

World's Greatest Militia

- Chapter 22 - Operation: 'Bait & Massacre'

22. Operation: 'Bait & Massacre'

In the recent battlefield of the now half-wrecked Dongducheon Stadium, a black bomb fell. Destruction ensued with a loud boom, causing a shockwave to spread out from the center. The floodlights and grandstand seating, that was somehow still standing, were flattened immediately.

Watching the events from afar, Kwang Hwi grabbed his radio.

"It's too close."

— "Readjusting the target."

A few minutes later, the gunner gave another reply.

— "Ready to fire with the new corrections."

"Fire."

Though it was his imagination, the thunderous sound of the artillery fire seemed to be right next to him, shaking his eardrums and causing his guts to squeeze.

The second bomb fell outside the stadium, creating a mushroom cloud of smoke and dust. The asphalt debris was thrown out in all directions and the smog barred the vision of the soldiers.

— "How was that one?"

"Looks good."

— "That's a relief. We'll stand by for further orders."

Kwang Hwi turned to face the men standing at attention next to him. They were in charge of driving each vehicle.

"You saw that? That's where it will fall, so find cover around the corners."

"Yes, sir."

"Everyone on board."

The men that had been observing from outside rushed into the car. Most of the combat force of the Kwang Hwi Faction was present here, witnessing the scene and preparing themselves for the upcoming fight. They came fully prepared for this campaign.

There was the APC Namer, Light Tactical Vehicles with machine guns, and even a Medium Tactical Vehicle mounted with a grenade launcher. All combat assets except those tasked with guarding the power plant and HQ were deployed for this cleanup operation.

The Kwang Hwi Faction returned to the stadium with the armored vehicles leading. The roads were rough from all the shelling, but military vehicles were designed to be used in such conditions in the first place, so they continued without any hiccups.

Each vehicle stopped in one corner of the stadium. Their positions were some distance away from where the shells were expected to land, with a small hill on their rear.

“Everyone disembark and begin the operation!”

The men got off the vehicles and stuck close to the carrier compartment. From there, they carried out blockades and obstacles such as sandbags and mobile barricades and began to set up a defense. Most were of considerable weight and were sturdy enough to take a beating.

“Make sure they are installed properly.”

Kwang Hwi’s subordinates walked around while supervising the work and spitting out orders. There weren’t only setting up obstacles. The soldiers were also preparing to engage in battle. Ammunition was stockpiled and the medical personnel was brought into the rear just in case. They were laying the groundwork for any unforeseen accidents.

“Boss, all the preparations are ready.”

“Really?”

All that remained was for the monsters to gather and come to them.

“Jackson, you take charge.”

“Y-you want me to?”

He seemed a little reluctant, perhaps due to what happened yesterday. Kwang Hwi placed his hand on Jackson’s shoulder to encourage him.

“You’re the only one I can trust here.”

“Leave it to me!”

Jackson’s expression became firm with determination as though the hesitation he just showed was never there. Kwang Hwi pursed his lips to hold back his laughter.

“Get ready and go around the perimeter to become familiar with the roads.”

“Of course.”

With a quick salute, Jackson ran towards the Light Tactical Vehicle. He took along a new recruit who had been standing around somewhat idly. Without clearly knowing what was going on, the recruit was taken away by the veteran.

“Ahem.”

Clearing his throat to hide the smile, Kwang Hwi turned to his radio. It was time to get serious.

“Operation Bait and Massacre, begin.”

The Light Tactical Vehicle in charge of baiting sped off. With a heavy foot on the pedal, the vehicle quickly left the stadium, leaving the men in anticipation of the upcoming fight.

Kwang Hwi entered the APC. A temporary operations headquarters was set up inside: a screen connected to the UAV, a digital map showing the nearby geography, and a communication line to the SPG.

Jackson was doing a great job as bait. The operation was simple with the following steps:

1. Using information from the UAV, go to where the monsters are concentrated.
2. Draw their attention by firing the machine gun.
3. Maintain a proper gap, large enough so that the vehicle is not caught by the monsters but also short enough to not lose the monsters.
4. Attract as many of them as possible to the stadium.

Kwang Hwi looked at the screen. The UAVs were following Jackson’s movements and accurately displaying the current situation. The Light Tactical Vehicle was driving around like crazy. Occasionally, there would be abandoned cars blocking the road, but Jackson’s vehicle slipped past them, barely avoiding contact. The driving was even more dangerous than that of a racing maniac or a biker gang. It was apparent that Jackson was driving.

The recruit that had been dragged along in confusion was now diligently firing the machine gun towards the rear. Yellow tracers streamed towards the Keku. The

monsters shot by the bullets would fall, but it didn't make a difference. Instead, the sound of the gunfire attracted more monsters to join the chase. It was evident that they were performing brilliantly and no mishaps had occurred so far.

'That's a lot of them.'

Kwang Hwi thought as he scrutinized the numbers of the monsters. Nevertheless, that was not all of them. It was only a fraction of what was being dragged in.

— “B-boss! ETA 3 minutes!”

“Affirmative, ETA 3 minutes.”

Communications were being made on an open channel. Members hiding behind the barricades checked their weapons. They fiddled with their equipment one last time to check for any damages. Who knew whether their last-minute check would save their lives.

The roar of an engine was heard in the distance. The familiar sound of the Light Tactical Vehicle could be discerned and the men quickly readied their guns, pointing the muzzle forward.

— “We've arrived!”

The vehicle leading the monsters quickly moved off to one side. Kwang Hwi and the others could see the monsters with their eyes. Their savage appearance had now become a routine to them. They were not as nervous as their first time.

“Fire!”

— “K-9 Firing!”

Shells from the SPG fell on the monsters' heads and the dust enveloped them. There wasn't time to even frown at the explosion. The ones lucky enough to be out of the explosive range were scampering away from the front hurriedly.

Primary arms, machine guns, and grenade launchers saturated the air with metal. The cacophony of sound almost caused everyone to become deaf. There was carnage everywhere with the blood and flesh of the monsters flying in all directions, scattering through the air and grass. The ground was dyed red with bullet shells dotting it like a painting—a bloody artwork with the bullet shells as stars and the blood as the night sky. The ferocity of the monsters died away in front of the barricade—a monster-grinding barricade.

Droves of monsters died every time a 155mm shell landed. A large hole would form in the black crowd, but it would quickly close up as more numbers filled the area. More Keku piled in from the rear as if they were attracted to their deaths like moths to a flame.

Abruptly, the machine-gun fire came to a halt. Its magazine had been exhausted as the smoke was released from the heated muzzle. There was a rare moment of relative silence. The assistant gunner next to him hurriedly pulled out a new magazine and connected it to the machine gun.

“Reloaded!”

The gunner nodded his head and loaded the chamber once more. The empty shells spewed from the side of the machine gun on to the floor as it began another round of firing. The bullets rained at the monsters like water droplets falling from the sky. The assistant gunner that helped with the reloading quickly grabbed his own gun.

There were only the screams of gunfire and monsters. Amongst the chaos, Kwang Hwi’s gaze was fixed on the screen connected to the UAV as he observed the overall situation and kept close of note of everything.

“SPG, cease fire!”

— “Cease fire!”

In only a few minutes, the majority of the monsters Jackson had drawn in had been defeated. There was no need to use artillery fire on the numbers that remained. Following the SPG, the grenade launcher also stopped firing. The seemingly endless gunfire gradually subsided and the battlefield calmed down.

“Casualty report.”

— “One minor wound. No serious injury or death.”

Kwang Hwi’s face creased. There should have been no monsters close enough to the barricades, so why was someone hurt?

“Who the hell was injured by an enemy with no ranged weapons?”

— “...I’ll give him additional disciplinary training.”

“Straighten him out! Equipment status check.”

Reports from those in charge of the SPG, machine guns, and grenade launcher came in one by one.

— “SPG, no issues.”

— “Grenade launcher operating normally.”

Thankfully, there was nothing to worry about as everything was going smoothly, except that rookie.

“Jackson!”

— “Yes, boss!”

“Go out one more time.”

— “...Do I have to go again?”

There were still plenty to kill and they wanted to have more fun.

The streets became cleaner with each passing round. The city was still quiet, but it was certainly different from before. The Keku that would wander around the city had disappeared, as well as the Black Wolves that would search for the survivors with their keen sense of smell. By the fifth cycle, the survivors that had stayed hidden for so long came out one by one. How many times was the operation carried out? Kwang Hwi noticed that there was no need to continue as the area had been pretty much cleaned up.

『All monsters within Dongducheon City have been eliminated.』

『You are the first to acquire a city.』

『You have obtained 300,000 MP as a reward.』

『Rumors of the ‘Kwang-Hwi Faction’ are being spread slowly by word of mouth of the survivors.』

『The ‘Lord’ entities in other regions have acknowledged the existence of the ‘Kwang-Hwi Faction.’』

“Boss?”

Kwang Hwi raised his head to look at his men. Everyone acted like they were fine, but their tiredness was evident from their faces. They had definitely worked hard for it as they had been fighting intensely for three days. There were no fatalities or serious injuries, but the physical and mental fatigue had built up due to the long fight.

“Dongducheon City is now in our hands. If we continue eliminating monsters like this, we’ll be able to reclaim our lives. We will once again live as we had back when there were no monsters.”

None of the men thought Kwang Hwi's words were nonsense. They may have had such thoughts before joining the Kwang-Hwi Faction, but they had experienced fighting back against the monsters several times now. The monsters they had once feared were shot and killed by their own hands. There was no other armed force like them in the world. As their arsenal become larger and more powerful, someday they would be able to drive out the monsters completely.

"Good work, everyone. Let's go back!"

"Yes, sir!"

23. Secure Dongducheon City

— "Greeting to all survivors. This is the 108.5 MHZ Kwang-Hwi Faction broadcast."

Kwang Hwi raised the volume of the radio that had been quietly playing in the background. Yesterday evening, a new message had been added to the repeating broadcast and he wanted to review it.

— "We will start with the good news first. As some of you may already be aware, all the monsters in Dongducheon City have been wiped out. Over the past several days, the Kwang-Hwi faction has mobilized all of its forces to combat and subdue the Keku, Black Wolves, and Blisters. After yesterday's final battle, we have confirmed that there are no more monsters remaining in the city. We, the Kwang Hwi Faction, will be beginning operations for rescuing survivors starting tomorrow. We offer safe passage, food, and shelter. We look forward to welcoming the new survivors who'll be joining us."

Kwang Hwi's eyes turned to the map and he studied it while thinking about his next steps.

'It's going to get very busy tomorrow.'

They had resolved a troubling issue and now it was time to taste the sweet fruits of their hard labor. Dongducheon was now in their hands in all of its entirety, including the land, supplies, and survivors. Taking in and absorbing all of these would let the Kwang Hwi Faction undergo rapid growth. They will be like a carp leaping through the Dragon Gate, becoming a hegemon of the area.

'We will have to move the HQ to the city hall. It's in the center and can also represent our status and authority.'

Though it was unfortunate that the headquarters had to be constructed and established in the city, it had to be done. Thinking ahead into the future, it would be best to make the city center the hub for operations. For the numerous survivors and supplies that would be coming in, it was necessary to have an appropriate building for that purpose.

Dongducheon City had many buildings still standing. There wasn't any need to expend resources and manpower on constructing a new building to house people. Practicality was one of the most essential principles to follow in this brutal era.

Along with it being an ideal location, defending the city was significantly easier too. Using the densely packed buildings as corridors, shipping containers could be moved to barricade roadways. The narrower pathways could be blocked with garbage. As for his former headquarters, he could repurpose it for farming and station a permanent security force. They had a whole plan prepared that uses their resources more effectively.

