept past Kang Chan.

Boom! Crash! Boom!

Only then did their hearing return and the world felt real again.

Whish! Boom! Whish! Boom!

Fiery debris cascaded from the sky, resembling meteors.

Screech.

Kang Chan brought the truck to a stop. Exiting from the passenger side, he was joined by the agents in the cargo bed and those in the other trucks. They all turned their gaze toward the facility, the flames belching black smoke catching their attention.

In the distance, the wild flames and smoke from the oil rig blanketed the sky. The flickering flames illuminated Kang Chan and those around him as if to say that they would not forget.

Chapter 299: Hold Onto The Head (1)

Kang Chan and Kang Chul-Gyu unintentionally stood front and foremost of their formation. Choi Jong-Il, Kwak Cheol-Ho, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik lined up behind them as if to support them.

Boom!

Another explosion erupted from the oil rig, followed by a hot, fiery burst of flame and a belch of smoke.

“Are you planning to step up if something like this happens again?” Kang Chul-Gyu quietly asked.

Kang Chan glanced over, finding him looking ahead.

“The men’s eyes completely changed when they heard you were coming. To them, you’ve already become a line they can’t cross and a wall they can always rely on.”

What’s this old man suddenly talking about?

Kang Chul-Gyu gave Kang Chan an indecipherable smile.

“It was nice to see you treat the agent from the US like he was your subordinate and how you entered an enemy country and carried out their punishment with dignity. You’re the kind of leader I’ve always wanted to be.”

Kang Chan looked back ahead. Things were still a bit awkward between them.

“Take on bigger enemies. Don’t grow old like me, trapped in the forests of the DMZ all your life.”

“What if I lose the men I care about?”

Kang Chan had never even thought about that question, yet he blurted it out for some reason.

“I’ll fight the battles. At the very least, I’ll keep fighting at the level I did today for as long as I’m alive. Only if you’re okay with it, of course...”

Kang Chan couldn’t help but look back at Kang Chul-Gyu. Kang Chul-Gyu locked eyes with him this time.

“I’m curious. I don’t know what kind of person you are and why you treat me like this. Sometimes I think I understand, but sometimes I feel like I still don’t,” Kang Chul-Gyu said.

Pft.

Kang Chan chuckled. What could he even say to that?

Boom! Boom!

Two more hot, deafening explosions, likely the last ones, burst from the oil rig.

“There’s nothing better than watching fireworks!” Yang Dong-Sik exclaimed from the back.

Thinking of the wounded, they decided that it was time to head back. Kang Chan turned around, and Kang Chul-Gyu and the rest of the men followed suit.

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap! Click! Click! Snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap!

In a stark departure from the usual press conference, reporters, especially foreign ones, swarmed the podium, much to the Korean reporters’ surprise. As innumerable flashes continued to go off, Moon Jae-Hyun walked up to the podium, looked at the reporters, and turned to the teleprompter.

“Respectable citizens, I am President Moon Jae-Hyun.”

Snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

“Before I begin my statement, I would like to make a few important announcements.”

The reporters quickly tapped away on the keyboards of their laptops, their recorders right next to them.

Usually, the full text of the speech was given to the reporters in advance. This time, however, for some reason, they were given not even an inkling of what the announcement could be about.

“First, I would like to inform you of our agreement with Japan. Following their demand, our government has approved the construction of the undersea tunnel. In return—”

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

Moon Jae-Hyun paused, letting the noises from the flashes die down.

“In return, the Japanese government has promised to recognize Dokdo as part of our territory, mark the borders of the East Sea, acknowledge and apologize for the war of aggression, and make reparations accordingly. They will also purchase three hundred seventy-six trillion won of our national debt in the form of bonds and completely retire these shares.”

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

The murmurs of the reporters began to mix in with the flashes.

“We will also be collecting cargo fees from the aforementioned undersea tunnel, securing huge revenues for our nation. For that reason, South Korea will make education up to the collegiate level compulsory. Our government will pay for all expenses, including tuition, food, and uniforms. We will also pay for students who choose to pursue vocational courses instead of academic ones.”

The noises from the reporters were loud enough to be heard on TV.

