

World's Greatest Militia

31. Who are you again? (1)

"It's over."

Just in time, the search team that had entered the Yangju City Hall reported back.

— "HQ, this is the search team. We have fully secured Yangju City Hall and found 50 survivors."

Soo Min, who had taken charge of the team instead of Kwang Hwi, spoke.

"Any injuries?"

— "Except for the one who got paralyzed by a Monkey, everyone else is fine. The poisoned individual is receiving first aid treatment as we speak."

"Alright. Return to HQ."

Watching over the city hall video footage from the Heron, Kwang Hwi ordered the men to come home. Initially, they were planning to use Yangju as a forward operating base. However, their plans changed once the monsters had resisted them inside the city hall. The autocannon had demolished the building with its 30 mm shells.

'We need to find a new checkpoint.'

『Combat Force Info』

★Title★

Kwang-Hwi Faction (View Symbol)

★Commander-in-chief★

[Absolute Leader] Kwang Hwi Baek

★Controlling Area★

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

★Total Force★

157 (+1)

★Equipment★

[Operating] 2x K-9 SPG

[Operating] 2x APC Namer

[Operating] 4x Light Tactical Vehicle

[Operating] 2x Medium Tactical Vehicle

★Divisions★

Dongducheon City Security Team

Power Plant Guard Squad

Farmland Guard Team

Recruit Training Center

There was a knock on the door. Kwang Hwi closed the Command System in front of him and refocused his attention on the visitor.

“Come in.”

The office door opened slowly and a subordinate carrying documents carefully approached Kwang Hwi.

“Commander, here are the reports.”

“Good work.”

Kwang Hwi meticulously inspected the papers. The documents contained fine details of what the Kwang Hwi Faction had obtained from securing Yangju City. As the commander, he only needed to concern himself with the overall situation and let his underlings do the rest.

Rescue Report

Yangju Armed Forces Hospital – 50 people.

Yangju City Hall – 50 people.

Yangju City – 10 people.

“This time, half of the survivors are army surgeons and military soldiers who were hospitalized. A comprehensive report of each individual is listed on the following page. Please view them at your leisure.”

Kwang Hwi flipped a page. Their name, military rank, and position were all there in detail. There were five army surgeons and the rest were hospitalized soldiers or hospital employees.

“How are they doing?”

“The hospitalized survivors all have some modicum of injuries. Some people were already ill, while others received theirs from Monkeys.”

“We should treat them with care.”

“Yes. Thankfully, it doesn’t seem like anyone has any serious wounds.”

It was fortunate there were no grievous damages or losses. No matter how many medical personnel and supplies the Kwang Hwi Faction had, it was challenging to recreate the capabilities of past medical services. It did not only depend on these factors as there was a lot more involved behind the scenes.

“It’ll be best to incorporate all the survivors from the Armed Force Hospital into our military and have the rest plow the farmland.”

Kwang Hwi’s former base was currently idle, so his private land had been repurposed into farmland. While they had plenty of food right now, they couldn’t push aside cultivating the land. It wasn’t like food grew in a matter of a few days, so they had to prepare in advance.

“Do you want to train them immediately after they get back to their feet?”

“Why not?”

“As you say. I’ll have it taken care of.”

Miscellaneous reports followed after, such as their former lifestyle or rusted ammo they carried with them. There was also good news, though. SPGs, which had been under maintenance due to overuse, had returned to operational status. After confirming the reports, Kwang Hwi changed the topic.

“How is the training coming along for the two?”

“You mean the hurricane duo that recently joined?”

“Hurricane duo?”

Kwang Hwi shook his head in amusement. It was a strange nickname that was indeed one of its kind.

“Many people were impressed by the hurricane they created at arrival. Therefore, the men are now calling them the hurricane duo.”

The ‘hurricane duo’ were practicing their ability at Dongducheon Training Center. They chose the location for having a sparse population around. Besides, there was no need to worry about collateral damage as it was close to the mountain range and was far from the city. Jin Hyun and Seung Chan, who were facing each other, shouted at the same time.

“One, two, three!”

With a swish, a small tempest formed at the empty lot. Small tree branches that were planted ahead of time rose into the air and were torn to fragments. It was not just some simple gale as each stream of wind was as sharp as a blade. Once sucked in, most life forms would perish within.

The two friends glared fiercely as they focused on controlling the hurricane they had created. Now and then, the situation took a dangerous turn. The hurricane would climb the mountain, only to change its course and head towards Dongducheon City Hall. Whenever that happened, beads of sweat would drip from the two men who would try their best to twist its direction.

They could have caused an unintentional coup d'état with their attempts. The raging storm gradually subsided under their guidance. After confirming that it had disappeared, the two men flopped onto the floor, too tired to remain standing.

“It’s like taming a wild horse.”

“I agree.”

While it wasn’t easy to control the hurricane, they were getting better at it with each attempt. It was as if some horse had stepped on a nail and went on a rampage, rather than letting go of the reins. Naturally, it was exhausting trying to deal with that.

“Even though I saw it last time, it still amazes me.”

Jin Hyun and Seung Chan scrambled to their feet. Kwang Hwi, who had just arrived, looked at the two with delight. He was satisfied with their earnestness and hard work.

“Greetings, commander.”

The two men raised their right hands to salute. Although they were previously known as survivors, they were now Kwang Hwi Faction’s recruits. Thus, they had to treat Kwang Hwi with the utmost respect.

“At ease.”

Even after Kwang Hwi had told them to relax, the two only lowered their hands. They stood upright like a spear, waiting for orders. It seemed like military discipline had been drilled into them, and quite thoroughly at that.

‘Seems like Jackson overdid it once again.’

Considering Jackson's personality, their reaction was natural. Only Kwang Hwi and his subordinates treated him like a naive kid. When it came to disciplining underlings, no one else was stricter than Jackson.

"Have you gotten familiar with your abilities?"

"Yes! We need more practice, but we're getting accustomed to it."

"That's good to hear. I look forward to your performance."

Kwang Hwi patted the duo's shoulders, but his eyes suddenly became sharp. Seeing Kwang Hwi reaching out for his leg holster, Jin Hyun and Seung Chan looked at him with surprise. In a flash, Kwang Hwi held a pistol in his hand.

"B-Boss?"

The two men panicked as they called out to Kwang Hwi, but his gaze was fixed on the mountain. He was fully alert as if facing some grave danger.

"Who's there?"

The two men, who belatedly realized there was a trespasser, also hurried to pull out their pistols wrapped around their waist. Regardless of rank, all members of the Kwang Hwi Faction were given sidearm.

"Come out! If you won't, we'll open fire!"

Despite the warning, the mountain forest remained still and silent. Seung Chan and Jin Hyun even wondered whether there really was someone out there. Just when they had that suspicion, Kwang Hwi pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit a tree, forcing the hiding people to step out. The duo's intuition was proved false as the black shadows revealed themselves. Kwang Hwi squinted his eyes; the people who had emerged all looked shabby. It almost made the ones who were rescued after a month look like some sort of nobility.

Their clothes were ragged, covered in dirt. Most of their skin was exposed and their faces looked miserable from the hardships. Even a young child looked like he was in his thirties. Some of them were holding onto rocks as substitute weapons. From their mouths, Kwang Hwi could only hear an unfamiliar Korean accent.

"P-please, do not kill us!"

"W-we're only trying to run away from the monsters!"

Jin Hyun and Seung Chan's mouths gaped. They couldn't hide their curiosity and one of them gave voice to his thoughts.

'Are these people...'

"North Koreans?"

"I think so."

Kwang Hwi grabbed onto his radio and sent an order to the Situation Room.

"Commander speaking. Send one support team to Dongducheon Training Center."

In less than two minutes, a loud engine noise could be heard from afar; it was the Light Tactical Vehicle.

"Boss! Where are you?!"

Without saying a word, Kwang Hwi shot a bullet into the air. A gunshot rang and the surprised North Korean defectors flinched. After identifying the location from the noise, the support team rushed to the scene. One of the best veteran soldiers greeted Kwang Hwi.

"Greetings, commander. I'm Hu Seok Oh, a Sergeant leading the support team."

"Sergeant Oh, guide these people to the temporary relief center."

"These people are... understood."

After identifying the North Koreans, the Sergeant moved quickly. Following the protocol, the soldiers checked to see if the defectors carried any weapons. After doing so, they gathered them to make sure no one would wander elsewhere.

"Everyone! Please follow the instructions. There is no need to be afraid or nervous."

"HQ, this is support team 3. We need one town bus."

— "This is HQ. Your location?"

"Entrance to the Dongducheon Training Center."

— "Affirmative. It'll be there shortly."

With a concerned expression, the defectors obediently followed instructions. Their eyes were fixated on the guns each soldier carried. It was typical for people to be scared of strangers carrying around weapons. At the very least, most would get nervous. Yet, the

defectors were showing signs of relief, contrary to what might one think. Kwang Hwi was able to get a rough idea of North Korea's situation from this; they were in the same plight as the South.

"...Seems like we won't have time for breaks."

He wanted to leave the HQ for a while, but it seemed like he had to return just after 10 minutes.

Kwang Hwi gathered his most trusted men when it was long past sunset.

"Have you found out anything about the runaways we found this evening?"

"They lived near the border. After the monsters appeared, the North Korean military issued evacuation orders to a nearby military base. Unfortunately, even that base was attacked."

"Was the military unable to stop the monsters?"

"Yes. Just like us, all of their weapons were destroyed."

"Figures."

Beside the handful of special forces, the ordinary soldiers in North Korea were far worse than South Koreans. It was questionable whether the famished and inadequately equipped North Korean soldiers would be able to kill even one Monkey. Most were probably swept away by the monsters.

"How do you plan to deal with the defectors, boss?"

"We'll accept them."

Having anticipated such an answer, the subordinates nodded. Kwang Hwi Faction had to keep expanding its size. That way, they could train more soldiers and maintain a powerful combat force.

"Like the survivors in the Armed Force Hospital, there are many in poor condition. Additionally, we need to teach them our language to communicate properly."

"In the morning, train them like the hurricane duo. In the afternoon, teach them our language."

"Understood."

“I think that’ll be enough for the defector issue...”

Kwang Hwi looked at one person.

“In Ho Kang.”

“Major In Ho Kang, reporting!”

In Ho sprang to his feet with a stiff face. He was responsible for rebuilding Dongducheon as a fortress.

“If monsters, not the North Korean turncoats, came to our Dongducheon Training Center from the mountains this time, everyone would have been in trouble.”

Unable to respond, In Ho lowered his head. The incident proved that the fortification process was not complete. They were fortunate to have defectors instead of monsters and had discovered an unexpected weak point. Perhaps the mutant Monkeys Kwang Hwi previously encountered came from the mountain range after taking a detour.

“Don’t forget this mistake.”

“Yes! Understood.”

Kwang Hwi ended his scolding with a light warning.

Even if his subordinate had made a mistake, it was his responsibility to check on it. After all, he was the leader and was responsible for their actions.

‘It’s my fault too.’

Kwang Hwi waved at his subordinate to sit.

“We’ll block the roads to the mount—”

A loud, whirring sound interrupted their meeting as everyone looked outside the window.

— Ω —

32. Who are you again? (2)

From above, a strong gust of wind blew against the trees planted in the ground. A colossal helicopter blocked the sky, letting everyone know of its presence.

“It’s fucking big.”

The gathered men nodded, seeing eye to eye. As Jackson stated, it was an unbelievably big helicopter. Kwang Hwi focused on the barely visible fuselage and found a red star was imprinted on it.

“It’s the DPRK’s helicopter.”

“DPRK?”

The helicopter didn’t seem to have any mounted weapons or rockets. Hovering at a low altitude, it didn’t look like it had any intention of attacking. At such heights, it was even possible for the Kwang Hwi Faction to shoot it down.

— “Boss. Reporting from the Situation Room. We’ve received communications from the unidentified helicopter.”

“What are they saying?”

— “They have stated zero intentions of engaging in a battle with us. Instead, they have surrendered.”

“First, have them land on the Dongducheon Training Center.”

— “Copy that.”

While Dongducheon High School was closer, the SPGs were still deployed there. Therefore, the next empty lot available was the training center. Over the radio, Kwang Hwi overheard the exchange of words. An unfamiliar voice with a thick accent agreed to the request.

“Let’s head to the training center.”

“Yes, sir!”

Peeking out from the vehicle, the traffic controller raised his traffic rods. As the Light Tactical Vehicle headed toward the training center, the traffic controller swung his rods without a rest.

Seeing that, the DPRK transport helicopter slowly followed behind the vehicle. Upon arriving, the dark training center brightly lit up. The chopper carefully descended after securing visibility. A dust storm was swept away by the strong breeze. In the meantime, armed soldiers were arriving one after another, encircling the newcomers.

— “Team 2 has arrived at the north.”

— “Team 8 has arrived at the south. Dispersing troops.”

— “Team 9, ETA one minute.”

Kwang Hwi had his subordinates manage the troops. Numerous assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, and an autocannon were all aimed at the helicopter. It was impossible to get away after being exposed to such a level of firepower.

As the rotor slowed its rotation, it came to a complete halt. The door on the side opened under the watchful eyes of the soldiers. DPRK pilots, who were wearing dark green military uniforms, revealed themselves.

“We’re unarmed!”

After coming down the stairs, the pilots raised their hands and turned around. Forget the gun; they didn’t even have a knife. The pilots were totally weaponless. Kwang Hwi picked up the loudspeaker.

“Approach slowly!”

After the pilots widened their distance from the helicopter, Jackson walked up to it. A single team covered his back, vigilant against any sudden change. After inspecting, Jackson reported back.

— “Boss, the helicopter is clear.”

“Copy that.”

Kwang Hwi walked up to the pilots.

“A-are you the commander of the ROK Armed Forces?”

“While I am Korean, I am not affiliated with the South Korean military.”

“What do...”

“Who are you?”

“W-we are pilots, part of the helicopter unit...”

Their story was similar to the defectors found earlier today. Without warning, all their weapons had turned into scrap metal. The only thing left intact was the transport helicopter without mounted guns.

Hiding in a secluded place, the troops held out for a while. Despite their efforts, though, the monsters somehow found them and raided their base. They could only last for so long. Once their last line of defense was breached, the few pilots ran away using the

helicopter. While deciding where to go, the men saw the city light and crossed the border.

“P-please save us. We won’t do anything bad.”

“We will even give this helicopter. So, please accept us.”

Kwang Hwi glanced at the chopper.

‘Mi-26’

Amongst the mass-produced helicopters, it was the biggest model that had similar transport capacity as the U.S. C-130. It could load up to 20 tons, twice as much as the famous Chinook.

If used for transporting soldiers, up to 90 people could board it. Just to operate this beast, five pilots were needed. It was a Soviet transport helicopter that highlighted its beauty and massive size. While Kwang Hwi had heard North Korea was operating a few, it was his first time seeing one.

“We’ll accept you only if you work for us.”

The pilots briefly glanced at each other. Naturally, they had already prepared their answers.

“We will fully cooperate.”

“Please leave it to us!”

Soo Min urgently walked up to Kwang Hwi. He frowned, having his back against the pilots and intentionally spoke with a loud volume.

“Boss, they are North Koreans. Even though they are saying they’ll be of service, there’s a good chance they’ll change their mind depending on the situation.”

Hearing that, the surprised pilots rejected the notion at once. They were flustered as they spoke.

“T-That’s not true! We will never betray you!”

“I-I will even sacrifice my life to express my loyalty!”

Kwang Hwi deliberately made a solemn expression. While the two were acting, the North Koreans looked like they were about to wet their pants. As the overwhelming silence continued, the pilots became even more desperate.

“Then, let’s do this. If you complete the task, we’ll accept you as one of us. You’ll need to receive some training, but it won’t be too difficult for you soldiers.”

“W-What should we do?”

“Shout out loud so everyone here can hear. Say ‘Kim Jong-un is a bitch’ loud and clear.”

“...”

Not only were the North Koreans silent, but even Kwang Hwi’s subordinates and other men also could not hide their astonishment. Even so, he was looking at the pilots with a calm expression.

“What are you doing?”

“B-but.”

“So, you want to die?”

Kwang Hwi reached out for his Glock wrapped around his waist.

“K-Kim Jong-un! How dare you look down on our general...”