'We're going to need a lot of troops to defend an entire city.'

While it was uncertain how many survivors would be rescued, they would try to enlist every able bodied-person into their ranks. Even though they valued skilled workers, soldiers were vital to protect them.

Early the next morning, all the members gathered after a well-earned rest. The members were divided into two large groups. One was tasked with rescuing survivors and the other was responsible for securing supplies.

"Did everyone listen to the broadcast last night?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Today's mission is critical. As we roam through Dongducheon City, we will scoop up survivors and salvage supplies. There may be survivors that are not willing to cooperate. If you meet them, take appropriate measures. Everyone is to treat this mission seriously!"

"Understood!"

The members, who were all lined up, all responded with vigor. The rest period had done them wonders and they were reinvigorated. Kwang Hwi grinned in satisfaction at their enthusiastic response. Morale was indispensable, especially now. For some reason, he was feeling positive since he woke up. And now, he believed there would be good results today.

"All aboard!"

The crew boarded the vehicles with well-practiced movements. The drivers that were waiting inside all started their engines in unison. It was as if a slumbering beast was woken up, ready to pounce. Each vehicle was also equipped with a loudspeaker system. In an effort to reach out to people hiding in the apartments, they would act like the salesmen knocking on their doors, promoting their shelter and name.

— “Rescue team is ready to be deployed.”

— “Salvage team ready to go.”

“Everyone, let’s rock and roll!”

The vehicles departed the base in a long line. As they approached the city, the rescue team split into smaller groups and spread out like a bee swarm, covering the whole city. They turned on their loudspeakers and the broadcast from the Kwang-Hwi Faction rang out across the whole city.

— “All monsters within Dongducheon City have been eliminated. The Kwang-Hwi Faction offers safety to all and doesn’t discriminate between the weak and strong, the skilled and unskilled, or the men and women. To all survivors, you do not have to be afraid; we offer food, medical care, and shelter.”

People that were in hiding began to emerge one by one. There were those who had heard the radio broadcast, those who had seen the graffiti on the wall, and even those who had just learned of the situation from the loudspeakers.

“O-over here! Here!”

A window on the third floor of a shopping mall slammed open and a teenager showed himself, waving his arms. He even held a white cloth in one hand. Hearing his shout, the vehicle that was passing in front of the mall stopped. Two rescue workers disembarked and entered the building.

For a while, the men were on full alert as there was a chance the survivors could be hostile. Thankfully, their worries were unfounded, and the survivors were very cooperative. Tears were shed by the survivors that had been holing up in a PC Cafe in the same building. It showed how desperately they clung to the hope of rescue. Seeing the soldiers, they were relieved of their fears. If it were a normal occasion, they wouldn’t have even batted an eye. But, no one else could reassure them more than these soldiers at the moment.

“Thank you! Thank you so much!”

“Thank you, sir!”

“Let’s get in the vehicle first. If you have any possessions, you can bring them with you. Don’t worry, you’ll be safe.”

Fully packed vehicles returned to base to drop off the survivors. Then, they were once again sent out to continue the rescue missions. The salvage team was also busy during this time. Starting at the L-Mart that had been raided previously and then moving on to the larger department stores of Dongducheon, they scoured the whole area clean.

Mobilizing all available vehicles and personnel, looting operations were repeatedly carried out.

“Don’t leave anything behind, take everything! Food, clothes, toiletries, beds and similar furniture, grab it all! Understood?”

“Understood!”

“Commence operation!” Kwang Hwi roared out instruction after instruction. He was supervising this mission seriously to avoid any possible mishaps.

“Roger that!” The men barked back. They exuded an aura of true soldiers now, having gone through flames of war.

The supermarket, which had been silent all this time, became noisy again. Occasionally, the survivors that had been hiding within the supermarket would stumble out, their faces lit up with hope. The salvage team would pass them onto the rescue team. The whole militia worked like the gears of machinery, rapidly fulfilling their duties.

While his men were busy working, Kwang Hwi was inspecting the Dongducheon City Hall that would soon become his new headquarters. The inside of the city hall was clean and tidy, and there was almost no sign of any attack on the building. It was as if this area was located in a different world than the one they were currently in. Corpses of people were rarely spotted. There were still some rotting bodies outside, but none inside the building.

“Set up the situation room.”

Having finished searching, the men hurried to the basement to organize the command center. After cleaning off the dust that had settled there over time, they brought in communication equipment and began installing them. They even prepared a chair for Kwang Hwi. He felt the weight of responsibility on his shoulders when he sat down. Reports were constantly coming in over the radio from the crew.

— “Rescue Team 2, five survivors rescued from zone 32. We’ve exceeded the capacity of our vehicle and will be returning to the base.”

— “Salvage Team 1, H-Mart has been cleaned of supplies. Moving to the next target.”

Of course, not everything went smoothly.

— “This is Rescue Team 5! We’ve encountered some survivors, but they are refusing to join us. Waiting for orders, commander!”

A situation occurred in which the rescued survivors did not want to join. Kwang Hwi gave his orders without any hesitation.

“Stick to the plan. Evict them.”

— “Roger that! Evicting!”

Dongducheon City was now the territory of the Kwang-Hwi Faction. Those that did not acknowledge it could not be left alone. It would be a fool’s dream to think that they could enjoy peace at the expense of others.

— “Who the hell are you?! It’s my house and I will live here! ...Wait, please stop!”

A resident’s voice could be overheard on the radio. He shouted at the soldiers at first but quickly changed his tone when he saw that they didn’t care about his protest.

— “Suppress him!”

Following orders, those who refused to join the militia were driven out of Dongducheon. Those with a rebellious attitude were responded to in kind with guns. Even the aggressive ones turned docile when confronting a muzzle.

“The situation room and the relocation of the HQ are almost finished.”

“Excellent. Now, start working on fortifying our position.”

Containers were transported to the downtown area. The reach stacker began diligently building up a container wall. The abandoned cars that were littered everywhere also became building materials. After flattening them, they were piled up outside the wall as an extra layer of defense. Troops were deployed to guard key locations. They were rapidly laying out the framework for their future well-being.

The day ended as darkness engulfed everything, only to be pushed away by the following sunrise. All roads except those intended to be used by the Kwang-Hwi Faction were blocked. Warning messages were posted all along outside the wall.

Kwang Hwi and other key members gathered at Dongducheon City Hall.

“Thanks to everyone’s hard work, we were able to relocate the HQ successfully.”

Thunderous applause followed his comment. They were appreciating their leader’s foresight, their comrades’ hard work, and, most of all, their own diligence, courage, and bravery. At the same time, they were hoping that this shiny moment was the start of their future and were encouraging themselves not to be afraid of any challenges they would face on their path of survival.

“Now then, shall we check on the results?”

Kwang Hwi gave Soo Min a look. Soo Min stepped forward, holding a piece of paper.

“In total, we found 210 survivors in the city, of which 200 joined the Kwang-Hwi Faction.”

The faces of the members present darkened. Originally, Dongducheon had a population of 50,000 to 60,000 people. While 210 survivors was not a small number, it was a far cry from the original population.

“Our numbers have increased greatly. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the salvage team, there are enough essential supplies, such as food, to meet the spike in demand.”

Some of the men who were in charge of the salvage team grinned. The acknowledgement of their arduous labor made them proud.

“How many new recruits will we get?”

“We finished the assessment three hours ago. I believe around a hundred of them will be fit enough to be trained as combat troops.”

“A hundred people...”

It was similar to the last time. On average, around half of them could be drilled into combat troops. This was good enough since they also needed people to produce other goods and maintain their equipment.

“How would you like to proceed?”

“We’ll start training all of them at once.”

Soo Min gave an understanding nod. He recognized the challenge they had to face in defending the entire city.

“We will begin the training tomorrow and...”

Before Soo Min had even finished speaking, a notification popped up.

『The number of combat troops has exceeded 100.』

『Commencing Second Stage.』

‘What?’

Kwang Hwi didn’t even get a chance to turn his head and make sense of the situation before his surroundings began to blur. The familiar scenery disappeared and only a white space remained. It was just like the first time he used the Merit Store.

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24. Command System

『Command System has been unlocked.』

『Using the system interface, you can now manage and supervise the members of the Kwang-Hwi Faction.』

Before Kwang Hwi could understand what was going on, another screen popped up in front of his eyes.

『Combat Force Info』

★Title★

Kwang-Hwi Faction (No Symbol)

★Commander-in-chief★

[Absolute Leader] Kwang Hwi Baek

★Controlling Area★

[HQ] Dongducheon City, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea

★Total Force★

155 (+1)

★Equipment★

[Operating] K-9 SPG

[Operating] APC Namer

[Operating] 4x Light Tactical Vehicles

[Operating] Medium Tactical Vehicle

★Divisions★

Dongducheon City Security Team

Power Plant Guard Squad

Farmland Guard Team

Recruit Training Center

『You can check the location and current status of the members and equipment in real-time.』

The Total Force category started to shine brightly as if it were asking to be clicked.

Kwang Hwi drew his finger towards it, giving it a tap. The list collapsed, revealing even more information. It felt like opening a folded bamboo scroll, unfurling it to reveal the contents within.

★Total Force★

155 (+1)

Kwang Hwi Baek

Commander

Soo Min Lee
Absolute Loyalty
Good
Dongducheon City Hall, Situation Room

Jackson Turner
Absolute Loyalty
Good
Dongducheon City Hall, Situation Room

...

The names of all the members in the Kwang Hwi Faction were displayed on the screen. Not only did it include his subordinates from Africa, but also the newest recruits. It was a comprehensive list, indeed.

『Name, relationship with the commander-in-chief, health status, and their current location will be displayed in respective order.』

『This will enable more efficient management and control.』

While his oldest comrades had 'absolute loyalty' towards him, the new recruits were only 'normal', as should be expected.

"I think I get the gist of it."

It wasn't that difficult to comprehend, after all. With an intuitive interface, even if he didn't understand something, the system would explain it in great detail.

It was truly an astonishing feature that even allowed him to know ahead of time if anyone harbored ill intent toward him. On top of that, it was possible to find their current location without using tracking devices or UAV. This would be especially useful for commanding a large number of troops, truly a god-send.

『You can designate a symbol of power.』

『Imagine the desired symbol to have it drawn.』

『Once designated, the symbol of power will automatically be imprinted on all weaponry and vehicles.』

'Oh, right!'

Kwang Hwi had been neglecting it for a while, mostly due to his hectic schedule. The notification reminded him just in time. Every group had a symbol to represent themselves, even African warlords used them. He went into deep thought until an image suddenly popped up in his mind: a majestic, fierce lion with a fluttering mane.

'Not bad.'

He didn't know why, but he really liked the image. It showcased his ambition of being a ruler and the majesty associated with it. The picture was drawn right before his eyes and, somehow, it looked exactly the way Kwang Hwi had imagined—dignified and splendid.

『Would you like to designate this symbol?』

『Once designated, the symbol of power will automatically be imprinted onto all weaponry and vehicles.』

Kwang Hwi nodded. He was very satisfied with the result.

『As a reward for entering the Second Stage, you have obtained 100,000 MP.』

『Engraving symbol on all equipment.』

Before he realized it, the white space disappeared and Kwang Hwi's body returned to the Situation Room.

“Uh, huh?”

The surprised men hastily stood up, looking around vigilantly. Something was being drawn on their guns. It was as if there was a laser hidden from their eyes, shooting through the void and rapidly carving a symbol. And this was not all. On their military vest, the same symbol was being engraved: a lion with its mane fluttering.

Kwang Hwi quietly watched the scene unfold. He heard a small commotion from outside as well. Everyone was dumbfounded by the event. Everything purchased from the Merit Shop was now being branded with the new symbol. Guns, military uniforms, tactical vests, vehicles, APC, and SPG all had the same symbol!