“The government is also planning to pay for medical care for the four major serious diseases in the future.”

Reporters from other countries clung to their translators, checking the information again and again.

Standing at a bus terminal, a man in a business suit muttered, “Is that even possible?”

[Next is our agreement with Russia.]

“Russia?” the man repeated, staring at the TV in utter disbelief.

[South Korea has signed a joint development agreement for crude oil with Russia. This puts our nation on equal footing with other oil-producing nations and ensures a steady supply of cheap crude oil.]

“I should’ve bought stocks back then!” regretfully exclaimed the middle-aged man next to the man in a business suit.

[I would also like to announce our agreement with China.]

“Another one?!” both men exclaimed at the same time.

[China and South Korea have signed a trillion-dollar currency swap and agreed to closely cooperate in terms of economy and security. As a start, we’ve agreed that illegally fishing in our waters will be considered a grave crime of border violation. Our military has the right to immediately destroy any Chinese fishing boats committing that crime until illegal fishing has been eradicated.]

“No way!” the business suit-wearing man blankly stared at Moon Jae-Hyun’s face, which the camera flashes had rendered completely white.

Afterward, Moon Jae-Hyun announced that South Korea would be cooperating with France and England to establish a power plant for next-gen energy. France would also permanently return the cultural Korean properties currently in their possession.

This was followed by a statement that was characteristically different from the previous ones.

[We will strictly apply the Nationality Act to ensure that dual citizens do not receive unfair benefits. Moreover, individuals and legal entities that siphon off funds to foreign countries will be strictly tracked down. Economic crimes such as embezzlement and professional negligence, as well as the wealthy’s crimes that harm society, will also be punished according to the law.]

Although many of the reporters and viewers had already been rendered speechless, Moon Jae-Hyun still wasn’t done.

[to prevent honest citizens from suffering losses, we will also punish those who shirk their national defense and taxation duties.]

Moon Jae-Hyun looked up from the teleprompter and stared straight into the camera.

[I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to our unsung heroes. Silently, in places beyond the public’s awareness, they performed their duties so that we can make all these announcements today. I would like to thank our honorable citizens as well for always striving to do the best they can.]

Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap! Snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap, snap!

Shouts from reporters eager to ask questions filled the room.

Contrary to the clamoring and noisy atmosphere that South Korea was experiencing due to the sudden onslaught of announcements, the seventh floor of the Central Hotel was quiet.

From the Athens Airport, the wounded were taken to the hospital. The others headed back to the hotel and immediately went to sleep.

Kang Chan was no exception, falling asleep not long after quickly briefing Kim Hyung-Jung on the situation. Knowing that the South Korean and French agents were taking turns guarding the hotel made him feel so relieved that he slept soundly.

He couldn't remember the last time he had come back from an operation unscathed.

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.

However, the phone wasn't of any assistance to Kang Chan at all. He shook off his drowsiness and glanced at the screen.

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.

The drawers under the table were acting like a speaker, amplifying the sound.

“Hello?”

- Hey, Cap. It's Gérard.

The sleep lurking in the corners of Kang Chan's eyes and head disappeared with a whoosh.

“What's going on? Where are you?”

Kang Chan sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

- I was given paid leave.

“What?”

- I'm on vacation! I'm going to South Korea!

Kang Chan glanced at his phone and raised it back to his ear.

“What about Congo?”

- We've wrapped everything up nicely yesterday.

“Where are you now, then?”

- France, of course.

Kang Chan chuckled at the irony.

“I'm in Athens.”

- What?

Gérard couldn't understand what Kang Chan was saying.

“I said I'm in Athens!”

- What? Why are you there? If I didn't call you, I would have ended up alone in Korea.

“Yeah, yeah. Well, if you can come here, fly on over.”

- Alright. I'll change my flight and let you know. This is going to be expensive.

The unexpected call had jolted Kang Chan awake, but he wasn't mad at all. Having to wait for Gérard to get back to him if he could come, he ran his hands through his hair, opened the door, and headed outside.

He was wearing comfortable sweatpants and a cotton tee. The French and Korean agents in the hallway looked at him at the same time when he came out.

This was a relaxing hour.

