

Blackfield 351

Chapter 351: It's A Hard Battle (2)

Du du du du du du du.

Three helicopters flew in and landed on the ground.

The men at the base unloaded the boxes first, which were filled with car parts that Kang Dae-Kyung had requested and food ingredients for Yoo Hye-Sook.

“It’s just a routine drill,” Kang Chul-Gyu, who was standing behind Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik, gently told Kang Dae-Kyung and Yoo Hye-Sook.

Contrary to what he had said, though, Kim Tae-Jin, Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, the men staying behind, and the soldiers who were leaving all had grim expressions.

“Have a safe trip.”

Kang Dae-Kyung extended his hand, and Kang Chul-Gyu shook it. He then clasped Kang Dae-Kyung’s right hand with his left.

“Thank you.”

Kang Dae-Kyung curiously looked up.

Kang Chul-Gyu bowed to Yoo Hye-Sook. “Thank you for bringing your family’s affection and delicious food to this desolate place.”

Afterward, he nodded at Kim Tae-Jin and turned around.

“Let’s go.”

Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik let them all into the helicopter.

Du du du du du du du du.

The helicopter rose into the air, kicking up a cloud of dust.

As soon as Seok Kang-Ho reached his destination, he downed a soju and cried. Tears, snoot, and drool dripped down his face.

“Heegh! Heeeeegh! Heeeeeegh!”

The large man had sharp eyes, a pointed chin, and a bulky physique, making him look as if he could throw a solid punch.

The elderly woman wiped her nose and sniffled.

She recalled her son saying that he had met an amazing senior... but he seemed more like a bandit.

The bandit had unexpectedly come into her home. Crying, he looked around the small house, gazed at her, and visited her son’s room.

The old woman inhaled through her nose, wiped away her tears, and stood up.

Then, she poured water into a pot and put it on the stove.

Clatter. Click.

“Heeeeggh! Heegh!”

How could she starve the person her son had admired?

“What are you doing? Heegh.”

“I’m about to boil some soup. You haven’t eaten yet, have you?”

“It’s okay. I don’t have an appetite right now anyway. ”

“What do you mean you don’t have an appetite? You need to eat!”

Seok Kang-Ho broke into tears again. A long stream of snot dripped from his nose, but he didn’t bother to wipe it.

“Goodness! What should I do? What do I do for my poor son?”

The old woman hobbled over and wiped Seok Kang-Ho’s eyes, nose, and mouth with her sleeve.

“Heeeegh.”

For the first time, the teary woman’s and Seok Kang-Ho’s eyes met.

“I feel so wronged! Heeeegh!”

“Why? What’s making you feel that way?”

“There was so much I wanted to do for Ji-Hwan! But I lost him!”

The old woman let out a choked cry.

“That mean, rotten boy! How could he leave his kind senior and poor mother behind?”

After more than half a day, the old woman hugged Seok Kang-Ho for the first time.

Not long after being informed that Kang Chul-Gyu had left the base in Mongolia, Kang Chan picked up his phone.

He pressed the call button. It rang a few times.

- Hello?

Kang Dae-Kyung had answered.

“Father!”

- Channy?

He didn’t expect Kang Dae-Kyung to be so happy to hear from him. Although Kang Dae-Kyung had always been expressive, this was the first time that Kang Chan heard him so delighted.

- The people here have left for training with Mr. Kang.

“I see.”

- Are you joining this training?

Kang Chan couldn't answer. At the very least, he didn't want to lie.

Kang Dae-Kyung sighed deeply. It seemed he already had an idea.

“I know this will make you worried, Father, but I don't want to lie.”

- Good! As you should. You can tell me anything.

Kang Dae-Kyung spoke rapidly, likely because he was trying to accept the situation.

They talked to each other for about twenty minutes. Talking about life in Mongolia and saying that they missed each other eased some of the awkwardness.

“How's Mother?”

- She's in the kitchen. The ingredients she asked for came today, so she's probably busy cleaning them up.

“Is she having a hard time?”

- What are you talking about? Your mom's been sleeping really well lately. She even snores through the night.

The two shared a laugh, then talked for another twenty minutes.

“Father, I'll call Mother now. Take care of yourself.”

Before Kang Chan could hang up, Kang Dae-Kyung quietly called him.

- Channy.

“Yes?”

- Are you sure I've got nothing to worry about? You're coming back safely, right?

“Of course. I'll call you as soon as we're done. I might go to Mongolia too. I'll buy some sushi on the way.

- Haha!

They hung up laughing.

Kang Chan exhaled quietly and then called Yoo Hye-Sook.

- Channy!

Where else in the world would he be able to hear someone as thrilled?

“Mother! Are you in the kitchen?”

Getting to talk to Yoo Hye-Sook again made Kang Chan feel overjoyed.

- Channy! I miss you!

“Me too. I miss you so much.”

He normally wouldn't say such cringey lines.

“Don't overwork yourself.”

- I won't.

Kang Chan knew that after the call, Yoo Hye-Sook would brag about it to Cha Min-Jeong. “My son was worried about me!” she'd likely say.

“I love you, Mother.”

- Me too, Channy!

He still found it awkward to say such things. After all, they felt foreign to him. Nevertheless, he said them anyway because he knew how happy it made Yoo Hye-Sook.

Their call lasted for quite some time. After hanging up, Kang Chan stared at his phone.

NIS counter-terrorism team barracks.

Kang Myung-Gu scratched his eyebrows and glared at the five people sitting in front of him.

The agent sitting to the very left began to speak, putting forth their close relationship. “Hyung-nim!”

These men had been through thick and thin together. They should have been able to recognize the strange tension in the air.

“Punks! Didn't you say tomorrow's your father's birthday? What about you, huh? Isn't your little sister's wedding today? Why are all you off-duty bastards here right now?” Kang Myung-Gu rebuked.

“I already told them that I couldn't make it home.”

“I also said I'm on standby.”

When Kang Myung-Gu sighed, one of the agents quickly added, “We have all already missed going home several times because we were on emergency standby, sir!”

Turning to his peers, he continued, “And you bastards! You're putting me in an awkward position too! My father's birthday will come around next year again, but your sister's wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime event!”

“How can you say that, sir? You know her temper! She's definitely going to get married again. I can just go then.”

Kang Myung-Gu and the other agents all laughed in disbelief.

Kang Myung-Gu looked at the agent sitting at the end. He was holding his bruised left hand with his right hand.

“You punk! Go put the cast back on!”

“It’s fine. That’s why I took it off.”

“Don’t be silly!”

“Look, sir.”

The agent raised his left arm, balled his hand into a fist, then opened it. He grimaced in pain.

“What’s wrong with all of you?!”

“I know you’re going out on a mission, hyung-nim! Please let me go too. I’m begging you.”

Kang Myung-Gu had already selected thirty people for this operation.

However, when he adjusted everyone’s shift schedule, the agents swiftly realized something was going on and requested to speak to him. Since then, they had stuck to him like ticks.

The agents who weren’t around during the International Building incident were especially clingy. Losing their seniors, colleagues, and juniors to that operation had made them so anxious to sign up for missions first.

Even the off-duty agents bustled around the barracks, constantly cleaning their rifles and bayonets.

“Hyung-nim! I just have to switch shifts with someone, right?”

“Haah.”

Kang Myung-Gu sighed loudly.

Click. Click. Click.

Three fully armed men in black uniforms entered the training center of the 606.

“What are you doing here?”

Jeong Won-Min looked scary. Nevertheless, the three sergeants didn’t back down against his sharp glare in the slightest.

“We’re here to ask you to adjust the work schedule, sir.”

“Go on.”

“I’d like to cancel my paid leave.”

“I’m canceling my overnight leave, too.”

Jeong Won-Min glanced at the soldier furthest to the left.

“I will never need an overnight or paid leave for the rest of my life, sir!”

The ridiculous response made the two sergeants standing next to him look as if they had been betrayed. Even Jeong Won-Min was flabbergasted.

“Why?”

None of the three sergeants answered.

“Are you guys joking around?”

“We believe our unit has been ordered to mobilize, sir! We’re willing to do whatever it takes to join the operation.”

“You idiots!”

“Sir, yes, sir!” Choi Chul-Han replied.

“Enough with the nonsense. Leave.”

“Please let us join!”

“You bastards...”

“It’s alright if you beat us up and make us run a thousand laps around the training field with our army gear on, sir! If it would mean you’d take us, we’d be more than happy to accept any consequences!”

Jeong Won-Min snorted. “What made you think there’s even an operation?”

“At least let me cancel my paid leave, sir!”

“Choi Chul-Han!”

“Sir!”

Jeong Won-Min’s eyes glinted. He was especially scary when he was like this.

His fussiness and refusal to let even the slightest mistake in training go unnoticed had earned him the nickname “The 606’s Perfectionist.”

“Have you bastards been smoking? Get out.”

“Permission to speak before we leave, sir.”

Jeong Won-Min nodded at Choi Chul-Han.

“I haven’t slept well since the terrorist attack hit the International Building while I was off-duty.”

Jeong Won-Min coldly gazed at Choi Chul-Han.

“You’ve noticed, haven’t you, sir? I’ve been training more, running more, and practicing hand-to-hand combat alone far into the night.”

“So?”

“The guilt of being away while my colleagues and juniors sacrificed themselves has been making me restless. If there’s an operation, please send me! I want to stand tall in front of my brothers who have already left this world. Only then will I be able to sleep properly!”

Choi Chul-Han's gaze remained unwavering even when Jeong Won-Min glared at him.

- Hello?

Kang Chan couldn't help but chuckle.

Kim Mi-Young sounded the same as before—no, maybe she had changed.

“It's me.”

- I know.

She sounded very upset at him. She didn't respond with a “Yeah!” like she had always done.

It was only natural for her to feel that way, though. He was disappointed and sad, but maybe this was for the better.

Kang Chan thought about saying something nice and hanging up. However, before he could, he heard her snuffle.

- You're mean.

“What's wrong?”

Kim Mi-Young remained silent. The tears that she had been holding back seemed to have burst.

Kang Chan didn't realize how hard it had been for her. He knew that she had been waiting for him, but he had no idea that she had been having a hard time because of it.

“I'm sorry,” he said, apologizing for not contacting her once and making her stifle her tears for so long.

About a minute passed.

- Can I keep waiting for you?

Caught off guard by the question, Kang Chan couldn't respond.

- Dad said you can't contact me because you're too busy serving the country. He said I shouldn't bother you, so I stopped myself from calling.

Kang Chan pictured Kim Gwan-Sik in his office ordering Kim Mi-Young not to contact him.

- Can I do that?

It was funny. Really.

The moment she asked the question, Kang Chan felt the regret and wistfulness he had thought vanished.

“Mi-Young.”

- Hm?

“Do you know what I do?”

- Yeah. I saw you on the TV. The International Building.

Kim Mi-Young sounded tearful again.

“Are you okay with that?”

Was that cowardly of him? Should he have asked if she was okay with him killing people and that he didn't know when he could die?

Either way, never could he have expected her answer.

- Stupid!

He never thought Kim Mi-Young would ever call him stupid.

- So what? Does that mean you'll stop seeing me if I don't become a diplomat or I get fat?

Kang Chan chuckled. How could someone be so pure?

- Why are you laughing?

Now she sounded a bit more like herself.

“Because I want to see you.”

- Now?

She suddenly sounded excited.

Kang Chan glanced down at his watch. It was a little after ten at night. If he went out to drink tea or take a walk, he'd be giving the agents a hard time.

“I'm going on a business trip tomorrow. Let's meet when I come back.”

- Is it dangerous?

“No.”

He didn't want Kim Mi-Young to be more worried.

They talked for about ten more minutes. When the call ended, he came to a decision.

If he returned from this operation...

“Ma'am, I'll visit again soon.”

The elderly woman worriedly looked at Seok Kang-Ho.

“I'll be quick. I'll take care of Ji-Hwan's funeral myself.”

“You're not heading into danger, are you?”

“Not at all.”

“No one will come to his funeral.”

“You don't have to worry about that.”

“Make sure you come back!”

“I said I will!” Seok Kang-Ho reassured. He then added, “Make sure you eat properly. Keep holding on until I come back so we can send Ji-Hwan off properly, okay?”

“Of course! I’m going to keep holding on so I can send my baby off. You better come back!”

“Whew.”

Now that Seok Kang-Ho had vented out his emotions, his eyes glinted more sharply than ever.

Clunk, clunk, clunk.

After having breakfast, the Jeungpyeong special forces soldiers boarded a bus. The sun had yet to rise.

Cha Dong-Gyun stood at the entrance of the bus, watching them enter.

Kwak Cheol-Ho was the last to hop on.

Cha Dong-Gyun slowly turned to the barracks and his aide, who was standing in front of him.

Their team would surely return victorious!

That was what Cha Dong-Gyun had learned from Choi Seong-Geon.

If he could protect South Korea with his hot blood, the Jeungpyeong special forces team would be happy!

Click! Click! Click! Click!

The morning of the 606 was tense.

One after another, the soldiers met Jeong Won-Min’s gaze as they boarded the bus.

He was the Perfectionist of the 606. Still, if they were ever in danger, he’d willingly abandon his pursuit of perfection and stand at the front of their formation.

As they boarded the bus, he shouted the line he’d always shout during training.

“You are the 606! You must always be victorious!”

Afterward, he followed it up with the words he always told them before training or whenever he wasn’t satisfied with their performance.

“Your failure will put our motherland in danger!”

Those who couldn’t lay down their lives for the 606 didn’t deserve to wear the uniform. That was why the 606 went into battle treating their uniform as a shroud.

Today was no different.

The counter-terrorism team, wearing black, exited the barracks.

The tension in these moments was always accompanied by silence.

Click. Clack.

All they could hear were the noises from their rifles.

The counter-terrorism team had failed to protect Hwang Ki-Hyun and Song Chang-Wook. They had lost their colleagues to the terrorist attack on the International Building.

The pain from those failures had turned into the resolve that now burned in their eyes.

If it meant protecting the Republic of Korea, the agents wouldn't mind becoming nameless stars! They'd willingly give their souls to the Taegeukgi and blood to the country!

Shortly after they arrived at the Incheon Airport, Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team headed to the helicopter that had been waiting for them.

The flight was exhausting, yet Kang Chul-Gyu and his men's eyes remained glinting.

The soldiers walked past Kang Chul-Gyu and then into the helicopter.

There was no telling who would return.

However, it didn't matter. They had already given their lives to their country and comrades. They had even sinned against their families to do it.

After breakfast, Kang Chan and the others in the office drank coffee and smoked.

“Hoo.”

Kang Chan looked at Seok Kang-Ho, who had returned at dawn. He still emanated a murderous aura, but it was clear that he had shaken his emotions off.

Next was Gérard. His eyes were just as fierce as Seok Kang-Ho's. He smiled, causing his scar to stretch.

Afterward, he turned to Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, Lee Doo-Hee, and the interpreter, who was smoking a cigarette. Nervousness was evident on the interpreter's face.

Kang Chan stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray.

“Let's go.”

They all stood up and followed Kang Chan.

Chapter 352: I'll Await The Results (1)

Kang Chan's group arrived at the Seongnam Airport a little after eight.

“Why are there so many of them?” Seok Kang-Ho asked.

The perimeter's security was definitely tighter than normal.

Kang Chan didn't think too much of it. After all, they were probably just trying to ensure that no information was leaked.

Lee Doo-Hee presented his identification, and the barricades were opened. They then drove around the main building and straight onto the runway.

A large civilian airplane came into view, then three buses.

As they pulled up behind the buses, they swiftly noticed the soldiers and agents standing rigidly in front of them.

Why are they so stiff?

Kang Chan stepped out of the car and stood in front of the group.

However, nobody turned to look at him.

Kang Chan immediately realized why they were standing at attention and why there was so much security.

Moon Jae-Hyun was shaking hands with each of them and patting them on the shoulder.

Behind him were Jeon Dae-Geuk, Go Gun-Woo, and Kim Hyung-Jung.

After shaking everyone's hands, Moon Jae-Hyun headed over to Kang Chan.

“Assistant Director Kang.”

Moon Jae-Hyun held out his hand, and Kang Chan took it.

“Thank you for leading this brave men into battle, Mr. Kang Chan, and I apologize for putting our nation on your shoulders. I look forward to your safe return.”

Moon Jae-Hyun locked gazes with Kang Chan for a while longer, then shook hands with Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, Woo Hee-Seung, Lee Doo-Hee, and then the interpreter.

Next to the 606 stood Kang Chul-Gyu and the rest of the DMZ team.

“Assistant Director Kang.”

Go Gun-Woo wordlessly took Kang Chan's hand. There was no need for words. Even if he wanted to say something, he wasn't someone who was good with words.

“Please return safely.”

“Yes, sir.”

The president and the director of the NIS would be waiting for him.

Kang Chan nodded at Cha Dong-Gyun.

“Attention!”

Thud!

“Salute the president!”

Thud!

Moon Jae-Hyun returned the salute and lowered his hand.

“At ease!” Cha Dong-Gyun commanded.

Thud!

Moon Jae-Hyun slowly looked at the team.

“As both the president and a fellow citizen of the Republic of Korea, I swear never to forget any of you. I have entrusted you with a difficult task. The least I can do in return is to do my best to make sure this day changes the reputation of Korea.”

Moon Jae-Hyun’s determination and sense of mission seemed to have moved the soldiers. By the time he was done speaking, his eyes had turned red.

After a few moments, Moon Jae-Hyun, Go Gun-Woo, and Jeon Dae-Geuk turned and headed toward the airport building.

“Let’s go!” Cha Dong-Gyun ordered.

In response, the soldiers headed to the airplane trap.

The counter-terrorism team was the first to climb aboard, followed by the Jeungpyeong special forces team, the 606, and, finally, the DMZ team.

They saw no need for conversations. All they did was exchange nods and briefly lock gazes before climbing aboard the plane.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Choi Jong-Il’s team, and the interpreter went up next.

Before climbing up the trap, Kang Chan looked back. Moon Jae-Hyun was watching them from the entrance of the main building.

Kang Chan bowed to him before heading inside.

The plane drove down to the end of the runway.

Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding.

The signal to fasten seatbelts lit up, but no one seemed to care.

Civilian airplanes couldn’t be compared to military transports. It was like comparing the back seat of a van to the back of a truck.

The plane gained altitude and settled into position. Afterward, they heard another ding.

The operation was finally starting.

Taking a cue from Choi Jong-Il, Kang Chan stood up and picked up the flight attendant’s microphone.

“I’m Kang Chan, Assistant Director of the NIS.”

The soldiers, who had settled into their seats, immediately focused on him.

According to the regulations, he was supposed to give them the emergency evacuation instructions first. However, no matter how many times he said it, no one would listen to them anyway.

Choi Jong-Il pressed a button on his laptop, making all the screens on the airplane display a map of Afghanistan. It looked exactly like the one that had been used during the briefing in the underground conference room of the NIS. Kang Chan provided an explanation for every piece of information that popped up afterward.