『The symbol representing the Kwang-Hwi Faction have been engraved on all equipment.』

“Commander, what is...?”

“This is the symbol we'll be using from now on.”

“A symbol, an emblem of sorts?”

The curious men looked at their equipment. Once again, all equipment had the same symbol engraved. This included the bulletproof helmets, combat boots, knives, and even their bullets! The members who were quick to understand carefully asked.

“Is this perhaps your ability?”

“Yeah.”

“Ah, I see.”

The men easily accepted the truth when they heard it was due to their leader as it was not the first time they had witnessed something like this. They believed nothing was impossible for him. Seeing them settle down, Kwang Hwi opened his mouth to discuss their future strategy.

“There’s still a lot of things we need to do. Only Dongducheon City has been cleared so far. Other areas are still being overrun by the monsters. There may even be stronger foes we have yet to face.”

The battles so far had been smooth. However, they couldn’t let themselves be caught off guard. They had to be on their toes and prepare for the worst.

“Remember, we have only won a single battle, not the war. The struggle has not ended yet. There’s much more to come.”

His men nodded with a solemn expression, understanding the gravity of the situation. Well, the mood did not last for too long. Jackson, clueless to the situation, spoke in a carefree manner.

“Come on, boss. Don’t worry. We will be alright, just like we have been so far!”

Soo Min, who had not interjected until now, glared at Jackson.

“Jackson, you’re the biggest problem.”

“What?”

“Can you please be more serious?”

“What did I do this time?!”

Kwang Hwi and his subordinates shook their heads at the familiar scene.

“Stop it. It’s hurting my head.”

『Merit Points: 800,000』

After the brief meeting ended, Kwang Hwi opened the Merit Shop. It was time to go on a shopping spree and he was going to purchase some new equipment.

『APC Namer』

『 Would you like to purchase? 』

『Medium Tactical Vehicle』

『Would you like to purchase?』

In an instant, half of his Merit Points disappeared. Kwang Hwi did his best to soothe the agony he was feeling. Now that they had grown in size, he had to get more transport vehicles. Otherwise, it would be too cumbersome to move around.

『Purchase complete.』

Now, he had two APCs and five Medium Tactical Vehicles, bringing up their transportation resources to suit their numbers. After purchasing all the equipment he needed, he had exactly 400,000 MP left. Since he had already prepared guns and combat gear for the new recruits, he could spend the rest on other things.

‘Should I buy another SPG?’

SPGs boasted overwhelming destructive power in numbers. The South Korean military sought after producing 1,000 SPGs to bolster their firepower and carried out projects to improve the older models, signifying their importance and effectiveness. If their weaponry had not been corroded, the situation would have never turned this bad. Once a dozen cannons were lined up, the monster horde would have been easily wiped out. After a moment of thought, Kwang Hwi closed the Merit Shop.

‘I don’t need to buy anything immediately.’

He didn’t lack firepower. Thus, he had the leisure to purchase it when the need arose. Kwang Hwi chose to delay the purchase in case he needed to buy other resources.

[▲ Dongducheon City]

Kiii.

The faces of the people who were running for their lives distorted with hopelessness and fear. A burst of low, shrieking laughter could be heard behind them. They were sweating profusely after running for hours.

A man at the rear turned around to look. Not too far away, there were monkey-like monsters chasing after them. They were jumping over rooftops and using utility poles to launch themselves into the air.

“Shit.”

A curse naturally spat out from his mouth. He turned around, thinking they had lost them. However, their plan evidently didn’t work.

'At this rate, everyone will be in danger.'

The distance was quickly shortening as the monsters closed in on them.

'200 meters... 120... 80...'

Soon, it would be near impossible to lose their pursuers. They had to somehow buy some time to give them that last bit of hope. If they continued like this, even that bit of hope would be lost to the fangs of the monsters.

"Everyone, just run without turning back! I'll buy us some time!"

"Y-you can't!"

The man stopped running and ignored what others said behind him. He mentally prepared himself for a final showdown.

'Just run faster!'

He aimed his crossbow at the monkeys and pulled the trigger. The arrow pierced the closest monkey, setting off a jet of blood. The monkey, with its small body frame, was unable to withstand the brunt of the force and was flung to the other side. Having an arrow penetrate the heart, it couldn't have survived and died with one hit.

Seeing the swarm rush forward, the man narrowed his eyes, gritted his teeth, and continued to pull the trigger, quickly firing arrows non-stop. The enraged monkeys continued running towards him, not caring one whit for their fallen brethren; they weren't scared at all. The monsters he had hoped to stall were already nearing him.

With such a short distance left, the man could not keep his composure and his perfect accuracy was affected. Thus, a few arrows missed their targets. Soon, he had no more arrows left. Without hesitation, the man threw his crossbow. The unlucky monkey who was hit on the face shrieked and faltered. Using that window of opportunity, the man started sprinting again.

"Brother! Please hurry!"

Sensing a monster right behind him, the man dropped down in a hurry and rolled on the floor. The monkey's sharp claws swiped across the air and a few strands of hair that could not escape its trajectory were cut off. His knee scraped against the asphalt floor several times and started to sting. However, ignoring the pain, the man quickly got back up and ran towards Dongducheon.

"Brother! Just a bit more! Please, run just a bit more!"

The colleagues he had urged to leave first were waiting for him. They each held weapons such as iron pipe spears, fire axes, and kitchen knives. All of them had determined looks while cheering him on.

“You idiots! I told you to leave me behind!”

Reuniting with his colleagues, the man scolded his comrades. However, they only responded back with smiles, warming his heart.

“How could we leave you behind, brother? If we’re going to die anyway, it’s better to do it together.”

“That’s right! We’re only alive thanks to you!”

“It’s not too late, so—”

Before he could finish his sentence, a dozen monkeys caught up to them, baring their fangs. It was far too late to escape now.

“It’s too late, brother.”

“Haa... Ah, screw it!”

The man reached out to his waist and took out his weapon. Pressing a button, the baton extended. The two groups stared at each other. Even though there were some meters in between them, he knew such distance could be narrowed in an instant.

Saliva drooped from the mouths of the monkeys as they stared at their prey. It appeared as if their sharp claws had become even more razor-sharp. Sensing his body tensing up, the man took a deep breath to calm down. It wasn’t like there wasn’t any hope. Since their bodies weren’t immune to sharp blunts, it was possible to defeat them. The problem, however, was that they were extremely agile and greatly outnumbered them. The size of the swarm was three times their group.

The man noticed that the monsters were about to make a move, so he spoke to warn everyone.

“Everyone, get ready...”

The abrupt roaring sounds of an engine throttling at full speed drew his attention. The man trailed off and didn’t finish his warning as a result. He looked sideways toward the origin of the noise. The accosting monkeys naturally followed suit.

“Huh?”

Kiii?

Spotting the group, Jackson blinked in wonder. But soon after, he waved his hand in excitement and smiled brightly. He was just as clueless to the dire situation as usual.

“Hey, man.”

25. Call for Help

Spotting the group, Jackson innocently waved his hand.

“Hey, man.”

“...Hi?”

Those who had escaped from Yangju City absentmindedly greeted Jackson. They were weirded out by his enthusiasm. After all, these were chaotic times, and anything that appeared too good to be true should be avoided.

“Something wrong?”

Jackson asked with eloquent Korean, startling the audience. They didn't even have time to react after seeing a burly foreigner speaking their language so fluently.

‘Is he insane? Does he not see the monsters in front of him?’

The leader could not hide his bewilderment. The man appeared oblivious to his surroundings. He even wondered if he was just playing tricks.

“There are monsters, as you can see.”

“Oh.”

Jackson grinned and beckoned to his comrades. The soldiers inside the carrier compartment pointed their guns from the vehicle. The leader could not believe his eyes at the spectacle. There were guns and they weren't rusted like the ones he saw at the police station.

‘Where did they find such weapons?’

The monkey monsters looked at the new group, sensing the situation was becoming unfavorable for them. At this moment, both parties were bewildered.

“Fire.”

With a command from Jackson, the oh-so-familiar sounds of gunshots rang out. Feeling surprised and surreal, the leader took a step back. Unable to do anything, the monkeys were rapidly shot down.

Seeing a few charging at him in desperation, Jackson drew his gun and aimed. It was an accurate one shot one kill. The monsters fell short of escaping and all were eliminated.

As relief washed over them, the survivors collapsed onto the ground. They had mixed feelings at the moment. The sudden reversal of the situation overwhelmed them. The leader gulped as the guns pointed at the monsters were now being pointed towards them. Jackson asked them sternly, his previous lax attitude complete vanishing.

“This area is controlled by the Kwang Hwi Faction. What business brings you here?”

“Kwang Hwi Faction?”

The whole ordeal made the head of the leader spin. He stopped his colleagues from brandishing their weapons, not that it mattered. It was an unfavorable fight. The opposing side was armed, pointing their guns from inside a military truck. Even if they wanted to, they couldn't do anything to these soldiers with just blunt weapons. Before they could take a step forward, they would be drilled with holes.

“We came from Yangju City and were being chased by those monkey monsters.”

Jackson's eyes narrowed at the answer and he deliberated over it for a while.

‘Yangju is...’

Yangju was a city south of Dongducheon.

“Please discard your weapons. I'll contact my superior.”

“Alright.”

The leader signaled everyone to lower their weapons carefully. Jackson picked up the radio after seeing everyone was unarmed.

“Boss, Jackson speaking.”

Kwang Hwi quickly responded.

— “Did something happen?”

“We've encountered survivors from Yangju City: a small group of five.”

— “Bring them with you.”

“Roger. We'll return immediately.”

Jackson beckoned to the survivors.

“Let’s go.”

The survivors boarded the Medium Tactical Vehicle with nervousness. Their weapons were discarded on the ground, but no one thought of bringing it with them. Kwang Hwi Faction did not collect weapons and it was pointless to amass them when they had guns anyway. The soldiers gave the survivors a cold glare. As always, they were fully alert.

“Now, now! Let’s go back!”

Jackson sensed the tense air and opened his mouth to ease both parties. The Medium Tactical Vehicle turned and headed to the Dongducheon City Hall.

“Hm?”

“Was there something like that before...?”

The survivors thought aloud while feeling perplexed. There was a solid wall erected at the entrance to the city, a barrier built to ward off monsters. It was freshly made, less than a week old, and surrounded the entire city that Kwang Hwi Faction had acquired.

On the gray wall, there was a symbol of a fierce lion with its mane fluttering drawn on it alongside a warning notice.

Kwang Hwi Faction’s Controlled Area

Stop immediately! Be unarmed and follow our instructions!

The truck momentarily paused at a routine checkpoint. Everyone’s attention was focused on the guard standing on top of the wall. Jackson hollered at him from inside the vehicle.

“Open up.”

“Greetings, Major Jackson! Opening!”

Being one of the few high-ranking officers in the Kwang Hwi Faction, everyone knew Jackson. The guard promptly saluted and followed the order.

Once the door was half-open, the Medium Tactical Vehicle entered the city. It was relatively quiet here, aside from the few guards on duty. The roads were clean of monster carcasses. In less than five minutes, another wall came into view that blocked their path and, just like the outer one, the inner wall also had guards deployed on it. The inspection quickly ended. This was primarily due to the fact that Jackson was the sole Black American in the Kwang Hwi Faction and they could identify him from afar.

“We’ve already received orders from HQ. Please enter.”

A guard reported to Jackson while making way for the vehicle. Beyond the wall, an entirely different scenery came into view. While there weren’t many people, it looked like civilians were walking on the roads. The people neither looked mistreated or starving. It was evident that they had a decent life and it was almost as if they had entered a small town from the times bygone.