A gunshot rang and a pilot collapsed onto the floor. Blood trickled down from the bullet hole in his forehead. Kwang Hwi turned around to the other pilots. The silence pressured them and they gulped their saliva.

“... Kim Jong-un is a bitch.”

“Louder!”

“K-Kim Jong-un is a bitch!”

“One more time!”

“Kim Jong-un is the son of a bitch!”

Perhaps they were under the heat as they added more insult. Kwang Hwi, including others, nodded with satisfaction.

“Boss, I’ve recorded them.”

Jackson, who had returned, gave Kwang Hwi a camcorder. It had perfectly captured the scene where the North Korean pilots slurred at the North Korean leader. Although it was uncertain whether or not Kim Jong-un was still alive, the pilots could not betray him anymore.

“Welcome, soldiers. Jackson, I’ll leave them in your care once again.”

“Yes, sir!”

Jackson led the surrendered pilots away, and they followed his footsteps with a look of defeat. No matter the circumstances, betraying their country would be a blemish on their hearts.

“Soo Min?”

“Yes, boss!”

“Tell the engineers to look at the condition of the helicopter.”

“Understood.”

It was a helicopter larger than the Chinook. While it would be difficult to deploy it for battles, it was perfect for transporting troops. It could even carry more than half of all forces in the Kwang Hwi Faction.

“I’ll leave all the matters to you, Soo Min.”

“Have a safe trip. We should be able to complete the fortification process by the end of the day.”

Kwang Hwi was the last person to get in the APC. All other members were already on board. He was greeted by an ample empty space.

— “Our commander is in. As of now, our vehicle is Turtle-1.”

The rear door closed after his entry. The faint vibration caused by the engine could be felt from the seat.

“Move forward.”

— “Orders received.”

The Light Tactical Vehicles led the way. Immediately following it was the Namer Turtle-2. Turtle-1 quickly trailed behind. In the rear, Medium Tactical Vehicles and large box trucks joined the ranks. In the carrier compartment, the grenade launcher was mounted alongside fully armed soldiers.

Kwang Hwi Faction's destination was the 26th Division's military base located at Yangju. It was not too far from Yangju City Hall and was not explored yet. They were also scheduled to visit the medical unit nearby.

— “We'll arrive at our destination shortly.”

The front gate, which should have been tightly shut, was wide open. As if there was a battle here, many of the obstacles were destroyed and the guard post was already demolished. Traces of blood were left on the ground, evidence of some fight taking place not too long ago.

Kwang Hwi Faction passed through the wide-open gate. Even after entering the army base, the APC did not have to worry about being attacked by the Monkeys. All vehicles stopped at the large military training grounds.

“Let's do it.”

Armed soldiers left the transport vehicles and got going. They were tasked with dispersing to find the survivors and supplies.

— “Boss! We found them!”

“What did you find?”

Immediately, the men had dug up edible supplies. Most of the food stored in the Post Exchange and cafeteria was rotten, but military MREs were perfectly fine. Being made for emergency consumption, they were not affected by the weather. Having such a long shelf life, MREs had many uses. Even so, the men did not only retrieve food.

— “We've found soldiers hiding inside.”

“Soldiers?”

Some troops were also found hiding in the warehouse that was transformed into a temporary shelter. As if there were a high-rank officer amongst the survivors, the radio became loud.

— “Oi, where did you come from?! I'm a Major General!”

‘Why am I getting this feeling of déjà vu?’

Although Kwang Hwi Faction wasn't associated with the ROK Armed Forces, the person in question was a two-star general. The situation could quickly deteriorate as the men had all served the military once. Kwang Hwi promptly issued an order.

“Subdue them.”

— “Yes!”

Their indecisiveness completely disappeared as the men brilliantly restrained the Major General and others.

When they tried to stand their ground, the men fired into the air. The noisy Major General stopped resisting at once. Kwang Hwi sent out the vehicles to carry food and survivors.

— “Boss, this is Team 12.”

“Team 12, report. What’s the sitrep?”

— “We’ve checked the Air Defense Team, but most of the equipment was out of commission. Even the M61 Vulcan and K30 Biho were unusable.”

“It’s unfortunate, boss.”

Kwang Hwi’s subordinate let out a sigh, looking extremely disappointed. Anything considered as a weapon was rusted, and there was no exception.

— “However, it seems like the anti-aircraft radar is fine. We would need additional people to check on it.”

Kwang Hwi’s face became bright at the surprise. It would be great if they could acquire at least an anti-aircraft radar. Just a few days ago, they didn’t even know how a DPRK helicopter had approached them.

“Copy that. We’ll send some technicians, so be on standby.”

The engineer sitting inside the APC stood up. She was a precious member of the Kwang Hwi Faction.

‘Would there be any user manual guide lying around?’

After some time, reports came in one after another.

— “Boss, this is Team 7. We found a group of Light Tactical Vehicles. They are fully operational.”

— “Commander, we have secured some bulletproof vests and combat gear used by the military police.”

— “Secured radio equipment from the Information & Communication Center. Returning shortly!”

— “Team 2, reporting! None of the ammunition is usable.”

— “Multiple corpses... found at Maintenance Depot.”

“Collect all the bodies and cremate them. That’s the least we can do out of respect.”

— “Yes!”

The search continued throughout the morning. In the meantime, the transport truck made multiple trips from the Dongducheon HQ. There were a lot of supplies that were unearthed and had to be preserved.

When the search was completed to a certain extent, Kwang Hwi ordered the men to block the entrance to the 26th Division base. Eventually, it would act as a replacement headquarters to the destroyed Yangju City Hall. The doors were closed and the broken chains were replaced. On top of that, a warning was also pasted.

Warning!

This facility is under the control of the Kwang-Hwi Faction.

Trespassers may be attacked.

In the afternoon, they all headed to the 26th Division’s boot camp located elsewhere. A small group of survivors was found there, as well. They were a mix of civilians and soldiers. Somehow, they managed to make a spear out of iron pipes, but in front of Kwang Hwi Faction’s guns...

“We surrender!” was the natural and only response possible.

Unfortunately, aside from human resources, there wasn’t much else to gain. The bulletproof vests they wore were damaged beyond repair by the Monkeys and they barely had any food left. In a single day, Kwang Hwi Faction had plundered all of the 26th Division. It wasn’t until late at night that they were able to return to the headquarters.

— Ω —

Chapter 33. Emergency Mission

“This is a rebellion, a coup d’état!”

“We refuse to acknowledge such unlawful and unwarranted use of military force!”

“Immediately yield the command of all troops and equipment to us. If you do so, we will consider offering you a position!”

Kwang Hwi's face creased with annoyance. The high ranking officers he brought from the 26th Division's military base were all shouting nonsense that pricked his ears, driving him up the wall.

"What should we do with them?"

His subordinates asked for guidance as they couldn't overstep their bounds. The current situation was somewhat similar—yet also different—to the time he found the General Officer at the Dongducheon General Hospital. The General Officer had quickly grasped the situation and surrendered to Kwang Hwi, even offering a UAV. Afterwards, he's been quietly living with them without kicking up a fuss. On the other hand, these stubborn idiots were giving him an attitude. Kwang Hwi couldn't tell whether they were obstinate or really that dumb to go against him.

"Despite being prisoners, they sure do like to yap."

"That's right, boss. They don't know their place at all."

"Boss! You're not planning to listen to their nonsense, right?"

His men raised their concerns at his continued silence. Before they went to Africa with Kwang Hwi, they were once part of the ROK Armed Forces. Having been sent out there for a politically motivated reason, most of his men did not have a favorable impression of military officers.

"Now, now. Everyone relax."

Soo Min did his best to calm the men down. When Kwang Hwi's right-hand man joined the conversation, the rowdy ranks and files did their best to regain their composure.

"Boss, this issue also pertains to how we will deal with the government in the future."

"Right."

Even though the military was gone, the people in front of him were the top brass of the division. Kwang Hwi Faction's relationship with the government would depend on how he dealt with them. Even so, Kwang Hwi didn't dwell too much into it.

"Take care of them in a quiet place."

"W-wait!"

"Based on the Geneva Convention... Mmm!"

Kwang Hwi knew what the officer was trying to say. He wasn't stupid, he just didn't care. The military officers, including the Major General, struggled with all their might, but their

limbs were already tied up. On top of that, his men were pointing their guns behind the officers, so any exertions they did were all in vain.

His subordinates forcefully dragged the flailing officers away. They were going to be executed in a secluded place and the timing was just perfect since it was late at night. Nobody would discover their clandestine affair.

“Will this be fine?”

“We can’t just leave them be.”

“But, boss! Our relationship with the government...”

“That’s if the government still exists.”

Ignorant fools like them were bound to cause trouble later. The Kwang Hwi Faction did not have people lying around to keep an eye on them. To make matters worse, it would be problematic if the former Korean soldiers had a change of heart. All in all, it was better to nip it in the bud.

Even if the government didn’t collapse, how would they know? Even better, what could they do? For a powerless government, the fully armed Kwang Hwi Faction was necessary. They would have to beg to not have guns pointed at them. Might was right during these chaotic times.

“Is the fortification process complete?”

“Yes. There won’t be another incident like before.”

“And the anti-aircraft radar?”

“Um... We can’t seem to activate it due to some unknown error. The engineers are looking into it. They say it’s a simple setup problem rather than a technical malfunction.”

“Finally, what about the vehicles we brought from the 26th...”

Suddenly, a notification appeared in front of Kwang Hwi.

『Emergency Mission!』

『Evacuate all members of the Kwang Hwi Faction into buildings within 15 minutes.』

『Reward: Pantsir-S1』

『Failure: Complete Annihilation of Kwang Hwi Faction』

‘Hole up inside buildings?’

A sudden notification popped up to issue an emergency mission. Kwang Hwi didn't even question its validity. Just like the previous one, the system never caused any harm to him or his men. While he didn't know who was behind it, he knew the system was set up to assist him. Therefore, he believed there was a good reason for evacuating and he better do it pronto.

"All members, immediately hide in the nearest building. Prevent any civilians from leaving the cover."

『Time left – 14:47』

『Time left – 14:46』

『Time left – 14:45』

Thankfully, it was the curfew time. No civilians were outside doing other activities, so only the troops deployed outside had to evacuate.

"I repeat. All members must conceal themselves in the nearest building without delay!"

Perhaps because Kwang Hwi spoke with such urgency, no one questioned his instructions. There was a small commotion outside as soldiers on night patrol hurried back in. The troops spread across Dongducheon City quickly hid inside the nearest building. After evacuating, the men reported back.

— "Southern Wall Security Team has evacuated."

— "Northern, Eastern, and Western Security Team have fully evacuated."

— "HQ Security Team has completed the evacuation order."

— "Night Patrol Team 2 is inside. Waiting for further instructions."

『Time left – 04:42』

『Time left – 03:35』

『Time left – 02:17』

There wasn't much time left. Kwang Hwi picked up the direct line connected to the power plant.

— "Executive member of the power plant, Ho Cheol Shin reporting."

"Brigadier General, Kwang Hwi Baek speaking."

There was a loud gasp from the other end at his introduction. Ho Cheol promptly addressed him with respect.

— “Commander! Greetings!”

“Cut off all electricity supplied by the power plant.”

— “Pardon? What do you...”

“Right now!”

— “U-understood. We’ll cut off the power supply.”

Taken aback by the sudden request, Ho Cheol couldn’t help but ask why. However, Kwang Hwi firmly restated his order, shutting down his question. Across the receiver, Kwang Hwi could hear people getting busy. He could make out the sound of people running around and tapping on their keyboards.

『Time left – 01:05』

『Time left – 00:52』

『Time left – 00:33』

— “Power supply shutting off in 10! 9! 8! 7! 6!”

— “5! 4! 3! 2! 1!”

A black veil covered Kwang Hwi’s eyes after the last exclamation. All the lights that lit up the ground went out. In an instant, the entire city of Dongducheon was covered in darkness.

『Time left – 00:05』

『Time left – 00:03』

『Time left – 00:01』

As soon as the timer reached zero, a black shadow engulfed the sky.

“What’s...?”

“Shh!”

Tens of thousands of bird-like creatures filled the sky. They looked more like bats than birds. While flying, their gazes were fixed on the ground, as if they were looking for some prey.

The faint moonlight was completely cut off by a giant bird monster in the sky. It was bigger than the Mi-26 he had obtained recently. As a matter of fact, it’s body was larger than most transport aircraft. The birds that were gazing on the ground raised their heads in unison and let out loud screeches.

The quiet sky became noisy as the uncanny birds shrieked. The giant bird monster, however, continued to flap its wings in silence, not joining his brethren. As the birds flew away from Dongducheon City, it revealed the moon once again. Without the birds covering the sky, the moonlight shone over the city. Only 10 minutes passed by. Yet, they were the longest 10 minutes, feeling like an hour.

『Emergency Mission Complete』

『You have evacuated all members in time. No casualties recorded.』

『For completing the emergency mission, ‘Pantsir-S1’ has been rewarded.』

It was only then that Kwang Hwi was able to lift the emergency protocol.

— “Lifting the restriction. Electricity... has been resupplied!”

The city that was hiding in the darkness regained its original brightness, shining like a pearl under the night sky. After a short break, the guards returned to their positions.

『Would you like to deploy Pantsir-S1?』

『Please confirm the location to deploy the vehicle.』

As always, Kwang Hwi chose the Dongducheon City Hall’s parking lot. An anti-aircraft vehicle with a lion emblem revealed itself. Although its design was a bit crude, it looked very reliable.

『Pantsir-S1』

『One of the best-performing short to medium range air defense system developed after the 2K22 Tunguska. It’s able to intercept missiles, precision munitions, helicopters, and stealth aircraft within a 20 km range. It can track up to 20 objects at once and shoot down four targets simultaneously using 30 mm autocannon and the Russian 57E6 missiles.』

To purchase it from the Merit Shop, Kwang Hwi had to unlock the [Aircraft] category and pay a large amount of MP upfront. So he had no reason to refuse such a weapon given to him for free.

“Next time we meet, I’ll take you down from the sky.”

While he couldn’t say the same to the thousands of birds, he knew the Pantsir had the capability to take down the giant bird monster at the very least.

“Brother.”

“Hm?”

“Can you really... stop them?”

“I have to.”

The rescue leader was carrying a little girl. He was her brother and her only support now.

“Now, why don't you let your brother go?”

“Okay.”

After gently patting his little sister's back, he managed to convince his sister to release him. Soon after, he joined the ranks of men who were moving in haste. More than half of their group were women, leaving only a handful of men who could effectively fight.

‘Would we be able to hold out today?’

The rescue leader grabbed onto the baseball bat that was leaning against the wall while mulling over the upcoming battle. Currently, they were staying inside a large mall, so it was easy to find something that could be used as a weapon.

“T-they're here!”

He quickly grabbed onto the roof's railings. On the road right below the H mall, there were thugs holding torches. The number of flames rapidly increased, perhaps their tactic to increase the pressure. One became two and two became four. As the yellow light grew, the looming darkness retreated, conceding a small area to the wolfish humans.

‘Their numbers increased again.’

There were more than a dozen of them. The biggest man among them, who was in the center of the group, held up a loudspeaker.

“How have you all been?”

The rough voice resonated in the vicinity. The people who had escaped to the roof flinched at the question.

“It's time for your payment! Come on! Give us all of those young women!”

A burst of lascivious laughter followed as the crowd that surrounded the man cheered. In contrast, the rescue leader made a solemn expression, just like his companions. A few of the strong-willed women raised their voices.

“Get the fuck out, you human-trafficking gangsters.”

“Do you not know shame!?”

They threw all sorts of insults, but the men shrugged their shoulders, not caring a bit.

“Human-trafficking? It’s just a transaction! All you have to do is give us the women and some food! In return, we’ll guarantee your safety! How simple is that? After all, what the world lacks the most right now is safety!”

The rescue leader shook his head.

“We can’t accept those terms!”

“Tsk. I knew this would happen. You leave us no choice!”

The man who clicked his tongue turned around.

“Boys!”

“Yes, don!”

“Let’s go collect our payment.”

Grinning, the men walked up. Even though they weren’t as burly as their leader, they didn’t look any weaker. They had blue translucent shields and batons in their hands. The survivors gaped their mouths in shock. ‘Police’ was clearly written on the shields the gangsters held.

‘So, they raided the police station.’