He began by telling them that special forces teams from Russia, China, and Germany would be joining them and that the US would also send a special forces team to hunt down the two leaders.

“The Rukha district is off the Saricha Road and has the Panjshir River flowing in front of it, which puts us at a strategic disadvantage.”

The men squinted at the map. A view of the mountain, shot as close as possible, came up on the screen.

“UIS combatants are holding up every inch of that mountain you see, and sixty of them are snipers from special forces.”

Their expressions turned grim.

“We’re going to meet with the three foreign special forces teams in Bazar. We’ll start the operation once we’ve rendezvoused with them.”

Taking Kang Chan’s glance as a signal, Choi Jong-Il changed the image on the screen. A red line appeared, stretching from the middle of the mountain to Rukha.

“Jeungpyeong special forces team, you’ll be transported by helicopter and enter through the mountain. You’ll be under Seok Kang-Ho's command.”

Another red line appeared afterward, following the river to Rukha.

“606, you will be moving along the river. Gérard will be your headman.”

Kang Chan then looked at Kang Myung-Gu and the counter-terrorism team. “Counter-terrorism team, you will be moving with me.”

A third red line ran between the paths that the Jeungpyeong special forces team and the 606 would take to Rukha.

“Finally, DMZ team.”

The image quickly changed as Kang Chan spoke.

“I need you to split into three squads. Eliminate all enemies in hiding, snipers, and the enemy leadership.”

Palpable tension filled the plane.

“The foreign special forces teams will be covering our six. Merging and mixing teams will make it harder to get the results we want, and leaving our rear open will give our enemies all the opportunity they need to surround us.”

Kang Chan looked at each of the seated troops.

“The UIS always uses civilians as meatshields. That’s why I assigned the Foreign Legion’s special forces commander to lead the 606 and Seok Kang-Ho to the Jeungpyeong special forces team. One more thing!”

The screen showed an Islamic man with a bomb strapped to his waist.

“Some of their hostages will be strapped with explosive belts similar to the ones you see on the screen. Even if you think you can save them, do not rush to their aid. Any questions?”

After a moment of silence, Jeong Won-Min of the 606 raised his hand.

“What if we encounter civilians like that when we’re not under orders?”

“It will be up to the soldier’s discretion whether to save or neutralize the civilian.”

Jeong Won-Min nodded.

Kang Chan added, “Be especially careful when dealing with women and children strapped with bombs. The moment you hesitate, your brothers die and the operation fails.”

The men had no further questions.

“If you have any more questions, feel free to ask anytime. Now, get comfortable until we land.”

Kang Chan handed the mic to Choi Jong-Il.

“I have an announcement to make.”

What was he going to say? He wasn’t going to say something like, “We have an emergency exit up front, to the sides, and...” was he?

“There’s ramyeon, coffee, and hot water in the galley up front and lunch boxes on the cart in the back. Feel free to eat whenever you want.”

After meeting Kang Chan’s gaze, Choi Jong-Il put down the microphone.

Kang Chan walked down the aisle to get to Kang Chul-Gyu, Nam Il-Gyu, and Yang Dong-Sik.

They had already run a mission together in Libya. Nam Il-Gyu, Yang Dong-Sik, and the others all greeted Kang Chan heartily.

Kang Chul-Gyu had the same stoic expression as before. Kang Chan expected nothing less of him.

“Is there anything you want to know about the operation?”

“How many snipers do we have?”

“Three per team.”

The other soldiers began mingling up front. Their noise soon filled the plane.

Most of the people here had once been in the 606, so they all recognized each other.

The smell of strong coffee wafted over to Kang Chan.

When Kang Chan turned toward its source, he saw Seok Kang-Ho approaching, his eyes still glinting. For some reason, Seok Kang-Ho was holding a large tray of paper cups, and Choi Jong-Il was following him with another.

A member of the DMZ team stood up and took the tray.

“This is Seok Kang-Ho, the one who’ll be leading the Jeungpyeong special forces team. Seok Kang-Ho, this is the DMZ King.”

“Seok Kang-Ho.”

“Kang Chul-Gyu. These are Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik.”

Shit!

Kang Chan never thought he would see Seok Kang-Ho bow. He remembered that Kang Chul-Gyu was Kang Chan’s father in his previous life.

The people around them looked at Seok Kang-Ho with surprise.

After being handed cups of coffee, Kang Chan tried to continue his discussion with Kang Chul-Gyu. However, Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, Jeong Won-Min, and Kang Myung-Gu walked over to them.

“Sunbae-nim!”

“Well, look who it is! How have you all been?”

Kwak Cheol-Ho and Yang Dong-Sik were overjoyed to see each other again. They looked like a father and his son reunited after a war had separated them. Cha Dong-Gyun greeted the seniors next, followed by introductions from Jeong Won-Min and Kang Myung-Gu.

They still had a long flight ahead of them.

The seniors were just as happy to meet their bright juniors as their juniors were happy to meet them.

Kang Chan didn’t want to interrupt them.

“I’ll come back later.”

When Kang Chul-Gyu nodded in response, Kang Chan returned to the front of the plane and glanced back.

Seeing the soldiers lining up in the aisle to greet Kang Chul-Gyu and the DMZ team, whom they considered legends, he concluded that he had made the right decision.

“He has the same eyes as you, Cap. It honestly surprised me.”

“Yeah?”

That didn't sound like a compliment.

As Kang Chan walked past the center countertop and into the business-class seat section, he found soldiers relaxing and chatting over coffee.

“Where's Gérard?”

“He's up front.”

Kang Chan walked further down the aisle. Seok Kang-Ho followed suit.

The plane was too big. He didn't mind it, though.

Reaching the first-class seats, they finally saw Gérard, who was smoking with the interpreter.

Kang Chan settled in the middle seat.

“Captain.”

“What?”

Grinning, Gérard offered them a cigarette. “I think I made the right decision coming to South Korea.”

Taking one, Seok Kang-Ho said, “What's that asshole saying?”

Underground prison of Loriam.

Lanok set down the thin current events magazine and stretched.

The only furniture he had was the bed against the wall, the desk next to it, and a couch.

Glug.

Lanok poured some black tea for Romain, who was sitting on the couch across from him.

“Why are you telling me this now?”

“If Monsieur Kang is after me, I cannot guarantee your safety, sir.”

“Drinking black tea often calms your emotions and helps you think clearly.”

“Sir.”

Click.

Lanok set down the teapot. He then puffed on his cigar as if to show disinterest in Romain's concern.

Click.

Each time he sucked on the cigar, the flame of the lighter was sucked to the other end and back again.

“Hoo. There's nothing I can do about Monsieur Kang's temper.”

Lanok leaned back against the couch and gave Romain a stern look.

“He knows that you’re affiliated with the Star of David and that the Star of David was involved in the terrorist attacks in South Korea. Wouldn’t Monsieur Kang naturally seek to eliminate you?”

“We have the ability to eliminate him.”

“Do it, then.”

Lanok spoke as if the topic wasn’t even worth discussing anymore. He lifted his cup of black tea to his mouth.

“You’re making the same mistake as the other DGSE directors before you.”

Click.

Romain silently met Lanok’s gaze, which was sharper than ever.

“The moment you gained the power to control the world from behind, you started to believe you could also turn the handles at the front too.”

Romain was rendered speechless.

“If the DGSE cannot fulfill the needs of the president and his regime, if it cannot serve the glory of France, then it does not deserve to exist.”

“The President still trusts me.”

Lanok nodded. “Of course he does, but how long do you think his trust will last? Will he still trust you if something fatal to his regime or detrimental to the glory of France gets exposed?”

“I understand what you’re saying. I’ll follow my own judgment on this matter.”

Lanok smirked as he picked up the magazine again.

“Do you really think the DGSE can’t eliminate him?” Romain questioned.

Lanok looked up and tilted his head. As if he couldn’t care less, he then returned his attention to the magazine, seemingly having lost all interest.

With a determined expression, Romain coldly said, “If you have any last words, say them now.”

Lanok took a deep breath, let it out slowly, and put the magazine down.

“How much time do you think I have?” he asked.

“I’ll give you five days.”

“And Anne?”

“I won’t touch your family.”

Lanok nodded. He then went back to reading the magazine, which Romain found ludicrous.

“It doesn’t matter how much faith you have in the boy. He’s not coming back from this battle alive,” Romain added, obviously displeased with Lanok’s attitude.

“When he dies, all the plans that Russia, China, Germany, and Switzerland have been preparing will be for naught.”

Lanok put down the magazine once more. “I see. That reminds me of something I’ve been wondering about.”

Romain looked at Lanok with curiosity.

“Was it you or the Star of David who ordered the assassination of Director Hwang Ki-Hyun and Director Song Chang-Wook?”

After a moment of silence, Romain answered, “It was the DGSE.”

Lanok sighed loudly and rubbed his face. It was an extraordinary display of emotion for a man who rarely showed it.

“Hwang Ki-Hyun was too outstanding for the NIS, and he paid the price for it.”

“You mean you dared do such a thing despite knowing how much Monsieur Kang respected him?”

“Like I said, he’ll die in this battle.”

Lanok and Romain stared each other down.

“I hope you enjoy the last five days you have left.”

“Next time we meet each other, one of us will be dead.”

Romain rose from his seat looking genuinely dumbfounded.

“Do you really believe that Monsieur Kang can survive this battle, defeat the DGSE, and compete with the Star of David?”

“Do you really believe that this battle can kill Monsieur Kang?”

Their eyes met again.

“Five days.”

“I’ll be waiting for the results.”

Romain turned away with a strange smile.

Chapter 353: I’ll Await The Results (2)

Alman bin Jibril looked slowly at the people around him.

“Abibu may have been excessive, but he has shown a clear and unequivocal commitment to our future and our safety.”

Nice men in white suits listened to him with thoughtful expressions.

Each chair had a side table to its right. However, the center of the room itself was empty.

Gesturing with his right hand after every word, he continued, “If we bow down to South Korea now, we will forever be under their economic domination!”

“If you approve of my work in Afghanistan, I will end this once and for all!”

Heavy silence then hung around the room. No one seemed to be able to make up their minds.

“Russia, China, and Germany have joined the fight. Do you really think they would just stand around and watch now that their special forces teams have gotten involved?” Uzman, the oldest and gentlest of the group, questioned.

He had been opposing Jibril’s plan from the start. Unfortunately, the majority seemed to agree with it.

“The president of France himself has called. I was told that he has reached an agreement with the relevant heads of state,” Jibril answered.

“Does that mean they will not interfere anymore?”

Jibril moved the blade of his hand as if slicing the air in half. “They promised to stop meddling in Afghanistan.”

“And the United States?”

“They seem happy with how all of this is turning out.”

Jibril looked around the room again. “Remember. We’re the only ones who can punish the UIS, not South Korea!”

As his eyes glinted even sharper, he took further control of the atmosphere.

“That Korean brat is trying to take everything from us! If we eliminate him in this battle, we will be the eternal winners in the energy business!”

Jibril’s strong-willed statement certainly had an effect.

“If the president of France steps up as well, we’ll have to pay for it.”

“Part of the terms state that we’ll give them a share of the next-gen energy facilities in exchange for the rights to buy their weapons.”

“What about the United States?”

“We have agreed to put a US presence in the Gaza agreement so that they would have a favorable stand during the presidential election.”

Uzman’s questions did not deter Jibril in the slightest.

He continued, “Iran suffered humiliation when its Quds were annihilated in Africa. Now, we have another chance to show the world the capabilities of Islamic warriors! We will make South Korea apologize for torturing Abibu by taking out that brat once and for all.”

Uzman groaned inwardly.

The tide had turned. Nevertheless, he still wanted to stop this plan at all costs. His age and experience warned him over and over again of the dangers it posed.

“The Korean brat who’s out to eliminate the UIS leadership will be sacrificed to commemorate the eternal victory of our energy project. He will surely die in Afghanistan!”

However, listening to Jibril made Uzman realize that he couldn't go against this decision.

“Hmmm.”

Uzman swallowed a sigh.

The French arms purchase? The American presidential election?

Jibril didn't know how light and flimsy trust laced only with profit was!

Moreover, he was too young to realize that there were no absolutes in the world.

What if, after all this, the Korean kid won?

Uzman shook his head at the horrifying thought. He then looked at Jibril, masking his doubts as befitted his age.

Jibril was hiding something. Unfortunately, Uzman couldn't tell what it was.

It couldn't hurt the soldiers to greet and familiarize themselves with Kang Chul-Gyu and the rest of the DMZ team. Hence, Kang Chan spent some time in the first-class seats.

The seats were comfortable anyway, and he had coffee and cigarettes next to him. He couldn't really complain.

“Let's eat.”

Seok Kang-Ho, who was clearly in perfect condition, had gotten lunch boxes and ramyeon noodles with Lee Doo-Hee and the interpreter.

“How's everyone at the back?” Kang Chan asked.

“It seems like everyone's going to eat together. The DMZ King must be pretty impressive!” Seok Kang-Ho answered. “I won't be surprised if they end up asking him to sign their guns.”

As Kang Chan ate the food in the lunch box with cup noodles, he noticed the Frenchman in front of him blowing on his noodles.

After cleaning up, Choi Jong-Il walked over to them.

“Director Kang would like to speak with you.”

“Now?”

“He's waiting in the business-class cabin.”

Kang Chan stood up. It would be awkward to have him come over here and lose their smoking area.

He walked to the back and pulled the curtains open, finding Kang Chul-Gyu sitting by a window. Kang Chan sat down next to him.

“Looks like this is going to be a long battle. Are you okay with that?” Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

He had a map of the Rukha district spread out on the table in front of him.

That was boring.

Wasn't he supposed to ask “Have you eaten?” or “Have you rested?” out of politeness first?

Unaware of Kang Chan's thoughts, Kang Chul-Gyu ran his index finger along the mountainous terrain. “It'll take us a while to get to the site too.”

His concern also affected Kang Chan, Kang Myung-Gu, Jeong Won-Min, and the rest of the soldiers.

“We'll have fighter jets to support us until we get to our destination by helicopter,” Kang Chan added.

Kang Chul-Gyu looked at Kang Chan with a mixture of surprise and disbelief.

He continued, “Bombarding them first before launching an attack from the ground should give us a shot at victory.”

“Did you just say we'll have fighter jets with us?”

Kang Chan nodded affirmatively.

“This is worth a try, then. I think a concentrated hit on this line should be enough. Our boys can then go in first to clear the way.... Yes, this should work,” Kang Chul-Gyu mused. He was looking at the map as if to memorize it.

“Don't overdo it,” Kang Chan said bluntly. “I know you mean well, but they'll be coming at us in ways you've never seen before. They leave kids wearing suicide belts alone in the mountains. Some even volunteer to be strapped with one and run toward us.”

Kang Chul-Gyu, who was looking away, smirked.

What the hell? I was trying to be considerate! He should change the way he smiles!

His smile was strangely provocative.

“Are we done?”

Kang Chan was about to stand up when Kang Chul-Gyu quietly asked, “Have you eaten?”

Why did it seem so awkward to ask that question?

“There's cup ramyeon and lunch boxes.”

Kang Chan stood up.

“Get some rest. Things will immediately get rough the moment we land.”

“I will,” Kang Chul-Gyu responded.

Kang Chan made his way back to the first-class cabin. He didn't expect the conversation to be so stiff.

"Back so soon?"

"Yeah."

The moment Kang Chan sat down, Seok Kang-Ho tilted his seat back.

Gérard was already sleeping.

They had a battle ahead of them. Getting some sleep while they could would be invaluable at crucial moments.

Kang Chan leaned back in his chair and immediately closed his eyes.

Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding.

Lights flashed, and the alarm sounded, signaling that they were landing in twenty minutes.

Waking up, Kang Chan sat up and shook his head.

Seok Kang-Ho, who was sitting across from him, cleared his throat. "Argh!"

The more diligent Gérard fetched some water bottles. His eyes were definitely sharper than before now.

Kang Chan opened the bottle and drank it. He wanted to wash his face with it too, but they weren't on a military transport aircraft. He couldn't just spill water all over the place on a commercial airplane.

"I'll go wash my face."

Kang Chan went to the restroom in the back, washed his face, and returned to his seat.

The time had come to arm themselves.

"Let's go."

Everyone in the first-class cabin followed him.

They passed the business-class seats, moving further to the back.

Clunk. Clunk. Click. Click.

Eventually, they found soldiers changing out of their uniforms and strapping on their weapons.

"Here you go, sir."

Yoon Sang-Ki handed him a large sack of off-white uniforms, rifles, pistols, grenades, bayonets, magazines, and radios.

Clack! Clack! Clunk!

Their usual routine followed.

Within ten minutes, everyone on the plane had finished preparations. Not long after, the landing signal blared.

Ding, ding, ding, ding.

They were still settling in their seats when the plane lurched.

It was still quite bright outside.

Kang Chan looked out the window and saw the familiar airport of Kabul, Afghanistan.

Hotan, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China.

Park Seung-Young's sunglasses reflected the military runway.

It had been half an hour since he had arrived at the military airport in Hotan with eight KF-16 fighter jets. He had been staring at the two-story control building and the poorly maintained runway across the desolate field ever since.

“Damn!”

Park Seung-Yong turned around.

It was hard for the Air Force to fight overseas. Depending on whether it was a dogfight or a bombing mission, different weapons were required, and if there wasn't an aircraft carrier, maintenance and armament teams had to accompany them.

That was why Lee Ki-Do and the other pilots who had come here kept looking around in disbelief.

South Korean fighter jets flying to Afghanistan?

Park Seung-Yong sighed loudly.

He couldn't believe he could fly a fighter jet across Chinese soil right after he had taken off from South Korea.

North Korea was a different issue, but he didn't think they could defeat the United States, who had the rights to operate in warfare.

Was this really possible? If it was...

Images of fighter jets had been floating around in his head all night long. Now, he was standing on the edge of China.

Fifteen or twenty minutes from here was their target—Rukha, Afghanistan.

“Lee Ki-Do.”

“Sir.”

Although they were both majors, Park Seung-Yong had more experience. Hence, Lee Ki-Do addressed him with honorifics.

“Have the men rest, but remain on standby. Be ready to leave at any time.”

“Yes, sir.”

Park Seung-Yong returned his gaze to the runway.

A KF-16 fighter jet waited patiently for him, being tended to by the maintenance team.

It was loaded with the weapons they'd need for the bombing run.

In truth, F-15s were better suited for bombing, but the Air Force Operations Command had designated them KF-16s just to be safe.

Park Seung-Young pressed his lips together. He could only hope that their preparations would be enough to take down the militia.

There was no time to waste at the airport.

Right after disembarking, the South Korean special forces team immediately piled into US-provided helicopters and headed to Bazar.

Du du du du du du du du.

The noises of the propellers rushed into their ears, the wind past their bodies, and the smell of Afghanistan into their nostrils.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and Choi Jong-Il, whose skills had been fully developed, stared ahead with glinting eyes. Meanwhile, the other soldiers mended their weapons or stared into space.