Naturally, there were no monsters or their corpses in the picturesque scene, a testament to the strength of the faction. Occasionally, there would be discolored bloodstains on the streets, which the civilians mopped. The survivors from Yangju City looked at the scenery as if they were country bumpkins who were visiting a city for the first time. What’s more, the city even had electricity. It was the complete opposite of what they experienced at Yangju.

The Medium Tactical Vehicle came to a screeching halt in front of the Dongducheon City Hall. A group of soldiers were there to meet them, likely informed of their arrival ahead of time. Jackson led the Yangju survivors out of the vehicle and into the building.

“Follow me.”

While following Jackson, the survivors saw the APC and SPG stationed at the parking lot.

“Boss, this is Jackson. I’ve brought the survivors.”

“Come in.”

Kwang Hwi greeted the survivors while comfortably reclining in his seat. Soo Min was standing right behind Kwang Hwi. Chairs were prepared ahead of time for the survivors.

“I’m Kwang Hwi Baek, the commander of the Kwang Hwi Faction.”

“Nice to meet you. My name is Sang Woo Hong.”

“I’ve heard that you came from Yangju City. Is that true?”

“Yes.”

The leader did the introduction and told his story. He recounted how the city was suddenly attacked by monkey monsters and how people were utterly massacred. The policemen tried to take action but couldn’t do much without their weapons. In the end, they were effortlessly slaughtered.

“That’s why the five of us looted the hardware store to arm ourselves. At first, we somehow managed to survive for two weeks in the city. But as time went by, without any help, we realized it was only getting dangerous, so we fled.”

“And you were chased by these monkey monsters?”

Kwang Hwi tapped his finger on the table. Based on the story, Yangju City was occupied by a different type of monster, referred to as the ‘monkey monster’. Using their small and agile bodies, these beasts would launch surprise attacks from blind spots. Their claws were their primary weapons, and some could even paralyze its victim.

“How many are there?”

“We don’t know...”

The survivors had no way of knowing the monsters’ numbers. They didn’t have the necessary equipment for this. In contrast, Kwang Hwi Faction had the UAV.

‘Yangju City, huh? There must be at least a few thousand.’

A rhythmic tapping sounded in the room as Kwang Hwi organized his thoughts. He then raised his head.

“Do the monsters eat people?”

“Eh? No. Even though they kill people, they don’t eat them.”

“So, they don’t eat people...”

It was unexpected or rather shocking information, to say the least as the Keku and Black Wolves ate people. Kwang Hwi had thought that the monkeys would do the same.

“There’s something else that’s pretty strange, too.”

“Strange, you say?”

“Two days before we fled the city, the monsters captured the people and took them somewhere. They killed the men who resisted and seized the powerless women.”

“I understand.”

Kwang Hwi signaled to Jackson, who took the survivors and left the office. After an aptitude test, the survivors would be assigned new jobs. Kwang Hwi thought they were suited to be soldiers. They had to be experienced in combat to flee from a city overrun by monsters. On top of that, all of the men were healthy adult males.

Soo Min, still standing behind him, asked Kwang Hwi.

“Boss, what do you plan to do?”

“First, let’s check what’s going on.”

There was no reason for Kwang Hwi to take any immediate action. They were still in the process of converting Dongducheon City into a fortress and needed a few more weeks to train the new recruits. It was not the right time to visit Yangju City.

“Then, I’ll deploy the Heron first.”

“Alright.”

Just before Soo Min was about to leave the office, the radio on the table sounded.

— “Southern Wall Security Team reporting! A number of unidentified monsters are approaching from Yangju City!”

26. Yangju City

A shrill siren rang on the outer wall, alerting the men. The sharp warning signal sounded far and wide.

“This is not a drill! It’s the real deal! Hurry!”

The Captain hastily shouted at the top of his lungs. The soldiers ran around diligently, preparing the ammunition they needed in advance. Boxes filled with magazines were distributed to each point. The men checked to make sure the crew-served weapons were functional so that they could provide support fire when needed. The Captain surveyed the proceedings with an eagle eye as he barked an order through the radio in his hand.

“Report!”

— “Mortar operating normally.”

— “Grenade launcher operating normally.”

The Captain raised his binoculars. The monkey monsters menacingly crowded the roads, approaching steadily. There were undoubtedly over a few thousand. The artillery fire data calculated from the observation device were sent to the computers attached to the mortars.

“Are the mortars ready?!”

— “Data received! Ready to fire!”

“Fire!”

With the green signal from the Captain, the soldiers quickly inserted the shells and backed away. All mortars fired at once. Immediately after it fired, the men inserted a new cartridge, their swift motions showing their training beforehand.

Loud explosions broke out in the middle of the horde. A destructive fire enveloped the area. Those who were at the center died before they could even scream. Chunks of flesh splattered across the sky, painting a bloody landscape.

Only now did the monsters understand that they were being attacked and scattered. Instantly hiding in the houses and buildings located on either side of the road, the monsters continued their advance. This smart trick made the mortar attacks less effective compared to before. Observing the situation, the Captain issued new orders.

“Prepare object 1 ~ 15.”

— “Trigger ON! Explosives ready!”

“Blast ‘em away!”

— “5! 4! 3! 2! 1! Firing!”

The buildings beyond the outer wall started to crumble simultaneously. Surprised by the collapse, the monsters scurried to escape, but it was far too late. Large blocks of concrete fell above their heads, blocking their advance. Unable to do anything, the monkey monsters were crushed. White dust clouds enveloped the area and vision of it became hazy.

— “Objects blasted.”

The Kwang Hwi Faction had already prepared for such a situation. Their simulation results showed that hostile forces could avoid direct confrontation by using structures outside. At first, the popular idea was to clear away any building that could be used to hide. But, Kwang Hwi cooked up another devious plan.

He thought of letting the enemies hide in the buildings first. When they felt safe, he planned to activate the explosives that were prepared ahead of time, burying them along with the buildings. His scheme had worked perfectly.

The number of monkeys was drastically cut down as most were crushed to death. Those who couldn't hide anymore charged towards the outer wall as a last-ditch move. The grenade launcher fired away, dashing their hopes. Even though they had dispatched sandbags below the wall, aftershocks still shook the grenade launchers.

The limbs of the monkey monster flew into the air as they were swept away by the bombardment, a testament to its destructive power. Meanwhile, the persistent ones that survived entered the rifle range. The soldiers, who had been patiently waiting, aimed and pulled their triggers.

Machine guns and assault rifles fired in unison, launching a hailstorm of bullets. The monsters that came close crumbled away one by one. Some managed to climb onto the wall, but they were drilled with holes by the soldier's focus fire. The mortars that were firing occasionally went completely silent at this moment. This was because the soldiers in charge of operating them had grabbed their primary arms. Brass shells rolled on the floor haphazardly.

The Captain clicked his tongue. At a glance, the battle appeared to be an overwhelming victory for the Kwang Hwi Faction. However, from a cold, objective perspective, he knew they still had a long way to go. The monsters that broke past the carpet bombing from mortars and grenade launchers were only a few hundred. In response, the soldiers became too nervous and wasted a lot of bullets. While it was fine to squander some, it was difficult to tell what could happen, so they should be prepared for any emergencies. Who knows, one more bullet in the chamber could save their lives. It was a battlefield after all, not some playground or simulation.

"Cease fire!"

"Ceasing fire!"

After thousands of monkeys were slaughtered, the gunshots gradually died. The vicinity became silent, except a few nervous gasps here and there.

"Report casualties."

Each team reported back immediately. Naturally, there were none. After confirming the reports, the Captain changed the radio channel. Connecting to the Situation Room, he spoke to Kwang Hwi.

"This is the Southern Wall Security Team. We've eliminated the monkey horde. Over."

— "Copy that. Good work, everyone. I'm sending civilians to clean the area."

Kwang Hwi and the Captain both spoke in a solemn manner.

"Affirmative, commander. Thank you for your hard work."

Above the Captain, the Heron flew, capturing the whole scene.

『You have defeated 3500 Monkeys faster than anybody else in the world.』

『As a reward...』

Kwang Hwi flicked his finger and the notifications blocking his view disappeared. While he couldn't get the reward for the first kill, he got plenty for killing en mass.

“Command System.”

This was the function he recently unlocked after entering the Second Stage. Among the categories, Kwang Hwi looked at the ‘Divisions.’

★Divisions★

Dongducheon City Security Team (▼Details)

Power Plant Guard Squad

Farmland Guard Team

Recruit Training Center

He clicked on the detail button. From there, he found a sub-category called “Southern Wall Security Team” under the Dongducheon City Security Team. The names of soldiers deployed to the Southern Wall were all displayed from top to bottom.

“Yong Seok was there, huh?”

Yong Seok was one of the highest-ranking officers in the Kwang Hwi Faction. Below him, other soldier's ranks were displayed in order.

Yong Seok Ma

Absolute Loyalty

Rational

Southern Wall Command Center

Choe Sang Lee

Loyal

Nervous

Southern Wall

Woo Jung Kim

Loyal

Nervous

Southern Wall

Chul Min Park

Loyal

Nervous

Southern Wall

Yu Jun Lee
Normal
Nervous
Southern Wall Portable Restroom

...

'Their loyalty went up.'

Kwang Hwi certainly remembered that just yesterday, most of his men were 'normal'. But today, they suddenly became 'loyal'. Kwang Hwi quickly understood why as it was not that complicated.

'It must have been due to the recent confrontation with the Monkeys.'

After going through a real battle and surviving the ordeal, their sense of belonging to the faction went up. Having an absolute victory must have affected them too. Kwang Hwi carefully checked everyone's loyalty. All of his direct subordinates had 'absolute loyalty'. Those who joined his group after the appearance of the monsters all had at least 'normal' loyalty. Thankfully, no one had 'distrust'.

【Loyalty Description】

Absolute Loyalty

Follows any orders. Will never betray.

Loyal

Follows most orders.

Trusts in the commander and superiors.

Normal

Will follow orders.

Distrust

Does not trust the commander.

Dissatisfied and could potentially cause a coup d'état.

It was a considerable advantage to be able to see the loyalty of the troops as a coup or possible disobedience could be prevented in advance. This was a real monitoring system, eliminating any uncertain factors.

'Of course, it's not like I would ever let a coup d'état take place. I must thwart any such attempts beforehand'

While Kwang Hwi was still in Africa, he was the second-in-command of the mercenary group. He had plenty of experience in dealing with those under him and knew how to lead stubborn men. Seeing their boss lost in thought in the Situation Room, the subordinates carefully called out to him.

“Boss.”

“Hm?”

“The Heron will arrive at Yangju City shortly.”

“Connect to the screen.”

The screen in the Situation Room showed the full view of the city. Monkeys were bustling in there. Initially, the city belonged to humans. But now, Monkeys were the ones who walked down the streets or peeked their heads outside the buildings. It almost looked like a settlement of monsters.

“Switch to infrared.”

“Heron switching to infrared.”

The pilot changed the camera mode and a black and white world came into view.

“It can’t detect any heat signatures?”

“The camera is operating normally.”

The Monkeys, giving off no heat signatures, were marked in black. The Heron hovered around Yangju for a long time and no other heat sources were detected, excluding the occasional campfires. They were unable to find any survivors, either.

‘The other survivors mentioned seeing people being dragged elsewhere. That means the Monkeys must have taken them somewhere deeper. But why?’

The situation in Yangju was far worse than Dongducheon. Looking down from the sky, there were more Monkeys than all the monsters combined in Dongducheon. The whole area was teeming with them. They lived in groups inside buildings previously used by people and dozens patrolled the streets. They had a system of their own. The Monkeys carried weapons and there were even ones who appeared to be in charge. It was like a bee colony, with everything in order.