The gangsters were subjugating powerless civilians with police equipment. It was an absurd and ironic situation. Behind the riot shields, relatively smaller men followed. They looked like a bunch of ordinary people who had joined the gang after the government was incapacitated. The rescue leader bit his lips at the spectacle. To him, those people made him feel sicker than the gangsters.

“Tear it down!”

The men swung their batons at the glass door. The door only lasted for a moment before cracks formed all over it. Soon after, the cracks extended and shattered the glass helplessly into the floor.

Behind the glass door, a wall made out of carts was erected. Several carts were stacked on top of each other to form a barricade, but it didn’t hold out for much longer

against the strength of the gangsters. The cart wall tumbled down, presenting a path to their incoming doom.

Chapter 34. SOS

After the gangsters swept through the mall, it was left in utter disarray. The little food that was left was plundered and the mall was vandalized beyond repair. To make matters worse, all of the women were taken away.

The remaining survivors had bruises all over their bodies, a witness to their futile struggle. The atmosphere was heavy and somber. It was natural since their family members and lovers were just kidnapped and they were helpless to stop them.

“What should we do?”

“We need to rescue them!”

The rescue leader had his little sister taken away. The others were also in a similar situation. They couldn't let it slide because they knew what would happen to those women. Unfortunately, not everyone shared the sentiment.

“B-but, we're outnumbered and they are much stronger than us.”

“Don't you think this is too much for us?”

What they said was reasonable. While monsters were monsters, they were dealing with an organized gang here—low life scum who were adept when it came to fighting their own species. It was uncertain whether the men could even win against two or three of them.

“Even so, are we just going to sit by idly?”

“We don't have a choice! Do we?”

After the dispute settled down and silence was restored, a man in the corner raised his hand. He was quite burly.

“Why don't we ask for aid from outside?”

“Support from outside? Really now? Is there even help?”

“He's right. The military and the police are both gone.”

The crowd raised their voices and the rescue leader had to calm them down. Being upset didn't help the situation at all. After everyone regained their composure again, the

rescue leader looked at the one who made the suggestion. He thought the man must have brought it up because he knew something.

“Could you elaborate a bit more?”

“Um... Before I joined this group, I heard of the Kwang Hwi Faction in Dongducheon City.”

“Kwang Hwi Faction? What the hell is that?”

Most people shook their heads, but some had also heard of the name. They were the few survivors who had joined much later.

“Ah, I’ve heard of them too. Kwang Hwi Faction is basically a military force.”

“Military?”

“I’ve heard about them from the radio broadcasts. Last time, they declared that they’ve conquered all of Dongducheon...”

The small group of men started talking about the Kwang Hwi Faction. Hearing their stories, people started seeing some light in the darkness.

“Is it really a military force? Then they should be able to easily wipe out those gangsters!”

“What can those bastards do in front of a gun?”

“How can we get in touch with them to ask for help?”

“Didn’t someone say that they did radio broadcasts? Why don’t we use that? Does anyone remember their frequency?”

“Ah, yes! It is 108.5 MHZ.”

The rescue leader thought to himself.

‘Were there any facilities nearby that had radios?’

He came to a quick conclusion.

“Everyone.”

The eyes of the people who were chatting among themselves gathered on the rescue leader.

“Let’s visit the fire station. If we use the equipment over there, I think we can find a way to save our companions.”

“A fire station? Isn’t the police station bet... Arg! Why hit me?”

“You’re so dumb. Did you forget that the gangsters are at the police station right now? Are you really asking us to go there?”

“Oh, right...”

“T-then, are we abandoning the mall?”

“There’s nothing left here. They took all of the food... so we really don’t have a reason to stay. I think it would be better to move our base to avoid their eyes.”

“You’re right.”

“Then let’s hurry. There isn’t much time left until dawn.”

After packing up, the survivors left the mall in haste. Some looked back at it with lingering feelings. The mall was a reliable base that had protected them from disaster since day 1. Checking the time, the rescue leader urged the people to move forward.

“We don’t have much time left.”

Holding torches, the survivors walked in the darkness. If anyone fell behind, the rescue leader or the survivors next to them would lend a hand. As time passed by, the rescue leader felt increasingly anxious. The darkness which seemed to continue endlessly gradually gave way to the morning light.

“Please hurry, even if it’s hard!”

After being beaten to near-death by the gangsters, everyone was tired. But they had to grit their teeth and drag their exhausted bodies. At the very least, the healthier people helped the injured. Right before the sun rose, they stepped foot in the fire station. The survivors slumped down onto the floor, their ragged breathing echoed in the quiet building.

Soon after, an alarm went off. Everyone looked outside the windows vigilantly. As the sunlight banished the darkness, the city revealed itself. And so, the change occurred.

A loud boom deafened the nervous onlookers. The ground was shaking as a large mass of dirt started to rise across the city. Soon after, it took the appearance of a person. Naturally, they were nothing like an actual person.

Its entire body was made out of dirt, lacking distinct features of a person. Instead of fingers, all it had was a fist. The monster looked similar to a poorly crafted doll.

It was not alone, there was a whole heap of them. The dolls stretched their bodies like they were warming up. Every time they moved, a small amount of dirt would fall. This was the main reason why the survivors moved in the darkness. These monsters were only active in the daytime and were dormant during the night.

Compared to an average person, they were much grander in size. Blunt weapons or sharp blades didn't affect them either. Even if they sustained an injury, they would recover soon after. People who tried to fight against them were either crushed to death or sent flying from a punch. There wasn't a single case where someone had successfully escaped them. Contrary to their looks, the monsters were quite agile.

"It would have been better if they were active 24 hours..."

"That's right. The gangsters wouldn't have been able to do whatever they wanted."

While others were looking outside the window, the rescue leader was fishing around the fire station.

"Here it is."

As he knew where it might be, it didn't take him long to find it. He grabbed the radio. People quickly gathered around and formed a circle. The leader turned it on and tried to establish contact with their potential knights in shining armor.

"Hello? Can you hear me? Kwang Hwi Faction? We're from Uijeongbu. Kwang Hwi Faction? Hello?"

"Boss, we've received an SOS request from Uijeongbu."

"SOS?"

It was an unprecedented case as this was the first time anyone had asked for rescue.

"Along with the monsters, there is an organized gang that kidnapped their family members, especially women."

"I guess their living condition isn't so bad if they can fight among each other."

"The survivors reported that monsters are only active during the day. People hide when the sun is out and fight with each other during the night."

“It’s not a night owl but a morning owl?”

“What do you mean by morning owl?”

One of the men corrected Jackson.

“The word you’re looking for is diurnal.”

“Oh, right. Diurnal.”

“Boss, what do you plan to do?”

Everyone looked at Kwang Hwi, waiting for his response.

“We took a long enough break. It’s time to move out.”

“I agree!”

The subordinates grinned in glee at the thought of the action.

『Combat Force Info』

★Title★

Kwang Hwi Faction (View Symbol)

★Commander-in-chief★

[Absolute Leader] Kwang Hwi Baek

★Controlling Area★

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

★Total Force★

187 (+1)

★Equipment★

[Operating] K-9 SPG
[Operating] 3x APC Namer
[Operating] 10x Light Tactical Vehicle
[Operating] 2x Medium Tactical Vehicle
[Operating] Pantsir-S1
[Operating] Mi-26

★Divisions★

Dongducheon City Security Team
Power Plant Guard Squad

Farmland Guard Team
Recruit Training Center
Yangju Detachment

There had been a slight change as the Light Tactical Vehicles found in the 26th Division were added to the <Equipment> category. The wounded soldiers from Yangju Armed Forces Hospital were also absorbed into their troops after rehabilitation and training. To account for the growing forces, Kwang Hwi had purchased another Namer.

Thanks to the increase in size, he was able to create a new unit called Yangju Detachment. Unlike Dongducheon, the entire of Yangju wasn't fortified. Even though they had grown in size, they were still lacking the manpower required to defend two cities. At best, all they could do right now was to patrol the area. In the meantime, the 26th Division military base they had raided was being used as a garrison.

Kwang Hwi Faction moved in haste. Now that they had decided to get involved, they had no time to waste. Being swift and precise was their principle. The UAV Heron hovered above Uijeongbu. Based on the images taken, the men quickly formulated a plan of action.

"Are these those mud people? Don't they look so weak?"

"The person who contacted was terrified of them."

"I mean, can you blame them? They don't have guns."

Jackson ignored the unimpressive monsters, but Soo Min was of the opposite nature and offered a cautious opinion.

"The dirt can absorb shock, so it's likely that regular assault rifles and machine guns wouldn't be enough."

Although the monsters had shown variance so far, all of them had flesh and blood. In those cases, an assault rifle or a machine gun was more than enough to inflict some damage.

However, the 'mud people' in Uijeongbu were different. Their entire body was made out of dirt and they had no internal organs or blood that could be observed. It looked like they would simply eat up all the bullets Kwang Hwi Faction shot. While they would receive some damage, it wouldn't be enough to finish them.

"These are all conjectures. We would need to put them in practice through real battle."

"Then, should we upgrade our weaponry?"

"Yes. I believe that would be the best course of action."

“Boss, I think we should use at least a semi-automatic shotgun or a .50 caliber heavy machine gun.”

Even though Jackson looked down on the monsters, he didn't mind getting his hands on some upgraded goods. Kwang Hwi opened the Merit Shop following their suggestions.

『K6 Heavy Machine Gun』

『An improved model of the U.S. Army's M2 Browning. It's much easier to replace the gun barrel in this one. Known for its long shooting range, it can be equipped on an APC or tank. It is also commonly used to defend checkpoints. Using .50 rounds, it boasts its anti-tank capabilities.』

『Purchase complete.』

On the floor of the Situation Room, a bunch of HMGs appeared out of thin air. With additional options, large red dot sights were added to the guns. The subordinates called in some soldiers to take them away. The incomers froze once they saw the arsenal. Even though they didn't know the HMG weighed 40 kg, they could tell it wouldn't be easy to carry it around from a glance.

“Move them outside.”

“...Understood.”

The soldiers responded hesitantly and went to pick up the new equipment. Although they hadn't neglected their training, they struggled to carry the guns away.

“What should we do if the .50 HMG fail?”

Kwang Hwi waved his hand, telling Soo Min not to worry.

“We just have to shoot 'em with something stronger.”

This time, they were planning to deploy two Namer APCs. The 30 mm autocannon on them provided sufficient firepower in most situations. If worst came to worst, they would receive assistance from the 155 mm SPGs.

“We've located the gangsters.”

“Where are they at?”

“They're currently at a police station in Uijeongbu.”

Kwang Hwi and his subordinates looked at the image on the screen and they could immediately tell who the leader was. It was the tallest and bulkiest man amongst the crowd. Even from afar, it was hard to miss such a prominent figure. He was presently

standing on the rooftop of the police station. As the camera zoomed in, they could see him biting his lips out of frustration.

'Is he not an ability user?'

Kwang Hwi had some doubts, but it didn't seem like he was one.

"How much gas do we have?"

"More than enough."

While he could purchase gas from <Logistics/Transport> category, there was no need as he could plunder nearby gas stations and military bases.

"We're leaving at 9 o'clock."

"Yes, sir!"

35. Mud Golem

The APC ran over something with a loud clunk, jolting the members inside the vehicle.

— "I'm sorry. We've bumped into some monster carcass."

After clearing his throat, Kwang Hwi pressed the transmission button.

"Uijeongbu team, this is your commander speaking. I'll brief you on the mission."

The chatter on the radio channel promptly subsided as everyone focused their attention on him.

"Our first objective is to rescue the survivors hiding inside the fire station at Uijeongbu. Immediately after, we will head to the police station to quell the gangsters and subdue any monsters we encounter along the way."

After explaining only the key points, Kwang Hwi asked if they had any questions. However, there was silence as a response.

"Alright. We'll soon arrive at Uijeongbu City, so get ready."

The APC escaped the dark tunnel and sunlight gently wrapped around the Kwang Hwi Faction from above. Unfortunately, the men did not have the leisure to enjoy the sunbath. As soon as they left the tunnel, the 'mud people' rushed at them madly. Whenever the monster took a step, the men could feel the ground vibrating from inside the APC.

“Eliminate all hostile monsters.”

The leading Light Tactical Vehicle pointed its HMG at the monsters. With a snap of the finger, a thick shell flew out, making the smaller 7.62 mm bullets look like child’s play in comparison. Often used by anti-materiel rifles like the .50 Barrett, the projectile flew at high velocity towards the monster.

The bullet pierced through its body, going out to the other side. However, to the dismay of the attackers, dirt started to fill the hole rapidly. The mud monster only flinched a little and started moving again. Observing the situation, Kwang Hwi shouted.

“What the hell are you doing!?”

Only then did the gunner snapped back to his senses and fired away. The gun gave a strong recoil and second round of .50 caliber shells rained hell on the monster. The bullets must have had some effect, as the mud monster halted in its tracks. However, even then, it did not fall. Slowly but surely, it was repairing the damage it was dealt with.

“Don’t spare any bullets!”

The APC gunner, which had been watching for a while, let loose his reins too. The autocannon rotated, aiming its muzzle at the mud monster. With a flash of light, a deafening sound followed. As expected, the 30 mm shell didn’t let them down. Unlike the .50 caliber shells that had merely stopped the monster in its steps, the 30 mm shell left a beautiful hole that was large enough to be appreciated by everyone. Soon after, the mud monster crumbled into loose sand, flying away with a gust of wind.

『You are the first person in the world to defeat a ‘Mud Golem’ .』

『You have obtained 1000 MP.』

It was the first-kill reward he hadn’t seen in a while. In addition, the bounty he received was double the usual amount.

“From now on, we will call these monsters Mud Golems. Aim at their legs with the HMGs so that they can’t approach us. Then use the autocannon to finish them off.”

— “Roger. Turtle-2, engaging in combat.”

Namer Turtle-2, which had been on standby, also entered the fray. The Mud Golems were charging towards it from all directions. Not cowering from their towering bodies, the heavy machine gunners focused on their lower halves. Unlike their thick upper body, their legs were thin in comparison.

Since this was a weak point, the .50 caliber shells managed to break their legs. While the Mud Golems were recovering on the ground, the autocannons spat fire. The mud-caked behemoths returned back to the earth, unable to retain their shape.

— “Warning! More Mud Golems up ahead!”

The driver yelled on the radio, alerting everyone. Mud Golems appeared out of nowhere and blocked the road ahead.

“Break past them at full speed!”

As if it understood Kwang Hwi’s words, the engine let out a battle cry. In a matter of seconds, the APC reached its max speed of 60 km/h. The Mud Golems quickly reached out their hands. It looked like they were trying to stop the intimidating APC with their bare hands. Sadly, they must have thought the APC was just another vehicle carrying a strong weapon atop it.

Not only did it boast its tremendous defense, but it also weighed over 60 tons and rivaled a tank. On top of that, it was running at full speed. That alone transformed the APC into an impressive weapon. It was a metal behemoth, quite literally.

A Mud Golem was crushed on impact, unable to withstand the shock. The monsters next to it hurried to stop the vehicle, but their hands gave way in a similar fashion. Their plan to stop the vehicle failed, leaving them at a loss.

Turtle-2 paved the way for the Light Tactical Vehicles and Medium Tactical Vehicles. The vehicles followed behind, shooting non-stop to slow the Mud Golems down. The Mud Golems tried to chase after the Kwang Hwi Faction, but the gap only widened as they went on. While they were fast, they weren’t swift enough to chase after a vehicle powered by engines.

— “Encirclement broken.”

Ignoring the welcome they received soon after entering Uijeongbu City, Kwang Hwi Faction headed towards the main street. The familiar view of the deserted streets with fallen buildings and debris everywhere greeted them.

— “We’ll arrive at the fire station soon.”

Uijeongbu fire station was stationed right next to the city hall. A few Mud Golems were waiting in front of the fire station, as if they knew some survivors were hiding inside. In front of the autocannon, however, they were pulverized into dust.

All the vehicles stopped in front of the fire station. The APCs parked inside and the Light Tactical Vehicles surrounded the APCs, neatly completing a formation. It was a defensive circle against any Mud Golems that might appear. The Medium Tactical Vehicles that were transporting troops parked elsewhere.

“Disembark.”