During moments like this, they always remembered the people they sorely missed and whose hearts they would break if they failed to come back alive.

Kang Chan leaned against the wall of the helicopter and looked at the red light inside.

Why did that remind him of the old Song Chang-Wook, whom they had left behind?

Du du du du du du du du.

After about thirty minutes in the air, the helicopter descended to the ground.

“Daye! Gérard!” Kang Chan shouted.

In response, the two men stood on either side of the entrance until the helicopter had landed and the door had opened.

Whoosh.

Wind, dirt, and a faint odor rushed into the helicopter.

“Secure our front!” Kang Chan ordered.

Dash! Dash!

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and four other soldiers scrambled out.

Bazar was a flat plain with a mountain in front of it.

Chk.

“I've got two men up here. All clear,” Seok Kang-Ho said.

Kang Chan quickly exited the helicopter and waved his arms together.

Du du du du du du du.

The helicopters in the distance landed one after another, and the men they were carrying jumped out.

The first to arrive unloaded the luggage that they had brought with them.

Kang Chan scanned the surrounding terrain and pointed down the mountain.

“Cha Dong-Gyun! Set up a perimeter over there and over there. I want a barracks for each team too!”

“Yes, sir!”

The men quickly executed his orders.

Kang Chan looked behind him, finding Kang Chul-Gyu approaching him quietly.

“We want to take a look up the mountain.”

Kang Chan followed Kang Chul-Gyu’s gaze to the top of the mountain. If they could take control of its peak, it would be a lot easier to clear the foot of it.

“Thank you,” Kang Chan said.

“Please inform the others that I’ll have two men posted per point.”

“Why don’t you leave the perimeter to the Jeungpyeong special forces team?”

“I’m worried about the sixty enemy snipers. My boys will be better at dealing with them, so leave this one to us.”

Kang Chan nodded. He then asked, “Why don’t you wear body armor?”

Kang Chul-Gyu and the other DMZ team members weren’t wearing body armor.

“This is just how we’ve always done things. We never wore them in the past either. They’re too much of a hindrance in ambushes and assassinations.”

Everyone had their specialty. Kang Chan insisting that they wore body armor would be like asking a sniper to use a lighter gun.

It took them thirty minutes to set up the barracks and unload the weapons and ammunition.

Afterward, Kang Chan summoned Kang Chul-Gyu, Cha Dong-Gyun, Jeong Won-Min, and Kang Myung-Gu to the central barracks.

“It’s currently twenty-nine minutes past three. Set your watches accordingly. Jeungpyeong team, I want you to guard the base while the DMZ team scouts our perimeter. Make sure to avoid any misunderstandings. Ready? One, two!”

Click.

The soldiers simultaneously pressed a button on their watches.

“We’ll discuss the plan as soon as reinforcements arrive, then leave right after. Until then, spend your time as you see fit. DMZ team, stay within two kilometers of the base.”

“Understood,” Kang Chul-Gyu replied with a stern face. They then dispersed.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“Sure.”

Through the scope of his rifle, Kang Chan looked at the tall mountain in front of the barracks. It was dense with thin trees.

On the Saricha Road, they would only be a thirty-minute drive away from Rukha. If they were to go over the mountain to get to Rukha, it would take them approximately eighteen hours.

The helicopter would drop them off the mountain, and they would climb down it.

Feeling a chill, Kang Chan slowly looked from one end of the mountain to the other.

Click, click.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, and the interpreter approached him, their rifles clanking as they did. The smell of the coffee in their hands wafted over to him.

“When will the others arrive?”

“They should be here any minute now.”

Seok Kang-Ho handed him the coffee.

“I’m already looking forward to seeing that Andrei guy.”

Kang Chan grinned. After listening to the interpretation, Gérard did as well.

Kang Chan kept his eyes on the mountain as he drank his coffee.

What’s with the chill I’m feeling?

He had never felt this before. Rather than a warning from his pounding heart or instincts, it seemed more like ice water running down his spine.

Was it his nerves? Was he anxious because he was in charge of such a huge battle?

“Hoo.”

Kang Chan blew on the hot coffee to cool it down. At the same time, Yoon Sang-Ki urgently approached them.

“It’s a satellite call.”

He didn’t say who it was.

Was this the reason?

Kang Chan handed him the paper cup and took the satellite phone.

“Hello?”

- This is the situation room.

Kim Hyung-Jung sounded as if he was in a rush.

- The NIS has just received word that Russia, China, and Germany have canceled the deployment of their men. Their respective presidents have apparently rejected the notion.

Kang Chan glanced at the mountain.

Why was his gaze drawn up?

- Germany is demanding to speak to you on the phone. Can I give them your number?

“Yes, please.”

- I think it would be best for you to leave as soon as the call is over.

“I’ll let you know after.”

After the call dropped, Kang Chan turned to Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard, who were looking at him curiously.

“Russia, China, and Germany have canceled the deployment of their special forces teams. They say their presidents didn’t give them permission. It’s strange. Ludwig from Germany wants to talk to me, so—”

Ring. Ring.

Kang Chan immediately answered the call.

“Hello?”

- It’s me.

Ludwig spoke in urgent French.

- We’re short on time, so I’ll get straight to the point. Romain has countered us with the French president’s support. Just before I called you, thirty fighter jets and warplanes were launched from Iran, so get out of there now!

That was it.

Kang Chan looked at the sky beyond the mountain.

- They’ll be there in less than thirty minutes. Hurry!

“If they’re that close already, the fighter jets will catch up to the helis in no time.”

- I don’t care what you have to do. Just make sure you escape! They got us with the perfect trap. We’ve even received reports that two hundred Quds have also joined them!”

“I’ll call you back after relocating.”

- Retreat as fast as you can! We’ll do something about Romain.

“Understood.”

No matter how skilled they were, it was impossible to deal with fighter jets with their numbers.

Kang Chan hung up.

Du du du du du du du du.

At that moment, he heard the sound of helicopter engines.

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard turned their heads and saw the helicopters hovering overhead.

Damn it!

Even if they ran now, they wouldn't be able to catch them.

Kang Chan quickly put his hand on the radio.

Chk.

“All units, prepare for battle!”

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard looked around in surprise.

There was no time for explanations now.

“Iranian fighters are headed this way. We'll give up on cooperation from the helicopters and abandon the barracks, so grab as many weapons and ammo as you can. In thirty minutes, we're heading to the mountains.”

As soon as the transmission ended, a flurry of activity filled the area.

“Daye! Lead the vanguard with the Jeungpyeong team!”

“Got it!”

Seok Kang-Ho quickly ran off.

Thirty minutes? Kang Chan pressed a button on the satellite phone.

- This is the situation room.

“Thirty fighter jets and airplanes from Iran have set off for us. How many fighter jets do we have?”

- Eight are on standby.

“Whew!”

He might not know much about air combat, but they were obviously outmatched.

Kang Chan gritted his teeth as he glared at the mountain.

- We'll have them take off now!

“There's no point. They'll just be flying to their deaths.”

- They can at least buy you time to evacuate!

Kim Hyung-Jung sounded quite frantic.

Ring, ring, ring.

Park Seung-Young, who had picked up the satellite phone, stated the agreed-upon passage. "This is the dispatch center."

- Iran has sent thirty fighter jets and warplanes to our destination. We need to buy our allies some time to evacuate.

"Do we have permission to engage?"

- I'll leave that to your discretion.

"We're on our way."

Park Seung-Young hung up and immediately turned around.

"Switch weapons!"

The maintenance team looked up in surprise.

"The enemy has sent in planes! Prepare for a dogfight!"

The maintenance team rushed back to the planes.

"Get ready for takeoff!"

Dash!

Park Seung-Yong and the pilots ran as fast as they could toward the fighter jets.

Chapter 354: I Believe in You (1)

The weapons and maintenance teams were still busily adjusting the weapons of his aircraft when Park Seung-Yong climbed the ladder to the cockpit.

Park Seung-Young put on his helmet and lowered the canopy. Afterward, he looked out, feeling like he was about to go crazy with frustration.

"Thirty minutes. Our allies are in danger. Please."

He didn't have to radio his sentiments. The weapons and the maintenance teams wouldn't slack off in this situation anyway. Still, considering the distance, he wanted to get every second he could get.

'Please!'

Park Seung-Young knew better than anyone how terrifying a fighter jet could be to ground troops.

Soon, the weapons team moved away from the aircraft. The ladder was removed as well.

Clunk.

Looking to his left, he found the chief of the maintenance team giving him a thumbs-up.

'Please protect the skies of South Korea!'

They had exchanged the same gesture countless times in training and on emergency dispatches.

Urrrrng.

As the jets whirred awake, seemingly raring to take off, Park Seung-Yong raised his left hand and gave a thumbs-up as well.

‘Believe in us!’

The chief of the maintenance team pointed forward with his index and middle fingers.

Whoooooosh!

The fighter jets took off without a hitch.

Chk.

“There’s a cave a hundred and fifty meters ahead!” Nam Il-Gyu radioed in.

Kang Chan didn’t expect the DMZ team to be able to scout that far ahead.

Chk.

“DMZ team! Lead the men there!”

Taking care to speak politely to his elders at a time like this was ridiculous.

Chk.

“Positioning the men.”

They didn’t have time to think about whether the cave was too high up or how deep it was. For now, they could only hope for a place to hide, preferably one where the enemies couldn’t see the entrance from above.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Kang Chan rushed out. Gérard, Choi Jong-Il, and Woo Hee-Seung followed him from the barracks.

“Hurry! Help them!”

Choi Jong-Il and Woo Hee-Seung carried some of the boxes of ammo and grenades.

Carrying basic equipment like medicine on their backs, everyone rushed to the mountains. The DMZ team led the way.

Kang Chan suddenly felt a chill run down his spine.

This had to be the reason he felt the urge to look at the mountain!

Chk.

“DMZ team! Check the perimeter of the cave for snipers! If there’s any in the area, we won’t be able to avoid being shot at!” Kang Chan ordered.

Chk.

“Nam Il-Gyu! Take three men with you and guard the nine o’clock of the entrance,” Kang Chul-Gyu instructed. “Yang Dong-Sik! Three men at twelve o’clock! I’ll handle the rest!”

Everyone was tuned to the same frequency. Hence, he didn't have to nag them to be careful or divide themselves into groups.

Considering it was one hundred fifty meters away, they'd likely take ten minutes to get there. The fighter jets would be on them in twenty-five.

'Those motherfuckers!'

If they failed to get to the cave before then, it would all be over. The jets could easily shoot them while they were in the open or make the cave collapse if they saw them entering it.

Chk.

"Cha Dong-Gyun! Set up our snipers where you think there will be movement! Withdraw after twenty minutes!"

Chk.

"Yes, sir!"

Chk.

"Daye! Secure the perimeter in front of the cave!"

Chk.

"Got it, Cap!"

Chk.

"DMZ team! They could just fire missiles at us once we've entered the cave! Make sure we're out of range! We don't have much time left!"

Chk.

"Understood," Kang Chul-Gyu replied.

Kang Chan quickly turned around.

"Gérard! On me! We're heading to the back of the mountain! There could be enemy snipers or missiles there!"

"Oui!"

Kang Chan ran along the mountains to the flat plain to his right.

Click! Click!

Right after, he leaped onto the ridge. Rifles, pistols, and bayonets clanked as the others followed.

Chk.

"All snipers are in position!" Cha Dong-Gyun radioed.

Swiiiiish.

Eight fighters soared across the sky. Park Seung-Yong led four aircraft. Lee Ki-Do led the other four.

“We’re still not sure what the enemies are flying.”

“I won’t waste time with that. You’re familiar with Iran’s air power, aren’t you?”

Once engaged, units three and four would cover units one and two, respectively. Units one and two would move back again along the formation.

Park Seung-Young looked at both sides. “Forget about the bombing. Our goal is to protect our allies.”

They were so high up that the horizon looked rounded, following the shape of Earth.

Although the ground seemed to move slowly, most people wouldn’t be able to breathe at the speed they were going. Some would even vomit.

“Can we engage?” Lee Ki-Do asked.

Recalling the situation room telling him to use his own judgment, Park Seung-Yong steeled his resolve.

“Shoot down any enemy that attacks our allies,” Park Seung-Yong ordered as if he had forgotten that they would be up against thirty enemy aircrafts.

“We have to prevent any further takeoffs from Iran.”

- Vasili, you’ll have to leave that to Yang Bum.

Vasili stared coldly at the monitor in front of him.

“Considering Romain has influenced the political regimes, the Star of David is bound to move.”

- All of this will be meaningless if Monsieur Kang dies.

Vasili gritted his teeth. “What about Romain?”

- We have already dispatched agents.

“Good. I will teach Josh the horrors of the KGB, then.”

- I’ll dispatch the GSG-9 again as soon as I’ve talked to the prime minister.

“The Spetsnaz needs three hours.”

- That would mean Monsieur Kang would have to hold out for six hours.

Ludwig sounded thick with regret.

“Hmph! If this was enough to kill Monsieur Kang I would have already dealt with him myself.”

- Alright. I'll call you as soon as I've met with the prime minister. Is this really what Lanok expected?

"Maybe not to this extent, but definitely something close to it. This moment will dictate the future, so quiet negotiations won't be enough to put an end to it. If Monsieur Kang wins, the Star of David will have to reveal themselves to deal with our president, Germany's chancellor, China's leader, and France."

- I didn't expect Monsieur Kang to become so influential.

"Yes. Unfortunately, we are just mere side characters in this battle. Anyway, hurry, Ludwig."

Vasili hung up and then called another number.

After a brief moment of silence, he said, "Who was it that hid the president's call from me?"

Vasili tilted his head and smiled.

"Arrest him, his children, brothers, and every living relative. Submit evidence as you see fit, and charge him with arms trafficking. Oh, kill his wife. Just say she resisted. The others can serve life in Siberia."

After hearing a response, he nodded.

"I'll report to the president."

Vasili put down the phone and picked up a bottle of vodka.

Glug.

His eyes glinted as he held up his glass.

"Lanok, you scary bastard! I can't believe you got me to bet everything I have!"

Vasili acted like Lanok and Kang Chan were right in front of him.

"Monsieur Kang, if you die, I won't let you rest—not even in hell."

Vasili drained his glass in one swift gulp. He then grimaced, seemingly finding the drink quite strong.

"Those idiots!" Warab Amedi of the UIS fumed.

The snipers were meant to take out the enemy in one fell swoop, whether they came in helicopters or traveling up the mountain on foot. However, the fighter jets' intervention had ruined a part of the big picture he had been forming.

He had thought they would just be keeping the South Korean fighter jets at bay.

'We're too out of sync!'

Now that Abibu was gone, they lacked proper communication.

The UIS couldn't really care less about Romain. They wouldn't obediently follow the orders of the French DGSE.

Amedi gripped the end of the table.

The UIS' declaration of independence, the attacks of terrorism that were supposed to ensue, and the enormous dealings behind the curtains were now being combated alone by the small country of South Korea. To make matters worse, that damn brat was leading the way.

“We'll be on standby until the fighter jets return. Tell the snipers to launch the missiles or shoot at the first opportunity.”

His subordinate immediately left the underground tunnel to carry out his orders.

They only had ten minutes left now.

Thanks to Kang Chan, everyone was already aware of the situation.

Chk.

“Captain, I'm already in front of the cave. I'll stay here until all the enemy snipers have been taken out,” Seok Kang-Ho reported as he kept an eye on the opposite side. He had already spread his men around the cave.

Although he was often criticized for not being able to use his head for anything but food, he was second to none in combat.

As far as he could tell, the enemies only had five viable positions they could take. After all, portable missiles that could be carried by people had obvious limitations. If they were too high above the cave, they would blow the entrance and not much more.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at his watch.

‘Hurry!’

Kang Chan had run up the mountain, muffling the sound as he descended.

Snipers were supposed to be on two-man teams.

However, the ones who were alone—covered in camouflage, branches, and various other foliage—were more frightening.

Halfway down the mountain, the path suddenly forked diagonally.

They were too short on time. They had already used up fifteen minutes without much time.

Rustle.

Kang Chan looked back to where he had run up from.

He wasn't sure if it was because he was in a hurry, but the dirt under the right toe of his boot crumbled easily.

Gérard, rifle in hand, covered their right, and Kang Chan kept watch of the other side.

Haah. Haah.

‘One, two, three, four, five.’

The enemy still hadn’t done anything.

Kang Chan gestured to the front with a nod. Since it was dangerous for them to move at the same time, Kang Chan decided to cover their rear while Gérard, who was in the back, proceeded onward.

Kang Chan scanned the area ahead of Gérard, who was descending the mountain.

Just then, under the bright sunlight, spiky leaves rattled in the wind.

Gérard froze. He raised two fingers, then pointed forward twice.

They had two enemies ahead.

Haah. Haah.

Cautiously yet quickly, Kang Chan moved toward Gérard.

Motherfuckers!

Twenty meters down, he saw grass sticking out of the bushes at a completely wrong angle. Three paces away from the sniper, a soldier was covering him, nervously glaring at the cave.

Still squatting, Kang Chan raised his rifle and looked at Gérard.

‘One, two!’

Pew! Thud! Pew! Thud!

The sniper’s head exploded like a watermelon. At the same time, Gérard shot the soldier in the neck.

Pew! Thud!

Kang Chan immediately fired another shot. Blood spurted from the back of the soldier’s skull.

Upon hearing a gunshot echo nearby, Kang Chul-Gyu pulled out the bayonet hanging around his left shoulder.

He heard three shots in total—two were fired in quick succession, while the third came a moment later. That was all he needed to know that they had taken out two men, and the extra shot was done to confirm the kill.

‘It’s Kang Chan!’

Kang Chul-Gyu lowered his stance and waited for the enemy’s reaction. Soon, one of them glanced back, then peeked into his scope again.

Haah. Haah.

I was already doing this when you boys were still learning how to walk.

The most frightening enemy one could encounter was those who'd shoot them from the back while they were trying to sneak up on another enemy. Hence, when Kang Chul-Gyu began to move, two of his subordinates turned around to cover their rear.

Like a leopard that had spotted its prey, Kang Chul-Gyu crouched down and stuck to the ground, keeping his head hidden among the grass.

The next moment, he lunged forward.

Swish!

The enemy turned back in surprise. As they locked gazes, Kang Chul-Gyu grabbed him with his left hand and twisted his neck.

Crack! Jab!

At the same time, he stabbed the sniper's guard in the neck with the bayonet in his right hand.

Shing!

After pulling the bayonet out, Kang Chul-Gyu pointed his right index and middle fingers toward his eyes, then forward again.

His two team members quickly disappeared into the forest.

Nam Il-Gyu nodded at the two men following him.

They had spotted two enemies.

Nam Il-Gyu could take them down alone, but time was of the essence.

Earlier, he had heard three gunshots. Considering Kang Chul-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik never used guns in covert operations, he concluded that Kang Chan had taken out some snipers.

His two team members got into position and then glanced at him.