27. Bombardment

“The meeting will commence now.”

Kwang Hwi attended the meeting with his subordinates. The screen displayed videos and images taken from the UAV over the past few days.

“After observing Yangju for several days, we have concluded that the number of ‘Monkeys’ in the city is size-four.”

“Size-four?”

His subordinates could not hide their shock. Size-four meant that their numbers exceeded ten thousand. They recalled how they killed thousands of monsters in Dongducheon and felt a bit proud and accomplished. In comparison, tens of thousands was a completely different ball game.

“Their biggest trait is their ability to reproduce. The population is increasing by hundreds—if not thousands—every day. While they initially maintained their power around Yangju City Hall, their forces have started branching out everywhere as the days go by.”

It would have been better if they were expanding with their existing numbers. If that were the case, they would have thinned out to cover a larger area. The problem was that their population density continued to grow and they were using their newborns to expand their territory. It allowed them to maintain their hold over the regions they were extending their operations to.

Two pictures were then shown side by side, providing a comparison to the viewers.

“These pictures were taken three days ago and this morning, respectively. Yangju City Hall and the east are both occupied by Monkeys.”

“Hm.”

“This is a bit...”

The gathered men lamented at the scene. The white areas were dyed in black. Without a doubt, the black dots were Monkeys. They were spreading like a locust swarm, rapidly engulfing everything. The eastern side of Yangju was much larger than the entirety of Dongducheon, but it was still conquered in a matter of three days. This matter could not be taken lightly.

“For us, this means that we need to move quickly because...”

A new image was displayed. It showed the administrative districts of Dongducheon and Yangju, where West Dongducheon met East Yangju.

“Once the Monkeys completely capture Yangju City, we’ll need to face them at two fronts.”

“It will only get harder the longer we drag this out.”

“Correct.”

The fortification of Dongducheon City was finally finished. It had no weakness and was able to defend against an attack even if it were from two directions. However, that was only against forces as big as size-three.

“What if we were attacked from two fronts by a size-four?”

No one replied as the implications were clear. While Kwang Hwi Faction grew in magnitude recently, there were only 155 people at the end of the day, nowhere near the humongous scale of the Monkey horde.

Based on the Korean military standards, they were equivalent to a company. But, it wasn't like the entire company was defending a single area. Instead, they were evenly divided into a few groups, each responsible for its own zone. In the worst-case scenario, they could deploy the SPG to defend against a size-three attack. But, beyond that?

“Even now, there is a size-three horde moving northward. They will engage us from the South. At this rate, we're going to have size-three attacks on a daily basis near the Southern Wall.”

“We'll strike first.”

Everyone looked at Kwang Hwi.

“How is the Heron?”

“It's operational. The engineers that joined recently are taking good care of it.”

The Heron was instrumental. Ever since they had acquired the Heron from the underground base, it had been deployed every day for recon missions. It should have been damaged from overuse, but the engineers were making sure it was in pristine condition.

“We'll deploy the SPG.”

The men exclaimed. In hindsight, the men forgot the Kwang Hwi Faction had an effective long-range weapon. The SPG's maximum range was 40 km and the distance between Dongducheon and Yangju City Hall was within 18 km. Even without lifting a finger, they could effectively strike the Monkeys and lay waste to their numbers. All they had to do was deploy the Heron to acquire firing data.

“That's right, we have an SPG!”

“But boss, will one SPG be enough?”

With a clang, Kwang Hwi stood up and headed towards the window. He pulled back the thick curtains, allowing sunlight to pour in.

『K-9 ‘Thunder’ SPG.』

『A self-propelled gun developed and employed by the Republic of Korea. Powered by a 1000 horsepower diesel engine with hydropneumatic suspension, it has an excellent capacity for tackling rugged terrain. An automated fire control system and auto-loader allow the first shell to be fired within a minute of maneuvering into position. It boasts excellent firepower with its 155mm howitzer main armament.』

『Would you like to purchase?』

‘I’ll buy it.’

『Purchase complete.』

『Please select the area to deploy the SPG.』

Kwang Hwi chose the City Hall’s parking lot, right next to the first K-9 SPG.

『Deployment finished.』

Above the empty space, an imposing SPG was constructed. On one side of its main body frame, it had the Kwang Hwi Faction’s symbol. The soldiers who were passing by glanced at it. While it was amusing at first, they had grown accustomed to the scene, so the men continued on their way without overreacting. Naturally, the subordinates present in the room saw it too. Kwang Hwi gestured towards the parking lot with a nod.

“Now, we have two.”

While Kwang Hwi wanted to purchase as many SPG as he could, he only had enough points to buy one. With the remaining MP, he had to purchase the necessary ammunition. Otherwise, the weapons would just be paperweights.

“First of all, we’ll deal with the size-three horde approaching from the south.”

“Roger!”

The men left the conference room with bright faces, except for one.

“Boss.”

“What is it, Soo Min?”

“As you are well aware, the SPG will only buy us some time. The biggest issue right now is dealing with the Monkey’s abnormal fertility. We have to solve this problem somehow.”

“Naturally.”

“Do you have some plan in mind?”

Kwang Hwi realized Soo Min had misunderstood him.

“I think you have the wrong idea.”

“Eh?”

“After we take care of the size-three horde, we’ll attack their base.”

“By base, do you mean... Yangju City Hall?”

“Mmm.”

Soo Min’s face became pale at the confirmation.

“T-then, we may kill all the survivors in Yangju along with the supplies.”

Kwang Hwi turned around to look at Soo Min and showed a determined look. Soo Min gulped quietly at his resoluteness.

“This is also the safest method possible.”

In the current situation, the Monkeys exceeded size-four. No matter how well the operation was planned, casualties could not be avoided. In layman’s terms, a single soldier had to fight against 150 Monkeys. While it was essential to secure supplies and save survivors, it was more important to minimize the damage Kwang Hwi Faction would face.

“Soo Min, you must remember this: we are a militia and our main objective isn’t to save civilians. It’s to ensure the safety of those in the Kwang Hwi Faction.”

“U-understood.”

“Increase the frequency of radio broadcasts. Try to inform the people of Yangju City so that they can at least prepare for it.”

After saluting, Soo Min left the room. Kwang Hwi looked away, towards the window once again.

“Please move out of the way! The vehicles are passing by!”

Soldiers carrying traffic rods cleared the area near the SPG and those passing by hastened their steps to move aside. After confirming no one was nearby, the drivers started the engines to move the SPG forward.

The continuous tracks of the vehicle rotated and the 47-ton heavy metal behemoth raced ahead. The Light Tactical Vehicles that were on standby quickly cut in front to lead the way. The SPGs were headed towards the Dongducheon High School near the City Hall. The soldiers who were contacted in advance were waiting there with the gates wide open. The school was usually used to train new recruits. Now that the training was over, it was empty.

The SPGs were parked in the middle of the schoolyard. Dust smoke rose into the air, following their halt. The UAV in the air checked on the Monkey horde's location and sent the data to the SPGs.

“Coordinates confirmed!”

The supporting ring fell, lifting the 8-meter long gun barrel. The automatic loading system inserted the shell while the soldiers finished loading it with gunpowder.

“SPG 1 loaded!”

“SPG 2 loaded!”

After confirming that both SPGs were loaded, the commander shouted.

“Fire!”

“Fire!”

A cloud of gas gushed from the gun barrel along with fine dust particles. While the frame shook from the recoil, it quickly recovered its balance. The shell instantly covered the 10 km distance and fell right above the size-three Monkey horde.

Wrapped around the explosion, the simian monsters vanished without a trace. Soon after, the asphalt road, which was previously covered in black dots, revealed itself. Flesh was glued to the floor from the intense heat, creating a grotesque scenery.

After reloading, new shells were fired with a loud roar, recreating the same scenery a bit further down the road. The SPGs continued shooting. Every minute, it fired 2 ~ 3 rounds or approximately 120 ~ 180 shells an hour. The Monkeys tried to escape from its firing range, but the SPGs immediately corrected its trajectory towards the most concentrated areas. Whenever the SPGs were pushed back from the recoil, they would quickly come back to their original position.

『You have defeated 4000 Monkeys faster than anybody else in the world.』
『As a reward...』

『You have defeated 4500 Monkeys faster than anybody else in the world.』
『As a reward...』

『You have defeated 5000 Monkeys faster than anybody else in the world.』
『As a reward...』

Kwang Hwi's MP quickly rose as the constant announcements made him feel dizzy. He decided to just close his eyes so that he couldn't see the alerts.

“Stop firing!”

The gunshots, which could be heard at set intervals, all stopped. The Heron hovered around the surroundings to check on the status of the enemy. The rain of steel brought about complete devastation. Buildings that could be seen occasionally were all destroyed without mercy and there were no Monkeys left alive.

— “Annihilation confirmed!”

“Ammunition report!”

“SPG 1 has 38 left!”

“SPG 2 has 39 left!”

The maximum loading capacity they had was 48 shells, and they did not even use half of it.

“Monkeys usually live inside buildings. Rather than shooting towards the ground, focus on destroying those constructions.”

“You are absolutely right, sir.”

The commander agreed with Kwang Hwi's words. If they took down the buildings, they could effectively reduce the number of Monkeys.

“When should we resume firing?”

“Hm...”

Kwang Hwi checked his watch. While he had told Soo Min not to show pity, he didn't want to cause unnecessary civilian casualties. That's because they had to integrate the survivors into the Kwang Hwi Faction in order to grow.

“Continue firing tomorrow morning at 8 o’clock. Until then, have the SPGs reloaded and let the soldiers rest.”

“8 o’clock tomorrow, affirmative.”

This gave the survivors a 12-hour leeway. While some may say that it’s not enough, it was better than shooting without warning. In this do-or-die era, they had already shown enough tolerance.

“Keep the radio on. Is there still nothing?”

“Last time, it definitely caught something!”

A young man was tuning the radio with a solemn expression. He didn’t care about his lamenting companion right next to him.

“Why are you doing something so pointless? Didn’t I tell you to trust me? The underground warehouse is filled with food and we can survive here for years to come.”

“Are you going to live here forever? You should at least know what’s going on out there. And what are you going to do about the monsters roaming around?”

— “Gr*** to ***vors...”

“Huh?”

Abruptly, there was some static, and then came a distorted voice from the radio. The man hastily adjusted the frequency. The faint voice became more and more distinct.

— “Greetings to all survivors. This is the Kwang Hwi Faction’s radio broadcast on 108.5 MHZ.”

“I found something!”

Even the grumbling friend quickly approached the radio. It was the first radio broadcast they had heard in a month, so he was also curious.

— “Kwang Hwi Faction have fully secured the entire Dongducheon City. We are now waiting to reunite with the nearby survivors. We provide food, shelter, and safety from monsters.”

“Kwang Hwi Faction? What kind of army is that?”

“I’m not sure. Dongducheon is... north, right?”

“Yeah.”

The two chatted but did not miss the crucial details. Food and shelter were provided alongside the protection from monsters and such.

— “A monster called ‘Monkey’ was found in Yangju City. Their numbers are rapidly increasing and have completely taken over Yangju City Hall and the eastern side of the city.”

“It’s the same monsters we met on the first day, right?”

“I mean they’re calling it Monkeys, so probably?”

— “We have confirmed that Monkeys are approaching our territories in Dongducheon, and we plan to annihilate the horde with our K-9 SPGs.”

“SPG?”

The two men looked at each other with disbelief. The horde had thousands of monsters, and they wanted to raze them all. But the more surprising news was that...