The soldiers got off the vehicles in an orderly fashion, ready to launch the offensive. Kwang Hwi tried to stop the soldiers in their tracks as they were about to leave with their vests on.

“Wait.”

The troop leader tilted his head in confusion. Seeing that, Kwang Hwi quickly grabbed on the radio and issued a new order.

“All members, be on standby until further instructions.”

The soldiers who were about to enter the building quickly backed away.

— “Is there an issue?”

Giving another quick glance at the fire station, Kwang Hwi opened the Merit Shop. Luckily, he found what he needed. Kwang Hwi grabbed onto the M32A1 grenade launcher on his back and opened the cylinder.

“Boss?”

He replaced the grenades with tear gas he had purchased. In a low voice, Kwang Hwi muttered, “Gas.”

The surprised leaders quickly propagated the order to their respective team members.

“Gas!”

Hearing that, the soldiers started shouting the same words and quickly wore the gas mask hanging around their necks. Confirming that everyone was prepared, Kwang Hwi pulled the trigger. The tear gas flew in a parabola, broke the window, and rolled inside. After firing all 6 shots inside the cylinder, Kwang Hwi also put on a gas mask and waited patiently. He was standing by for any reaction from inside. White gas fumed out of the broken glass window.

“Cough! Cough!”

“Wheeze!”

Soon after, people rushed out after opening the door to the fire station. They desperately sought fresh air while covered in tears and snot. Kwang Hwi gestured towards them with a nod.

“Subdue them.”

The soldiers pointed their guns at the survivors and some even brought zip ties. The survivors were unable to resist because they were out of their minds from the tear gas. They were dragged away and forcefully restrained.

Amidst the chaos, some tried to struggle to break free. However, the soldiers repressed them in a cold-hearted manner. They didn't open fire, but they weren't lax with their fists. The survivors' faces were a mess and unsightly to see. Those who had come back to their senses raised their voices in protest.

"W-what is this? Cough! A tear gas out of nowhere?"

"How can you do this to unarmed civilians?!"

The restrained survivors spat their complaints one by one, hollering at full volume. The fire station became noisy, just like a marketplace. After inspecting each person, Kwang Hwi pointed towards one individual.

"Bring him."

The two soldiers next to the man dragged him out of the group. The frightened man looked at Kwang Hwi with a face that evoked sympathy. If they hadn't known better, they'd have been fooled.

"W-why are you doing this? We didn't do anything wrong."

"I won't ask twice. Where are they?!"

"W-what do you..."

Kwang Hwi pulled out the Glock on his waist and pulled the trigger. The man collapsed onto his knees after being shot and fell to the ground. Blood trickled down from his forehead and formed a small puddle. His eyes were opened wide with shock, fear, and confusion at his own unforeseen death.

"Hiiiik!"

"P-please, do not kill us!"

Horrified by the sudden cold-blooded murder, the survivors screamed at the top of their lungs. The soldiers were also shocked, but they did not show it on their faces. They stayed staunch in their attitude.

"You."

Kwang Hwi picked a new man. The selected guy tried to scamper away, but the soldiers quickly dragged him out. Thrown next to the dead man, the survivor's face became pale with fright. Kwang Hwi indifferently pointed his gun at the man's forehead.

"Nooo!"

"Where are they at?"

"I-I will speak! I'll tell—"

A bang followed and another body joined the pile, right next to his companion. Kwang Hwi looked at another man. Before the soldiers could drag him out, the frightened fellow spoke as fast as he could, not caring one whit about others.

"T-they're trapped inside the Uijeongbu Police Station! Uijeongbu Police Station! We were sent here to ambush you!"

Only now did the soldiers realize that everything was a trap. Even Kwang Hwi's loyal subordinates could not hide their amazement.

"Wow, boss! How did you know?"

"Amazing, boss!"

Kwang Hwi casually spoke, as if it were nothing noteworthy.

"I saw their faces from the UAV."

Yesterday, the Heron flew above Uijeongbu. While hovering around the gangster's hideout, it had managed to catch the faces of these survivors. With a nagging suspicion, Kwang Hwi threw tear gases. His concerns were validated once he saw their faces and he became certain that a trap was set up.

"Check the building. Afterwards, we'll head to the Uijeongbu Police Station."

"Do you think our boys will do the job properly...?"

"Those soldiers will be fooled flawlessly, don."

The don looked back at the figures on the ground. The survivors from the fire station were kneeling on the hard floor. While they weren't tied up, they were beaten up pretty badly. With such injuries, it wasn't possible for them to lift even a finger, not to mention making an escape.

“I didn’t think you guys would pull such a cute trick.”

The don sarcastically jabbed at them, but the survivors couldn’t even respond. He was right, though. At the end of the day, they were caught.

“You should have known better. Why did you ask for help using the public channel?”

The survivors lamented over the blunder they had committed. While it was a good idea to ask for help, they should indeed have been more cautious.

‘We shouldn’t have told them about our location so soon.’

It would have caused some inconvenience, but they could have been safely rescued later. Even so, it was too late to cry over spilled milk. When they had their guards down, the gangsters barged into the fire station and dragged them away. In return, they left some thugs to be rescued in their place.

“Gentlemen, I’m grateful for what you did. Thanks to you, we can get our hands on some guns! How can you bear so many fruits for me? First offering me women and now even weapons. Isn’t that right, boys?”

The gangsters on one side bowed their heads in humility. They were like a bunch of loyal dogs wagging their tails at their master.

“Yes! Don!”

The don smiled and spread his arms wide in the air as if grasping everything in his embrace.

“The world is in quite a mess, isn’t it? Our lives were spared because we were imprisoned. Thanks to that, we took all the equipment from the police station and became the strongest power in Uijeongbu! And now, with Kwang Hwi Faction’s help, we can become the strongest power in the entire country!”

“That... won’t happen.”

With a swollen face, the rescue leader struggled to leave one remark.

“You really think so? Even if they are soldiers, it’s not like they’re immune to blades. Ultimately, they are made of flesh and blood. We left the best actors with the sharpest knives back at the fire station. I don’t think things will go the way you imagine. Nonetheless, it’s quite a good fantasy to have.”

The rescue leader closed his eyes in pain and grief. The don was lightly tapping on his cheeks while explaining his scheme. Then, he made himself comfortable on his chair.

“They should be done by—”

Before the don could finish his sentence, a black container rolled onto his feet.

“What’s this?”

Pshhh!

Chapter 36

Tear Gas of Laughter

White gas instantly enveloped the entire area. After a momentary confusion, a sharp pain, an unbearable tingling, and a burning sensation bombarded their senses almost simultaneously. Their noses became uncontrollably runny and their eyes teared up.

“I-it’s tear gas!”

“Cough, cough!”

The gangsters, who had looked stronger than everyone else, were now crawling blindly on the floor.

“O-open the window!”

The men near the window fumbled to unlock it. Soon after, some of the rising gas escaped through it. Just as they thought the air had gotten a bit better, a new tear gas canister came in through the open window. Thanks to that, those who were inside the room suffered even more. Their actions to save themselves harmed them instead.

Amidst the chaos, the rescue leader acted fast. He didn’t miss the opportunity to escape, especially when no eyes were on him. He hurried to help other survivors get back on their feet.

“Now is our only chance! Please get up!”

No one was in good condition after receiving such a brutal beating. However, they were going to be in for a lot worse if they didn’t escape now. Groaning in pain, the survivors struggled to stand up. Luckily, they were not restrained at all and quickly regained their mental and physical faculties.

“Everyone, grab on! Don’t let go!”

The rescue leader led the way from the front, raising their spirits all the while. Even though his eyes were scorching and his nose was stinging, he was able to figure out the general direction.

“Get them! Don’t let them escape!”

The don shouted, but no one was in the right state of mind to respond to his commands at the moment. Because of that, the survivors were able to widen the distance and managed to escape the conference room. Thankfully, the hallway was much better than the previous smoke-filled location.

‘This is...’

The rescue leader had a hunch the Kwang Hwi Faction had responded to their urgent plea.

— “Resist and you’ll be shot! Drop to your knees immediately!”

An unfamiliar voice came from outside, supporting his idea.

Without taking a breather, Kwang Hwi systematically fired tear gas everywhere. He was shooting evenly on all areas as he didn’t know what kind of defense perimeter the enemy had set up. A cloud of gas leaked out from the window on the fourth floor as its doors opened with a loud bang. While it was a reasonable reaction, the gangsters were practically telling Kwang Hwi where they were hiding.

Without further ado, Kwang Hwi shot tear gas in the opening. He heard faint screams and coughs shortly after. Seeing that, the subordinates pitied those inside with schadenfreude.

“Unlucky.”

“How pitiful.”

They were exposed to the tear gas without any masks, certainly not a situation they wished to be in.

— “All members, stay on alert. We don’t know how they will attack.”

The soldiers dragged out the gangsters they had captured from the police station. After killing two of their comrades, the rest promptly became submissive. They had already confessed to their ploy.

“T-the hostages were meant to be used as meat shields.”

In response, Kwang Hwi reciprocated in kind, making the gangsters kneel in front of the soldiers. With their comrades held as hostages, it wasn’t easy for them to charge out or attack. Looking at the watch, Kwang Hwi muttered.

“They’re lasting...”

Before he could finish, the police station’s gate slammed open. The trapped gas escaped from the interior, along with people squirming on the floor. Some of them hit their heads as they couldn’t see properly. The soldiers, who were on full alert, aimed their guns at the gangsters. The prominent leaders of each group amplified their voices.

“Raise both of your hands! Do not move!”

“Lie down!”

Accompanied by the commands, warning shots were fired into the sky to make them submissive. Despite being disorganized, the thugs quickly fell down when they heard the gunshots. Some gangsters were still struggling, though. In return, they were kicked and smacked with the butt of the rifle.

“Don’t show any mercy. They are our enemy.”

“Yes, sir.”

With that, a few thuds and smashes followed as the tough ones were beaten without any remorse.

“Uwagk!”

“I-I surrender.”

Before long, the gangsters were tamed into obedience, rolling on the asphalt floor. The apprehending team quickly stepped in to search their bodies. Weapons that were found were thrown far away.

More and more people were forced to kneel in front of the police station. Some of them included women who didn’t have time to dress appropriately, while others looked like captured survivors. Seeing this, some of the soldiers started hesitating to take action. In response, the team leader stepped in to scold them.

“Don’t be sorry later and check them now! Are you going to put your fellow men in danger with your lofty compassion!?”

Only then did the soldiers come back to their senses and hastened their steps. Kwang Hwi waited until the gas was gone. While it didn’t disappear completely, it was much thinner than before, barely a hindrance.

“Team 1 to 5, enter the police station. You are authorized to fire based on judgment.”

— “Authorization received. We’ll start the search.”

Following the order, soldiers wearing gas masks entered the police station.

— “Resisting hostile found. Subdued.”

— “Found a survivor on the second floor. We’ll guide him outside.”

— “The basement is clear.”

As most people had already left the police station, the operation proceeded smoothly. Occasionally, some gangsters would resist with knives, giving them a rough welcome. The soldiers of the Kwang Hwi Faction responded in their own ways.

Shots were fired and blood spewed out as the gangsters fell onto the floor. Clear metallic clangs accompanied the crumbling bodies due to their cherished knives dropping on the tiled surface. Witnessing their grim outcome, the remaining gangsters immediately threw away their weapons.

“W-wait! We’ll surrender!”

One of the soldiers acted like he heard nothing and aimed his gun at the thugs. Even during peaceful times, the gangsters caused harm to him and the others. Just as he was about to shoot, the team leader smacked him on the back.

“Don’t forget what the commander told us.”

“...I’ll mend my ways.”

Another soldier came forward to apprehend the gangsters. During that time, they reunited with team 3, who had headed to the other side.

“Fourth floor clear!”

Gently tapping on the soldier’s shoulder, the team leader reported the news back to Kwang Hwi.

“Commander! We just need to secure the roof now!”

The men went upstairs together with the sound of military boots reverberating in the vicinity. The member who had turned the doorknob shouted.

“It’s locked!”

The team leader promptly issued an order.

“Bring the sticky bomb.”

Right behind, another soldier brought a backpack he was wearing on his chest. Taking out a wrapped rectangular package, he attached it to the door and pulled the pin in the middle. It sparked a bright fire; everyone quickly backed away. Then the soldier pushed on the detonator.

“Breaching!”

With a loud bang, the iron door flung to the other side. The men set foot on the rooftop, passing through the faint cloud of dust and gas. Beyond the entrance, they could see the broad back of a burly man. He was huge, even for the Kwang Hwi Faction’s standard. They circled the man in a semicircle formation, ready to fire at any given moment.

“Raise your hand and kneel! Now!”

Despite the numerous warnings, the don didn’t move.

“Hahaha.”

Instead, he laughed for reasons unknown to everyone.

“Hahaha!”

The soldiers were taken aback at his sudden outburst. They didn’t think he would be so jovial even under such a dire situation.

‘Is he insane?’

“The world of people is really unpredictable.”

“Shut up! Get on the floor. Right now!”

Sensing something amiss, the team leader shouted again. However, the don only continued.

“I thought it would all end here, but I was wrong.”

“This is your last warning! Slowly lie down on the floor!”

As the team leader was about to pull the trigger, he flinched. The don was glowing in bright light.

‘He’s shining?’

The don swung his fist towards the team leader. It was a massive fist, much bigger than an average human. On instinct, the team leader raised his gun to protect his face. With

a resounding crack, the assault rifle snapped like a straw toy. The momentum behind the punch crashed onto the team leader, sending his body flying into the air.

“Ugh.”

“Leader!”

The soldiers, who were standing behind and witnessing everything, fired their weapons at the man. The assault rifles spat fire, sending hundreds of bullets in a matter of seconds. However, the bulletstorm was in vain as the crushed shells fell onto the floor.

“What the...?”

“W-what’s that?”

The don, who should have been drilled like a beehive, was standing perfectly fine. On top of that, he was becoming taller and bigger. His torso became thicker, alongside his limbs and it was questionable to call him a human anymore.

‘It’s as if he is a...’

“Mud Golem?”

His appearance resembled the Mud Golems they had encountered along the way. The only difference was that instead of dirt, his entire body was covered with iron plates.

“Kghaha!”

Even his voice changed with his body. The don charged towards the soldiers. The men fired non-stop, but their guns soon went silent as they ran out of bullets. While they were hurrying to reach out for a new cartridge, the don closed the gap and swung his fist.

“D-duck!”

The soldiers, who were trying to reload, swiftly ducked away. Not everyone was lucky, though. A soldier was unable to avoid the fist, which penetrated his chest. While he was wearing a bulletproof vest, it didn’t help at all against the overwhelming force. Blood spewed from his mouth like a broken faucet, mixed with some of his internal organs.

The remaining members didn’t even have a chance to be surprised. The fist that flew like a bolt was now being swung at them. The don jumped on the soldiers like a wolf hunting sheep. With each swing, bodies collapsed onto the floor.

With each deadly attack, screams rang out on the rooftop. In a short period, two entire teams were incapacitated. Only the team leader, who was hit first, was left better off

than the others. He had managed to block some of the force with his gun. Raising his upper body with great effort, he grabbed on the radio. He had to tell others about this revelation.

“C-commander! The don became a Mud Go—”

Crushing the team leader’s head like a watermelon, the don looked below. He had only faced a small portion of the Kwang Hwi Faction. Now, it was time for the full course. The don stepped on the railing and directly jumped off the roof. In midair, his eyes met Kwang Hwi.

“New target found. All members, attack!”

The weapons that responded the fastest were the HMGs. Small sparks erupted all over the don’s body, but that was all. They didn’t even manage to slow him down like they did with the Mud Golems.

The car hood of the Light Tactical Vehicle was badly crushed under his assault. Due to the weight of the weapon mounted in front, the rear side was slightly raised. The heavy machine gunner quickly hid his body inside the vehicle. The don’s fist barely grazed his hair, tearing away the mounted HMG like paper.

“I like this very much! Kghaha!”

After taking out one of the vehicles, the don looked around for a new target. There happened to be another Light Tactical Vehicle in front of him. The don leaped from his feet to enjoy the dish served to him. Unfortunately, he was shot by the 30 mm autocannon midair, ruining his meal. From the shock, he flew outside of the police station.

“That won’t be enough! Kghaha!”

“All vehicles focus fire on that crazy bastard.”