'One, two, three!'

The moment the enemies turned their heads, bayonets were plunged into their throats.

Swish!

Jab! Jab!

Right after, Nam Il-Gyu and his men quickly withdrew their weapons.

Shing!

Nam Il-Gyu gazed ahead of him. If he had time, he would have cut off their heads and hung them on a tree.

Jab! Jab!

Yang Dong-Sik pulled the bayonet that was deep in the sniper's neck up toward his uvula. The area around the writhing enemy's neck was stained with blood, but he didn't have the time to dwell on it.

‘Hurry!’

Yang Dong-Sik’s eyes glinted as he nodded toward the front.

Dash!

At the same time, two men rushed forward.

The bastards that targeted South Korean soldiers, the Assistant Director, and his shining juniors!

Yang Dong-Sik was about to move forward when the head of one of his men snapped back and blood splattered out of it.

Thud!

As his subordinate slumped to the ground, Yang Dong-Sik looked up.

The enemies were above them!

Hearing the gunshot, Kang Chan immediately got the gist of where the enemies were located.

They didn’t have enough time to get up there, but they couldn’t and shouldn’t go into the cave while snipers were still outside either.

Kang Chan quickly pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“DMZ team! Send a crackle if your group has taken out snipers.”

Chk. Chhk. Chk.

After hearing three crackles in total, Kang Chan spoke into the radio again.

Chk.

“We found one hiding on our five o’clock, which means we’ve taken out four snipers in total. DMZ team, head to the cave.”

Gérard sharply protected Kang Chan while the latter was issuing orders.

“Don’t let your bloodlust get ahead of you. You’ll have to eliminate all the snipers on the way to Rukha and any other variables later, so get back to the cave immediately.”

Once Kang Chan was done speaking, Kang Chul-Gyu pressed the button on his radio.

Chk.

“Pull out.”

Chk.

“Gérard! We’ll take care of those two over there,” Kang Chan said.

As his eyes burned ferociously, Gérard nodded. “Oui!”

Whoooosh!

Hearing a noise from the skies, Kang Chan looked up just in time to see a fighter jet cutting through the clouds.

Damn it!

They got here faster than he had thought.

Kang Chan gritted his teeth and ran upward.

Swoosh!

Discovering their allies, the enemy planes began to spread out.

“Lee Ki-Do! Shoot down the Phantoms! Do whatever it takes to stop them from bombing our allies!”

Swiiiiish!

Being in the air with enemy planes was scary. In this high-tech age, missiles and radar detection were more likely to determine victory than dogfights.

“We’ll stop the MiGs while Lee Ki-Do gets the Phantom!”

Park Seung-Yong pulled the control stick.

Whoooosh!

His plane soared, making it seem like the sky was tilting and switching places with the ground.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

“Unit One! I’ve got an enemy plane on my six!”

“I need more time!”

An enemy plane appeared on his radar.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Competition? Honor! Eat this!

The Phantoms had soared all the way here to bomb the ground forces.

He needed to catch all the MiGs he could and draw in as many enemy planes as possible so Lee Ki-Do could catch the damn Phantoms.

At the very least, their allies would be safe for as long as they could keep the hostile planes engaged in aerial combat.

Zooooooooom!

The ground flashed by like a three-dimensional graphic.

‘Please!’

Zooooooooom!

His surroundings spun.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

“Unit One! Enemy aircraft closing in from the rear! Be careful!”

Park Seung-Yong gritted his teeth and pushed the side lever.

Just then, the radar-lock alarm blared. The enemy plane had entered the target box.

Beeeeep!

Park Seung-Yong pressed the fire button, sending out one of the AMRAAMs attached to his wings.

Peeeeew!

Right after, he pushed the side lever as far as he could.

His Falcon plunged almost vertically.

“I’ve got a bogie on my six!” Unit Three shouted.

Zoom! Zooooooooom!

As the upside-down Falcon plummeted to the ground, Park Seung-Yong gritted his teeth to steady his fading vision.

“Unit Three! Get under the enemy! I’ve got you!”

The Falcon shuddered as an enemy plane soared below it.

Swiiiiish!

“Evasive maneuvers!” Park Seung-Yong shouted. He swung the control stick to the left.

Boooooom!

Right after, one of the Phantoms burst into flames and plummeted.

A series of warnings soon blared, warning Park Seung-Yong that his Falcon was now in range of the enemy.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

“Unit Three! Now!”

Swiiiiish!

As Unit Three swerved right and then left, Park Seung-Yong dove into the gap.

Determined to engulf the entire area in a sea of fire, the enemy had sent a dozen F-4 Phantoms. On top of that, they had also deployed ten F-14 Tomcats and eight MiG 29s.

Boooooom!

Another enemy Phantom burst into flames and plunged to the ground.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

More planes came after them. One even closely followed after Park Seung-Yong. Fortunately, they were in the air.

Evasive Maneuver.

It was a nice name, but it was really just a feint.

He would draw a long line like he was going right but suddenly go left!

Park Seung-Yong pushed the throttle lever and pulled the side stick toward him.

Whirrrrr!

The sky and ground turned upside down and then back to normal.

Unit Three had evaded its enemy. However, Unit Seven was still under pressure.

“Unit Seven! Escape! Escape!” Lee Ki-Do frantically shouted into the radio.

At that moment, Unit Seven was hit. Its wings caught on fire, sending it spiraling down.

Boooooom!

It exploded in midair before the pilot could escape.

Unfortunately, there was no time to lament his death.

“I’ve got an enemy on my tail!” Lee Ki-Do urgently radioed in.

Park Seung-Yong jerked the throttle lever and side stick wildly.

Chapter 355: I Believe In You (2)

Whoooooosh!

The sun, shining white, swept from the right side of the canopy to the left. The ground and the sky appeared half to the left and half to the right.

“I’ve got it! Unit Five!”

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

The enemy plane was in missile range.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

However, Park Seung-Yong’s Falcon had also entered the enemy’s.

“Unit One! It’s dangerous! Get out of there!”

If Park Seung-Yong left now, Lee Ki-Do would be struck, and if they lost Lee Ki-Do, the enemy Phantoms would be left unattended.

The MiG 29 followed Lee Ki-Do as he made his plane twist around. Park Seung-Yong, who was targeted by another MiG 29, followed right behind him.

They were too outnumbered.

‘I’ve already given my life to the Taegeukgi!’

Park Seung-Yong made the Falcon soar, then sent it plunging.

Beeeeeeeeeeep.

Click.

Peeeeew!

An AMRAAM flew from the tip of his wings.

Park Seung-Yong Falcon spun and flew away as if it was tossed sideways.

Swiiiiish!

Kang Chan gritted his teeth and ran upward. He felt as if the sound of the jet engines were digging into him.

The more the sniper moved, the harder it was to catch him. The good news was that the enemy planes hadn't bombed them yet, and the noises from the dogfight above made it impossible to hear any footsteps.

Gérard and Kang Chan gasped as they neared the top. "Haah! Haah!"

They were going to catch their motherfucking enemy so they could escape to the cave!

Kang Chan pointed Gérard to three spots, ordering him to take them.

Haah. Haah.

Catching his breath, Kang Chan slowly moved forward. In front of him was a patch of grass at an odd angle, a tree rising out of nowhere in the middle of the grass, and an area that was raised above the ground.

Swiiiiish!

Hearing the jumble of airplanes sent a shiver down his spine. Nevertheless, he focused on what he could see.

They only had eight men facing the enemy's thirty.

His first instinct was to have them take cover in the cave and, if possible, get their allies' planes away from enemy skies.

Perhaps it was because of the planes above them, but the wind was a little stronger now that they were higher up.

Kang Chan moved slightly, leaning on trees and branches.

Where is the enemy? Where?

Gérard was still looking as well.

Kang Chan knew that the enemy had to be somewhere in this area.

Perhaps he was even right next to them or under their noses already.

Maybe he was already in the crosshairs of their rifle scopes.

At that moment, Seok Kang-Ho spoke on the radio.

Chk.

“Captain. I’m going to head in front of the cave. Get the sniper before he shoots me!”

That crazy bastard!

If the sniper turned out to be outside Kang Chan’s range, Seok Kang-Ho would be a goner.

They were rushed. With only eight friendly planes fending off thirty enemy planes, the thought of being carpet-bombed made Seok Kang-Ho impatient.

Although the planes were drawing out their voices, it was still dangerous for them to talk on the radios here.

Kang Chan scanned his surroundings. His venomous eyes glinted mercilessly.

Swiiiiish! Swiiish!

“Unit Six! Fall back! Fall back!”

Despite Lee Ki-Do’s urgent insistence, Unit Six stubbornly pursued the enemy Phantom.

They were all aware that the Phantom that Unit Six was after was aiming for the ground, but with an MiG on their tail, it was still too dangerous to pursue it.

Whoooosh!

The enemy plane plunged, and Unit Six followed.

“Unit Six! I said fall back!”

Hisssssss!

Unit Six fired an AMRAAM. Immediately after, the MiG that was chasing him fired an AA-11.

Boooom! Crash!

The enemy’s Phantom and Unit Six burst into flames.

Whoooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong’s aircraft plunged as if it had lost its balance. However, it quickly recovered.

Beeeeeeep.

The MiG 29 that destroyed Unit Six appeared on his radar.

Click.

Hisssss.

Booooom!

‘Please!’

Park Seung-Yong prayed desperately that Kang Chan, whom he had met just a few days ago, and the ground troops with him would find a place to hide.

Haah. Haah.

Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion.

The hair on his head stood on end, and a chill ran down his neck and spine.

Let's see if you can hide, you fucking son of a bitch!

If you can risk getting bombed just to target my men, then I'll risk getting bombed just to fucking kill you!

Kang Chan's bloodlust blossomed like never before.

Suddenly, he froze. His gaze locked on an area where the grass was more clumped than others. The stalks stood stiff even with the wind blowing against them.

Kang Chan put his finger on the trigger.

At that moment, Seok Kang-Ho spoke on the radio again.

Chk.

"I'm moving now."

At that moment, Kang Chan saw the muzzle of a gun move.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

He fired three shots into where the sniper's head and torso likely were, then two more in succession.

Kang Chan ran forward. Almost at the same time, Gérard charged in from the side.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kang Chan shot the soldier guarding the sniper, who had been hit in the chest and was now coughing out blood. Gérard shot him two more times.

The RPG-7 in between them drew his attention.

These assholes had intentionally waited on this route.

What would have happened if Kang Chan and his men had flown over this area in a helicopter?

Just thinking about the consequences horrified him.

Chk.

"We got this one! There might be more, so when you go into the cave, split into teams before you enter!" Kang Chan shouted into the radio.

Swiiiiiiiiish!

Boooom! Boooom!

At that moment, the ground shook, and a huge pillar of fire rose from the mountain up ahead.

Bombs!

Chk.

“Hurry!” Kang Chan shouted.

Swiiiiiiish!

The fighter jet that had bombed the mountain in front of them dove down.

Kang Chan glanced at Gérard.

‘One! Two!’

They knew this was the only way to go. It was frustrating and maddening, but there was nothing they could do.

Dash!

Kang Chan and Gérard threw themselves down the mountain at the same time.

Crack! Crack, crack!

Did they slide down?

No. They essentially just jumped off.

If they hit a tree, their bones would break, and if they hit their heads on a rock or broke their necks, they would die.

Swoosh.

Soon, they hit a hill, sending them back into the air a little before crashing back down again.

Splat! Crack! Crack, crack!

They bounced and spun multiple times. Eventually, they started skidding across the ground, the sharp rocks in their way cutting through their thighs.

Crack! Crack, crack!

Every time their chests hit large rocks, their breaths were forced out of them.

It felt like the ground and the entire world around them were spinning.

However, this was the fastest way they could descend the mountain.

Boooom! Boom!

The ground shook violently again. The place that they had just been standing on earlier was engulfed in a sea of fire.

If they had been just a little late...

Thud! Thud!

Kang Chan and Gérard were thrust to the bottom of the mountain.

Rumble!

They could barely breathe, let alone groan.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

As dirt rained down on them, Kang Chul-Gyu and Nam Il-Gyu tightly yanked Kang Chan inside.

Swoooooooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon soared, seemingly defying gravity.

The enemies had started bombarding the ground. This was why Unit Six had been willing to die to take out even just one Phantom!

Swiiiiiiiiish!

“Unit Eight! You’ve got bogie on your six!” Lee Ki-Do shouted again. “The ground troops won’t be able to make it if we can’t take down these bastards!”

Whoooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong forcefully made his airplane swerve.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep!

The enemy's MiG followed behind him. He didn't even need to look at the radar to know.

Park Seung-Yong spun the side stick in a circle. In an instant, the sky and ground were turned upside down and then returned to their respective places.

Whoooooosh!

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Beeeeeeep!

The MiG that was chasing after him was now in front of him.

Click. Hissssss!

Avoiding the explosion, Park Seung-Yong's Falcon, dove toward the ground.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

‘How?’

Park Seung-Yong felt a chill run down his spine.

Boooooom! Boooooom!

The Phantom that Unit Eight had shot and the MiG that Park Seung-Yong had been fighting burst into flames in midair at the same time.

Booooooooooom!

Park Seung-Yong made the Falcon fly to the side again before soaring vertically.

“Unit Eight! Turn around! Turn around!” Lee Ki-Do radioed.

“It’s too late! Please protect our allies—!”

Booooooom!

Unit Eight exploded in mid-air.

Booooooooooom!

They barely had enough fuel to head back to base now. It was time to leave.

Swiiiiiiish!

“Got it! I got it!” Unit Four exclaimed.

Right after, the enemy’s Tomcat exploded.

Boooooooooooooooooom!

“This is Unit Five! I’ve got an enemy on my tail! Cover me!”

Whoooooooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong immediately dropped down behind Lee Ki-Do’s Falcon.

“I’ll cover our rear, Unit Five!” Park Seung-Yong shouted.

“Get in my fucking radius!” Lee Ki-Do shouted at the wild Phantom that he was chasing.

Neither Lee Ki-Do nor any other pilots in the air were worried about fuel.

They were prepared to fight to the death.

Park Seung-Yong couldn’t be prouder of his squadron.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep!

Park Seung-Yong’s Falcon cried out in danger.

“Hurry! Unit Five!”

“Got him!”

Hisssssss!

Swiiiiiiish! Boooooooooooooooooom!

Lee Ki-Do swung to the left, and Park Seung-Yong to the right.

Boooooooooooooooooom!

The Phantom exploded loudly, destroying the MiG that was chasing after Lee Ki-Do.

Swiiiiiiish!

Park Seung-Yong wasn’t one to let any opportunity like this pass him by. His Falcon swerved to the left, then stalked a panicking MiG.

Click.

Hisssssss!

Boooooooooooooooooom!

As the Falcon soared high and wide, the MiG burst into pieces.

If a hundred people, one after the other, pounded someone with sharp stones, their target would be in the same state as Kang Chan and Gérard currently were.

They were scratched, torn, and had gouges all over them.

They couldn't even be wrapped in bandages anymore.

“Daye.”

“Got it.”

Seok Kang-Ho walked over to Kang Chan and cut a piece from a bandage with his bayonet. Then, he shoved it into the open wounds with his fingers.

‘Kegh.’

It wasn't just one or two injuries.

As the DMZ team looked on with curiosity, Seok Kang-Ho rolled up the bandages and tucked them into Kang Chan's body in more than half a dozen places.

“Let's tie you up.”

“Take care of Gérard first.”

Following Kang Chan's command, Seok Kang-Ho went to Gérard and stuck bandages into his wounds as well.

The cave was quite deep.

As Kwak Cheol-Ho came over and tied Kang Chan's wounds until his blood was barely circulating, they heard multiple noises from outside.

Swiiiiiiish! Booooooom!

“Yoon Sang-Ki! Can you communicate with the fighter jets?” Kang Chan shouted, looking back. The sounds coming from the fighter jets echoed through the cave, drowning out any other sounds.

“I can try!”

“Then set the radio for me!”

Yoon Sang-Ki pulled out a brick-sized radio and held it to his ear.

Swiiiiiiish! Swiiiiish!

Beeeeeeep!

Park Seung-Yong took down another Tomcat.

Click.

Hissssss!

The moment the Sidewinder went flying, Park Seung-Yong's Falcon flew sideways, spinning as if performing aerial acrobatics.

Boooooom!

"I got it! Cover me! Cover me!" Lee Ki-Do shouted again.

Whooooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon spun and soared behind Lee Ki-Do.

"I got you, Unit Five!"

Swiiiiiiiiish! Swiish! Swiiiiiiiiish!

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon beeped loudly in warning.

He couldn't move away from behind Unit Five right now and let Lee Ki-Do die.

Swiiiiiiiiish!

Unit Five sank, following the Phantom that had suddenly plunged down. Park Seung-Yong's Falcon chased them.

They quickly swept past the mountains, swerving sharply around the bends.

Whooooooosh!

Right after, he violently soared higher into the skies.

Hissssssss!

The moment Lee Ki-Do fired a Sidewinder, Unit Five and Park Seung-Yong's Falcon crossed past each other.

Whoooooosh! Swiish!

Hissssss!

The enemy's Tomcat hurriedly soared through the air to avoid a collision with Unit Five.

Whooooooosh!

However, Unit Five suddenly spun and followed closely behind the Tomcat's back.

Chk.

"Dispatch center! We are safe! Get yourselves to safety now!" Kang Chan shouted over the radio.

Whooooooosh!

Park Seung-Yong covered Unit Five's rear again.

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

The enemies weren't fools, and there were many of them too.

The surviving MiGs and Tomcats were all racing to catch Park Seung-Yong first.

“We don’t have enough fuel to go back! We’ll do our best to stop the enemy planes, so please protect South Korea!” Park Seung-Yong shouted in response.

At that moment, everyone could hear their conversation.

Whooooooosh!

As if to answer him, Lee Ki-Do doggedly followed the writhing enemy Tomcat.

“There’s no time! Hurry! Unit Five!”

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Park Seung-Yong couldn’t move away. Otherwise, Lee Ki-Do would be left wide open.

Swiiiiiiiish!

In the blink of an eye, Park Seung-Yong flew behind Unit Five, which had spun in the air twice.

“UFOs approaching! Speed 900 knots! There are too many of them! I repeat! Multiple UFOs approaching!” Unit Two radioed urgently.

Whooooooosh!

Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.

Park Seung-Yong’s Falcon did its best to avoid the MiG behind it.

Chapter 356: Go Far Away from Here (1)

“I got it!” Lee Ki-Do yelled.

Hissss!

Lee Ki-Do launched an AIM-9 Sidewinder.

Boom!

Lee Ki-Do and Park Seung-Yong’s Falcons parted—one ascended, and the other dove down.

At that moment, they heard Unit Three on the radio.

“I’ve got one behind me!”

Swiiiiishhh!

Park Seung-Yong pushed the side stick diagonally to the left.

He felt like his eyes would roll back; it was nearly impossible to think properly when he was plunging downward like this.