— “Kwang Hwi Faction plan to bombard a portion of Yangju tomorrow morning at 8 o’clock. It is to curb the Monkeys’ rapidly growing population. The survivors in the vicinity should leave the city or evacuate underground if possible.”

“Don’t we need to run away too?”

“What are we going to do about the monsters outside?”

“...Fuck, you’re right.”

28. Rain of Steel

[07:57]

[07:58]

[07:59]

[08:00]

As soon as the hour hit 8 o’clock, an alarm went off. Kwang Hwi looked at the commander and calmly issued an order.

“Begin.”

“Yes!”

The Heron, which was deployed earlier, hovered above Yangju City. It had already sent the coordinates for the first target. The commander held onto the radio and contacted the troops.

“SPG-1, report. Did you confirm the coordinates?”

— “This is SPG-1. Affirmative, we’ve confirmed the coordinates. Ready to fire.”

“Fire away!”

— “Firing at designated coordinates!”

A loud roar rumbled through the open window, shaking its frame. The shell soared through the sky, reaching its designation shortly after. The patrolling Monkeys looked up at the incoming foe, fully alert. A black silhouette covered their vision as the shell crashed into the ground.

Swarms of Monkeys instantly disappeared in the detonation. The fire raged devastation as the sharp screams filled the air. Others were dazed at the sight of it. In the blink of an eye, the companions that were standing in front of them had disappeared. Soon after, the monsters urgently bawled and scurried away. They flocked into the buildings without hesitation, as if rehearsed beforehand.

Identifying the buildings packed with the most Monkeys, the UAV sent firing data to the SPGs. Once received, the coordinates were automatically punched in. Having patiently waited for its turn, SPG-2 raised its head, like a sleeping behemoth opening its maw. Its next target was a four-story building in the shopping district. The 155 mm shell was already loaded inside.

— “SPG-2, ready to fire!”

“Bring them hell!”

The SPG trembled as it sent off the explosive. Shells flew high into the air at set intervals. This was K9 SPG’s Multiple Rounds Simultaneous Impact feature. In MRSI mode, the K9 could fire three projectiles in under 15 seconds, allowing for quick response at demand.

— “MRSI completed!”

“Be on standby.”

On the screen, a white dust cloud rose from the shopping district. The first shell blew away the roof while the other two flattened the entire building. The monsters hiding inside didn’t even have a chance to escape. It was like a rain of doom falling on them.

— “Target eliminated.”

— “Received new coordinates!”

With the Heron’s guidance, the next target was quickly selected. The automated fire control system calculated the trajectory and made appropriate adjustments. A new shell was inserted with the autoloader. The weaponry once again proved that although physically weak, humans were still at the top of the food chain.

— “Ready to fire!”

“Fire!”

SPG-1 continuously fired, unloading its burden. Once again, the shells hit the building with high precision. The windows were shattered and concrete blocks were thrown out in all directions. The building trembled under the might of artillery fire.

Sensing danger, the Monkeys immediately jumped outside the building, but it was futile. The place was already collapsing, annihilating their hopes. It was a difficult situation to run away from, after all.

The Heron captured all of that from the sky above and sent new coordinates. Another shell landed, right above the escaping Monkeys. The asphalt road overturned and the simians were swallowed up in dust clouds. The frantic Monkeys hurried to hide in a different building. Still, they were bombarded with new shells and buried alive in a matter of minutes.

Similar scenes repeated several times. It didn’t matter whether they hid or ran away. In the end, they all met their fate and died. Realizing that peril existed regardless of where they holed up, the Monkeys started moving towards the south.

SPG-1 fired a shell towards the expected pathway with the Heron’s assistance. While the Monkeys were trying to minimize the damage, they had a habit of moving in groups. Explosions continued to engulf them, killing multiple at a time. SPG-2 focused on firing on buildings, even if only a single Monkey took refuge there. This was just in case there were babies or injured monsters.

Back in the Situation Room, all the data gathered over the past few days was presented.

“72nd building in 16th street, Monkeys confirmed 3 days ago!”

“102 Star Hills Apartment, Monkeys sighted yesterday!”

“Deokjeong Elementary School, 4 days ago!”

“... 2 days ago!”

“We’ve confirmed yesterday!”

The members present in the Situation Room were hard at work. Even though there may not be a Monkey in the building, they had to demolish the ones that the monsters had previously accommodated. The number of targets kept increasing with each report.

The Star Hill Apartment crumbled helplessly while an elementary school sunk. But soon after, the SPGs that were firing in turn went silent.

— “SPG-1! No ammunition left!”

— “SPG-2 has also exhausted all its shells!”

“Boss. We’ve received reports that our SPGs have consumed all of their ammunition.”

Kwang Hwi checked the time. Morning had barely passed since they began the operation. It may have been a short operation, but the results were satisfying.

“Restart after 3 hours.”

“Understood.”

The radio broadcasts resumed after being suspended for a while. It touted the power of Kwang Hwi Faction and did not forget to warn others of another artillery attack.

— “We will temporarily stop bombarding the city between 10 AM and 1 PM. If there are any survivors nearby, please escape Yangju City or hide in underground shelters.”

“What are you doing?”

The man looked at his friend, dumbfounded. His friend, with a blank expression, flung a backpack towards him. A jerky wrapper was sticking out through the zipper.

“Did you take a good shit? Here, I packed a bag for you.”

“A bag...? I mean, what are you doing?”

“Can’t you tell? I’m preparing to head outside.”

For emergencies, they had already prepared two bicycles and placed it at the entrance that was connected to the ground level.

“Are you crazy? What about the monsters on the surface?”

“Just listen to this first.”

The man received a radio from his friend. From it, he heard a familiar voice from yesterday.

— “At 8 AM today, Kwang Hwi Faction conducted a military operation around Yangju City. Utilizing K-9 SPGs, we have killed a number of Monkeys in the Deokjeong area. We are confirming that Monkeys are running away from Deokjeong...”

“It’s saying that the Kwang Hwi Faction is sweeping up the monsters with artillery shells, so it’s the perfect chance to make a run for it.”

“Stop spouting non—”

“We don’t have much time left. If we hadn’t slept in, we could have left comfortably by now.”

The man wanted to stop his friend, but before he knew it, he was being dragged away. As the door to the ground level opened, their noses were pricked by the thick smell of gunpowder. It was more than enough to make them frown. There was even a faint smell of cooked meat mixed amongst it as if someone had held a barbecue party here.

“I’ll take the lead, so follow me.”

“...Sigh.”

The two men carefully observed the surroundings. They couldn’t be lax just because of an announcement that they couldn’t verify.

“Nothing, right?”

“I think so.”

They checked one more time before riding their bikes. The familiar shrieks that had haunted their ears before had disappeared without a trace. The silence even unnerved them a bit. The buildings that were perfectly fine a few hours ago were all flattened and, between the gaps of the wreckage, a Monkey arm was sticking out. The entire road was littered with the flesh, presumed to have belonged to the simian monsters. The flat highway had large craters in it. The whole scene appeared to be taken from a post-apocalypse movie.

“Why are there so many cra—”

A shrill screech sounded in his ears as the man swerved sharply. A black shadow passed right by his nose. A hot sensation of pain came belatedly and beads of blood dripped from his nose to the pedals. The man was left petrified at the sudden ambush.

The Monkey, who missed, screeched louder. In response, cries could be heard from everywhere. The two men felt like they were in the middle of a jungle, amid hungry predators thirsting for their life.

“Yo! Step on it!”

The men pedaled with all their might—their lives hinged on it, literally. The bicycles started to pick up speed. It was certainly fast, but the two couldn’t relax as they could still hear loud squeals right behind them.

“This was your idea of a perfect chance?! A perfect chance to die?!”

“Shut up and keep pedaling!”

Their quarrel didn’t last long because they were greeted by a new group of Monkeys up ahead. They did not look very well, though, as their bodies were scarred by shrapnel and some even had one or two limbs missing. The problem, however, was their numbers. There were more than ten. With menacing glares, the Monkeys blocked the road. Even if they had some minor or severe injuries, it wasn’t going to be easy to confront them.

“Fuck!”

“Hey! What are you going to do about that?”

“What else can we do?! Just break past them!”

If they turned here, they would be cycling around Yangju. By then, more monsters would pick up their trails and they would lose all chances of escaping. As the distance narrowed, they could smell the foul breath from their gaping maws. The two friends closed their eyes. It was too late to avoid the clash now.

‘It’s either do or die!’

“Argggh!”

They roared at the same time. It was their last-ditch move, a gamble with their lives, and it worked magnificently. As if their bodies had emitted an intangible shockwave, the Monkeys that were standing in line were sent flying. They flew through the air before crashing into the walls of buildings. Others were skewered by the steel bars jutting out from the road, like a monster kebab.

In the empty road, the two bicycles passed by safely. Not feeling the expected crash, the two men opened their eyes, nervously.

“W-what?”

Some Monkeys were still falling from the sky. The monsters tried their best to do something, but they couldn't defy gravity. The lucky ones received grave wounds, while the unlucky ones died immediately.

Seeing the head of a primate crushed like a watermelon, one of them cringed. It was not something he would have liked to see and almost fell off his bicycle as a consequence.

Maybe, they were surprised at the death of their comrades? Nevertheless, the Monkeys behind them slowed their pace. Having already gone through a catastrophe, they were rather wary of any unusual happenings.

“They must have given up the chase!”

“Hell yeah! I thought we were going to die!”

Abruptly, a wristwatch beeped, breaking their joyous cheering. Seeing it, the man's face became pale with fright.

“What's wrong?”

“It's time.”

“Time for what?”

“Time for the artillery attack to resume.”

Right after he spoke, a sharp sound pierced the sky above, bringing his fears to reality. A black shell was falling directly above their heads.

“Fuck.”

After restocking ammunitions, the SPGs spat fires once again. Kwang Hwi's gaze was fixed on the screen. The Heron was displaying two civilians that had barely escaped the SPG's attack. An explosion erupted behind them, almost making the two men lose their balance. However, they quickly regained their senses and continued their getaway. The Monkeys chasing them from behind were caught in the explosion and died.

“Jackson.”

“Yes, boss.”

Kwang Hwi gestured towards the civilians on screen.

“Use the transport vehicles and rescue those two men.”

“I’ll do so immediately.”

It was more of a coincidence that Kwang Hwi had found them. Before they resumed firing, he had spotted a small horde of Monkeys. Tracking them down, he saw the two men.

“Can we review the video footage taken just now?”

“Yes, we can.”

On another screen, a video was put up, replaying the scene right before the two civilians were supposed to crash into the Monkey horde. However, the monsters were suddenly thrown into the air, preventing the expected catastrophe.

The video was enlarged, showing that the bicycles never collided with the Monkeys. Even if they did, it didn’t make any sense. Instead of knocking out one or two Monkeys, the bicycles should have flipped over.

Instead, the entire horde was thrown away violently as if they were hit by an invisible force. The thin bicycles did not have the mass of an armored vehicle. Therefore, it was highly likely that the civilians did it. Aside from himself, they were the first awakened ability users he had seen.

— Ω —

29. 1+1=3

“Please come in and relax.”

The two men looked around anxiously. They were tense because they were suddenly asked to meet the leader of the Kwang Hwi Faction. Chuckling, Jackson guided the two men to the office.

“Boss, I’ve brought the survivors.”

Kwang Hwi stood up from his seat and reached out his hand to greet them. He didn’t act high and mighty after gaining a bit of power. Moreover, he knew he had discovered an unpolished gem.

“Nice to meet you. I’m the leader, Kwang Hwi Baek.”

“H-hello, I’m Jin Hyun Park.”

“My name is Seung Chan Jeon.”

Kwang Hwi began the conversation with a light topic to ease the tension in the room. It seemed to work, as their stiff expressions gradually softened. Now that they were relaxed, he began discussing the main topic.