Kang Chan dragged his indoor slides on the ground as he headed for the conference room. He then poured two packets of instant coffee into a mug and started to walk back to his room.

“You could've just asked me to bring you coffee,” a Korean agent told him with a smile.

“You want a cup too?” Kang Chan offered goodnaturedly.

The agent chuckled. “No, sir.”

After mischievously grinning at each other, Kang Chan returned to his room. He closed the door behind him and opened the curtains.

Swish! Whoosh!

The intense sunlight blinded his eyes and chased away the darkness in the room.

Sitting at the table, Kang Chan took a sip of coffee and picked up a cigarette.

Click.

“Hoo!”

That punk is coming here for his vacation?

The mere thought of his arrival made Kang Chan smile.

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.

The call he had been waiting for had finally arrived.

After checking the number, Kang Chan pressed the answer button.

“Allo?”

- It's Gérard. I'll be leaving in an hour.

“I'm at the Central Hotel in Athens.”

- Huh? You're not picking me up from the airport?

Gérard chuckled with amusement at his own joke. His excitement radiated over the phone.

- I'll be arriving in about six hours.

“All right. See you.”

Kang Chan hung up the phone and stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray.

White people really take every vacation they can get.

They could learn a thing or two from them about not giving up their vacations unless it was for special operations, though.

Anyway, he had heard good news, drank good coffee, and smoked a cigarette. He could now fall back to sleep again—

Knock, knock, knock.

“Who is it?”

As Kang Chan stood up, the door opened.

“I stopped by the conference room and heard you were just there too,” Oh Gwang-Taek remarked. His face was red, and his hair was sticking out in all directions and pushed down at the sides.

“Have a seat,” Kang Chan offered.

Oh Gwang-Taek sat down across from him.

“Ah, damn it! I left my coffee behind!”

“Give me that cup over there. I’ll give you a bit of mine. We can just make more later if we need to.”

Kang Chan poured some coffee into the cup that Oh Gwang-Taek held up. He then opened the windows halfway, allowing a refreshing breeze to rush in and cool them down.

“Want a cigarette?” Kang Chan offered despite already knowing what the answer would be.

Oh Gwang-Taek accepted the cigarette and put it in his mouth. He then picked up the lighter.

Click.

The two took turns lighting their cigarettes.

“Couldn’t sleep?” Kang Chan asked afterward.

“No,” Oh Gwang-Taek replied, brushing his hair back. “Honestly, I thought I led a pretty tough lifestyle, but I’m gonna need some time to accept everything that happened yesterday.”

Glancing at Kang Chan, he let out a weary chuckle.

“For fuck’s sake! This world is too scary to live in!” he exclaimed.

“Yeah, I know you’re so afraid,” Kang Chan sarcastically responded, shocking Oh Gwang-Taek.

“You’re a scary motherfucker! Where did you get all these monsters from? And you put me right in the middle of them?”

“Sorry about that,” Kang Chan apologized half-sincerely.

“Stop with the bullshit, punk!”

Oh Gwang-Taek seemed to be feeling a little more at ease, evidenced by his expression and voice becoming more relaxed.

“Staying in Mongolia for a bit made me think I had already seen everything, but the battle yesterday proved me otherwise. I could never have imagined such a fight. I feel a bit better now that I’m here with you, though.”

Kang Chan just silently listened. If Oh Gwang-Taek was in Mongolia, he probably would’ve confided in his close subordinates about this instead. In this place, however, Kang Chan was likely the only one he felt close enough to speak about his feelings.

“Hey! Does that mean this is how you’ve been living all your life? Your life’s fucking sad too, huh.”

The more Oh Gwang-Taek cursed, the more his expression returned to normal, which was great and all, but he was also becoming equally louder. Kang Chan was beginning to worry that the people sleeping next door would hear him.

The two—no, Oh Gwang-Taek talked loudly for an hour or so.

Knock, knock, knock.

Choi Jong-Il walked in.

“You’re not eating, sir?” Choi Jong-Il asked.

“Hm? Weren’t you all going to sleep?” Kang Chan asked.

“Most people are already up.”

“Yeah? Let’s go eat, then.”