— “Roger. We’ll turn him into swiss cheese with the autocannon.”

As the don charged at the Kwang Hwi Faction, two autocannons started spouting flames simultaneously. Large shells slammed into his body and, from the powerful kinetic energy, he was shoved back again. HMGs joined the shell-fest, albeit late. It was a sight to behold. The men had deployed all of their arsenal to take down a single person.

Chapter 37

37. A Stronger Attack

The area where the don stood was utterly destroyed under the concentrated attack. The convenience store across the street from the police station was turned into ruins after receiving a few shots from the autocannon. The wall of the studio apartment right behind was knocked down, revealing its interior. As the grenades exploded, dust scattered through the air.

With a clank, a stray bullet hit the don's head. It merely bounced off without doing much. He didn't receive any damage besides flinching.

'To think I was scared of these weaklings.'

After engaging with them, the don was ashamed of his past self. He started taunting the Kwang Hwi Faction.

"Kghaha! Is that all? I'm fairly disappointed!"

Then he slowly walked towards the soldiers. Passing by the countless streaks of yellow light in a carefree manner, he wanted to demonstrate the overwhelming difference in power to these chickens. Even the 30 mm autocannon barely startled him, so the don was confident that the Kwang Hwi Faction could not stop him.

— "B-Boss! The target is approaching us, completely ignoring our bullets! It looks like we're unable to deal any damage to him!"

The gunner was unable to hide his fear while reporting. Kwang Hwi didn't blame him. It was not unusual to be afraid of someone impervious to weapons.

— "I-it would be best to receive support from the SPG..."

Kwang Hwi shook his head. The SPG was indeed powerful. However, it was currently difficult to deploy it. The Uijeongbu Light Rail Transit was in front of the police station, so even if they fired the SPG, it would only hit the U Line. Delivering a clean hit from the current angle was almost impossible.

Even if he was willing to accept some casualties, there was no guarantee that damage could be inflicted. It was highly probable that explosives were not effective on this freak either.

"Slow him down as much as possible."

— "Understood."

The autocannon fired shells without rest. The soldiers followed as they pointed their guns at the don. The sound of gunshot and artillery fire intertwined in the background while Kwang Hwi hurried to open the Merit Shop.

『Merkava Mk. 4』

『Israel Defense Forces' main battle tank primarily known for its electronic systems and defensive capabilities. Equipped with a 120 mm smoothbore gun and LAHAT missiles, it is possible to attack helicopters as well as ground targets. As secondary weapons, it has two 7.62 mm machine guns.』

『120 mm shells (48) included.』

『Price: 450,000 MP』

He was really fortunate to have enough MP to purchase the tank.

『Purchase complete.』

『Please confirm the location to deploy the vehicle.』

Kwang Hwi ordered the nearby soldiers to spread out and clear the area.

“Move away and make some space!”

Despite the sudden order, the soldiers fanned apart in an orderly fashion.

『Deployment finished.』

A tank appeared out of nowhere in the empty lot. It had a bulky turret and heavy layers of armor rarely found in its brethren. Even without it, the vehicle was massive.

“Jackson! Head to the loader!”

Jackson rushed to Kwang Hwi and the two entered the tank from the rear entrance. Merkava was the only tank to have a back entrance that led to the main crew compartment for easier access and additional storage capacity.

Arriving first at the loader, Jackson pushed a switch. Soon after, a shell was ejected from the protective container. Jackson carefully grabbed the projectile and inserted it into the loading dock. After swallowing the shell, the door closed to separate it from the main crew compartment. Confirming that the round was loaded, Jackson shouted.

“APFSDS loaded!”

Kwang Hwi operated the automated fire control system. The don was on full display—a person who looked more like a mutant Mud Golem than a human. While Kwang Hwi had questions nagging his mind, he needed to silence the target first.

Ballistics computer and laser rangefinder calculated the distance and displayed its specification. Kwang Hwi firmly pulled the trigger. A boom followed, and the thin and sturdy armor-piercing shell penetrated the don's metal skin that was impregnable so far.

The don staggered and his nonchalant face crumpled as his body, which had withstood the autocannon, received a deep scar. The APFSDS was made to penetrate the thick armor of modern tanks, and its kinetic energy increased as the distance shortened. No matter how hard he was, it was a force to be reckoned with.

— “H-hit! The target has stopped moving!”

While the soldiers cheered on the radio, Jackson smiled and reloaded a new shell.

— “APFSDS loaded!”

Maintaining his aim, Kwang Hwi fired the second shot without hesitation. A small hole formed on the don’s chest. Compared to his massive body, it was a minimal injury. However, tiny shards of the shell had penetrated deeply into his heart.

If he was a true Mud Golem, he wouldn’t have received any damage, and it would have regenerated. Unfortunately, or fortunately, he was still a person. The don knelt on one knee as he failed to keep his unflinching posture. Even the autocannon and HMGs he didn’t fear before were starting to hurt him now.

“N-not... bad...”

The third shot hit the skull perfectly. Flinging his head backward, the sharp metal made him groggy.

“Ugh...”

Unable to keep his mental faculties working properly, the don collapsed. His metallic skin, which had been reflecting the sunlight, turned into a murky black liquid.

『You have defeated ‘Jong Hoon Park.’』

『You have obtained 100,000 MP.』

Unlike before, the screen didn’t display a monster’s name. Instead, it revealed a person’s name: the don. After staring at the display screen for a while, Kwang Hwi tried to lean back and relax.

『You have defeated a member of the Armata family.』

『For such an outstanding feat, you have been rewarded 300,000 MP.』

‘What?’

Kwang Hwi squinted his eyes as he pondered about the new information.

‘Member of the Armata family? Outstanding feat?’

These words caught his attention more so than the additional MP he received.

— “Enemy neutralized!”

Jackson shouted at the top of his lungs out of sheer joy. Kwang Hwi removed his headset and exited the vehicle from the rear door. His subordinates were lined up neatly, waiting for him. They all praised Kwang Hwi and admired his unique ability once again.

“B-Boss!”

Right at this festive moment, the HQ communicator rushed in with great haste.

“What’s the matter?”

“I’ve received reports that all of the Mud Golems are on the move!”

“Where are they heading to?”

“H-here...”

Kwang Hwi looked at his men. They weren’t smiling anymore. Rather, they wore a grave expression, recognizing that they had to face more peril.

“Reload and get ready for another battle.”

“Understood.”

The battle was not over yet...

A loud explosion echoed throughout the quiet city like thunder and the man covered in metal knelt in front of the Kwang Hwi Faction. Seeing that, the Armata frowned.

‘How? Even if it was done in haste...’

Armata did not have high expectations for him because he had given the mortal a small shard without proper preparation. It was a feeble power, like a small gift for his child. Especially when compared to his own power, it was nothing noteworthy. Despite everything, for insignificant monsters and people, it should have been an overwhelming power. Even then, his child died so helplessly.

Seeing the demonstration of power at the rooftop, Armata had some anticipation for the results. Nevertheless, he didn’t expect the battle to be lopsided. It only took three attacks to overpower the mortal who should have crushed others like playing with a toy.

Armata looked at the Kwang Hwi Faction on Earth with newfound interest. The unfamiliar form of weaponry impressed him.

'How did they get those?'

He was certain that the current world had all its weaponry rendered useless. That's why they were able to settle in with little effort.

'But what's this?'

The weapon looked exactly like the ones that should have been destroyed. Therefore, he didn't know what was going on. Even so, he knew one thing for sure: if things continued like this, they would take over his territory. He had to stop that at all costs. Armata slightly opened his mouth. He was saying something, but there was no sound.

“■■■■a■■■■m ■■■t■■■■f■■■ ■■■■j■■■■ ■■■■l ■■■d■■ ■k■■■■k!”

A strange reverberation spread across the place. At the same time, unknown symbols were being etched to the mountain range surrounding Uijeongbu. In short notice, the symbols started to glow brightly. A strange phenomenon that couldn't be scientifically explained was happening there.

With loud booms, heaps of dirt rose from the ground. Soon after, it took the appearance of a giant person. It was the Mud Golems Kwang Hwi Faction had previously encountered. Armata glared at the aggressors with cold eyes.

“Stop them.”

The Golems started moving on the command. All of them, including the newly created Golems, were heading towards a single target. Hundreds of Mud Golems moved in unison, causing deafening rumbles. Whenever they took a step, the ground would tremble under their weight. While they looked daunting, Armata looked bored, as if he wasn't impressed by their appearance. In spite of that, he was confident that the Golems were more than enough to take care of the mysterious army.

'It won't be easy to take down my children.'

To make Golems, he needed material. The core material of the Mud Golems was 'dirt', and his territory had plenty of that. The entire area was surrounded by mountains. The tip of Armata's fingers melted away. Even at the frightening scene, he was unfazed and only clicked his tongue.

“I'll need to find a better doll.”

The 'doll' he made was nothing noteworthy as he had picked a random human passing by. He couldn't even display his full power, let alone attack others. Soon after, his doll crumbled into a fistful of dust and scattered into the air.

Not noticing that Armata was observing him from above, Kwang Hwi was busy preparing for the battle. Based on the reports from the UAV, several hundreds of Mud Golems were approaching them from all directions. They were encircling the Kwang Hwi Faction currently located at Uijeongbu Police Station.

"How are the SPGs?"

— "SPG-1, secured firing data!"

— "SPG-2, ready to fire."

"Let them loose. Soo Min, take over from here."

— "Roger! All vehicles, fire!"

A sharp swishing sound split the sky as the shells fired from the SPGs fell in a parabola. The strong explosions swallowed the Mud Golems. Those who were directly hit by the shells returned back to the earth, while the nearby ones were blown away. They struggled against the aftershock that followed, trying to restore their original form.

However, despite all their efforts, they lost when the second shell landed amidst them. The Mud Golems that were trying to regain their balance flopped once again. Losing its cohesion, the pile of dirt drifted away in the air.

The APCs broke the walls of the police station and then stopped, adjusting their aim. After securing their surroundings, the autocannons spat fire. Their shells destroyed Mud Golems approaching from afar. Guided by the automated fire control system, the gunner changed his target. After one fell, he immediately fixated on the next one. While there were only two APCs, it did not have any issues handling the Mud Golems. As support, the tank was also deployed.

"NE 20! 1720 away!"

Once the gunner confirmed a target, the loader hurried to insert a new shell. With a dull clank sound, the shell was sealed inside. Confirming the cartridge was loaded, the gunner pulled the trigger and the Mud Golem approaching from the northeast was smashed into pieces. The 120 mm had caused fatal damage to the metal-plated don, so it was impossible for a weaker Mud Golem to resist a single shot.

The heavy machine gunners focused on pushing away the Mud Golems that got closer to the tank and APCs. When a Mud Golem found its way in, the HMG would slow it down, and the APCs would suppress it soon afterward. After firing non-stop, a few HMGs went silent.

— “Turtle-3 is out of .50!”

— “Namer Turtle-2 only has 140 bullets left!”

The soldiers who were carrying bullet containers left in a hurry. Since rifles were ineffective, most of them were tasked with supplying ammunition and changing the gun barrels. Among them all, Kwang Hwi’s role was to make the necessary ammunition or equipment. Even while issuing commands, he had the Merit Shop open on one side to make purchases.

『30 mm rounds (1000)』

『Would you like to purchase?』

A large container full of autocannon shells appeared out of thin air. The soldiers who were waiting in front of Kwang Hwi carried them away in a flash.

“Commander, we need .50 cal..”

“I know.”

Kwang Hwi flicked his finger to purchase the .50 caliber shells for the HMGs. Once again, the troopers received the containers and ran off. Without a rest, Kwang Hwi looked at the screen connected to the Heron.

“SPG! Destroy the light metro line at 125!”

— “Affirmative.”

A few minutes later, a shell accurately landed on top of the U Line. With a loud explosion, chunks of concrete tumbled down on the road. Underneath it, Mud Golems reached out their hands towards the falling concrete. However, they were crushed into dirt paste as they could not withstand the weight. Some piles of dirt wriggled underneath the concrete but stopped soon after losing its strength.

Chapter 38. Find It (1)

The encroaching Mud Golems lost their shape and returned to a pile of dirt. Without a target, shells flew through the air. One of them landed on top of a bus, causing a massive explosion. Bright red flames soared into the sky for a brief moment.

“Cease fire!”

The hard-working autocannons went silent to take a rest. Even so, an acrid smell of gunpowder pricked the men's noses, a natural result caused by shooting for an entire day. It was more than enough to nauseate those who weren't used to it. The sun had already set and a thin veil of darkness had replaced it.

— “Boss! All targets have been incapacitated!”

A report from the Heron showed that the Mud Golems that once filled the screen had all returned back to the soil.

“Boss, everyone is exhausted.”

Kwang Hwi wore a grim expression at the outcome. At first, he was fairly confident that they would be able to suppress the enemy in a few hours. As the battle continued for an entire day, his outlook became bleak.

Despite eliminating over hundreds of Mud Golems, new ones would appear at set intervals. There was no end to them, no matter how many rounds they fired. It was just like pouring water into a bottomless pit. Only after the sun had set were they able to take a breather.

Kwang Hwi inspected the tired men nearby. Having fought a fierce battle for an entire day, they were at their limit. If the fight had continued, casualties would have occurred from exhaustion. While he wanted to search the area, he knew it would be a selfish request on his part. Now was the time to retreat.

“Get ready to return to HQ.”

“Roger. We'll make the preparations.”

“Also, retrieve our brothers who have died.”

Unfortunately, his brave men who faced off the mutated don were all killed in action. They were the first casualties of the Kwang Hwi Faction. The faces of his subordinates, including Jackson, stiffened at the news. They had tried their best, but it was near impossible to prevent losses.

“We need to make sure that the families of our fallen brothers are treated with respect. Jackson, take care of it for me.”

“Yes, boss.”

“Now, move out!”

His men dispersed to make the necessary preparations while Kwang Hwi contacted the Situation Room at HQ to call the Mi-26. They needed to quickly transport the wounded

soldiers. Even though it was dangerous to summon it without any escorts, he had to take the necessary risk. Fortunately, the helicopter arrived quickly without any hiccups.

A strong gust of wind from above blew against his hair as the blades whirred. The beads of sweat on his forehead cooled down rapidly. Underneath, two men waved their traffic rods to guide the helicopter. As the helicopter's landing gear contacted the ground, its rear door opened in haste.

Soon after, wounded soldiers and those who had died in action were boarded. Then, the tied up gangsters and survivors alike were escorted inside. Finally, the destroyed Light Tactical Vehicle occupied the unused space. The vehicle was utterly crushed by the don, rendered inoperable. So, it had to be slowly towed by other vehicles from behind. By the time the transport helicopter was ready to take off, foot soldiers had completed preparations to leave.

"We're returning! Prioritize the safety of all members."

— "Departing to Dongducheon HQ. Ryker-2 will guide the way."

Ground forces made up of APCs, tanks, and tactical vehicles left the police station. Even in the dark sky, the fuselage of the Mi-26 was easily visible. Behind them, heaps of dust around the police station were blown away by the wind.

"Dear! No!"

"S-son, what am I supposed to do now..."

Coffins of the fallen soldiers were laid out on the open field. They were crafted to the best ability possible in an apocalyptic world. Even so, it couldn't be compared to official ones with fancy decors.

Each coffin had the names of the fallen soldiers, and they were surrounded by their respective family members. Upon receiving the sudden grievous news, the families mourned in their own ways. Some sobbed loudly, while others mourned in silence. Kwang Hwi and his subordinates also attended the funeral. The guards immediately stood upright to greet them.

"Commander, you've arrived."

Placing an index finger on his lips, Kwang Hwi approached the families. Everyone's eyes were on the commander-in-chief.

"Bring back my husband! Bring him back!"

A widow threw flowers on Kwang Hwi's face, scattering the petals onto the floor. The alarmed guards tried to protect Kwang Hwi from the crowd, but he raised his hand to stop them. Bending his knees to pick up the chrysanthemums scattered on the ground, he carefully placed them on top of the coffin.

"I'm sorry. It's all my fault."

He bowed deeply to the widow to show his sincerity. For those who had lost their family members, it was natural to be angry and aggrieved. As their leader, he was responsible for their deaths. Even if he couldn't have prevented casualties, he may have reduced the numbers if he had carefully planned out the operation beforehand.