Gritting his teeth, he pulled the side stick again. “Unit Three! I’ve got your back!”

Bam! Swiiiiishhh!

Fortunately, they could pay less attention to their enemies’ Phantoms now since the ground forces had gone into hiding.

“Unit Three! Evasive maneuvers on my command!” Park Seung-Yong shouted.

Unit Three quickly twisted to the left.

“Now!”

Boom!

Unit Three abruptly soared toward the right.

Park Seung-Yong couldn't turn in the same direction. Otherwise, Unit Three's evasive maneuver would become meaningless.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep.

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon flew to the left. Like moths to a flame, almost all of the enemy planes chased after him. With their pride hurt, they were determined to shoot him down.

Boom!

“Unit One! Please come up!”

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon was still diving.

Lee Ki-Do kept telling him to change his course, but Park Seung-Yong remained undaunted.

“Now's our chance! Take out as many of those bastards as you can!” Park Seung-Yong yelled back.

Swiiiiisshhh!

Once close enough to the ground that it looked as if it was the one flying toward him, he finally pulled the side stick up.

Swoosh! Swiiiiishhh!

The Falcon turned and flew between mountains.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep.

“Unit One! Get back here already!” Lee Ki-Do yelled.

If their enemies weren't stupid, they would definitely come down from the sky above Park Seung-Yong to cut off his path.

This situation would have been a lot different had they been up against just a couple of planes. However, their enemies currently numbered close to twenty, only six of which were chasing Park Seung-Yong. The rest were looking down at him from above.

Swiiiiisshhh!

Park Seung-Yong navigated between the sporadic mountains as the enemy planes gained on him. Above, his allies and enemies fought each other, tangling and swerving all over the air.

Beep beep beep beep beep beep.

Park Seung-Yong couldn't keep running from their enemies any longer. Hence, while pushing the throttle lever, he pulled the side stick as far back as he could.

Boom!

His Falcon soared toward the sky like a missile.

The sudden movement made Park Seung-Yong blank out. It was as if all of his blood had rushed to his head and he had left his stomach behind.

The clouds now looked divided to him—like an abstract painting.

“Unit One! Change directions!”

Even Lee Ki-Do’s comms now sounded distant.

Park Seung-Yong smiled, looking at the sky. The shining sun and the clouds around it reminded him of the Taegukgi.

“Hey! Park Seung-Yong! Fucking turn already! Please!” Lee Ki-Do shouted in rage and fear.

‘Did you really think I would die in front of the Taegukgi?’ Park Seung-Yong thought.

Beeeeeeep.

Park Seung-Yong heard a signal warning him that their enemy planes’ lock-on feature had caught his Falcon.

They had caught him. Even though he had done his best to avoid them like the plague, he ultimately failed to escape their sights.

Swish!

Park Seung-Yong pulled the throttle lever and pushed the side stick forward.

Boom.

Seemingly having lost its propulsion power, his Falcon began falling to the ground. It was so sudden that no one could predict where it would crash.

Swoosh! Swish! Swiiiiishhh!

The enemy planes tailing Park Seung-Yong urgently scattered. Park Seung-Yong’s aircraft was spinning so fast that he had trouble telling the ground from the sky.

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

The Falcon quickly warned him that it had lost its balance.

Swish!

At that moment, Park Seung-Yong pushed the throttle lever and pulled the side stick.

Boom! Swiiiiishhh!

The Falcon leveled in the air. At the same time, Park Seung-Yong shouted into the radio, “I can’t believe I was stupid enough to worry about that man!”

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

Unfortunately, the Falcon hadn’t stopped beeping. Now, it was telling him that it had run out of fuel.

He had fought as best as he could. All that was left to do was face his death without fear!

I should try to take down at least one more enemy with whatever fuel I have left!

Swiiiiishhh!

Park Seung-Yong's Falcon turned sharply.

Boom! Swiiiiishhh!

Their enemy planes were simultaneously flying back toward the direction that they had come from.

Park Seung-Yong's radar now showed about sixty or seventy aircraft. When he looked up, he saw fighter jets densely filling up the sky in the distance.

Are those Vigorous Dragons?

He wasn't sure whether he was just hallucinating or he was actually looking at a Chinese fighter jet.

Park Seung-Yong tuned in to the public channel on his radio.

"Korean fighters!" the Vigorous Dragon pilot said.

Their pronunciation and the words they used were awkward, but they were definitely speaking in Korean.

"You may now pull back and return to base."

Park Seung-Yong understood everything they were saying.

"Roger, Dragon. We're running on empty, so we can't head back to base anymore," Park Seung-Yong responded.

Swiiiiishhh!

Close to seventy Chinese fighter jets surrounded his Falcon, seemingly covering for him.

"Korean fighters, please accept your gift," the Vigorous Dragon pilot replied, again in awkward Korean.

Park Seung-Yong looked past his canopy. Two aerial refueling planes were flying near him, their long oil pipelines hanging in the air.

The Vigorous Dragon pilot continued, "We hope that you like it."

"Thank you, Dragon. You just made me happier than when I got to meet my wife!"

Park Seung-Yong immediately positioned himself for refueling.

The piercing sounds of the fighter jets, which had been rushing into the cave, slowly subsided.

However, it was still too early for them to leave the cave. Honestly, even if they went outside and examined the situation, it would still be difficult for them to see what was happening to the fighter jets since they were too high in the sky.

Hence, Kang Chan and his men just calmly waited.

Soon, someone communicated with them through the radio.

Chk.

“This is Park Seung-Yong. China has refueled our birds. It sucks that this is all we can do for you and the others, but have to go back to base now. I look forward to everyone’s safe return.”

Kang Chan immediately held up his radio.

Chk.

“You fought hard out there. We’ll see you all later.”

Chk.

“Copy that, Captain.”

What? What did he just say?

Everyone quickly looked at Kang Chan. However, even he wasn’t sure why Park Seung-Yong had called him Captain.

“Give me the satellite phone,” Kang Chan ordered.

As instructed, Yoon Sang-Ki handed him the phone.

Kang Chan pressed the button twice. The dial tone rang afterward.

- This is the situation room.

“All of the fighter jets have retreated. What happened?”

- Based on the intel that China, Russia, and Germany’s intelligence bureaus have sent us, I believe South Korea and Iran have chosen to withdraw since their jets are no longer fit for combat.

Kang Chan couldn’t tell if this was good or bad news right now.

“Anything else I should be aware of?”

- Just the testimony of our Egyptian informant. He said that Ivan, the arms trafficker, recently sold a ballistic missile.

Kang Chan cocked his head.

He couldn’t just brush off news about a ballistic missile.

“Give the number of this satellite phone to Russia and China. Tell them what you just told me and that I’m expecting them to call.”

- Yes, sir.

Kang Chan hung up. Afterward, he raised his head and looked at the soldiers near him.

“South Korea and Iran have ordered their fighter jets to withdraw. Daye, send some men to stand guard outside. Let’s eat before we decide what to do next.”

The soldiers quickly executed his orders.

Vasili received a call from one of the Russian agents stationed in South Korea to monitor the satellites. After the brief conversation, he hung up and cocked his head.

Glaring at the monitor in front of him, he analyzed the satellite view of Earth that it was displaying. Long lines were drawn on it.

“According to this path, Dmitri should be the most suspicious of them all, yet Ivan’s the one who sold a ballistic missile?”

Vasili frowned. Pursing his lips, he zoomed into the map.

“If Dmitri can’t launch the missile because Monsieur Kang has taken the OTP, then he will definitely look for another way. Is that why the missile was sold to someone else?”

He straightened up, then smiled coldly.

“Now, even Dmitri sees me as a pushover because I’ve been acting as a supporting character for so long.”

Vasili coldly glared at a red triangular dot on the North Pacific.

“I’ll keep watching you until I find out what you’re looking for in the North Pacific.”

A starving man had fewer chances to win in combat.

For that reason, despite being in immense pain, Kang Chan sat up and ate C-rations. His wounds throbbed and stung whenever he scooped up bibimbap with a spoon or even just picked up a biscuit.

“We’ll be in danger if we stay here for too long. DMZ team, find a place for us to stay on the upper part of the mountain,” he commanded.

“Alright,” Kang Chul-Gyu answered.

Nam Il-Gyu then took three men with him outside to carry out the order.

“Daye! Take some men back to the barracks and bring over the things we left behind,” Kang Chan said.

“Got it.”

Seok Kang-Ho selected the soldiers who would go with him and then headed to where the barracks were located.

Twenty suffocating minutes later, they heard their radios crackle.

Chk.

“We secured a location,” Nam Il-Gyu reported.

A moment later, a soldier who had gone with him returned to the cave.

Chk.

“Daye, how much longer?” Kang Chan asked.

Chk.

“We’re almost at the cave.”

They had to evenly distribute any luggage among all the soldiers before climbing the mountain.

True to his word, Seok Kang-Ho soon arrived at the cave. They then divided up the bags so that everyone would have an equal load to carry to where Nam Il-Gyu was.

Kang Chan sighed. “Haaa...”

With his rifle slung over his shoulder, he looked around their surroundings.

The new location that they had secured wasn’t so bad since it was dense with trees. They could also look down the mountain from every direction. As long as a fighter jet didn’t rush toward them again, a place as perfect as this was rare in the mountains.

“Cha Dong-Gyun! I want three men in the upper part of that area. Send a sniper and two soldiers to our flanks as well,” Kang Chan said.

After assigning the soldiers to strategic positions, Kang Chan looked at the map. At the same time, the satellite phone rang.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

Kang Chan answered it and swiftly heard a familiar voice.

- It’s Vasili.

“Go ahead.”

Kang Chan only felt happy when he answered Vasili’s call as curtly as possible.

- We believe Alex, our nuclear-powered submarine, was the one that was supposed to receive the OTP. The captain of that submarine is Dmitri, who’s currently in the North Pacific.

Kang Chan just listened intently.

- The Spetsnaz and GIGN are going to leave in three hours. It’ll take some time before they can reach your position, though.

“Where’s Romain?”

- He has already left Germany. I’ll take care of Josh.

“Did you find the route that the Quds are taking?”

- Considering they scattered from Iran to Afghanistan, they’re likely heading over to your position.

“Is this line secure?” Kang Chan asked, having realized that Vasili had been spouting classified intel carelessly.

He had to make sure that they weren't being tapped.

- The number you're using right now can only make and take calls through our satellite. Thanks to Russia's impressive tech, even if others try to wiretap it, all they'll hear are loud noises.

Did this fucker really just say that? Is he a propagandist of some communist party?

Kang Chan shook his head. All that mattered was that they had a secure line of communication.

"Vasili, we'll be moving out soon. I'll contact you twice every day at eight hundred and twenty hundred our local time. Make sure not to call me outside those hours. "

- Alright.

After hanging up, Kang Chan looked at the map again.

"Gather around," Kang Chan said.

Seok Kang-Ho, Gérard, Kang Chul-Gyu, Cha Dong-Gyun, Jeong Won-Min, and Kang Myung-Gu walked over to him.

"I'm designating this place as Point Alpha and this one as Point Beta. No matter how convoluted I word it on the radio, you are to regroup in these respective places if you hear me say Alpha or Beta," Kang Chan explained.

Afterward, with his index finger, he pointed at their target location and then drew a line across the map.

"DMZ team, I want you to follow this route. Take out all of the snipers you can find while you're at it," Kang Chan said.

Kang Chul-Gyu nodded. His gaze sharpened.

"606," Kang Chan called.

"Sir."

"Follow the route in between the Panjshir River and the Saricha Road all the way to our target location."

"Yes, sir."

"Counter-terrorism team, we're climbing the mountain up ahead. From there, we'll head to the target spot."

"Understood," Jeong Won-Min answered firmly.

"Jeungpyeong special forces team, I need you to stay here and stop the two hundred Quds hoping to join the enemy ranks," Kang Chan ordered.

"Copy," Cha Dong-Gyun replied.

Jeong Won-Min and Kang Myung-Gu looked at him.

Thirty South Korean special forces soldiers against two hundred Quds?

Although it wasn't that much different from their mission to eliminate one thousand two hundred hostels with only a little over eighty people, they still couldn't help but be worried.

Kang Chan added, "I was told that the Spetsnaz, the GSG-9, and the White Wolves will be heading over soon, but I wouldn't count on it.

"Please don't worry," Cha Dong-Gyun answered.

Kang Chan also knew that sending their thirty-man army against two hundred Quds was a horrible order. Unfortunately, he had no other choice.

Proceeding with the briefing, he looked at Rukha's mountainous terrain.

"Currently, we have the OTP required to launch a missile, the coordinates that Director Hwang had left for us, and the information we got from Abibu and the informant Um Ji-Hwan secured. However, we are still missing a lot of information," Kang Chan said.

The commanders of each team focused on the briefing. Strangely, hearing the army interpreter quickly relayed it in French made them even more nervous.

"Just now, I received word that one of Russia's submarines was the one supposed to get the OTP that is now in our hands. That same submarine is now in the North Pacific. Our informant also told us that an arms trafficker named Ivan has sold a ballistic missile."

Something's wrong!

Everyone now had the same expressions, but none could seem to figure out what was happening yet.

"Russia's submarine was supposed to be the one carrying the nuclear warhead, but it has since been transported somewhere else. If that's the reason why our enemies need a ballistic missile, then..." Kang Chan trailed off, then quickly glanced at all of the commanders around him. "They're likely targeting South Korea."

After listening to the army interpreter, Gérard nodded.

Kang Chan continued, "Since we're short on time, I want all teams except for the Jeungpyeong special forces team, which will be covering our rear, to raid the enemy base."

"When are we moving out?" Kang Chul-Gyu asked.

"In thirty minutes. Rest until then," Kang Chan answered.

The sun had already gone past its zenith.

Once they had adjourned, Kang Chan sat against the dirt wall. He bent one of his legs and straightened the other.

Gérard sat next to him in a similar posture.

Kang Chan just smirked.

Strangely, looking at the bastard made him smile. It was probably because he had already been reduced to a mess even though the actual battle was yet to begin.

“Are we even alive right now?” Gérard asked.

“Have you gone insane? How else would we be here?” Kang Chan replied.

Afterward, he looked ahead of them again.

As the sunlight warmed them, the wind blew softly, bringing in the scent of wet soil, trees, and grass.

“I could use a smoke right now,” Gérard said.

“I want instant coffee,” Kang Chan remarked.

Seok Kang-Ho glanced at the army interpreter, who the army interpreter quickly relayed what Kang Chan and Gérard had just said in Korean.

Oh, shoot!

Kang Chan turned his head to the army interpreter. Thinking about climbing a rough mountain with him made Kang Chan shake his head.

Noticing Kang Chan’s gaze, the army interpreter quickly turned to Gérard to gauge his mood.

“Without proper training, you won’t be able to follow us up the mountain. You should stay here,” Kang Chan said.

“Pardon?”

The fear in his face made it clear that the army interpreter was remembering the battle in Africa.

“It won’t make sense for you to follow the DMZ team or the 606, will it?” Kang Chan asked.

“That’s true,” the army interpreter answered reluctantly.

“I’ll tell Cha Dong-Gyun about this. Once the battle begins, make sure to hide somewhere.”

The army interpreter swallowed dryly and answered, “Yes, sir.”

Clunk. Clank. Clunk.

The commanders and their respective subordinates soon gathered in front of Kang Chan. The time had come for them to move out.

Kang Chan stood up. Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard followed suit.

“If any team reaches our destination ahead of the others, you are to wait until we have all regrouped. Teams that fail to reach the target location by eight hundred tomorrow are to return here,” Kang Chan said.

Instead of giving a verbal answer, everyone just looked at him with determination.

Kang Chan slowly looked at each of his men.

“I know I have given each of you a difficult role to fulfill. However, our main objective remains the same. We will kill the leadership of the UIS and return to South Korea together.”

Finally, he smirked. “Move out!”

Before he could go, however, Kang Chul-Gyu extended his hand toward him and patted his helmet.

Kang Chan blankly stared back at him.

“Be careful,” Kang Chul-Gyu told Kang Chan.

Afterward, he smirked and patted Cha Dong-Gyun’s helmet.

Touched, Cha Dong-Gyun exclaimed, “I’ll see you later, sunbae-nim!”

Instead of replying, Kang Chul-Gyu simply walked onward. He patted Jeong Won-Min and Kang Myung-Gu’s helmets as well.

Chapter 357: Go Far Away from Here (2)

Kim Hyung-Jung knocked on the door and entered Go Gun-Woo’s office to report the information they had been receiving, all the changes in the situation, and his conversation with Kang Chan.

“Welcome,” Go Gun-Woo greeted from his desk. He looked exhausted.

“We have received a report that five of our fighter jets have returned to the Hotan Air Base,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

With his expression remaining unchanging, Go Gun-Woo called, “Manager Kim.”

“Sir.”

“Some military officials are claiming that we broke the rules of engagement. They argue that we engaged in combat without first providing them with a report and getting their permission to retaliate. They also insist that we investigate Major Park and hold him responsible for losing some of our pilots and fighter jets, regardless of the reason.”

“During our last satellite phone call, I clearly told them to make the call depending on the situation on-site.”

“They seem to be trying to take issue with that.”

Go Gun-Woo was already aware of what was said during that phone call since it had been reported to him.

“People are claiming that the National Intelligence Service violated the military’s chain of command,” Go Gun-Woo said, then looked at Kim Hyung-Jung, perplexed. “The military will have trouble interfering with the 606 and Jeungpyeong special forces team since on paper, they were sent by the National

Intelligence Service. However, the same thing does not apply to Major Park Seung-Yong and his squadron.”

Go Gun-Woo exhaled softly, then added, “Manager Kim, as the NIS Director, what should I do in times like this? Should I let the military investigate and decide how they should punish Major Park and his fellow pilots or stop the military from taking action even if it means breaking the law?”

Kim Hyung-Jung didn’t know what to say.

“I’m sure you have trouble answering this since the military isn’t wrong either. The president did say that he’ll take care of this issue by saying that he gave the order himself, so I’ll simply act accordingly. Still, it frustrates me when things like this happen.”

Afterward, Go Gun-Woo asked, “What else do you have for me?”

“Russia has given us information about Alex’s course. They have also sent over intel about Ivan the arms dealer. However, they requested that only the two of us ever get word of this.”

Kim Hyung-Jung placed a USB on the desk.

“Hmm. Alright. One last thing, Manager Kim.”

“Yes?”

Go Gun-Woo turned the monitor on his desk. “Do you know what this is?”

Leaning forward, Kim Hyung-Jung looked at the folder that Go Gun-Woo was pointing at.

“It’s the folder that I’ve told you about last time. It contains all the top-secret information that the agents directly report to you,” Kim Hyung-Jung explained. He then asked, “Did you create a new password for it?”

Puzzled, Go Gun-Woo turned to Kim Hyung-Jung. He then moved the cursor over to the folder. “What does this mean, then?”

[You have entered the wrong password thrice. All data in the folder has been deleted. Please create a new password.]