Kang Chan and Oh Gwang-Taek walked to the conference room. So many people were already eating inside that nobody was probably asleep at this point. Oh Gwang-Taek’s loud voice earlier most likely woke up half of them.

After a moderate lunch, Oh Gwang-Taek headed back to his room with a much more relaxed expression. He looked like he would fall asleep as soon as he lay down on his bed.

Having returned to his room as well, Kang Chan sat down at the table. Choi Jong-Il and Kwak Cheol-Ho then came inside with cups of coffee in their hands.

Since Gérard would be arriving in a few hours, Kang Chan probably wouldn’t be able to get any more sleep.

His conversation with the two was worthwhile, at least. They told him about Moon Jae-Hyun’s announcements and the general response in detail. They had apparently heard all about it from the National Intelligence Service when Choi Jong-Il submitted a report regarding their situation.

“He announced all that at the same time?” Kang Chan asked in disbelief.

“Yes. We’re expecting a major audit and inspection of chaebols, high-ranking government officials, and the National Assembly soon.”

Kang Chan simply nodded. Moon Jae-Hyun and Hwang Ki-Hyun would undoubtedly go through with that.

Keep growing stronger!

Kang Chan felt a bit glad.

South Korea becoming stronger would soon present ways for him to quietly remove himself from the equation. Once they had established the next-generation energy facility and the Eurasian Rail broke ground, he wouldn’t have to run around like this anymore. He might even be able to go on vacations with Seok Kang-Ho then.

“I heard Colonel Park has regained consciousness,” Kwak Cheol-Ho said, breaking Kang Chan out of his thoughts. “Colonel Park Chul-Su, I mean.”

That was truly good news. He still had some crazy things to think about, like how Sherman attempted to pull a fast one on him and who drove away in the truck during yesterday’s operation. However, he at least felt as if weights were slowly being lifted off his shoulders and back.

They continued to speak more until a brief pause in the conversation.

“Oh! Gérard will be here soon,” Kang Chan informed them.

The camaraderie between people was a powerful emotion. Even though Choi Jong-Il and Kwak Cheol-Ho seemed a bit awkward around each other, their faces lit up upon hearing the unexpected news.

The three men in sweatpants and cotton shirts chatted together for about three hours, during which they made coffee two more times and smoked a whole pack of cigarettes. While discussing the issue of recruiting more people into the Jeungpyeong special forces team, Kang Chan’s phone began to ring.

Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz. Buzz, buzz, buzz.

“Where are you?”

- I’m in the hotel lobby. Where should I go?

“Stay there. I’m on my way.”

Kang Chan put on a sweatshirt and some sneakers. Before he left the room, Choi Jong-Il and Kwak Cheol-Ho told him that they would be waiting in front of the emergency exits.

In the hallway, Kang Chan told a French agent that he needed to bring someone over from the lobby. The agent politely responded that it would be better for him to go instead to avoid the CCTVs catching Kang Chan’s face.

Kang Chan agreed. He then called Gérard to update him.

“Stay at the front.”

- Got it, Cap.

Not long after their phone call, Oh Gwang-Taek walked out of his, rubbing the drowsiness off his eyes. He must have been a tad noisy because they were speaking in front of the elevator.

“Hey. Did I wake you up?” Kang Chan greeted.

“What’s going on?”

“Someone from France just arrived. I’m waiting for him.”

Oh Gwang-Taek yawned so widely it was a wonder his mouth didn’t rip apart. As if insisting on seeing what kind of monster was coming this time, he remained standing next to Kang Chan.

Creak.

The emergency exit doors soon opened. Gérard, wearing sunglasses, walked into the hallway.

“Captain!” Gérard greeted.

“Took you long enough to get here!” Kang Chan joked.

He was glad to see him again. It was a little strange to see him wearing plain clothes and walking around in a place like this, though.

Gérard grabbed Kang Chan’s hand and mischievously bumped shoulders with him.

Afterward, he greeted Kwak Cheol-Ho and Choi Jong-Il. “Kwak! Choy!”

“Huh...?”

Oh Gwang-Taek looked at Gérard, surprise written all over his face.

Chapter 300: Hold Onto The Head (2)

Oh Gwang-Taek’s reaction instantly drew everyone’s attention. Choi Jong-Il and Kwak Cheol-Ho, who were exchanging greetings with Gérard, also glanced at him.