His subordinates, who were following from behind, also bowed silently. Seeing these tough and battle-hardened men apologizing to her, the widow burst into tears. Kwang Hwi then quietly bowed to the other families. For those who didn't have family members, he stayed in front of the coffins for a while to offer his prayers. Without any relatives to bid farewell, he couldn't just leave them alone.

"It's been a short time, but thank you for being with me. I... will see you again when I get there."

After finishing, Kwang Hwi left the funeral gathering. As if reflecting the hearts of the people, the gloomy clouds looked like they were also about to shed tears. After a long silence, Kwang Hwi opened his mouth.

"Soo Min?"

"Yes, boss."

"Why don't we send the prisoners we captured this time to our farm?"

It was where the Kwang Hwi Faction was born and also where Kwang Hwi lived before the monsters appeared. After moving to Dongducheon HQ, his house was repurposed as a farm to utilize its large fields and some of the recent survivors were deployed there to cultivate the lands.

"Do you plan to use them as slaves?"

"Yeah. There's no good reason to keep them alive, so we might as well use them for manual labor."

Reports were coming in that they needed more manpower to manage the abundant farmland, so Soo Min agreed with Kwang Hwi.

"Understood. We'll send them out tomorrow. I'll have them work like those slaves in salt farms."

Having the gangsters work like this was also beneficial for improving the public opinion of the Kwang Hwi Faction. Kwang Hwi and his subordinates walked along the road, sharing their views on the way.

Right before they went inside the Dongducheon City Hall, Kwang Hwi caught sight of a destroyed vehicle that had been left in one corner. It was the Light Tactical Vehicle that was destroyed back at Uijeongbu. Its hood had practically caved inside the engine, making it impossible to repair. When Soo Min followed his eyesight and spotted it, he spoke with a troubled expression.

“We tried our best to repair the vehicle, but our engineers reported that it would be more economical to scrap it altogether. Although, there isn’t much left that could be used as spare parts...”

“Yeah?”

Kwang Hwi smacked his lips. Unlike the earlier days, he didn’t lack vehicles now. Furthermore, there was no need to purchase Light Tactical Vehicles from the Merit Shop as he could find plenty in nearby military bases. Nevertheless, it was still disappointing to let it go just like that.

‘What can we do about it?’

At that moment, a message appeared at the corner of his eye.

『Would you like to recycle the destroyed Light Tactical Vehicle K-151?』

『Complete Repair: 7000 MP』

『Resell: 3000 MP』

“Hm?”

Startled by the sudden prompt, Kwang Hwi blurted out, “What’s this?”

‘Complete repair? Resell?’

It cost 10,000 MP to purchase the bulletproof K-151 from the Merit Shop. Just to make sure, Kwang Hwi looked away in search of another target. There just happened to be a regular sedan he had found at downtown right next to the destroyed vehicle. The content of the message changed.

『This was not purchased from the Merit Shop.』

He reshifted his gaze back to the Light Tactical Vehicle and the content changed once again.

『Would you like to recycle the destroyed Light Tactical Vehicle K-151?』

『Complete Repair: 7000 MP』

『Resell: 3000 MP』

It seemed like he could only ‘recycle’ equipment purchased from the Merit Shop.

“Repair it.”

A white light wrapped around the Light Tactical Vehicle after he chose to repair the scrapped vehicle. It was so bright that he couldn’t open his eyes. His men also covered their eyes in tandem.

“...What’s going on?”

“Why are you even surprised?”

『7000 MP have been deducted.』

『Repaired.』

The light disappeared and the destroyed Light Tactical Vehicle regained its original appearance. On the surface, it looked no different than when it was first purchased. However, the HMG that was torn apart was missing. It seemed like he needed to buy the weapon separately.

‘If we can repair equipment mid-battle...’

If the pilot was fine, as long as he had time to spare, he could repair any vehicle with some MP. It would, in effect, have infinite durability. This was another piece of good news for his future encounters.

Kwang Hwi headed to his conference room with his subordinates. Along the way, he met those who were preparing for the meeting. The pictures taken by the Heron were displayed in order on the projector and the Mud Golems roaming around Uijeongbu were enlarged.

“Even though we eliminated a significant number of Mud Golems yesterday, there are already new ones to replace them.”

“Just like Yangju.”

Monkeys in Yangju also took advantage of their fast reproduction cycle to bolster their strength, a similar case to the current situation in Uijeongbu.

“Are the Mud Golems reproducing like the Monkeys?”

Hearing Jackson's suggestion, a commotion followed in the conference room as the attendees engaged in the discussion.

"The Golems look like inanimate objects. Are you telling me they can reproduce?"

"Logically, no, but common sense has been destroyed long ago."

"Come on. Even so..."

Having been silent the entire time, Kwang Hwi spoke to provide his own viewpoint.

"I think it's closer to being manufactured."

"Manufactured?... It does make sense."

The men were slightly surprised, but they nodded their heads. They had gathered testimonies of the don before he turned into a mutant from the survivors. Prior to Kwang Hwi Faction raiding Uijeongbu, the don was skilled at using blades. However, he didn't look like a monster back then.

Given his nature, it was apparent that he was not the kind of man who would hide his strength. Rather, he liked showing off to everybody. This meant that he was originally a human that transformed soon after Kwang Hwi Faction appeared.

"And the entity responsible for causing such a change was likely Armata."

'It must also be why I saw <Armata's Family> in the notification.'

"Armata..."

"Then, all we need to do is either find and kill Armata or research how the Golems are made and destroy its source."

"Bingo."

Chapter 39 Find It (2)

Kwang Hwi issued a new order to his men.

"Find Armata or the facility that is mass producing the Golems."

Immediately after, the men deployed the Heron. It was one of the most treasured assets of the Kwang Hwi Faction as it was the only equipment suited for a large scale reconnaissance.

A few gathered at the Situation Room to keep a close eye on the screen. If they found anything strange, they shared their opinions on the matter. Their efforts paid off as they were able to find suspicious areas in less than a day.

“Boss. We found it!”

Soo Min dashed into the office, prompting Kwang Hwi and his subordinates to turn their heads.

“We found two suspicious locations. The Cheonbosan Peak and Mt. Mangwolsa.”

“Mark them on the monitor.”

Soo Min tapped on his smartpad to transfer the images into the large screen. Soon after, they were displayed on the map.

“Did you find Armata?”

“No, sir. We don’t think it’s Armata. We presume it’s the facility that is mass producing the Golems.”

A video taken from Cheonbosan Peak was displayed on the screen. Cheonbosan was a relatively small mountain with a height of 335 meters. However, it’s rocky cliffs made it difficult to climb over it.

While the summit was relatively flat and unnoteworthy, there were unidentified symbols drawn all over it. The symbols looked like they would disappear from a slight disturbance. A few people tried to analyze the symbols, but they couldn’t make any sense out of them.

“We have confirmed that whenever the symbols shine brightly, newly made Mud Golems appeared at the base of the mountain.”

“So it’s essentially a production facility.”

“Yes, it appears to be so.”

Soo Min displayed the next image.

“The next target is Mt. Mangwolsa located at Dongbansan.”

“...It looks like it’s even more difficult to approach than Cheongbosan.”

The mid section of the mountain was a vertical cliff, which looked dangerous. It was going to be difficult to deploy a large-scale operation, not to mention vehicles, to such a place.

“After finding the symbols at Cheonbosan, we focused on searching nearby mountains. By chance, we spotted the same light coming out of Mt. Mangwolsa.”

“Nice. We’ll attack immediately.”

Fortunately, they didn’t have to go in person. They were really lucky to have SPGs that could fire projectiles a few dozens kilometers away.

Outside, the SPGs were waiting orders. Their turrets were already raised up high as they had received the firing data beforehand. They were ready to be fired with the push of a button. Kwang Hwi gave them a simple order.

“Fire.”

A deafening sound reverberated through Dongducheon and the windows of buildings near the SPG shook violently. Citizens of Dongducheon momentarily stopped what they were doing, but quickly went back to their daily tasks. It was not unusual for the Kwang Hwi Faction to fire guns without giving any notice.

A shell flew high into the sky, only to lose its momentum and strength. After a momentary pause, it started to fall back down. Under the downward pressure of gravity, the speed sharply increased.

When it contacted the ground, a large explosion occurred. As if it were trying to swallow everything, intense flames burst out. The shockwave swept across 50 meters, sending thick clouds of dust into the air. The symbols were removed as they could not withstand the external shock.

— “Hit confirmed!”

As soon as the symbols were erased, Mud Golems scattered around Uijeongbu dispersed.

[You have defeated 100 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]

[You have obtained 3000 MP.]

[You have defeated 200 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]

[You have obtained 4000 MP.]

[You have defeated 300 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]

[You have obtained 5000 MP.]

A single shell shaved off half of the Mud Golem population. As the kill count increased, Kwang Hwi’s MP reserve shot up. Compared to other monsters, Mud Golems gave twice the Merit Points. Confirming the kills, Kwang Hwi pressed on for more points.

“Next target.”

— “Target confirmed. Firing!”

Two SPGs fired at the same time. In MRSI mode, the SPGs fired a total of six rounds right above Mangwolsa. The mountain which enjoyed peace until now was unable to avoid the incoming projectiles. None missed and they all landed perfectly on top of Mangwolsa. The pagoda for a respectable Buddhist teacher that’s considered a cultural asset for Gyeonggi-do was destroyed by boulders that came tumbling down. Nearby buildings couldn’t withstand the destructive force of the SPG and shattered into pieces. In a matter of seconds, the oldest pagoda of Uijeongbu was turned into ruins.

At the same time, the explosion swallowed symbols hidden inside Mangwolsa. The flickering symbols lost their light, drawing on their last breath. Soon after, the remaining Golems lost their form and returned to a pile of dirt.

[You have defeated 400 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]
[You have obtained 6000 MP.]

[You have defeated 500 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]
[You have obtained 7000 MP.]

[You have defeated 600 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]
[You have obtained 8000 MP.]

— “A-all Mud Golems have been incapacitated!”

Everyone inside the Situation Room had their eyes glued to the screen after hearing the report. They couldn’t believe it until they saw that there weren’t any Mud Golems roaming the streets.

[Gyeonggi Province’s Uijeongbu 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.]

While they had faced some trouble, Kwang Hwi Faction was able to safely secure Uijeongbu.

The blue eyed Keku exchanged glances with each other. Their leader pointed towards the white walls and cried out to rally his troops. Others nodded and raised a metal pole so large that multiple Keku, known for their strength, had trouble carrying it.

The monsters rammed the pole into the wall, leaving a small mark. They did not rest and kept swinging their siege weapon. As they continued, the visible mark grew in size.

The men who were watching the scene through the camera bit on their lips. They were wondering what happened to the Keku that had gone silent for the past month. Never did they think they would return after finding the weakest point of the bunker.

As the wall shook, one of the security guards asked his buddy.

“What should we do?”

“Report it to the Chief.”

The man nodded and dialed the phone.

“Chief, it’s the security team. Monsters are attacking the wall.”

— “Wait a bit. I’ll be there.”

Hearing an urgent sound of footsteps from behind, the men turned around and immediately stood upright to greet the Chief.

“Chief, you’re finally here.”

“You said they’re destroying our wall?”

The middle-aged man looked towards the wall that was visibly shaking.

“Since when?”

“Yesterday, all they did was knock on the walls. It wasn’t until 10 minutes ago they started their siege. You can see them on the screen.”

His eyes twitched after watching what was going on.

‘Why now?’

He didn’t think for too long as they had to reinforce the walls immediately.

“First, reinforce the wall as much as possible. The two of you will go to the storage room and bring anything we aren’t using. We need to slow them down with a barricade incase they breach our walls. Also, bring fire extinguishers and shields as well.”

“Understood!”

The men rushed to the storage room.

“As for you, I need you to stay here and report every hour. Make sure to report immediately in case of emergency. Got that?”

“Yes! Understood.”

“I’ll be back after visiting the president.”

The Chief Security Officer hurried along the corridor. After walking past the empty corridor for few minutes, new scenery entered his vision. There were men in black suits guarding the entrance to a room across the corridor. When the guards saw the Chief, they greeted him with a respectful bow.

“Hello, Chief.”

“Good work.”

Immediately after entering the room, a blue logo stamped on the floor welcomed him.

[Republic of Korea, Blue House]

After passing by few more corridors and security doors, the Chief Security Officer finally reached the temporarily Situation Room. As the facility was still under construction, the room was quite empty.

‘Why here.’

If their weapons were not broken, they would have relocated the president to other bunkers that were completed. However, hundreds of monsters attacked them at once, slaughtering the security guards that were unarmed. Eventually, the Chief was forced to evacuate the president and his staff to the nearest bunker.

Perhaps they would of had a better chance if the enemies were human, but they faced monsters who surpassed humans’ physical strength. Without firearms, all they had left were tactical batons that didn’t help much.

They had thought about breaking past other buildings, but decided not to as they couldn’t ensure the safety of the president and others. While they were able to save their lives by escaping here, they couldn’t be at ease. Because the construction of Sangchunjae Underground Bunker was incomplete, their food reserve was low as it wasn’t properly stocked and they didn’t have any escape route if the monsters broke past their defense.

“Hahaha.”

“Things turned out to be great.”

“Who’s laughing?”

He turned his head around to the place he heard the laughter. Representatives of major political parties who took refuge with the president were talking with a bright face. The Chief had never seen them make such a bright face in years.

‘What’s going on?’

The leader of the Liberty Korea Party spotted the Chief Security Officer and waved his hand.

“Chief! Where have you been?”

“I went to check on the wall. Did something good happen?”

“Something good? Hahaha! Take a look here. There was an armed force still left!”

“Eh?”

At first, the Chief thought he had misheard.

‘An armed force?’

“You look like you don’t believe me.”

“Of course he can’t. Now, Chief come here and take a look at this.”

Representatives from each party, who had gathered in front of the screen, moved out of the way. The Chief walked close to the screen. A familiar staff bowed to greet him.

“We spotted them through the satellite.”

“This is...”

On the screen, APCs and Tanks were moving in a line. He didn’t expect to see anymore. On top of that, there were perfectly fine autocannons mounted on top of the APCs. The Chief blinked his eyes. Seeing his reaction, the politicians laughed.

“I told you so.”

The Chief Security Officer hurried to check the details of the photo. The location and time were visibly marked.

[Gyeonggi Province’s Uijeongbu, 20180520. 1123]

It was taken today at 11:23AM, not too long ago.

“Oh, Chief you’re here too?”

“President!”

Respective party leaders greeted the President and so did the Chief Security Officer.

“Did you see the photo? We’re truly fortunate. To think that there was still an armed force.”

“God must be truly looking out for our country.”

“Contact them immediately and bring them here. There’s no need to worry about the monsters outside.”

While the president and political party leaders were happily discussing about the weapons, the chief security officer bit on his lips. In a low voice, he spoke carefully.

“Excuse me.”

“What’s wrong, Chief?”

The President looked at the Chief Security Officer. After a momentary silence, the Chief closed his eyes and spoke.

“Those people in the satellite images are not from our country.”

Chapter 40. Contact

“What are you saying, Chief?!”

The surprised men raised their voices. Even though they were politicians who were good at keeping a poker face, they could not hide their shock. The president was not exempted. Their high expectations lead to a great disappointment that crumpled their faces.

“Explain to us, Chief. What do you mean they’re not our people?”

As the Chief remained silent, the president took a deep breath to regain his composure. He asked again.

“I’m not trying to reprimand you or anything. I just want to know the reason why you believe so. Tell us the truth.”

The Chief Security Officer pointed at one side of the picture.

“If you look closely at the lower right corner, you’ll see a vehicle with a heavy machine gun. That vehicle is called K-151, a Light Tactical Vehicle that our military recently received. While a small portion are sold overseas, it’s one of the most popular models we purchase.”

“Yeah? Then how come they’re not from our military?” Someone interrupted him with a question, but the Chief ignored it and continued his explanation.

“The problem is the APC and the tank next to it.”

“What’s wrong with them?”

Everyone gazed on the screen, still confused. Unlike the absent Minister of National Defense, most people present here did not have any military knowledge.

“Those vehicles are equipment used by Israeli forces.”

“I-Israel?”

The politicians tilted their head and thought to themselves, ‘Not North Korea, or China, nor Japan, but Israel? Why are Israeli forces operating in South Korea?’