“If it weren’t for our UAV, we wouldn’t have found you two. You see, we just happened to watch over a small Monkey horde when we discovered that you were in a pickle.”

“We’re grateful as we were only able to survive thanks to you.”

“I’ll be straightforward. Has either of you awakened an ability?”

“An ability?”

“What’s that?”

The two men stared at each other, puzzled. Kwang Hwi scrutinized them, but it didn’t seem like they were acting. They really didn’t know what they were capable of.

‘Maybe it was their first time using the ability.’

“Please take a look at the screen over there.”

Jin Hyun and Seung Chan looked at the screen where a video was being replayed. It was footage the UAV took a few minutes ago. The two men were frantically pedaling for their lives. A horde of Monkeys appeared in front of them, barring their path ahead. Right before clashing, the primates blocking the road were pushed away as if they had crashed onto something.

“...My eyes weren’t deceiving me?”

“I believe one of you has awakened.”

“One of us?”

Kwang Hwi nodded.

“Seeing that you came to Dongducheon, may I assume that you are willing to join the Kwang Hwi Faction?”

“Eh? Ah, yes.”

“While I can’t tell which one of you awakened, it’s certainly a handy ability. I personally find it fascinating. I would love to have you both join the Kwang Hwi Faction. If you join us, we’ll treat you better than any ordinary civilians.”

Jin Hyun and Seung Chan looked at each other to confirm their intentions.

‘It should be fine, right?’

‘It doesn’t look like a bad deal.’

While protection was attractive, it was even better to be scouted into a powerful army. If the men were in their 40s to 50s, they might have had a different opinion, but they were currently in the prime of their youth and were full of vigor and ambition. The feeling of being recognized moved them.

“I won’t mistreat you even if you don’t have any abilities. The courage you showed while escaping the city has really moved me. I’ll do my best to help you get the job you want.”

Kwang Hwi made such an offer because he was confident that one of them was an ability user. He knew they wouldn’t be intrigued if he brought nothing to the table. Additionally, it was a good deal for the two men.

“It’s certainly appealing. I won’t be in my right mind if I don’t accept it.”

“But, sir Kwang Hwi? How do you know we have an ability? Even for us, it’s unbelievable.”

“I, too, have an ability, albeit different from yours. You can say that it’s a gut feeling.”

“Y-you are also an ability user?”

Kwang Hwi purchased a gun from the Merit Shop, the sidearm Glock 17 he had distributed to all members. Jin Hyun and Seung Chan were amazed to see a pistol appear out of thin air. It was like a fascinating magic trick, captivating the audience.

“So this is how the Kwang Hwi Faction gets their guns...!”

“Wow, what a cheat. This is too OP!”

“What do you think? It might sound like bragging, but there aren’t that many groups like us that could fight against monsters. In many ways, I think it’ll be good for you to stay here.”

After a moment of silence, both spoke at the same time.

“Alright, we’ll join you.”

Kwang Hwi reached out both of his hands. Jin Hyun and Seung Chan took them without hesitation. Since they were becoming a member of the militia, they had to stick to the etiquette.

“Let’s go to the training room.”

The two new entrants were directed straight to the training room. They were going to find out which one of them had awakened. There were shooting targets installed throughout the room. Was it because they were being evaluated? The two men became fidgety once again.

“Please don’t worry too much. Just as I said before, I will not mistreat or ignore the one without an ability.”

Kwang Hwi spoke firmly as he didn’t want them to misunderstand his intentions. Upon hearing his guarantee, Jin Hyun and Seung Chan did their best to relax. Kwang Hwi had nothing to lose. If one didn’t have an ability, he could appoint him as a normal soldier.

He gave a bit of simple advice as it was nice to have more ability users. He couldn’t have enough of them.

“You don’t need to think too hard. Speaking from experience, just ask yourself what kind of ability you have and simply wish to use it. I got an immediate reaction from doing so.”

“Then, I’ll have a go at it.”

Jin Hyun stepped up first. He was a healthy, muscular male. Shutting his mouth and closing his eyes, he tried to focus his attention.

‘What’s my ability?’

Surprisingly, an image was drawn in his mind. He could tell how to use it and how powerful it was. Jin Hyun raised his hands as if he was possessed.

Kwang Hwi, who was standing behind them, felt a strong gust of wind blow through his hair. The targets that were within 100 meters all fell down. They were set to do so after receiving a fixed amount of force. Realizing he had succeeded, Jin Hyun’s face lit up.

Kwang Hwi clapped his hands.

‘He’s able to push away objects with a strong gust of wind. If so, he must be the one who sent the Monkeys flying.’

Seung Chan tapped Jin Hyun’s shoulder.

“Congrats.”

Despite his words, there was faint darkness lingering on his face. It seemed like his expectation of having an ability was crushed. He couldn't help but feel a bit down at the revelation.

"Seung Chan, why don't you give it a try too?"

"Eh? But Jin Hyun already..."

"Just do it. Who knows."

Jin Hyun cheered his friend up. After hesitating for a moment, Seung Chan stood up from his seat. Perhaps because he had made up his mind, he looked more determined and focused. The targets were raised again. Jin Hyun, who had already succeeded, whispered.

"Concentrate. It seemed to have helped."

"Concentrate, huh?"

After having closed his eyes for a while, Seung Chan reached his palms towards the target. Unexpectedly, something really came out from his open palms. The target, which Seung Chan had reached out to, was torn into pieces. It became mangled after being cut by an invisible blade.

"Huh?"

Everyone watching was amazed.

'I thought only one person awakened, but to think both were ability users?! I've hit the jackpot!'

Seung Chan, who was looking at his palm as if it were possessed, grabbed Jin Hyun's arm and pulled him in.

"Jin Hyun, let's do it together."

"Together?"

"Yeah, together."

Jin Hyun was dragged next to Seung Chan. He didn't know why his friend was acting like this, but he didn't mind.

"We'll do it together at once."

"3, 2, 1. Now!"

A strong wind gushed from the hands of the two and the shooting targets shot up into the sky. The plants and flowers nearby were also helplessly plucked from the ground. Anything that wasn't firmly fixed was dragged into the raging wind. A small hurricane swept through the training room.

The hurricane tore the shooting targets into shreds. The flowers, which were helplessly sent airborne, were also ripped apart. Kwang Hwi, including others, was dazed by the hurricane. However, the two men who started the hurricane were panicking.

"S-stop!"

"How do you stop it?!"

The hurricane whirled for a good while until it eventually died out. Luckily, it stayed in one spot, minimizing the damage. As if they had committed a grave sin, Jin Hyun and Seung Chan apologetically lowered their heads.

While the damage was minimized, the training room was left in shambles. The shooting targets that were sent into the air crashed onto the floor and crumpled. Boxes that were not cleared away spilled out their contents. The aftermath left everybody in disarray.

"Boss! Are you okay?!"

"I'm fine."

In addition, soldiers rushed in thinking that something had happened because of the clamor.

"W-we're sorry."

"We didn't mean to..."

Amidst all of this, Kwang Hwi was smiling.

"Don't be. This is really great!"

"Eh?"

While having two individual ability users was like winning the lottery, the combination of their powers wasn't like $1+1=2$. Instead, it was more like 3, or perhaps even more. The Kwang Hwi Faction had won the jackpot and gained immense power from what was a mere coincidence.

"I'll be blunt with you two."

"Y-yes!"

Kwang Hwi looked at Jackson. Gazing at his boss, Jackson grinned sheepishly. He immediately knew what his boss wanted.

“Jackson, I don’t need to tell you, right?”

“Yessir. I’ll turn them into strong and unbelievably perfect soldiers.”

“I trust you.”

Jackson walked up in front of the two men.

“Men, follow me.”

Not knowing what was going on, the two flustered men fell into step behind Jackson. Seeing this, Kwang Hwi did his best to hide his smile.

For three days straight, the SPGs bombarded Yangju City. Loud artillery fires would start sounding early in the morning, but none of the members gathered at the Situation Room thought twice about it. While it was annoying at first, they had gotten accustomed to it in two days.

“How’s the current situation?”

“We’ve destroyed everything in the east. There may be a handful of Monkeys hiding under the wreckage, but most were eliminated.”

East Yangju was utterly demolished. Shells were frequently reloaded and exhausted soldiers were rotated so that they could fire non-stop. Due to the constant deafening noise, some civilians who lived nearby complained of headaches. The number of Monkeys seemed to have dropped from a size-four to a size-three scale.

“In the south, our recon team is on the move. Thankfully, it seems like only a small number of Monkeys escaped there. Once in a while, a size-two horde would appear, but they’re quickly being suppressed.”

Kwang Hwi did not rule out the possibility that Monkeys could escape to the south. To prevent this, aside from the SPGs, he had dispatched mortars and other weaponry to the south.

The mortar team had even secured a separate temporary foothold there. Their primary purpose was to stop Monkeys from entering or leaving the area by using 81 mm shells. While not as strong as their 155 mm counterpart, the 81 mm weapons were sufficient enough to blast away the simians.

As long as the soldiers responsible for the mortars were not tired, it had the advantage of firing shells rapidly. In return, the UAV pilots moved around without a rest. The barrage of shells fell from the sky like rain. As a result, the Monkeys could not leave the city.

At first, a small group of Monkeys attacked the mortar team. Still, they could not remain standing in the face of the Kwang Hwi Faction's bulletproof vehicles and machine guns. Separately, a search team surveyed the area with the APCs. They created a racket and lured the Monkeys nearby.

With distorted faces, the monsters charged in, only to be greeted by grenade launchers. Before they could cross the line, the majority died. The lucky ones managed to scratch the vehicle's body frame, but their claws snapped. The Namer was an overwhelmingly powerful vehicle. With its help, the search was quickly over.

"Boss, it's over."

"Good work."

The SPG that fired the last shell lowered its head. While he needed to reload it, he had been overspending MP over the past three days. They also had to maintain the SPGs before reusing it.

"Keep focusing. It's almost o—"

His sentence was abruptly cut off by something shattering the window. Something had entered the Situation Room: a Monkey.

— Ω —

30. Attacked

The window was smashed to smithereens and something rolled on the floor. It was a Monkey. Its eyes glowed with a menacing gleam as it were looking for a victim. Unfortunately, he had walked into the wrong hood as armed soldiers filled the room.

『You are the first person in the world to defeat a 'Half Flying Monkey.'』

『As a reward...』

Before the Monkey could do anything, a barrage of bullets pierced its body. After being showered by a hail of lead, the corpse was in tatters.

"Cease fire."

Kwang Hwi looked at the mangled Monkey carcass on the floor. At first, he thought it was something else. But he had to change his opinion soon after. While it had a

Monkey head, it's body looked like a human. On top of that, there were wings on its back.

It was indeed a sight that would make one shudder in disgust. It was almost as if it were a Monkey and human hybrid. 'Hybrid? It can't be...'

Kwang Hwi remembered the testimonies of the survivors Jackson had brought back from Yangju.

"The monsters captured the people and took them somewhere. They killed the men who resisted and seized the powerless women."

After mulling over it for a while, his eye twitched. It was horrifying to even imagine what could possibly have happened. The mere notion of it gave him chills. His train of thought was interrupted by an urgent voice on the radio.

— "A large group of flying Monkeys are appearing at HQ! Cannot identify exact numbers!"

"Commander!"

"You must escape!"

The men grabbed Kwang Hwi's arms in a bid to escort him to a safe location. However, Kwang Hwi waved at them to stop.

"Shut up and go out. We need to kill these moths."

"B-but."

"Now!"