“What is it?” Kang Chan asked.

“Well, the thing is...” Oh Gwang-Taek trailed off as he gazed at Kang Chan. He then looked back at Gérard with an uncharacteristically flustered expression.

“You remember that camera footage that Do-Seok got? I think I remember seeing him there.”

When Kang Chan turned to Gérard, the latter gestured at Oh Gwang-Taek with his chin. “What’s up with him?”

Kang Chan first used a mix of Korean and French to introduce the two to each other.

“Oh Gwang-Taek, Gérard. Gérard, Oh Gwang-Taek.”

The two awkwardly shook hands.

“If he’s not him, it might make him feel offended, so we’ll go and talk about it. I’m going to be with him for the time being, so don’t worry,” Kang Chan told Oh Gwang-Taek.

“All right,” Oh Gwang-Taek replied. He glared sharply at Gérard with certainty that this was the person in the video.

“What is it?” Gérard asked, following Kang Chan to his room, turning his nose up in the air.

Then, Oh Gwang-Taek and Gérard met each other’s eyes. It was between one who held a heavy grudge and one who found the other’s attitude extremely offensive. It sounded like the “du du du du du, waah, waah, wah” sound from some Wild West cowboy movie was playing somewhere in the hallway.

“Gérard, come on,” Kang Chan urged him.

Gérard shook his head from side to side in disgust and walked after Kang Chan.

Click.

“What’s up with that gangster-looking punk?” Gérard growled the moment they stepped inside the room.

“Coffee?” Kang Chan offered.

“Got Korean ones?”

As if to shake off his displeasure, Gérard took off the bag hanging on his shoulders and tossed it at the wall behind the chairs.

“Have a smoke while you wait,” Kang Chan told him.

“I’ll come with you,” Gérard offered.

“Not a fucking chance. It’ll be so damn uncomfortable.”

Kang Chan would feel a hundred times more at ease bringing back coffee himself than watching Gérard and Oh Gwang-Taek glare at each other in a face-off.

However, just as he was about to leave, Kwak Cheol-Ho suddenly pushed the door open with his foot and came in with a mug in each hand.

“I’ve got coffee,” Kwak Cheol-Ho said.

“Kwak!” Gérard exclaimed.

Kwak Cheol-Ho, who had gone through hellish battles with Gérard in Afghanistan and Africa, seemed worried that Gérard would be upset over what happened with Oh Gwang-Taek. Kwak Cheol-Ho’s eyes, smile, and even the bandage that extended from his shoulders to his left hand carrying the coffee showed how sorry he was.

“Thank you, Kwak!” Gérard said in awkward Korean. The two chuckled over it.

These crazy assholes.

Kang Chan shook his head. Their eyes still showed hints of ferocity from the heat of the operation. They should be grateful that he was the one with them. Any normal person witnessing Kwak Cheol-

Ho, who normally had a scary countenance, and Gérard, who had a knife scar on his cheek, smiling at each other evilly would probably shiver every time they saw instant coffee.

“Sit down,” Kang Chan said.

“I’ll be outside,” Kwak Cheol-Ho told him.

Kang Chan didn’t stop him from leaving. They were going to be speaking in French anyway.

Thud.

Gérard made himself comfortable on the other side of the table, then casually offered Kang Chan a smoke. They both lit their cigarette.

“Where’s Daye?” Gérard asked.

“Hoo. He’s in the Athens Hospital. You can go see him later,” Kang Chan responded.

“Was he badly hurt?”

“He barely got out alive.”

Gérard smirked.

“Being alive is good enough.”

Only those who had survived the thick of battle would give such a response.

While stubbing his cigarette out in the ashtray, he gestured in the direction he met Oh Gwang-Taek. “Anyway, what was wrong with that guy?”

Damn it.

It was a shitty story to tell, but if he didn’t, Gérard would feel unsettled and offended.

Kang Chan put out his cigarette.

“Remember when I told you I woke up and found myself in this body?” he began.

“How could I ever forget?”

“Well, back then, I met Sharlan and Smithen.”