Kim Hyung-Jung looked at Go Gun-Woo in confusion.

“That folder can only be opened from this PC. If someone tries to connect to this system through an external network, it’ll set off an alarm and immediately track the hacker,” he explained as he stood up straight. “Even if someone manages to access this computer, all information inside the folder will be automatically destroyed if they enter the wrong password three times.”

“Does that mean someone has tried getting into the folder but got all the information in it deleted instead?”

“Although this is also my first time seeing that message, I do believe that’s what happened.”

“I’ve never tried opening this folder, though. You?” Go Gun-Woo asked.

“No. I don’t have the authority to, sir.”

Go Gun-Woo and Kim Hyung-Jung’s gazes met.

“Someone might have tried to check what’s inside this folder.”

“They could have just purposely entered the wrong password to delete the files, too,” Kim Hyung-Jung said.

Their eyes glinted at the same time.

“I’ll look into it.”

“Let me know as soon as you learn anything.”

“Yes, sir.”

Kim Hyung-Jung hurriedly left the room.

Vasili sat on the outdoor terrace of the Presidential palace with Alexei, the President of Russia. Despite Alexei’s troubled expression, Vasili’s cold attitude did not change.

“Even though you’re the Director of our intelligence bureau, you can’t just act however you please,” Alexei said.

“I’ve never done anything like that, sir.”

“If so, then why were Shevchenko, his family, siblings, and even his elderly parents all arrested? Why was his wife shot to death on the scene without me knowing?”

“Isn’t that why I’m here? To report that to you?”

Alexei’s troubled look persisted.

After a moment of silence, Vasili began his report.

“Ivan has sold off the ballistic missile, and Dmitri is going around the North Pacific with the nuclear warhead. If it reaches the hands of the UIS and blows up in the Korean Peninsula, we’ll find ourselves in a predicament that’s difficult to get out of.”

“If South Korea gets hit by a nuclear bomb, they won’t be able to afford to look elsewhere for the next few decades.”

“That’s true. Still, even though we have enormous amounts of crude oil and gas, that will result in the United States and the oil-producing countries in the Middle East repressing us and drowning us in debt.”

“You’re going too far, Vasili,” Alexei warned.

Vasili glared at President Alexei as if challenging his authority. “Please face the reality. If I have to, then I’ll resign from my position.”

“Vasili!”

“If you don’t want that to happen, then don’t let Schevhenko or some other person sway you into ruining what I’ve planned.”

Alexei huffed in disbelief.

“Do you have any idea how many times I had to face near-death experiences in combat operations and information warfare just to rise through the Spetsnaz ranks and get to this position?” Vasili leaned closer to Alexei. “Don’t forget the life-or-death situations I had to overcome to make you the President of Russia. If you do, then you best not ignore my accomplishments. As I’ve said earlier, I’ll resign if you want me to.”

Alexei exhaled deeply.

“But even if I do, I will not allow an imbecile like Shevchenko to become my successor,” Vasili warned. “One more thing. Unless you want to end up in Siberia after your term, then I suggest you stop provoking me.”

He then leaned away, sat up properly, and tugged on his jacket to straighten it.

“I’ll hand in my letter of resignation as soon as I leave, sir,” Vasili said.

“Do you think I can’t control a mere intelligence bureau? The moment you submit your letter of resignation, I will take care of you in a much crueler way than how you arrested Shevchenko.”

The edges of Vasili’s lips curved into the most unpleasant smile possible.

“If you believe that the Federal Security Service can suppress the KGB, then you’re about to have a huge problem in your hands, Mr. President,” Vasili countered, his eyes glinting colder than a snake’s. “If you want to resign earlier than planned because the work is too difficult for you, then by all means. Please do what you want.”

Neither Vasili nor Alexei broke eye contact.

After a couple of deep breaths, Alexei finally sighed. “What do you, Vasili?”

“Please respect the work of our intelligence bureau.”

Alexei cracked his neck as if in anger, then straightened his head again.

“That does not excuse your recent actions. You’ve crossed the line.”

“If we can’t get our hands on the next-generation energy facility, Russia will never be able to maintain its current position.”

“You really trust the youngster running around Afghanistan this much?”

“I trust him more than I trust you, Mr. President.”

“Vasili!”

“If you’ve got nothing else to say, then I’ll get going. I’ll hand in my letter of resignation as soon as I leave.”

The moment Vasili stood up, Alexei gritted his teeth.

“From now on,” he said, “I’ll respect the work of our intelligence bureau.”

Standing in front of the table, Vasili looked down at Alexei with a relaxed expression.

“I was initially planning on sending Shevchenko to Siberia, but I’ve changed my mind. I’ll have a firing squad execute him,” Vasili said.

Alexei, who had been looking at Vasili with resentment, sighed and nodded.

“Thank you for making a wise decision,” Vasili said.

He then turned around and left the terrace.

Once he had gone down the stairs, two agents approached him.

“Keep a close eye on him. Make sure he doesn’t attract more bugs,” he ordered.

The two agents respectfully saluted Vasili.

Kang Chul-Gyu moved forward silently.

The soldiers had already scattered. Since snipers could be hiding anywhere in the trees, they carefully swept the entire mountain as they advanced.

Hearing a gunshot right now would mean that they had lost one of their men. On the other hand, hearing the radio crackle would mean that they had killed an enemy sniper.

Some of the soldiers went down the mountain while others, like Nam Il-Gyu and Yang Dong-Sik, continued to climb until they had almost reached the peak of the mountain. Kang Chul-Gyu naturally led their group.

The shape of Afghanistan’s mountains, trees, and even the sunlight and the wind were completely different from the ones they were used to at the DMZ. Moreover, this was by no means just a skirmish. As part of this long operation, they had to spend the next fourteen hours completely focused just to survive long enough to reach their destination.

Haah. Haah.

It had been quite some time since Kang Chul-Gyu had climbed a mountain with his senses completely alert.

The wind that touched his skin felt different when he encountered an enemy. Although others weren't aware of it, his heart hammered to send him a terrifying warning whenever an enemy pointed their gun at him.

Swiftly, he repeatedly advanced and examined the forest from left to right, gathering as much information as he could.

With his surroundings seemingly moving in slow motion, he could clearly see everything—even the ends of the grass shaking and the sharp leaves swaying with the wind.

There was nothing fun about a battle to the death, but Kang Chul-Gyu couldn't help but feel strangely happy right now. After all, Kang Chan wanted him in this fight.

When Kang Chan called him in Libya, Kang Chul-Gyu felt so happy that it made him feel uneasy. It made him wonder if he was allowed to be so happy even though his life was stained with blood and tears.

As ordered, Kang Chul-Gyu was determined to kill all the snipers and key figures of the UIS. This was the best way for him to help Kang Chan.

The tree leaves rustled as the wind blew and brushed past Kang Chul-Gyu.

He briefly glared at one area of the forest, then looked in another direction.

Haah. Haah.

If he wasn't careful, a muzzle could peek out from between the windswept grass before he knew it.

Swoosh.

As Kang Chul-Gyu seemingly swayed along with the grass, he suddenly disappeared.

The wind kept blowing from the mountain ridge and below the valley.

Carefully but quickly, he advanced like a leopard that had crouched low to hunt a deer. However, he kept getting a different scent and feeling from his surroundings.

He needed to kill all of the enemies before they could aim and shoot at them.

Kang Chul-Gyu wanted to protect at least one more soldier who had dedicated their life to their country and comrades. He wanted to defeat all their enemies and return to South Korea together... just like what Kang Chan wanted.

Kang Chul-Gyu thought of his suit that was hanging inside his closet. He wanted to allow the other soldiers to experience the kind of happiness that he had felt—the kind of happiness that made him open the closet several times just to look at his suit.

Cha Dong-Gyun assigned three snipers to the entrance of the mountain and then assigned soldiers to guard them, one of which was the army interpreter.

Kwak Cheol-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, and the soldiers who had fought in Africa and Libya now looked like seasoned veterans. Their eyes were now sharper and their movements calculated.

Cha Dong-Gyun couldn't really tell if they'd win if they fought two hundred Quds right now. If Kang Chan was with them, then he'd be confident that they would emerge victorious. Unfortunately, they were on their own right now.

Regardless, Cha Dong-Gyun calmly assigned soldiers to their respective positions.

Afterward, he pressed the button on his radio.

Chk.

Before issuing orders, he slowly looked around the mountain, seemingly checking on his men.

"Looks like we got lucky," Cha Dong-Gyun began.

The soldiers turned to him as if to ask, "What are you saying?"

"After all, we are now about to fight our enemies' weakest link." Cha Dong-Gyun took a breath, then continued, "Moreover, we'll be fighting them fully rested and with the skills that the captain had been trying to teach us during the operations in Afghanistan, China, North Korea, Africa, and Libya."

Under the Afghan sunlight, Cha Dong-Gyun conveyed his determination to his men.

"Soon, we'll be facing two hundred Quds! I believe there's no better way for us to show how much the combat experiences we've accumulated have helped us grow!"

The soldiers' eyes met his as they nodded in agreement.

"In the sky above us, eight of our fighter jets defeated thirty enemy planes! Now, it's our turn! Let us show our enemies and the world the true might of the Jeungpyeong special forces team, our captain, and the entire South Korean military!"

"If I can!" Yoon Sang-Ki then yelled, his voice low and husky, somewhere in the middle of the mountain.

"Protect the country with my blood!"

Before Cha Dong-Gyun, the soldiers expressed their relentless resolve to protect their country at all costs.

"I am happy!"

For some reason, Cha Dong-Gyun really wanted to see Kang Chan now.

He slowly turned around and got into position, then looked in the same direction as the soldiers.

In the distance, he could see the remains of one of the fighter jets that had been shot down. It had hideously crashed onto the mountain.

With the grueling battle now on the horizon, Cha Dong-Gyun adjusted his rifle with his right hand.

‘Come at us. We’re no longer the same team you bastards fought back then.’

Jeong Won-Min and his men moved through broad daylight with only a map to guide them.

Soon, as he had ordered, two soldiers quickly ran ahead.

Rustle. Rustle.

A soldier examined the area in front of him. He then pointed his middle and index fingers toward the sky and then ahead of him.

Clank. Clunk.

Two more soldiers ran to their target location.

The others then moved in groups of four, taking turns using the area that they had secured.

There was a river below them on their right and a road above them on their left.

They had to follow a dirt road that was almost big enough for just two trucks to drive on, so it wasn’t particularly difficult.

There was no one on the road since there were no houses nearby. Moreover, since the road was about seven meters above the river, it provided them with a lot of cover.

Jeong Won-Min would’ve loved to run as if their lives depended on it, but he relentlessly and meticulously stayed wary of their surroundings instead. The others even thought it was excessive.

The goal was for the 606 to reach the target location without any support.

They were doing this for Kang Chan.

Kang Chan trusted and ordered the 606 to complete this task in front of the DMZ King—a living legend among South Korea’s special forces—the Jeungpyeong special forces team, and the National Intelligence Service’s counter-terrorism team.

The 606 had to run for twelve hours on the road without being able to stand up straight. They also had to be wary of the mountain in the distance.

Rustle. Rustle.

Jeong Won-Min took point and slowly examined his surroundings. He then nodded.

It was a relief that the sun had gone past the road and was now on the opposite side. A cloud of dust rose from the road and swept above them whenever the winds blew, but it didn’t really faze them.

This was Jeong Won-Min’s first time hearing about an objective like this.

I still can’t believe Kang Chan said that our objectives are to kill all of the UIS leadership and return to South Korea without losing a single man. That’s so cool.

When a smile threatened to break out, Jeong Won-Min glared ahead of him to stop his lips from curving.

Right after, he turned to Choi Chul-Han.

Sergeant Choi Chul-Han had clung to him, begging him to allow him to join the operation. He even said that Jeong Won-Min could hit him and order him to run laps around the training field until he died if it meant getting to join.

Jeong Won-Min was aware of Choi Chul-Han's tenacity. He also knew that ever since the International Building incident, Choi Chul-Han had been training with bloodshot eyes.

'Let's do this, Choi Chul-Han!'

Jeong Won-Min gritted his teeth.

Even if it meant this military uniform would be the last clothes he'd get to wear, they would take down every UIS executive and return home together.

Chapter 358: Let's Go Together (1)

That afternoon, under unfiltered sunshine, Seok Kang-Ho's team walked along the ridge.

Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il led the way, and Gérard and Woo Hee-Seung brought up their rear.

Meanwhile, Kang Chan kept a sharp eye on his surroundings, his index finger on the trigger loop. They were taking a roundabout way up the mountain. Nevertheless, they only had sixteen hours to trek it. Otherwise, they wouldn't make it in time.

If they weren't doing this for their country, this would've been the perfect time to quit.

Kang Chan's eyes darted back and forth, surveying the men.

The 606 were clearly well-trained. Given the current condition of the counter-terrorism team, no one would deny that.

Kang Chan grinned to himself. Why the hell were there so many of these soldiers in South Korea?

At this rate, he might start going around saying, "I'm sorry, Mi-Young! I've given my life to my country and men!"

For three hours now, they had been walking with twenty kilograms of equipment—including rifles, pistols, bayonets, grenades, magazines, and ammunition—strapped to their bodies. They felt as if they could actually taste death now.

They could feel indescribable pain in their backs, knees, thighs, and feet.

Thud, thud.

Nevertheless, not a single person fell behind. The weight on their shoulders was likely keeping them on their toes.

Behind them, thirty men would soon be facing two hundred Quds.

Thud, thud.

The gruesome battle that the Jeungpyeong special forces team had ahead of them kept the counter-terrorism team members moving.

Keep your heads up. We can't fall here.

Listen to the desperate pleas in each of my steps and stand firm even in your last moments.

Keep the Taegeukgi in your minds and the Republic of Korea, our home, in your hearts. Together, brothers, we will head back to the country you are willing to shed your blood to protect.

Thud, thud.

Holding on to their anguished hopes, the men marched onward.

Kang Chan had a sharp expression on his face. The gaping wounds and scratches he had all over made him look even more vicious than ever.

This battle wasn't like any of the ones they had fought before. A nuclear warhead was involved.

Kang Chan had never seen a nuclear missile. However, he was well aware of their horrors.

Perhaps he was even more afraid of them because he had experienced what weapons could do.

Thud, thud.

Kang Chan was also bothered by the atmosphere changing rapidly during his absence.

What could have made Vasili and Ludwig change their plans?

At that moment, he thought of Lanok.

Could he keep Lanok safe once Romain and Josh began to feel like their lives were in danger?

Vasili had said that he was confident.

However, if they ever found themselves in a situation where they could not get reinforcements within the day, could they still rescue Lanok?

Kang Chan looked at the distant sky with glinting eyes.

'I'll come over as soon as this battle is over, Mr. Ambassador.'

The elevator doors opened, revealing the only entrance to the basement.

Three armed soldiers, two agents, and a man then stepped in from behind them.

Lanok raised his gaze and stood up.

Sarkose, the French president, looked around warily. He then walked toward Lanok.

The two exchanged formal greetings and shook hands. However, their expressions and body language remained void of sincerity or emotion.

"Take a seat."

"Thank you."

When Sarkose sat down, Lanok looked up at the agents standing behind him.

Unlike Sarkose, the agents didn't understand what his gaze meant.

Hence, Sarkose spelled it out for them. "Would you prepare some black tea for us?"

Looking as if he had just come to a realization, one of the agents straightened up and grabbed a teapot and some tea from a table.

Click. Glug.

After some time, the agent finally set down two cups of black tea and stepped back.

“How are you doing?”

“I’ve got tea and cigars, so I can’t complain.”

Lanok picked up a cigar and lit it.

Sarkose turned around. “Would you leave us for a moment?”

As instructed, the two agents headed back to the front of the elevator.

“Lanok, why are you being so stubborn?”

Lanok simply exhaled smoke from his cigar in response.

“From becoming the president to stopping Gong Te Automobile, I’m indebted to you. I haven’t forgotten that.”

Lanok knew that Sarkose still hadn’t gotten to his main point yet, though.

Seeing Lanok’s masked expression, Sarkose continued with difficulty, “I’d like to reinstate you. Can you promise me that there will be no political reprisals?”

Lanok extended his long arm and flicked the ash onto the ashtray.

“Mr. President.”

Sarkose focused on Lanok.

“I’m sure you know how I deal with traitors, don’t you?”

“I didn’t betray you. I promise.”

Lanok smirked. “With just a single word from Romain, you’ve forgotten all the assistance you received from me, yet you say you haven’t changed? How am I supposed to believe that?”

“Lanok, that’s a misunderstanding,” Sarkose quickly replied. “I’ve always planned to meet with you again after Romain is done upholding his end of the bargain.”

A corner of Lanok’s lips curved upward once more.

“He told me that all of Africa could belong to France—that he could make it all happen as soon as I gave my approval since he had already completed all the preparations.”

“Sounds like a good deal, especially right before a presidential election.”

“That’s not the only reason.”

Lanok raised his cup of black tea to his mouth in a gesture of disinterest.

“Lanok.”

“What do you want, sir?” Lanok asked as he set his cup down.

“A guarantee of my safety, no political retaliation, and...”

Sarkose glanced around. “Your cooperation in the next elections.”

Lanok just stared at him. It was almost scary—the look in his eyes and his emotionless expression. It was as if he was wearing a mask.

“Mr. President,” Lanok finally said. “What were the conditions Romain offered to have me imprisoned here?”

“Give me your word first, Lanok.”

“How will you believe me?”

“I trust you.”

“Then please show me that you are trustworthy as well, Mr. President. Isn’t that simple and fair? All you have to do is tell me what Romain offered to put me here.”

Rendered speechless, Sarkose gulped.

“I’m sure you expected to get the Director of the DGSE on your side and thought you wouldn’t have to feel burdened by pushing me out.”

Lanok pushed the end of his cigar into the ashtray.

“If that’s what you believe, then that’s what you have to do, sir.”

“Romain plans to eliminate you, Lanok.”

Lanok smiled.

“Lanok!”

Realizing that he had gotten too loud, Sarkose glanced around his surroundings. Afterward, he sighed.

“I didn’t know that the European, Russian, and Chinese intelligence bureaus would turn against us or that the French intelligence bureau and the DGSE would be so divided. That’s why I am here. Now, I need your word.”

“Trust comes first.”

Lanok seemed unwilling to compromise at all.

“If I stand up and leave now, Romain will eliminate you.”

“It’s your call, Mr. President.”

“You’re going to regret this, Lanok.”

Instead of responding, Lanok wiped all emotions from his face once more. A moment of silence passed.

“Why in the world are you so obsessed with this Korean kid?”

Without hesitation, Lanok responded, “He’s the strongest person in the world. No matter the situation, you can trust and believe in him. That man treated me and France with respect... at least until your and Romain’s greed ruined everything.”

Sarkose easily understood what Lanok meant.

After a moment of silence, he stood up.

“I’ll be on my way.”

“Take care.”

Lanok leaned back in his seat and picked up a magazine.