“We also have another problem.”

The Chief led their attention to the screen once again. On top of the Light Tactical Vehicle, they could see a soldier of the Kwang Hwi Faction. The person in question was, without doubt, Korean.

“A Korean is operating the Israeli vehicle.”

The people gathered in the Situation Room were speechless. Their thoughts were left in shambles, unable to make any sense out of the situation. Only the president, befitting his role, quickly regained his composure.

“We’ll have to contact them.”

“Yes. We’ll need to get in touch with them first. Regardless of nationality, they have what we need the most.”

The Chief agreed with the president. Even if they weren’t part of the ROK Armed Forces, they had to check whether the Korean government could cooperate with or use them.

“Does everyone agree?”

The absent-minded Minister of Justice and other officials nodded. In the end, they didn't have any other plans. Soon after, the president made his decision.

"Then, let's contact them."

Vehicles of the Kwang Hwi Faction traversed through the streets. They were running through Uijeongbu to find any useful supplies. Just a moment ago, they found a large amount of gas from the gas station. On their way, Kwang Hwi spotted something and barked an order.

"Stop!"

— "Eh?"

The driver was taken aback from the sudden order, so Kwang Hwi shouted again.

"I said, stop!"

With a screech, the APC stopped on the road. Vehicles following from behind also came to a halt.

"Open the rear door."

— "Opening the rear door. All members, please be on the alert."

Kwang Hwi exited the APC.

"Hey boss, what's the matter?" asked Jackson.

Kwang Hwi pointed afar. His men looked only to find an electronic billboard. It was an electronic billboard installed by the local government, mainly used for commercial or political advertisements. The electronic display lost its flare and showed only black letters on a white background.

We want to talk.

New words were being written right below it as if someone was typing it out with their keyboard on the spot.

5F Gyeonggi Province

Northern Government Building

Not taking his eyes off the billboard, Kwang Hwi picked up his radio.

"We're heading to the Northern Government Building."

After passing the light rail and the pier, they arrived at their destination. A fairly grand building greeted Kwang Hwi and his men.

The APCs drove up the sidewalk, which cracked under the sheer weight. A small staircase blocked the pathway, but it posed no challenge as the APC was designed to operate in rough terrains.

After climbing over the stairs, the APCs stopped in front of the main entrance. Fully armed soldiers exited their vehicles. Fortunately, they did not have issue with visibility as the only thing that stood nearby was the government building. Kwang Hwi, who confirmed that the area was clear, got out of his vehicle.

— “Boss, the Heron also reports the area is clear.”

“Keep an eye on it, just in case.”

Kwang Hwi and his men entered the building. As with other buildings, there were signs of damage everywhere. The men moved in front of Kwang Hwi and combed through the building.

[5F] Industrial Policy DMZ Policy Construction Technology Emergency Planning
Emergency Safety

He walked past the corridors. Every door had a nameplate with the department’s name on it, such as Industrial Policy or Construction Technology.

“Found it.”

In contrast, all that Room 505 had were numbers. The keypad on the door shot a faint blue light.

‘They must have a power source somewhere.’

Kwang Hwi inputted the password he received earlier.

With a beep, the locked door opened slightly. When Kwang Hwi was about to enter, Jackson stepped forward.

“Boss, I’ll check first.”

Fortunately, the interior room was quiet. In a small room, there was only a comfy sofa and equipment for video call. Confirming that there were no threat, Jackson left the room.

Soon after, a camera in one corner of the room focused on Kwang Hwi. As the monitor turned on, an old man appeared on screen. Kwang Hwi knew that familiar face.

— “Nice to meet you. I’m the president of the Republic of Korea, Shin Myeong Lee.”

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

The president’s flashed a surprised look.

— “Kwang Hwi Faction... Are you not from our military?”

“Unfortunately, no.”

For a moment, the president could not hide his disappointment. In a dire situation, an armed force appeared but they were not part of the ROK Armed Forces. He was extremely troubled by the developing situation.

— “So, the Chief Security Officer was right.”

“What did you want to see me for?”

Naturally, Kwang Hwi did not care what the president felt. He was slightly surprised that the president and the head of government were still alive, but there was no particular excitement.

— “While it’s unfortunate to hear that you are not part of our military, we would like to make an offer.”

“You have my ear.”

— “Representatives from all political parties, including me, have been evacuated to an underground bunker at the Blue House. Please rescue us from here.”

Kwang Hwi gave the president a surprised look.

‘I had doubts, but were they really unable to evacuate?’

Sensing the doubtful stare, the president spoke with a solemn expression.

— “We’re currently hiding in an underground bunker located at Sangchunjae.”

‘Sangchunjae, huh?’

It was a location frequently mentioned by the media, a traditional Korean building used mainly for political meetings.

— “When the disaster occurred, I was discussing pending issues in Sangchunjae with representatives from each political party. Then suddenly, monsters poured from everywhere. To make matters worse, our security team’s weapons were all destroyed.

While we were able to hold out for a while, they overwhelmed us with their numbers and we hurried to escape to the underground bunker at Sangchunjae. The current problem we face is that this bunker is incomplete.”

“Incomplete?”

— “It’s still undergoing construction. There aren’t enough food or defensive measures to protect us. Those creatures have already spotted us and have attempted to break in a few times. While the doors are fine, the walls have started to crack. At this rate, they will breach our bunker and we’ll all die.”

Kwang Hwi understood their rough situation. If the bunker was perfectly fine, the president would have waited patiently from inside. He would have been able to last for months. During that time, he would have sought after the remaining military or collaborators that might have survived. However, he did not have the time, so he had been quick to offer a deal to the Kwang Hwi Faction.

“A rescue.... What would we receive in return?”

The president went silent for a moment, pondering what to offer. Kwang Hwi waited patiently because he knew it wasn’t an easy decision to make.

— “According to our investigation, we heard that the Kwang Hwi Faction reclaimed Dongducheon, Yangju, and Uijeongbu.”

“Yes.”

— “We’ll officially recognize your sovereignty in the name of the South Korean government.”

‘I’m disappointed.’

It was not a favorable term for Kwang Hwi as he had already conquered those territories. He didn’t need approval from the government.

“Is that all?”

— “On top of that, how about we offer the equipment we’re not using?”

“What equipment?”

— “Do you know Baengnyeongdo-class?”

“Baengnyeongdo-class? Are you talking about the amphibious assault ship?”

The president nodded.

— “While it’s not armed with any weapons, the construction is complete.”

‘An amphibious assault ship, huh?’

Kwang Hwi gulped quietly. While he wanted the ship, the Kwang Hwi Faction was currently unable to operate it. They did not have the trained personnel for it nor a secured port.

— “Are you interested?”

‘Well, either way...’

After organizing his thoughts, Kwang Hwi nodded.

— “If you could rescue us from the current place, we’ll tell you the location of the ship. When will you be able to get here?”

“We’ll need some time to plan the operation. Why don’t you get back to us the same time tomorrow?”

— “Tomorrow... alright. It would be great if you could help us soon.”

After making the appointment, Kwang Hwi ended the video call. The screen showing the president turned off and he exited the room. His subordinates were waiting for him outside, curious about what happened.

“Commander! Who did you talk to?”

“The president.”

“T-the president?”

“Wait.”

Kwang Hwi looked around and then took his subordinates to a remote place. He had to make sure no one was eavesdropping.

“What happened inside?”

“The president...”

Kwang Hwi shared the details about the president’s situation and the offer the Korean government made. His subordinates listened carefully.

“Hm, a rescue request.”

“It does make sense, since their security team was disarmed.”

“Boss, are you alright with just the Baengnyeongdo-class? We could have obtained their satellites and more.”

Looking around, Kwang Hwi whispered in a soft voice.

“Either way, once we rescue the president...”

After listening to his plan, his subordinates flashed a devilish grin.

“So you had a plan. Well, if that’s the case...”

“You’re right boss. There’s really no need for us to uphold a fair deal.”

Not hearing any opposition, Kwang Hwi opened his mouth once again.

“First, we’ll deploy the Heron and figure out the situation around the Blue House. Then, we’ll rescue the president and think afterward.”

“Roger that, boss!”

“For now, we’ll use this place as a forward operating base. Maintain the defensive perimeter and make yourself comfortable here. We’ll have the helicopter transport the necessary supplies.”

The subordinates moved in haste. Commanding their respective team, they started setting up the temporary base.

While everyone was busy, Kwang Hwi got on top of the APC. He decided to use the APC as a command center until the base was complete.

“Heron, move to the next location. Check 1 Sejongno, Jongno-gu, Seoul.”

— “1 Sejongno, understood.”

The Heron pilot, who confirmed the location, became speechless.

“Did you confirm the location?”

— “Is it the Blue House?”

“Yeah.”

— “Confirmed. We’ll report back once we get there.”

It didn't take long for the Heron to arrive to the Blue House. Kwang Hwi looked at the screen installed inside the vehicle. He received the live video feed of the Blue House.

"It's been a while since I've seen some Keku."

The mysterious place where the president of South Korea resided was now overrun by Keku.

Chapter 41. Second Mission

"Hm..."

Kwang Hwi let out a murmur, pondering what to do.

"It would be ineffective to move across the land," said Soo Min.

The road to the Blue House was crowded with all kinds of monsters. To be more exact, entire streets of Seoul were packed with them. Their number was incomparable to any of the other territories that the Kwang Hwi Faction had seized so far.

Normally, it would have taken them less than an hour to drive to their destination. However, if a battle broke out, it would take them more than a day.

This posed a problem for Kwang Hwi. As the operation dragged on, his men were put at a greater risk. After the recent incident, he wanted to avoid casualties as much as possible. On top of that, he had another issue to solve once they reached the Blue House. The Keku that they hadn't seen in a while had set up a camp around it. Not only did they had to fight the monsters while they were exhausted, they even had to deal with potential threats from the South Korean government.

"Seems like only hardship will await us if we go in on foot."

"Boss, I think it would be best to use our helicopter."

The Kwang Hwi Faction had Mil Mi-26 transport helicopter. It was a massive helicopter that could carry up to 90 people, perhaps even 100. However, one of his subordinates disapproved of the idea.

"Without an escort, it'll be dangerous. We would be setting ourselves up for a disaster if a flying monster like before were to appear."

"That's true. If we had the Chinook, we could have mounted some weapons. It's unfortunate that the Mi-26 is just a transport helicopter."

After some thought, Kwang Hwi opened his mouth.

“If we don’t have it, we just have to make it.”

“Pardon?”

Kwang Hwi opened the Merit Shop. It was time for him to unlock the [Aircraft] category.

『Aircraft』

『This category is currently locked.』

『This category can be unlocked after completing a mission.』

『Would you like to accept the mission?』

Kwang Hwi nodded to accept the mission.

‘I wonder, what kind of mission would it give me this time?’

He wished for a mission that wasn’t too difficult.

『Kwang Hwi Baek’s Mission』

『Find 5 people who can pilot an aircraft.』

『Mission Rewards: Unlock <Aircraft>, 300,000 MP.』

Kwang-hwi smacked his lips with a perplexed expression.

“It just had to be pilots...”

It was natural to have pilots to operate a helicopter. The problem was that, unlike soldiers who can be put in action with a little training, pilots had to be skilled. It wasn’t easy for him to find such talent out of thin air.

‘Why couldn’t it tell me to just kill some monsters?’

Just when he had that thought, a system message appeared in front of him.

『Pilots : 5/5』

『Kwang Hwi Baek’s Mission Complete!』

『You have found 5 pilots who can operate an aircraft.』

『Unlocked Aircraft category.』

『You have obtained 300,000 MP.』

Along with all his concerns, the second mission was quickly resolved.

“How...”

After a momentary confusion, Kwang Hwi quickly understood what had happened. He forgot that he had recently acquired the North Korean pilots. Mil Mi-26 was a massive transport helicopter that required at least 5 pilots to operate. Although he had killed one who failed to surrender, he had another pilot.

“Chopper? No problem!”

There was Jackson, the all-round capable operator. As for his other subordinates, they simply shook their heads as they never imagined they would one day operate a helicopter.

“They say that everything has its use.”

“I know right? What can’t you do, Jackson?”

Receiving everyone’s attention, Jackson simply shrugged his shoulders. Given his already large frame, his wide shoulders were covering the sky. After watching the comedic scenery for a while, Kwang Hwi started talking again.

“Now, now. Let’s decide what helicopter to buy.”

“Is that even a question? It has to be Apache!” said Jackson.

“Jackson is right, boss. Are there any other helicopters that can rival an Apache’s combat prowess?”

Kwang Hwi agreed with his men. The first thing that came to his mind when he thought of attack helicopters was the Apache. It was so famous that even people who didn’t know much about military equipment had heard of it before.

“Give me a sec.”

Kwang Hwi scanned through the Merit Shop.

『AH-64 Apache』

『The primary attack helicopter of the U.S. Army. It’s possible to equip a variety of weapons such as the 30 mm Chain Gun, Hellfire missiles, Hydra rocket pods, or even other air-to-air missiles. While there are many other attack helicopters, the Apache retained its throne for 20 year as the best selling model.』

『Price: 4,780,000 MP.』

『Merit Points: 950,000』

『You do not have enough Merit Points to purchase.』

‘4.78 million?’

It was too expensive. While it was nice to have, he had nowhere near MP to purchase one. Disappointed, Kwang Hwi let out a sigh. Without a clue, Jackson was still singing a song about Apache right next to him.

“I can’t buy an Apache.”

“**What?! Nooo!**” yelled Jackson.

“Then, how about a Viper?” Ignoring Jackson’s cries, Soo Min made a suggestion.

Kwang Hwi looked for the Viper.

『AH-1Z Viper』

『An improved version of the AH-1W SuperCobra. It can compete with the Apache AH-64 Longbow in close combat and has the latest target sighting system that’s superior to the Longbow. Depending on the situation, it can be equipped with autocannons, Hellfire missiles, and short range air-to-air missiles.』

『Price: 3,200,000 MP.』

『Merit Points: 950,000』

『You do not have enough Merit Points to purchase.』

“I can’t buy that either.”

While it was cheaper than the Apache, it was still expensive. Soo Min could not hide his disappointment.

“Is there anything else?”

“Why not the Russian Ka-50?”

『Kamov Ka-50』

『Manufactured by the Russians to counter against the AH-64 Apache. Unlike the Apache, only one pilot is required to operate. It’s one of the few attack helicopters that is equipped with an ejection seat. Has a distinctive coaxial rotor system that is known for its speed and maneuverability.』

『Price: 1,610,000 MP.』

“Anything else?”

『Mi-24 Hind』

『A transport and attack helicopter manufactured by the Soviet Union. It can transport up to 10 soldiers at once. There’s a misconception that it’s slow due to its large size, but it’s high-performance engine allows it to quickly maneuver in the sky. It’s commonly referred to as the ‘flying tank’.』

“Setting aside the price, isn’t the Hind known for its questionable performance?” asked one of the subordinates.

Afterward, there were mentions of the Mi-28 Havoc, Mangusta, Harbin Z-19, and many others. However, there were none suited for immediate deployment. Chinese helicopters had a quality issue, where else others were too expensive.

Kwang Hwi’s men racked their brains to find the cheapest and most reliable helicopter. They wanted to find the one that could transport many soldiers.

“How about the dragonfly?”

“Dragonfly?”

“You know, the AH-6 Little Bird.”

『AH-6 Little Bird』

『A light helicopter used by the U.S. Army. It was originally designed for observation and reconnaissance, only to be modified later on for transport, escort, and ground attack missions. Its low price, maintenance cost, and mobility makes it a popular model. Recent models are equipped with high-performance engines to help traverse through windy mountain ranges. With a bulletproof fuselage, it has a six-bladed main rotor.』

『Price: 100,000 MP.』

『25 mm autocannon and 70 mm Hydra rocket pods included.』

It was a small helicopter that couldn’t be even compared to any of the previously mentioned attack helicopters. Some people referred to it as a dragonfly because of its appearance. Thanks to its small size, it was considered multi-purpose and had relatively great mobility. With the 25 mm autocannon and 70 mm Hydra rocket pods, it’s affordable price made it favorable compared to other attack helicopters. On top of that, if the situation called, they could even mount anti-tank missiles. Unlike larger models that required at least 2 people, the AH-6 only required one pilot. Given that he was lacking pilots, Kwang Hwi could deploy up to 5 helicopters simultaneously.