Kang Chan gave a summary of what had happened since then. Making sure not to omit any details, he even covered how he met Lanok and all the incidents involving the Blackhead.

“You’re telling me all this on purpose,” Gérard said.

“What do you mean?”

“Since that thug can check the camera footage, you’re doing this to let me know you trust me, aren’t you?”

“Stop with the crazy talk, punk,” Kang Chan scoffed. Putting down his mug, he smirked at Gérard. “I don’t have the brain to do something so complicated. I

believe in the people I've learned to trust. That's all there is to it. I only told you all this so you won't feel uncomfortable when you run into Oh Gwang-Taek later. There's no other motive."

Gérard grinned. "I don't know anything about that."

"I thought you wouldn't. Even if you do, it's fine. All that matters is whether or not you can be honest with me right now."

It felt good to get that off his chest.

"A lot of things happened behind the curtains, huh," Gérard mused.

"The enemy in front of us is still the biggest problem," Kang Chan replied.

Gérard lifted his right hand and rubbed his cheek with his fingers, cupping his chin. "Hmm."

"I'd like to check the camera footage now too. I want to know what it recorded that's making that thug act up."

"How long is your leave?"

"I'm taking the full twenty days."

Kang Chan chuckled.

He's taking a proper vacation, all right.

Before dinner, Kang Chan met with Oh Gwang-Taek in private and explained Gérard's position.

"I heard what kind of person he is from Choi Jong-II. Since you're vouching for him this hard too, I'm sure he's not that person now," Oh Gwang-Taek remarked. He didn't seem fully convinced, but his suspicion had at least been weakened a bit.

He added, "You know how white people all look a bit similar? The moment he walked in with the sunglasses, I thought it had to be him."

"He'll be coming with us to Seoul. We can go and see the camera footage and talk about what happened then," Kang Chan suggested.

"Got it. Oh, man! What am I going to do if I'm wrong?" Oh Gwang-Taek groaned.

"Motherfucker. That's why you should think before you speak," Kang Chan rebuked.

"I just blurted that out because it was what ruined Do-Seok. Shit! This won't do. If a man says it's not him, it's not him. Where is he? I need to go apologize to him myself or I won't be able to rest. This isn't how a man should act."

When Oh Gwang-Taek started talking louder again, Kang Chan immediately guided him to the room where Gérard was waiting. Oh Gwang-Taek apologized, and Gérard willingly forgave him.

That puts an end to this Wild West movie!

After introducing Gérard to the others in the conference room, they all had dinner together. Kang Chan left ahead of them to give Kim Hyung-Jung a call. He needed to discuss the recent events in Seoul and wanted to make a few requests.

- I will inform the Director about this right after this call. Are you okay with departing in twelve hours?

“Yes. Please let me know when it’s ready. What about our wounded?”

- We’ll send a special flight for them.

“Gérard will be coming with us on the way back.”

- Got it. I will make arrangements.

After hanging up, Kang Chan felt as if he had just completed a huge school project. He left the room and met up with Gérard, who was waiting for him, to go to the hospital together.

Kang Chan changed into cotton pants, sneakers, a cotton shirt, and a comfortable outer layer. His outfit made him feel as if he was on vacation with Gérard.

“Can he talk?” Gérard asked.

“He’s probably eating ramyeon as we speak,” Kang Chan replied.

Gérard grinned and was about to say something. However, when he glanced at the driver’s seat, he decided against it. He seemed bothered by the DGSE agents’ presence.

“People probably have no idea about the world we live in,” Gérard muttered as he looked out the window.

Unlike Kang Chan, who had come out to the real world a few times, Gérard had never stopped wandering the battlefields. If it wasn’t for Kang Chan, he probably couldn’t have cared less about getting paid leave.

Kang Chan just grinned, finding it difficult to accept his sudden shabbiness in the light of the world. Every time he sat in a bar, feeling down in the dumps, someone had always tried to mess with him to impress his friends or show off to a girl he liked.

Those idiots lunging at him with such pathetic eyes always made him laugh. A broken arm was all it would take to make them cry and drool all over themselves.

The car slowed down to a stop in front of the hospital.

Click.

The two got out of the vehicle, headed into the building, and took the elevator to the fifth floor.