Sarkose let out a long sigh. He then sat back down.

Seemingly having made up his mind, he began to rattle off.

“Romain said he would introduce a monetary system that could unite Europe, Africa, and Asia.”

Lanok listened intently. However, his eyes remained cold.

“A new standard currency created by a coalition of Middle Eastern oil producers, British financial institutions, and the Rothschilds. It will bring the collapse of the American dollar and become the new currency ruling over Asia and the rest of the world!”

After a brief pause, he added, “In exchange for our cooperation, they have promised France all of Africa.”

“Do you really believe that is possible?”

“You know the power of petro-capital, don’t you? If a new standard currency is created after the dollar is abandoned... not even our country will be able to resist the influence of the Rothschilds and the financial power of petro-capital.”

Lanok shook his head.

“I’ve always known Romain was an idiot, but I didn’t think you would go along with selling out France too.”

‘So Lanok already knew!’

Sarkose suddenly felt a chill down his spine.

“What makes you think this plan is wrong, Lanok?”

“Simple. Monsieur Kang stands opposite them.”

“So let’s get rid of the Korean brat. For the glory of great France.”

Lanok glared at Sarkose.

“If I could, I would. However, France does not have the men to make Romain’s plan our own. Even if Africa is handed to us on a silver platter, we cannot possibly protect it. Only Monsieur Kang has the ability to do that.”

“Don’t we also have you?”

“Mr. President,” Lanok called, silencing Sarkose. “Who do you think holds Europe, Asia, and America in their hands?”

“Well, I suppose Britain controls Asia, and we control Africa.”

“Britain is incapable of organizing all of this. Do you really think Romain and Josh, who can’t even eliminate me, Vasili, or Russia, can tie the world economy together in the face of Russia, China, and the United States’ resistance?”

“I was told there was an alternative.”

“War, I’m sure.”

Sarkose’s expression filled with surprise as he nodded.

“A war involving China. With the appearance of a new gold standard, if all else fails, the perpetrators of the plan will take nearly half the world’s capital in derivatives,” Lanok said.

“Then why don’t we invest in derivatives too?”

At that question, Lanok was unable to hide the fact he thought Sarkose was pathetic. He responded, “France will have to repay Romain for planning the war, and they’ll probably demand a share of Africa.”

“What if we win?”

“All the money in the world goes to the one who owns the gold standard. Now, realize that this plan is not the desperate need of someone hungry. This plan was made by those who want to have more even if it is their last lifeline.”

“If this plan succeeds, and the war happens as I want it to, what will happen to France when the new gold standard is introduced?”

“Every time they release more of the gold standard or withhold its production, the price of food, housing, and the value of wages in France changes. We would have to cling to them, begging them not to cut off our last lifeline.”

Sarkose, who now looked bewildered, turned to Lanok as if he had come to his senses.

“No political reprisals, my safety, and your duty to the honor of France.”

“Give me back the DGSE, and I’ll accept.”

“Understood.”

As Lanok set the magazine back down on the table, Sarkose rose and gestured to the agents.

Looking at the armed men, Lanok thought, ‘Monsieur Kang, you’ll just have to hold on a little longer.’

Kang Chan pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“Daye, find a place to rest.”

Chk.

“Got it.”

It was already past five in the afternoon. The sun was shining like a halo above the mountaintop, making it hard to see.

Thud, thud.

After radioing Seok Kang-Ho, Kang Chan walked for another ten minutes.

Chk.

“We’ve found one,” Seok Kang-Ho radioed.

Chk.

“Secure the perimeter and stand by.”

Chk.

“Got it.”

After walking for another ten minutes or so, he finally saw Seok Kang-Ho and Choi Jong-Il standing at the end of the ridge, their rifles in hand.

“Over here!”

Kang Chan quickly moved forward and looked around.

The area put the mountain behind him and the rocks in front of him, making it a good place to hide.

“Kang Myung-Gu!”

“Sir!”

Kang Myung-Gu quickly came running.

“We’ll eat dinner here and leave in half an hour.”

“Understood.”

Kang Myung-Gu waved his hand from side to side. The men then dropped to the ground.

Click. Click.

Kang Chan climbed to the top of the ridge that overlooked all four sides.

A few moments later, Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard climbed up to him with C-rations and water packs.

“Let’s eat,” Seok Kang-Ho said. When it came to things like this, he was certainly the best.

“Let’s take turns standing guard.”

“Got it.”

The look that Kang Chan gave Gérard seemed enough for the latter to understand what he had said.

Kang Chan took the first shift. Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard sat across from each other and had dinner.

Gulp. Gulp.

While Kang Chan was drinking from his water pack, Kang Myung-Gu came up the ridge and walked over to him.

“I’ll send some men over. Please get some rest after you eat,” he said.

“They have been walking for hours in full combat gear. This might be the only time they’d ever get to rest, so don’t worry about me. Let them sleep for twenty minutes.”

Since this was his first time joining such an operation, Kang Myung-Gu turned to Seok Kang-Ho as if to confirm what he should do.

“The men need rest. Let them get as much sleep as they can. If they overexert themselves and collapse at night, we can kiss this operation goodbye.”

“Yes, sir.”

Once Kang Myung-Gu had turned around, Seok Kang-Ho resumed eating. He then stood up.

“Make sure you finish your food,” he said. He didn’t really have to tell them that, though.

At the same time, Kang Chan came down the ridge and ate the C-ration that Gérard had opened for him.

“Get even just a few minutes of sleep. We’ll be moving at night,” Kang Chan ordered.

“Understood,” Gérard replied.

This wasn’t his first rodeo. Hence, he had no trouble just leaning against the ridge and resting.

Two minutes later, Kang Chan had finished his meal. He walked up to Seok Kang-Ho.

“Head down and get some sleep. I’ll keep watch.”

“I’m fine. You’re pretty beat up. You need to rest more than I do.”

Instead of replying, Kang Chan scanned their surroundings.

“Are you thinking of Dong-Gyun?”

Kang Chan grinned. He then looked back at the direction that they had come from.

Cha Dong-Gyun and the Jeungpyeong special forces team would do just fine.

Cha Dong-Gyun pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“Hold your fire. Wait for my signal.”

The Quds, wearing their black uniforms, confidently approached in their trucks.

Chk.

One of the Jeungpyeong special forces team’s snipers, who had just looked at the back of the trucks, said, “Two RPG-7s confirmed.”

A total of ten trucks and two jeeps were approaching them from three hundred meters away.

Cha Dong-Gyun looked around. It would be disadvantageous to them if they let the enemies get any closer to the mountain.

Chk.

“Snipers, take out the drivers of the jeeps, then prioritize anyone who approaches the machine guns on the jeeps or anyone with an RPG.”

Chk.

“Yes, sir.”

The vehicles had closed in on them by about thirty meters.

During training, the snipers would set up a dummy around five hundred or eight hundred meters away from them. They would then attach a watermelon or balloon with red paint to it as its head.

Most people wouldn’t even see a bullet go flying.

At a distance of more than five hundred meters, all one would see was the bullet’s blurred trajectory in the air. It would look as if it had been shot underwater.

Once the bullet had hit the watermelon or balloon, a red color would spread behind it, making it seem as if a person’s head had actually exploded. Snipers had to practice like that so they wouldn’t panic or freak out once they had blown up an actual head.

Sniping was more terrifying than most people thought. It was hard to deal with the fact that the moment one had pulled the trigger, the enemy’s head would explode right in front of their scope.

Cha Dong-Gyun looked ahead as two gunshots echoed.

Pew! Pew!

In the blink of an eye, the jeep drivers' heads exploded.

Creeaaaak!

The jeeps spun out of control. The trucks screeched to a halt beside them.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Three of the machine gunners in the back of the jeeps fell out of the vehicle and bounced backward.

Five down, one hundred ninety-five enemies to go.

Chapter 359: Let's Go Together (2)

An eerie silence hovered between the Jeungpyeong special forces team, who were holed up in the mountains, and the Quds hiding behind the trucks.

They had taken out five enemies.

Although Cha Dong-Gyun didn't expect them to run toward them like lunatics, he still found it suspicious that they were hiding behind the trucks with their hair or the ends of their bandanas peeking out above.

Cha Dong-Gyun tried to think like Kang Chan and make a move. He recalled what Seok Kang-Ho had told him after losing Han Jae-Guk.

'Settle down.'

'All the men will die if the commander gets overwhelmed.'

'Calm them down. Think about what Captain would have done. If you can't, fake it.'

What would Kang Chan have done if he was here?

Kang Chan had faced some of the most undeniably horrific enemies, yet he had always encouraged his men in times of crisis.

'I'll try to do it. I will do it.'

Kang Chan had told him that Cha Dong-Gyun's training was second to none but found it unfortunate that Cha Dong-Gyun lacked experience.

Did Cha Dong-Gyun enjoy being dragged around to places where he could die?

Pft.

Cha Dong-Gyun smirked like Kang Chan.

Without all that experience, how would he be able to face the two hundred Quds clad in those stupid black outfits?

Cha Dong-Gyun pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

Had he ever radioed others in past situations like these?

Kwak Cheol-Ho, who was about five meters away, and Yoon Sang-Ki, who was positioned a bit farther away from him, glanced at Cha Dong-Gyun.

“We only have one hundred ninety-five enemies left.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho stared at Cha Dong-Gyun in disbelief.

“If our experience in Africa is any indication, they’ll come at night. That’s probably why they’re wearing black military uniforms.”

The enemies were a good distance away, and they had hidden themselves perfectly. Maybe that was why some of the special forces team members chuckled in disbelief at the situation.

Chk.

“Snipers, keep an eye out for enemy RPGs and machine guns. I want everyone else to rest in groups of two with a nearby teammate. When night falls, we’ll teach the enemies a painstaking lesson about who we learned from.”

Kwak Cheol-Ho glanced at him from a slight distance away.

Since when did we start looking at two hundred Quds with such ease?

Chk.

“I’m going to try to imitate what the captain always says...”

And why is this guy so chatty today?

Kwak Cheol-Ho gave him a look that said, “What is he going to say this time?”

“Today, every single one of those bastards will be meeting the God of Death. After all, that’s who taught us how to fight. I will stand at the very front. We’ll kill them all, and then we’ll all go home together.”

After the radio transmission, Cha Dong-Gyun casually turned his attention back to the enemy.

Kwak Cheol-Ho and Yoon Sang-Ki’s reactions were a bit different than when Kang Chan spoke, but Cha Dong-Gyun didn’t mind.

They had become a team that could afford to be so nonchalant in front of the enemy.

Cha Dong-Gyun let out a quiet sigh and looked up at the mountain.

Twenty minutes? Thirty?

The darkness in the shadows had eaten up the middle of the mountain and was slowly moving toward the wide berth of enemies.

At that moment, a sniper who had been watching from high above reported in.

Chk.

“The enemy’s rear is moving.”

Click! Click! Click! Click!

They'd been taught to check and double-check all the time. Cha Dong-Gyun and his men inspected their guns and glared at the enemy.

'We'll do well, sir.'

He felt like Kang Chan was watching over him.

The forest had grown dark.

Kang Chan pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

"On your feet. Let's go."

The sounds of his men strapping on their armor and picking up their weapons echoed off the Afghan ridge.

"Daye, I want you to keep a tighter perimeter."

"Got it, Cap."

Choi Jong-Il, who had been standing beside him, nodded at Kang Chan and walked onward with Seok Kang-Ho.

"Gérard, stay frosty."

"Oui."

Seok Kang-Ho and Gérard understood Kang Chan's gaze, tone, and instructions better than anyone.

After giving a firm answer, Gérard fell back with Woo Hee-Seung.

Kang Chan slowly looked around as darkness fell.

In the twilight, the bend of the ridge was clearly visible. It was as if the mountains beyond had been lit up.

They were deep in enemy territory. There was no telling when or where the battle would begin.

Kang Chan breathed in slowly.

His bandaged wounds were throbbing, and every time he moved, searing pain surged up as if it had been waiting for him.

Nevertheless, he knew he could handle this. He would grit through the pain if that was what it would take to finish the job and return safely with his men.

Kang Chan set his thoughts about missiles aside for now and wondered how the Jeungpyeong special forces team was doing.

He looked behind him.

Chk.

"The front is clear," Seok Kang-Ho radioed in.

Chk.

“Be more alert while you move. Let’s go.”

The men began to move.

Thud, thud. Click, click.

Kang Chan walked on as well, keeping his middle position. The moment he did, an ominous feeling bloomed from within him.

Damn it!

In this situation where they couldn’t predict anything, his instinctive warnings of not knowing what to expect felt so gut-wrenching. He would rather their enemies ran toward them head-on.

As the sun continued to set, Kang Chan sharply looked around the ridge once more.

After drinking some water, Yang Dong-Sik his water pack back in his back pocket.

The world had certainly advanced. From clunky canteens, they now only had to carry a wide, thin plastic pack.

He hadn’t run into any snipers yet. Considering he hadn’t heard any crackle on the radio, he assumed the whole team hadn’t found any either.

‘Where are these assholes hiding?’

Yang Dong-Sik pulled out the bayonet slung around his shoulder.

Their surroundings had already become pitch black.

The dark Afghanistan sky made the moon seem like it was shining brightly out of nowhere.

In a way, it reminded Yang Dong-Sik of Yang So-Mi.

He had always known that she was going to run a restaurant—a Chinese-Korean fusion one.

Based on the way that chubby girl went mad for a bowl of jjajangmyeon, he already knew that that was her path.

Yang Dong-Sik shook his head and moved forward.

He had to focus.

The DMZ team had been assigned to the route over the mountain to the mountain across it and the grassy areas.

If the slope was too steep even for Yang Dong-Sik and the DMZ team members to head straight, then that would mean the enemy would not be able to hide from those areas either.

Swish. Swish.

Yang Dong-Sik moved as silently as he could. Unfortunately, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t completely muffle his movements like Kang Chul-Gyu.

Well, he supposed Kang Chul-Gyu looked more like a bobcat than a human when he moved. The way he slid through the grass and approached the enemy without a sound made Yang Dong-Sik glad Kang Chul-Gyu wasn't an enemy.

Why did she have to marry that guy, though?

Yang Dong-Sik's son-in-law, a chef, had an affair.

No!

Yang Dong-Sik shook his head again and sighed quietly.

He was having too many random thoughts because of his damned son-in-law. Yang So-Mi might have been chubby and had a temper because she took after Yang Dong-Sik, but she was a fine woman. He couldn't believe that bastard dared cheat on her!

'That motherfucking son-in-law!'

Yang Dong-Sik gritted his teeth, determined to give his son-in-law a visit.

Under the faint moonlight, the mountain seemed eerie and spooky.

He was passing through a dangerous path. His world right now could end instantly if he ran into the tip of a muzzle.

'I wonder how our juniors are doing.'

He was having too many random thoughts today.

As darkness descended, Jeong Won-Min slightly relaxed.

The darkness between the river and the road was especially blacker, making it much easier to move.

Chk.

"Scouts, check out the hill that bends up ahead. We need a place to settle down for the evening."

Chk.

"Yes, sir."

They had been traveling without any rest or water.

All the men probably understood, though. The Jeungpyeong special forces team was going against two hundred Quds, the DMZ team was dealing with sixty snipers hiding all over the mountain, and Kang Chan and the counter-terrorism team had to go around the rugged mountain to get to their destination.

He had been intentionally hard on their training. If there was something he didn't like, he forced them to do it again. He believed it was that kind of training that would save his men's lives during desperate moments.

Chk.

"Position secured."

Chk.

“Everyone stop. I want four men on the perimeter up ahead. The rest can have dinner two meters apart,” Jeong Won-Min ordered.

As commanded, the men all stopped.

They didn’t know where the enemy was. If they huddled together while eating, they could be wiped out by one enemy machine gun. Hence, they would wait to sit down two meters away from the next soldier who sat down.

Click.

Once the soldier in front of him had sat down, Jeong Won-Min hid on the hill facing the road as best as he could and then got down as well.

Rustle. Rustle.

Then, he pulled out a C-ration from his pack.

The moon was too damn bright.

Rustle. Rustle.

Listening to the sound of the wind and the crinkling of the C-rations being unwrapped, Jeong Won-Min forced himself to eat the rice balls.

People might ask why he chose to eat so pathetically and was so obsessed with the 606 despite all the hardships.

Jeong Won-Min picked up a nutritious misugaru [1]drink and lifted it to his mouth.

Oh bright moon, let your moonlight shine on me.

Let those bastards see the Taegeukgi on my left arm.

Jeong Won-Min opened his plastic pack and sucked in some water.

Those people didn’t know the sound of their motherland calling for them.

Hardships? Would those people have the slightest idea of the last wishes of the men who died in the International Building?

What about the wishes of their pilots who died somewhere in the sky? They couldn’t even leave a body behind.

Jeong Won-Min folded and folded the plastic of his C-ration and shoved it into the end of his gear.

Turning around, he saw the rest of his men had finished eating as well and were sitting in similar positions to him.

Sergeant Choi Chul-Han, who had been cursed at but still clung to his job, grinned at Jeong Won-Min.

Don’t you hate or resent me?

No, sir!

Jeong Won-Min felt like he could hear Choi Chul-Han’s answer from his gaze.

Noticing that Choi Chul-Han had rice and misugaru dripping from his chin, Jeong Won-Min frowned to prevent a smile from forming.

You saving that for later?

What do you mean, sir?

Jeong Won-Min almost burst out laughing.

At that moment, their moment of peace spiraled into chaos.

Pew! Pew! Pew!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Choi Chul-Han's head jerked forward.

Click! Click! Clank! Clank!

The soldiers quickly got into position and aimed all around them.

Rustle. Rustle.

Jeong Won-Min practically crawled across the ground to get to Choi Chul-Han.

“Hey! Choi Chul-Han!”

Pew! Pew! Tat! Tat!

“They're across the river, on top of the mountain!”

“Snipers! Find those bastards and return fire!”

Jeong Won-Min pulled Choi Chul-Han. Blood dripped from his nose, ears, and eyes, staining the rice at the corners of his mouth and the misugaru on his chin.

He'd been hit in the neck, which was why his head was halfway off.

You idiot! You should have stayed still!

I should've smiled at him earlier!

They didn't have any time to waste, however. Jeong Won-Min turned around and raised his barrel toward the direction of the enemies' position.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Tat! Tat! Tat!

The dirt in front of him splattered.

“Casualty report!”

“Koo Seung-Jo and Sung Ho have been hit.”

Pew! Pew! Thud! Ding!

Pew! Pew! Pew!

This time, the bullets flew from a different direction.

The snipers were all gathered here!

“The radio!” Jeong Won-Min shouted to his side.

Dust rose again in the distance.

The darkness had nearly consumed everything around them.

Chk.

“Snipers! Watch for the oncoming truck!” Cha Dong-Gyun radioed and held back a curse.

The moon was too bright for the situation. Trucks were coming at them with their headlights off.

Chk.

“Fifteen trucks! Based on the enemy’s reaction, they seem to be reinforcements!”