His subordinates rushed out of the Situation Room while he stayed inside. Kwang Hwi raised his gun. There were mutant Monkeys with wings flying in the sky. Kwang Hwi fired. The head of the mutant that was attacking the security team abruptly flew backward. With half of its head crushed and black blood oozing out, the Monkey collapsed onto the floor, lifeless. Kwang Hwi flicked his gun elsewhere.

Every time his gun rang, another mutant would perish. It didn't matter whether bullets punctured their cheeks or foreheads, they all died with a single shot. After quickly suppressing multiple hybrids, Kwang Hwi grabbed the radio.

"Get inside the buildings to neutralize their flying ability."

The soldiers that were caught unprepared started to counter-attack. Following Kwang Hwi's command, they hid in structures or vehicles nearby. From inside, they began

unloading their guns at the horde. Although it was not easy to keep up with the flying Monkeys, the men never stopped firing.

It became much louder outside. The sirens, gunfire, and shrieking Monkeys were all mixed together, piercing everyone's ears. They had to shout even when talking to someone next to them.

— “HQ! This is the Outer Wall Security Team. We can hear gunshots and the siren from here. Do you need reinforcements?”

— “Immediately...”

Kwang Hwi quickly interjected into the radio.

“This is your commander. Do not come to the HQ! It may be a diversion! Maintain your current position and prepare for any possible offensive!”

— “U-understood.”

The superiority the Monkeys had gained from the surprise attack lasted only for a moment. The half-breeds were quickly being swept away. While their ability to fly looked threatening, their weaknesses were evident. Their gliding speed was slow, and, due to having a similar physique as an average person, one or two bullets could incapacitate them. Moreover, they had limited means to attack.

On the other hand, the Kwang Hwi Faction had adequate ranged attack capabilities. Once the element of surprise was taken out of the picture, they were superior. And to prove that point, one by one, the mutant Monkeys fell from the sky. Yet, Kwang Hwi wore a grim expression.

‘Something is strange.’

The ambush was sudden and the mutant Monkeys created from breeding with human females were appalling. But amid all this chaos, it was clumsy. It almost felt like a piece of the puzzle was missing. As if on cue, a roar was heard from the sky above. Kwang Hwi turned around and looked up.

“There it is.”

A giant monster was falling from the sky. It's blood-red fur stood out like needles, looking hideous.

‘Rather than a monkey, it's more like a gorilla.’

The monster fixed his gaze at Kwang Hwi. He could feel intense hostility from its stare. It was as if the beast knew who the leader was. Kwang Hwi quickly grabbed the M32A1 next to him. It was the revolver-type grenade launcher he previously used.

He fired and a grenade went off, exploding on the monster's chest. The gorilla was pushed back slightly from the force. Kwang Hwi continued to pull the trigger and the rounds quickly left the cylinder. The chain of explosions continued. While there were no critical hits, the shock sent the gorilla further away. Eventually, the monster landed in a small forest right next to the Dongducheon City Hall.

The ground trembled as a shockwave overturned the soil. Trees were knocked down and thick clouds of dust rose into the air. Nearby mutant Monkeys and soldiers, who were fighting each other, both fell over due to the small earthquake.

The enraged gorilla started causing a ruckus. Not finding its target nearby, it vented its anger on the landscape. The chipped trees were wholly flattened by its weight. Kwang Hwi hurriedly ran outside. Conveniently, there was the APC Namer in front of him.

— “Boss, please teach that uncultured monster some manners!” said Jackson.

“Always a pleasure.”

Grinning, Kwang Hwi got in the gunner's position. He was welcomed by the automated fire control system. On-screen, there was the giant gorilla who was demolishing the forest. Focusing on his target, Kwang Hwi grabbed the stick.

The 30 mm autocannon rotated. The gorilla was still charging and laying waste to the forest, carving a path for itself. All the while, it had not realized that the gun was aimed at it. The crosshair was aligned with the gorilla's chest.

Kwang Hwi gently pulled his finger. A large hole was pierced into the monster's chest as a witness to his gentle squeeze. Blood trickled down the wound.

Despite the fatal blow, the gorilla continued to run wild. It plucked utility poles and trees from the ground and threw them at the APC. Jackson, who was piloting the vehicle, quickly maneuvered away. The utility pole struck the ground, missing its target. Kwang Hwi promptly followed the first shot with the second and third shells.

Before the heavy shell bounced off the ground, it drilled more holes in the gorilla's body.

It kneeled onto the floor, failing to even scratch its prey. Its shoulder bone and muscles were exposed, while the contents of its abdomen and chest were spilling out. The blood rivulet started to dye the soil red. When Kwang Hwi thought it couldn't possibly be alive, a notification appeared in front of him.

『You have defeated the 'Red Monkey Lord'.』

『You have obtained 100,000 MP.』

Only then did Kwang Hwi stopped firing. The system was his best companion, after all.

“Death Confirmed!”

— “Nice shot!”

The mutated Monkeys that raided the HQ were also almost cleaned up by now. Their limp bodies were littered everywhere. A small stream was formed from the black blood oozing from their bodies. Gunshots rang sporadically, the men making sure the monsters stayed dead.

“This is HQ. Security team, report!”

— “All hostiles were eliminated! A small number of mutants ran away, while around ten civilians were injured.”

“What about our combat force?”

— “Three have minor wounds while one has serious injuries. The wounded were relocated to the hospital to receive treatment.”

Kwang Hwi quietly let out a sigh of relief. Thankfully, no one died. While they were ambushed, the Monkeys were unexpectedly weak, lessening their threat.

— “HQ. This is the Southern Wall Security Team!”

“Speak.”

— “We’ve engaged with a size-three horde that descended from a nearby mountain. Luckily, no one was injured and the monsters were all eliminated.”

“Roger. Stay on alert. Hostiles at HQ were also eliminated.”

— “Understood.”

Kwang Hwi then changed the channel. The search team sent to Yangju was using a separate radio network.

“Search team, report on the operation.”

From the radio, disorderly noises could be heard. It was the engine sound of the APC and gunshots from the machine guns. It seemed as if they were fighting the monsters.

— “This is the search team! We have entered Yangju City Hall and are currently engaging against the Monkey horde. However, they are being suppressed without an issue!”

“Copy that. Prioritize the safety of all members.”

— “Affirmative. We’ll report back once we’ve secured the location.”

As soon as Kwang Hwi got off the APC, his subordinates gathered around him. They were here to confirm his well being. He was their mental support, after all.

“Boss! Are you okay?!”

“We thought something happened because we couldn’t find you.”

“I’m fine, so don’t worry. Instead, report back to the Situation Room. We still need to secure Yangju City.”

“Roger that!”

After responding loudly, few men headed back into the city hall. They were now relieved after seeing him unhurt with their own eyes.

“As for the rest, clean up this mess. If you were injured, don’t be stubborn and immediately head to the hospital.”

There was nothing more stupid than leaving a treatable injury unattended.

‘The mercenaries in Africa were like that.’

“Move!”

The rest dispersed at his behest.

With the repeated sound of bullets being fired, the machine gun rained hell at the horde. As the windows of city hall shattered, chunks of flesh splattered from within. The Monkeys that were preparing for a surprise attack flew out while bleeding profusely. In a role reversal, the hunters had become the prey at this moment.

A mutant swung its claws at the gunner. The gunner lowered his head in a hurry to dodge the incoming strike. The razor-sharp claws grazed the bulletproof helmet, almost causing him to meet his maker. There wasn’t time to be terrified, though.

The gunner turned his machine gun, links and empty cartridges poured out. After being shot in the wings, the mutant fluttered and fell to the ground. It tried its best to stand up, but its vision was filled by the APC's continuous tracks.

The mutant could not withstand the iron hulk that weighed several tons. As it was crushed underneath the vehicle, its flesh scattered everywhere, creating a grotesque scene. The autocannon fired and the walls of city hall crumbled like tofu, just like its defenders. It had no difficulty in penetrating the thick walls. Concrete boulders rolled onto the floor due to the overwhelming power.

"City hall, 3F! Size-two Monkey horde spotted!"

The Monkeys started pouring out of the broken windows and walls. The Medium Tactical Vehicle packed with heavily armed soldiers stopped. Bullets greeted the Monkeys that had just landed, dashing their hopes.

The Monkeys died before they could even scream. Instead of a neatly organized flower bed outside the government building, deep craters formed where they landed. Soo Min was issuing commands inside the APC, keeping the whole situation under control.

'Their resistance is weakening.'

In the beginning, hundreds were pouring out at once. But now, it was reduced to a few dozen. It was evident that their forces were depleted. After all, they had been bombarded by SPGs and mortars for days.

"All soldiers, disembark!"

Finally, the order was given. The soldiers, who had been waiting for the command, immediately jumped out of the vehicle. The convoy covered every point to guard against a possible surprise attack. Even if they had cut down their numbers, they couldn't be lax now.

The infantry entered the building in a hurry. The place revealed itself in its entirety, showing how it was ravaged by shells and bullets. Monster carcasses were lying everywhere.

The infantry split into smaller teams. Each team surveyed the building to see if there were any remaining monsters. Hidden Monkeys were routed out by the soldiers one by one.

"Ugh."

An infantry member opened a door and immediately fell on his back. A small needle was sticking out from his neck.

“Neurotoxin! It’s a Monkey!”

His companion quickly grabbed him by the bulletproof vest and dragged him away. Another soldier threw a grenade and closed the door. An explosion erupted inside the room as the iron door shook violently.

The men opened the door once again. One of the subordinates holding an Ultimax machine gun pointed the muzzle through the gap. The Monkey, who had already died from the explosion, had some bonus bullets added to its body.

“All clear!”

The last member of the team quickly drew a circle with a spray can. It was to indicate the room was clean. They then moved on to the next office and knocked on the door.

“Is anyone inside?”

“W-we’re here!”

“Please help!”

The soldier cautiously opened the door. Survivors, who appeared to have been tied by the Monkeys, were wriggling on the floor. Seeing the soldiers, they burst into tears.

“W-we’re saved! Saved!”

After confirming there were no Monkeys nearby, the men cut the ropes. Once they were freed, the survivors rubbed their sore wrists and ankles.

“Rescued 20 survivors in the 2F. We’ll escort them out.”

— “Roger. There are still a lot of monsters inside. Prioritize the safety of all soldiers.”

After a few minutes, Yangju City Hall was thoroughly combed through. Spare vehicles, which had been brought just in case, were packed with survivors. As for the soldiers, they were taking a short break outside.

“Major Soo Min.”

“What’s the matter?”

“...There is something you must see.”

Soo Min followed the soldier to the city hall’s underground parking lot. As they got closer, a foul stench overwhelmed their noses. The men guided Soo Min to a subterranean bunker that was used as a shelter in case of emergencies. Those who

were guarding the entrance greeted Soo Min. His face became contorted as he bore witness to a gruesome spectacle.

“...Shit.”

A pile of corpses could be seen inside. There were women who had their stomach split open. The floor was drenched in an unidentified liquid that couldn't be distinguished as either blood or urine. Babies were abandoned in one corner.

“These babies are...”

The soldier could not finish his sentence due to grief, disgust, and anger. Soo Min went to inspect the babies himself.

“Ugh.”

The babies had a monkey head and a human body, similar to the mutants the men saw outside. The only difference was that their bodies were much smaller, with either one arm or leg shriveled up badly. It appeared to be deformation caused by cross-breeding.

Now they knew why the women were dragged away: to procreate mutant Monkeys. It seemed the situation was worse than they had initially thought.

“For now, take pictures and report them back to the commander.”

“...Okay.”

『Gyeonggi Province's Yangju City was added to the Controlling Area category.』

『It is strongly suggested to deploy troops in the area. If troops are not deployed, other forces may take over the territory.』

— Ω —