Ding.

Stepping into the hallway, they were immediately greeted by the smell of cigarettes. Kang Chan walked straight to Seok Kang-Ho’s room and opened the door.

Creak.

Inside, they found the upper part of the bed raised. Leisurely leaning against it, Seok Kang-Ho exhaled two wisps of smoke through his nose.

“What are you doing?” Kang Chan asked, flabbergasted.

“Hey! Have you had dinner—huh? Gérard!” Seok Kang-Ho greeted Gérard with his most welcoming expression. “What’s this punk doing here?”

“He’s apparently on vacation,” Kang Chan answered.

“Vacation?”

“Yeah.”

It already felt noisy the moment the three of them sat down.

Seok Kang-Ho definitely looked like he was healing up quickly.

“It’s good to see you, Gérard,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

“He says it’s good to see you,” Kang Chan interpreted.

“How are you doing?” Gérard asked.

“He’s asking how you’re doing,” Kang Chan interpreted again.

These little motherfuckers!

The two of them snickered together seeing Kang Chan furrow his eyebrows.

This was new. The three of them were always in Africa or were holding guns when they sat together like this.

“We’re leaving for Seoul tomorrow,” Kang Chan said.

“Yeah? I’m coming with you,” Seok Kang-Ho insisted.

“They’re sending a special plane for the wounded,” Kang Chan told Seok Kang-Ho.

“Well, well, I’m not a part of the wounded anymore. Look.”

“What’s Daye saying?”

Kang Chan shook his head.

“I heard about the results of the operation. Dong-Gyun was acting all ominous and grave until the call came. You couldn’t imagine—”

“Oh, right!” Kang Chan quickly interjected to explain what happened between Gérard and Oh Gwang-Taek. He also informed him that he had told Gérard nearly everything.

“There’s no way this bastard would do that. He would hold a knife right to your face, not stab you in the back,” Seok Kang-Ho remarked.

“Yeah, and Gérard said he doesn’t know anything about it either.”

“Sounds about right. Oh Gwang-Taek’s eyes can’t be that dull, though. Dang. I really want to see that camera footage now.”

“We can just go take a look at it together.”

“That’s why I need to come with you!”

Seok Kang-Ho was definitely different from Oh Gwang-Taek. Even if Kang Chan changed the subject, he’d always get what he wanted.

The three spent about two hours chatting.

“So the only thing this guy has done on vacation is go to the hotel and this hospital?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

Kang Chan glanced at Gérard.

“Have a drink with him. You’re not injured, which is perfect.”

“I guess.”

Kang Chan interpreted Seok Kang-Ho’s suggestion for Gérard and asked Gérard what he wanted to do.

“You said we’re leaving tomorrow, right? Let’s just get some rest today. When we get to Korea, let’s have some of that good food you always talk about,” Gérard said.

“All right.”

A bunch of DGSE agents would have to follow them if they were to stroll around Athens anyway.

After about thirty more minutes, Kang Chan stood up. Before he could leave, Seok Kang-Ho grabbed onto him and gave him a serious look.

“I want to come with you tomorrow, Cap.”

Although he could already sit up, eat ramyeon, and smoke, he still couldn’t even properly stand. If he got on the plane in his current condition, there would definitely be issues with his wounds.

“This won’t be my first time getting on a plane with severe injuries. Let me come with you,” Seok Kang-Ho pleaded.

Did this punk just read my thoughts through my eyes?

Assuming what was going on, Gérard pressed his lips together and simply watched Kang Chan.

“Son of a bitch!” Kang Chan swore.

Realizing why Seok Kang-Ho was smiling, Gérard smiled as well.

“Phuhuhu! See you tomorrow. Gérard! See you tomorrow!”

Kang Chan left the hospital room.

“Sir? When did you get here?” asked Cha Dong-Gyun. He had just walked out of his room with the army interpreter.

Gérard couldn't be happier to see them. The interpreter greeted him as if he were meeting his older brother from back home. Kang Chan could guarantee that it wasn't because he wanted to be promoted and head back to Africa, though.

Kang Chan headed toward the front of the hospital. First, he needed to learn more about what was going on in Korea. As soon as he pressed the call button, Kim Hyung-Jung immediately answered.