Those motherfuckers! That’s why they were waiting!

While Cha Dong-Gyun was assessing the situation, the approaching trucks joined the Quds’ trucks.

Enemy soldiers jumped out of only half of the new trucks.

Cha Dong-Gyun couldn’t help but laugh in disbelief.

If there were enemies in the unloaded trucks, that meant they had at least three hundred new enemies to deal with.

Cha Dong-Gyun turned around and looked to his sides.

Chk.

“Remember when we fought in Afghanistan! They could try to push toward us or attack us after surrounding us! We wait until they get as close as possible! Snipers, keep your eyes on the missiles and the machine guns!”

He then glared forward.

Just then, Yoon Sang-Ki asked a ridiculous question.

“How come they always come in hordes for us?”

He was shouting without using the radio, so his question echoed throughout the mountain.

It didn’t matter, though. The enemies knew that they were hiding here anyway.

“You bitches! Our policy is one hundred per man!” Kwak Cheol-Ho shouted.
“Make yourself presentable and greet our guests!”

It was so outrageous that Cha Dong-Gyun wondered if they had gone mad. However, listening to what they said made his heart pound eagerly.

Hence, Cha Dong-Gyun also shouted at the top of his lungs.

“Let’s finish them up! We’re going to return together!”

The moment his shout hit the mountain, the new trucks started up once more.

Vroom! Vroom! Vroom!

“Snipers! Get them!”

“Yes, sir!”

That’s right, abandon the radios! This is more like it!

Click. Clack! Click! Click!

In the darkness, under the moonlight, Cha Dong-Gyun and his men all aimed at their enemies.

“Allahu Akbar!” The enemies shouted far louder than the Jeungpyeong special forces team’s shouts.

The large number of enemies made the widespread, powerful shouts scarier.

Vroom. Vroom. Vrooom.

The trucks began to move toward the mountain. At the same time, the new enemies ran after them under their cover.

Chk.

“I don’t see the Quds! Keep watch of our flanks! I want those guarding the snipers to check for enemies coming from the back!”

The enemies were now within one hundred meters.

‘C’mon!’

Cha Dong-Gyun put his index finger on the trigger.

This situation was similar to the one that they had been in Africa. The enemies were using the night to creep up like cockroaches.

Cha Dong-Gyun steadily pulled his index finger.

Pew! Pew! Pew! Pew!

The bullets from his and his men’s rifles flew toward the trucks and the enemies hiding behind them.

Du du du du! Du du du! Du du du du du!

Right after, their enemies returned fire.

The battle had started. All hell was about to break loose again.

Kang Chul-Gyu stopped in his tracks and scanned his surroundings.

His heart was warning him and his instincts were screaming not to go any further—no, to get out of here.

His heart had never pounded like this before.

He was on his way down the side of the mountain, which was narrow enough to be in between two other mountains.

His heart began to beat a little louder.

Kang Chul-Gyu quickly pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

“Stop!”

He had already hidden himself.

Kang Chul-Gyu glared at the mountain up ahead. Not only was it close, but it also overlooked their position.

‘Is that where they are?’

With a warning like this, it was best to go alone.

Chk.

“Stay where you are until I tell you otherwise. If they approach, deal with them our way.”

Kang Chul-Gyu lowered his stance and began to move. Hoping that all the snipers were hidden in the mountain above, he sharpened his nerves and stepped forward.

Peeeeeeew! Peeeeeeew! Peeew!

Just then, with a whistling sound, white smoke flew down from the top of the mountain.

Dash!

Kang Chul-Gyu rapidly turned around and ran away from the approaching smoke.

Boooom!

Two more explosions erupted, one near him and the other at the bottom of the mountain. The impact sent him into the air and violently crashing down.

Thud!

Peeeeeeew! Peeew! Peeeeeeew!

As another RPG shot toward them, Kang Chul-Gyu gritted his teeth and forced himself to move.

Boooooom! Boom! Boooooom!

He was pushed high into the air.

Thud!

Right after, he fell back to the ground.

Rustle.

“Argh!”

He leaned his arm on the ground to push himself up.

Peeeeeeew! Peeeeew! Peeeeeeew!

Missile after missile flew toward Kang Chul-Gyu and where the rest of the DMZ team could be.

Booooooom!

Kang Chul-Gyu once again crashed onto the ground.

Chapter 360: Are You Watching? (1)

Kang Chul-Gyu wiggled a protruding rock on the slope free. The world had changed. Where there used to be snipers, rifles, and mines, now there were snipers wielding RPG-7s, also known as 'Allah's magic wand.'

Whizzzz! Whizzzz!

Missiles kept flying toward their position. However, they were no longer coming as fiercely as they had been earlier perhaps because his men had gone into hiding.

It was funny how the world worked, though. To his surprise, after being blasted into the air three times, he landed out of the missile range.

Brushing off his head, Kang Chul-Gyu settled down on the slope as if it were a makeshift fishing chair. Like a wild boar that had just dug up potatoes, his face and body were completely covered in mud. His back and right shoulder tingled, possibly hit by shrapnel, and blood was oozing from all over him.

Pfft.

Brushing his hair with his hand, Kang Chul-Gyu realized that he had clotted blood on his hair and the back of his hand. Fortunately, Kang Chan didn't have to see him like this.

A missile whizzed out of nowhere. A massive explosion followed, shaking the slope where Kang Chul-Gyu was sitting.

Swoosh, swoosh!

Dust and soil tumbled down below. Their pathetic enemies seemed to know nothing else but how to hold a missile.

Nevertheless, Kang Chul-Gyu decided it was time to show them why the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean special forces feared him and the DMZ team.

While surveying his surroundings, he pressed a button on his radio.

Chk.

"Nam Il-Gyu."

Chk.

"Sunbae-nim! We have two dead and three injured," Nam Il-Gyu replied.

Chk.

"I've got one dead and five injured on my side," Yang Dong-Sik reported.

Chk.

"I want everyone fit for combat on stand-by. It's time to turn the tables. Show them how we retaliate."

Chk.

"Yes, sir. What about the control room, sir? What should we tell them? We agreed to report any enemy sightings..."

Kang Chul-Gyu stood up.

Chk.

"Nam Il-Gyu, handle the report. Tell them we'll take care of it."

Chk.

"Copy."

As the huge moon hung high above them, shining down amid the starry sky of Afghanistan, Kang Chul-Gyu turned to the mountain where the enemy was. His eyes glinted ferociously like a furious panther.

I'll hang their heads on trees! It doesn't matter if they're Spetsnaz, Baekryong, or airborne troops!

He would let his enemies know that he and the DMZ team had passed through and rampaged here.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh!

As the 606 fired at the mountain where they suspected their enemies were hiding, Jeong Won-Min accepted a brick-sized radio.

"Control room! This is the 606! We've encountered enemy snipers! We haven't figured out their numbers yet, but we already have three dead on our side!" He exclaimed, then repeated his message.

Right after, he heard Kang Chan on the radio. "606! Can you get out of there?"

"The snipers across the river are pinning us down! Requesting permission to handle this ourselves!"

A brief silence followed.

"Understood. Permission granted, 606!"

"Copy that, Command!"

Jeong Won-Min handed over the radio to one of his men and eyed the opposite bank of the shallow river, which had mounds of dirt rising like islands amid the twisted stream. The enemy snipers were well-hidden, and they had all stopped firing.

You think snipers are enough to take us down? Dream on! You have no idea how hard I trained my men, but you're about to find out!

Jeong Won-Min turned his head.

"Han Jeong-Su! Jeong Wook! Take four men each and cross over! Park Nam-Gi! Cover them from this side!"

"Yes, sir!"

The instant Han Jeong-Su jumped into action, enemy fire erupted, and the soldiers immediately retaliated.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh!

Cha Dong-Gyun and the Jeungpyeong special forces team unleashed a relentless barrage of bullets. The enemies had blocked the mountain path with a truck like barbarians buying time while they prepared to storm a castle.

To be fair, climbing this mountain without any cover would be a daunting task. Although its relatively low height was a definite drawback, the ridge gave the defenders a strategic advantage.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Tuk tuk tuk! Tuk tuk tuk! Tuk tuk!

Amid the rifle gunshots, the Jeungpyeong special forces team's snipers took down the enemies armed with missiles and machine guns.

Fwoosh! Fwoosh! Fwoosh!

'What else are these guys waiting for?'

Cha Dong-Gyun surveyed his surroundings. He then suddenly felt a chill down his spine.

Chk.

"Snipers! Watch the truck!"

Flap! Flap! Flap! Flap! Flap!

At that moment, the enemies removed the tarp behind the truck, revealing five machine guns. The weapons swiftly blazed.

Tatatatatatatatat! Tatatatatatatat!

Cha Dong-Gyun, Kwak Cheol-Ho, Yoon Sang-Ki, and their snipers' positions were riddled with bullets, causing dust and soil to explode into the air.

Cha Dong-Gyun ducked down.

Tuk tuk tuk! Tuk tuk tuk tuk! Tuk tuk!

While they were under heavy fire, their enemies charged all at once.

After communicating with Nam Il-Gyu and Jeong Won-Min, Kang Chan turned on the satellite phone and dialed a number. The call rang thrice before he heard Kim Hyung-Jung on the line, quickly saying everything he had to say.

- This is the situation room. The enemy seems to have figured out our positions via satellite. Once we hang up, we'll jam the satellite again, so we won't be able to use the satellite phone for a while.

- Except for you, Command, all other teams are under attack.

The others had already told Kang Chan as much.

"Anything else I should know?" Kang Chan asked.

- We are conducting an internal investigation, but there's nothing special to report yet.

"Alright. I'll call you at zero eight hundred tomorrow."

After hanging up, Kang Chan looked at the dark sky and called Vasili.

Fucking satellites!

'Why are the enemies attacking all other positions aside from ours?' Kang Chan wondered as he listened to the dial tone.

- Monsieur Kang.

Kang Chan was so surprised by the voice that he was momentarily rendered speechless.

- Monsieur Kang?

"Mr. Ambassador?"

- Do you ever get surprised, Monsieur Kang?

Kang Myung-Gu and the other members glanced curiously at Kang Chan as he spoke French in a way that felt different compared to when he was conversing with Gérard.

- This phone number will be invalid in five minutes, so let me get straight to the point. Special forces teams from the French Foreign Legion, Russia, China, and Germany have departed. The DGSE and Russian intelligence bureau have determined that the missiles Ivan sold do not have nuclear warheads mounted on them.

"Does that mean there are no nuclear missiles?"

- It's more likely that they can be launched directly from a submarine. Since the OTP is in Korea, they might have found another method.

"I see."

- Monsieur Kang.

"Mr. Ambassador."

Despite the urgent situation, Lanok called out to Kang Chan softly. It was clear that he had more to say.

- The submarine Alex is in the North Pacific. Their nuclear missiles' target might not be Korea.

What is this all about?

Kang Chan cocked his head in wonder.

- Alex is clearly aiming for the USA. On the surface, everyone would see this as Russian nuclear warheads being launched from a Russian submarine.

Damn it!

Kang Chan glared at the sky.

This is why they've got to stop needlessly creating weapons. Just like that satellite.

- Sherman seems to be panicking now. The US has been searching for Alex, but they cannot react rashly. It's just like the situation with the Titanic.

The Titanic? The ship that sunk after it boasted so much about its grandeur? What does that have to do with this?

- US aircraft carriers are moving, and fighters are on standby, but they cannot strike Afghanistan because they don't know where the launch device is or if they have another OTP.

"Do we have at least a small lead?"

- Unfortunately, we don't. That's why we have to leave this matter to you and Korea's special forces teams... Figure it out... the only way... Monsieur Kang...

"Mr. Ambassador? Sir! Hello?!" Kang Chan shouted. Receiving no response, he turned off the satellite phone.

It was a little over eight in the evening now. They were three hours away from the DMZ team and five hours from the 606.

Kang Chan gazed toward where Kang Chul-Gyu and Jeong Won-Min would be.

"Everyone, on me!"

The agents quickly huddled together. Seok Kang-Ho, Choi Jong-Il, Gérard, and Woo Hee-Seung guarded their perimeter.

"The DMZ team has encountered the enemy here, and the 606 is being pinned down by snipers here. Both sides have reported three casualties," said Kang Chan.

Kang Myung-Gu and the other agents' eyes glinted as they looked up from the map.

Kang Chan continued, "Special forces teams from France, Russia, China, and Germany have already been deployed. However, there's likely a nuclear launch device somewhere in the Rukha area that will launch the nuclear missiles themselves from a submarine in the North Pacific to the USA."

From their location, Kang Chan drew a line toward Rukha with his index finger.

"Instead of moving around the outskirts, we will be pushing straight through this path. This should cut our time by at least five to six hours."

Kang Myung-Gu nodded.

"The mountains luckily aren't that tall. Still, it'll be hard to carry all this equipment. We should eat once more here before we depart."

They had to be quick.

The DMZ team and the 606 were fiercely battling the enemy as they spoke. Moreover, considering the Jeongpyeong special forces team hadn't had time to communicate, they were likely already in combat.

Unfortunately, no matter how urgent the situation, there was a limit to what they could endure.

"Pack light. Ammunition, grenades, medkits, water, and just one more meal. Once we leave, we're not stopping until we reach our target location."

The agents gritted their teeth, their blood boiling with the desire to depart immediately and their hearts aching for their colleagues who were in difficult situations.

"Go eat."

The agents nodded and quickly settled down.

Chomp. Chomp.

Kang Chan relayed the situation to Gérard again in French.

"Here you go, sir."

One of the agents handed them C-rations. Kang Chan, Gérard, and Woo Hee-Seung, with their rifles slung over their right shoulders, put rice balls into their mouths.

Chomp. Chomp.

In the vast area of Rukha, they had to find or destroy the nuclear launch device.

As they ate, Kang Chan once again looked in the direction of the DMZ team and the 606. Soon after, he surveyed the area where the Jeongpyeong special forces team should be.

Hearing a rustle twice, Kang Chan put a rice ball, slightly bigger than a fist, into his mouth and chewed quickly.

I've had enough of this kind of life.

However, someone had to do it. This was the only way to build the South Korea that Song Chang-Wook and Hwang Ki-Hyun had dreamed of.

"Gérard, I'll take point with Daye. You cover our rear. I'll position Choi Jong-Il and Kang Myung-Gu in the middle," Kang Chan ordered.

"Oui."

Kang Chan drank from his water pack and then stood up.

"Choi Jong-Il! I want you and Kang Myung-Gu in the middle of our formation. Daye and I will take point. We'll be picking up the pace from here on out, but let me know immediately if you notice any problems."

"Yes, sir."

Kang Chan moved to the very front and approached Seok Kang-Ho. His body was screaming at him to slow down, seemingly irritated by the pain.

"Let's go."

"Copy," Seok Kang-Ho answered.

Seok Kang-Ho followed Kang Chan, and so did the rest of the team. They had long since forgotten the number of enemies waiting for them at Rukha—no, they simply no longer cared.

Isn't this what special forces teams are for? A small elite force exerting unimaginable power.

The DMZ team, 606, and Jeungpyeong special forces team would handle their parts.

I trust them. That's why I brought them with me in the first place.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The Jeungpyeong special forces team's snipers risked their lives to target the machine gunners. Having experienced countless battles before, they no longer felt as if they had to rush.

Ratatatatatat!

Thanks to their machine guns, the enemies had closed the distance between them and the Jeungpyeong special forces team by ten meters. enemies in black uniforms and dark hoods charged at them head-on.

Ratatatatat!

No matter how many bullets they fired, the enemies kept coming, steadily closing the distance and stubbornly climbing the slope. They were like demons trying to burst out of a portal connecting this world to hell.

Ratatatat! Bang!

Click!

"Reloading!" Cha Dong-Gyun shouted as he swiftly changed magazines. Even in that brief moment, the enemies continued to push toward them.

Click-clack!

Bang! Bang! Ratatatatat!

Not long after, Kwak Cheol-Ho shouted, "Changing mags! Cover me!"

In response, Cha Dong-Gyun immediately turned to Kwak Cheol-Ho's twelve and rained down bullets on the enemies.

A moment later, Kwak Cheol-Ho resumed opening fire. At the same time, an enemy managed to reach Cha Dong-Gyun.

"Inshallah!"

Before the enemy could do anything, Cha Dong-Gyun fired two bullets into his chest.

Bang! Bang!

Flash! Crash!

However, during that time, two more enemies had managed to close in on him. It was already too late to shoot them. Even if he could take down one, he'd be an easy kill for the other.

'You bastards!'

Cha Dong-Gyun swiftly unsheathed the knife attached to his ankle.

Swoosh!

'I've seen and experienced this kind of thing countless times!'

Swiftly, he grabbed the charging enemy by the collar and stabbed him in the neck. Right after, he turned the enemy around like a shield.

Crash! Thud!

Bang! Thud! Thud-thud! Bang! Ratatatatat!

The first line of defense had collapsed.

"Hold them off!"

Whistle! Thump! Thump! Thump!

The only silver lining they could see was that the second line of defense could now provide them with cover.

It doesn't matter if it kills me! I've got to give it my all!

He would face the enemy with just a knife in hand—just as Kang Chan had.

"Do not back down! Don't let them get past us!"

Crack! Splatter! Crack! Crack!

Amid the enemy gunfire and advance, the snipers stubbornly protected Cha Dong-Gyun.

Boom! Bang! Boom! Bang! Boom! Bang!

I've been taught this too!

Ping!

When a sniper took down an enemy, Cha Dong-Gyun used the brief opening to pull the pin of a grenade.

I just gotta keep doing what he did back then!

Whoosh!

Cha Dong-Gyun threw the grenade, then swung his knife three more times.

Whistle! Whistle! Whistle!

About ten meters below him, a large explosion erupted.

Boom!

Ping! Ping!

Cha Dong-Gyun wasn't the only one who had learned from combat. Kwak Cheol-Ho fought just as well and hard as he did.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

Crack! Boom! Boom! Boom!

As the neverending gunshots overlapped one another, two more explosions reverberated.

Boom! Boom!

'This is it!'

Cha Dong-Gyun recalled the time he defeated enemies in a rundown house in Afghanistan. The moment his enemies lost the initiative, they immediately fled from the area they had been so desperate to claim.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The enemies staggered and fell as if dancing. However, he could still hear more enemies breathing heavily near him.

Cha Dong-Gyun met their gleaming eyes that seemed to say "Surprise! Injustice! And the desire to kill Cha Dong-Gyun!"

The enemy kept his glare on Cha Dong-Gyun as he flailed and tumbled down the slope.

You want to take me to hell with you, don't you, you fucking bastards?! Well, guess what? I don't give a fuck! Go do whatever you want. You can even turn into a ghost and haunt me. No matter how hard you try to scare me, you'll never cross this line we're holding!

I don't care what it takes! I'm fulfilling the mission that the captain and South Korea have entrusted to me!

Cha Dong-Gyun shot the writhing enemy.

Bang! Bang!