- Kim Hyung-Jung speaking.

It would've made sense if he sounded tired, but he sounded quite strong and energetic.

“Manager Kim, I'd like the patients who can already move to come with me tomorrow,” Kang Chan said.

- You'll be returning on a civilian flight. For as long as they can get to the airport, it wouldn't be impossible. We will need to bring a medical team and some simple treatment supplies, though, so I'll have to get back to you.

Ah, right. A medical team.

Since he was already taking Seok Kang-Ho with him, he was hoping to do the same for Cha Dong-Gyun and the other soldiers.

He let out a low sigh.

- The director approved what you mentioned to me earlier. We'll take care of it as soon as you provide us with the list.

“Great. Thank you.”

All Kang Chan had to do now was figure out the transportation.

It would be easy if it was just Seok Kang-Ho since Kang Chan could just take care of him himself, but that would make him feel bad for the soldiers they would leave behind.

- I'll find a medical team and call you back.

“Please do.”

One call to the DGSE would allow the staff of this hospital to come with them, but this wasn't for an operation. Kang Chan didn't want to ask for help just to move the wounded, especially since he was only taking the soldiers who wanted to come in the first place.

Still, he couldn't just bring them all onto the plane without a plan like Seok Kang-Ho wanted. There was no guarantee their condition would remain stable.

A few minutes later, Gérard, Cha Dong-Gyun, and the army interpreter walked out together.

Like Seok Kang-Ho, Kang Chan suddenly felt bad for Gérard, who had done nothing so far in his vacation but visit their hotel and this hospital and snicker with scary-looking men.

Gérard glanced at Kang Chan as if to ask when they were leaving.

“Cha Dong-Gyun, Those who can already move may come with us to South Korea tomorrow. We still have to find a medical team, though, so I’ll let you know if this pushes through,” Kang Chan informed him.

“Yes, sir,” Cha Dong-Gyun responded.

While Cha Dong-Gyun saw them off, Kang Chan got into the elevator with Gérard.

“We’re going straight to the hotel,” Kang Chan said.

“I’d prefer that. We could always have a glass of wine with Krak and Choy at the hotel. If they’re not up for it, the two of us can just go to the hotel bar,” Gérard replied goodnaturedly.

“All right. Let’s do that.”

The elevator reached the first floor with a ding. One of the agents with them got off first.

As Kang Chan and Gérard walked out of the main entrance, the agent standing by its doors greeted them. Soon after, they got into a sedan.

The men felt as if they had just had the best naps of their lives.

Upon reaching the seventh floor, Kang Chan heard Oh Gwang-Taek talking loudly in the hallway. He passed by the conference room, finding Kang Chul-Gyu and nearly all of the men inside.

“I’m thinking of stopping by. What about you?” Kang Chan asked.

“I’ll go take a shower in the room across the hall,” Gérard replied.

“All right.”

After seeing him off, Kang Chan entered the conference room. He had something he needed to tell the men about.

“You’re back!” Oh Gwang-Taek greeted with a smile and a wave of his hand.

Kang Chan walked to one side of the room, poured himself some coffee in a mug, and then took a seat.

“I have an announcement to make,” he began.

The quiet conversations in the background instantly disappeared.

“We’ll be returning to Korea sometime tomorrow. Our departure has been finalized, but we don’t know yet if those in the hospital will get to come with us or take a special flight.”

Crunch.

Yang Dong-Sik, who had just bitten into a snack, carefully looked around him to see if anyone heard.

“One more thing.”

Kang Chan turned to Kang Chul-Gyu.

“If any member of the DMZ team wishes, you can join the National Intelligence Service’s counterterrorism team as special agents.”

Staring at Kang Chan, Kang Chul-Gyu tilted his head. A heavy silence filled the room.

“D-does that mean the country will be able to call upon our service again?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked in disbelief.

Kang Chan smirked. He wasn’t aware Kang Chul-Gyu could stutter.

“Yes,” he replied.

“We get to bear the flag again?”

“Don’t do anything that would ruin your family this time,” Kang Chan said.

Gritting his teeth, Kang Chul-Gyu glared at him.