“My big and beautiful Apache...”

Jackson looked like he was about to cry. It was not pleasant to see a bulky man like Jackson in tears like a kid. It certainly didn’t help Kwang Hwi’s mental health. Kwang Hwi and the others turned their back on Jackson.

“Boss, we still haven’t finished our search. Let’s look for pilots in Uijeongbu.”

“Yeah. There should be a military base used by the Army Aviation or an airdome.”

What they had to do became clear. They had to secure as many pilots as they could before heading out to the Blue House.

“Boss, we found someone!”

Kwang Hwi found helicopter pilots who have previously operated the Apache for the ROK Armed Forces. They were hiding in an underground shelter located at a military base in Uijeongbu because their Apache broke down.

Kwang Hwi was concerned they would refuse to join, but the men agreed without question. In total, they found 8 pilots who belonged to the same squadron. It was unfortunate that not all members had survived the ordeal. In either case, if he assigned them to operate the Dragonfly, he could deploy 8 helicopters at once.

There was also another piece of good news. They found ‘training simulators’ near the military bases. Soldiers who had no experience in piloting a helicopter could be trained as new pilots there.

“The Apache pilots have previously piloted the Dragonfly, so they shouldn’t have any issues operating them.”

“Nice. I’ll purchase the helicopter later and have them get accustomed to it. It must have been a while since they operated one.”

“It sounds like a good plan, boss.”

Kwang Hwi heard a knock on the door.

“Come in.”

A security member opened the door and entered the room.

“Commander, we’ve been contacted by the Blue House.”

“Let’s go.”

When Kwang Hwi returned back to Room 505, the president was waiting for him.

— “Were you able to come up with a plan?”

“Yes, we’ve just finished the preparations. Would you tell us how many people we need to evacuate?”

— “Please wait.”

The president looked away. Kwang Hwi could barely hear an unfamiliar voice across the screen.

— “Around 15 people.”

“15... understood. We’re planning to head there tomorrow or the day after. Would you be able to hold out until then?”

— “It would be best if you could hurry.”

“Then, we’ll depart tomorrow morning. Before we depart, we will call you one more time.”

The president nodded. Perhaps because he was told he could escape from the stuffy place, his face brightened a bit.

“Then, farewell.”

After finishing the video call, Kwang Hwi left the room. Jackson guided him to the hangar. They’d built a temporary hanger right next to the Northern Government Building.

Inside, Kwang Hwi saw unfamiliar men talking to each other. They were the newly recruited helicopter pilots. Spotting Kwang Hwi, the men stood upright to salute their new leader. During their orientation, they were told to memorize the faces of important figures of the Kwang Hwi Faction. A senior member greeted Kwang Hwi with a loud voice.

“To the boss! Salute!”

After receiving the warm welcoming, Kwang Hwi told them to relax. The pilots clasped their hands behind their backs.

“Men! You will take on an important mission tomorrow by operating helicopters. There must be some of you who haven’t piloted a Dragonfly for a very long time, so get accustomed to it asap.”

“Yes! Understood!”

As a demonstration of his powers, Kwang Hwi decided to purchase the AH-6 Little Birds.

『AH-6 Little Bird』

『A light helicopter used by the U.S. Army. It was originally designed for observation and reconnaissance, only to be modified later on for transport, escort, and ground attack missions. Its low price, maintenance cost, and mobility makes it a popular model.』

Recent models are equipped with high-performance engines to help traverse through the windy mountain ranges. With a bulletproof fuselage, it has a six-bladed main rotor.』

『Price: 100,000 MP.』

『25 mm autocannon and 70 mm Hydra rocket pods included.』

『Purchased 8x AH-6 Little Birds.』

『800,000 MP have been deducted.』

『Please confirm the location to deploy the aircraft.』

After purchasing the Dragonflies, he deployed them across the hanger. The helicopters, which appeared out of nowhere, filled the empty hanger. Its black fuselage didn't reflect the light. On one side of the body, a grey symbol of the Kwang Hwi Faction was engraved. The color combination made it look almost invisible at night.

Seeing the magical scene unfold, the pilots couldn't believe their eyes. Naturally, it was to be expected. It was their first time seeing an ability power. On the other hand, other soldiers didn't bat an eye as they were focused on guarding the perimeter.

The following day, Kwang Kwi visited the Gyeonggi Province Northern Government Building, Room 505. He greeted the president of South Korea before departing.

— “I'll be expecting you.”

“Please be careful. We'll get there as soon as we can.”

He spoke with some sincerity as he couldn't have his goods be damaged, especially if they were going to make the Kwang Hwi Faction grow bigger. When he exited the room, he was greeted by his men who wore carefree expressions. They were fully armed and ready to depart.

“Let's go.”

“Yes, sir!”

When he reached the first floor lobby, soldiers were already there on standby. Kwang Hwi walked up to them and stood in front of the soldiers.

“Attention, everyone.”

“ATTENTION!”

Even at Kwang Hwi's low voice, the soldiers responded with vigor.

“Today, we’ll be using the helicopter to launch an assault. We shouldn’t encounter any issues if everyone follows my command. Let’s end this quickly and return back to HQ.”

“Understood!”

Kwang Hwi didn’t speak much as his subordinates had given a briefing for the mission yesterday. He didn’t need to repeat what was already known, instead pointing outside.

“Go.”

“Embark!”

Following Kwang Hwi, the soldiers exited the government building in an orderly fashion. In front of the building, the road had been cleared of abandoned vehicles and was now filled with helicopters. There were eight AH-6 Little Birds and a massive Mil-26 transport helicopter. The soldiers embarked the helicopters and Kwang Hwi got inside the Dragonfly at the front. His Dragonfly had only one autocannon to make room for additional fuel tanks so that he could command and guide his men from the helicopter.

Kwang Hwi fastened his seat belt and wore a headset to protect his ears from loud noises. The headset also enabled him to communicate with his men. The pilot in front wore a custom made HMD. Depending on whether one wore the helmet or not, their ability to respond to situations and conduct combat differed greatly. While he needed to spend some extra MP, he knew it was a necessity.

The rotor blades began to spin and gusts of wind spread around. The flowers that had been planted in front of the building were shaking dangerously. The commanding helicopter that Kwang Hwi was on was first to lift off, and the others followed soon after. The largest transport helicopter, the Mi-26, was last to take off. As they ascended, the helicopter made loud noises which filled the surrounding area. Even the headset was unable to block all of it.

Kwang Hwi looked outside. It had been a long time since he last rode a helicopter. The cold wind brushed against his body and the clear blue sky captivated his eyes.

— “Boss.”

His subordinate tapped his shoulder and gestured below. Right beneath them, he could see a green billboard. They were passing by Uijeongbu and entering Seoul.

Good bye! – Uijeongbu City.Welcome! – Dobong-gu, Seoul

Unlike the empty streets of Uijeongbu, the road leading up to Seoul was blocked by Mud Golems that were shouldering each other. Their gazes were fixed on what was in front of them, making them look like a massive wall from a distance.

'We could have been in trouble.'

The Dobong-gu road that bordered Uijeongbu was filled with Mud Golems. Their numbers easily surpassed scale three. If they proceeded with the operation by land, they would have had to get past all of them. It would have been cumbersome to engage in such battle.

The helicopters continued on their path to Jongno-gu, where the Blue House was located; the nation's largest city that had once been full of people was now filled with monsters.

— “Boss, we'll arrive shortly.”

In front of them, Kwang Hwi found a lustrous mountain. It was Bugaksan Mountain, located right next to the Blue House. Perhaps because it hadn't been visited by humans for months, the mountain looked greener and more sacred than he remembered.

“Heron, report.”

— “So far, it's quiet. We haven't found any other monsters besides the scale three Keku horde in front of the Blue House.”

“Got that. Keep an eye out.”

In the meantime, the helicopter passed by Bugaksan Mountain and the Keku horde came into sight. The monsters were on full alert, startled by the sound of the helicopter's rotor.

— “We've arrived.”

“Proceed with the plan. Get in formation and launch a ground attack as a pair!”

— “Roger. Besides Mi-26, Dragonflies will enter combat.”

The Mi-26 from the rear stopped in its place with escort helicopters on each side. For the safety of the soldiers, the escort helicopter had to be next to Mi-26 at all times. The remaining helicopters were sent to attack the enemies on the ground. In pairs, the Dragonflies lowered their altitude. Only then did the Keku spot the Kwang Hwi Faction from the sky above. While shouting, they pointlessly swung their weapons at the air even though the helicopters were far beyond their reach.

When the helicopters got close enough, they slightly tilted to the side and the HMD displayed their targets. The 25 mm autocannons spat fire and Keku turned into mincemeat. Their limbs were torn apart, falling onto the ground helplessly. Blood splattered across the green yard in front of the Blue House. The Dragonfly passed by

the Keku, mowing them down and leaving behind mutilated corpses. After a barrage of shells, they shot up back into the sky.

Only a few managed to barely avoid the disaster. They raised their head to see if the enemy had left. Sadly, a new pair of helicopters were coming right after them. The helicopters drew a line right at the center of the Keku horde. Monsters who could not avoid the line of barrage died miserably. Some threw their weapons in vain, as they were unable to reach the Dragonflies soaring in the sky. It was a one-sided massacre. Realizing they have no chance of winning, the frightened Keku turned their backs and started running away in haste.

“Jackson!”

— “Engaging!”

Jackson’s Dragonfly chased after the ones who were escaping. The circular pod fired a Hydra rocket towards the monsters, which flew and landed precisely near a Keku. An explosion swept through the surrounding area and the shockwave swallowed all the Keku nearby, instantly killing them. A few at the outer ring of the explosion managed to roll away. Naturally, they were not safe, as another helicopter chased after them. From the sky, they could see a dainty helicopter. However, nothing was dainty about its mounted weapons. The helicopter’s autocannon mowed past the Keku, further reducing their numbers.

From Sangchunjae, Kwang Hwi slowly expanded the operation area. He ordered his men to find Keku hiding inside buildings. When they did find the monsters, they showered those Keku in a hail of bullets, raining empty shells from the sky. During the entire operation, Kwang Hwi kept a close eye at the surrounding area and reports from the Heron. Only after he confirmed Sangchunjae was cleared did he issue a new order.

“Descend.”

— “We’ll prepare for landing.”

The helicopters landed in order and the Mi-26 opened its rear door. Soldiers of the Kwang Hwi Faction exited the helicopter, lowering their heads on the way out. Keku blood soaked their military boots as they stepped on the ground.

“There may be monsters who are still hiding! Don’t lower your guard!”

“Stay on alert!”

The soldiers combed every corner of Sangchunjae. When Keku came out of their hiding spots, in an attempt to ambush them, they were shot down immediately. In the meantime, the last Dragonfly landed.

— “Commander has landed on the ground. I repeat. Commander has landed on the ground. Focus on the operation!”

Kwang Hwi extended his arms after unfastening his seat belt. On request, his subordinate handed him an AA-12.

『AA-12』

『A fully automatic shotgun, similar to the USAS-12. It’s durability and reliability improved thanks to its gas system with a locked breech. Improving on the Ultimax 100, it has reduced recoil to automatically fire 12 gauge rounds at once without loss of accuracy. Can use 8 shell box magazine or a 20 ~ 32 shell drum magazine.』

It was the same automatic shotgun that appeared in a certain action movie, famous for its firepower at close range.

— “Boss. It’s Soo Min.”

Kwang Hwi, who was about to leave the helicopter, stopped. He heard Soo Min from a separate radio he used solely for the operation. The second radio used a different channel from the one connected to the Blue House.

— “Right now...”

Listening to Soo Min’s report, Kwang Hwi made a grim face.

“Boss! We found a pathway connected to the bunker!”

“Let’s go.”

Kwang Hwi and his subordinates led the way. Keku with visible gunshot wounds were scattered everywhere. It was a sign of the skirmish that took place while the soldiers were searching for the basement entrance. They found it relatively quick as it was being forcefully torn apart by the Keku.

The pathway leading to the underground bunker was like a maze. It had many twists and turns. On their first corner, a Keku ambushed them out of nowhere. Soldiers from behind quickly rushed to the front.

“Commander! It’s danger...”

Kwang Hwi simply pulled the trigger and 12 gauge round flew to shred the Keku and the wall behind it. The monster’s blood mixed with the cement powder.

“... or not.”

Rather than their commander, the soldier thought the Keku were in danger. Grinning, Jackson tapped on the soldier's shoulder.

"Who do you think our boss is?"

With the AA-12, Kwang Hwi and his men made quick progress. After walking for a while, the flat tunnel started slanting downward and became steeper.

"We can see the end of the tunnel, boss!"

A wide room greeted them, blocked by a blast proof door that looked thick enough to withstand a nuclear explosion. Sadly, it couldn't do anything about the deep hole being carved right next to it. Keku were sieging the thinner walls with a metal pole. Sensing Kwang Hwi Faction's arrival, they turned their heads. When they spotted the new enemy, the monsters dropped the pole to grab their weapons.

"You think I'll let you?"

The entrance to the bunker quickly turned into a butcher's, the floor and walls covered in black blood. Unable to withstand the rounds, the walls were painted with chunks of flesh from the Keku. An empty drum magazine dropped to the floor, along with an eerie silence. Kwang Hwi waved his hand at the camera on the ceiling.

"You can open up now!"

Immediately after, the door opened. Despite its large size and thickness, the door wasn't slow. Across the entrance, he could see a group of people. Immediately, he recognized a familiar face, the president. A middle aged man standing right next to the president slightly moved forward to cover for the president. The Chief Security Officer's eyes were fixed on the weapons Kwang Hwi and his men possessed. Grinning, Kwang Hwi passed the shotgun he was holding to his subordinate.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. President. I'm Kwang Hwi Baek."

"... Nice to meet you. I'm Shin Myeong Lee."

After the simple greeting, the two shook hands.

"May I ask who they are?"

"A-ah. They are representatives of each party."

The president beckoned the politicians to come and introduce themselves. As expected from a politician, they wore professional smiles while shaking hands. Kwang Hwi shook hands with them without saying a word.

“This is our Chief Security Officer.”

The Chief squinted his eyes.

‘He’s not the type to sit back and issue orders.’

The Chief had combat experience and knew Kwang Hwi was just like him. The man before him had calluses on his hand and smelled of gunpowder mixed with sweat.

Kwang Hwi swept his eyes across the group of politicians. The Chief was immediately filled with a strange sense of uneasiness.

‘Why?’

Then he realized that Kwang Hwi’s eyes were filled with murderous intent.

“Wait...”

Kwang Hwi grabbed his Glock 17 from the leg holster. His subordinates from behind pulled out their personal firearm and pointed it at the politicians. Even for the experienced Chief, it all happened in a flash. Soon after, gunshots rang out.

Chapter 43. Got It

The president trembled in fear as the security guards that were protecting him fell to the floor. The Chief Security Officer had also collapsed after being shot in the heart. In a threatening manner, Kwang Hwi pointed his Glock at the politicians.

“President, move aside.”

The president vacantly looked at the dead security guards. Jackson, who was standing next to Kwang Hwi, stepped forward to pull the president away. His other subordinates pointed their guns at the group to make sure they didn’t make any sudden movements. At gunpoint, the politicians became pale.

“W-wait!”

“Hey!”

Shots were fired and blood spewed from the two politicians as they also collapsed. Red blood oozed from their heads, forming a puddle as it mixed with the Keku’s black blood. Regaining his senses, the president shouted.

“W-what are you doing?! Didn’t we agree to a deal?!”

“Yeah, we did.”

“Then why?!”

Kwang Hwi furrowed his brows.

“Are you really asking because you don’t know anything?”

Silently staring at the president, Kwang Hwi extended his arm and Jackson passed him a smart pad. After tapping on the device a few times, he passed the smart pad to the president.

“Will you still say you don’t know anything?”

On screen, it displayed a live video feed of captured men. The men wore black clothes to hide their identity, but they looked like they were suffering from injuries. Their blood drenched the floor, clothes, dagger, and wires they carried.

“You sure are assertive for attempting burglary at an empty house.”

The president bit his lips. He had proceeded with the secret plan after confirming with the satellite that Kwang Hwi Faction’s base was nearly empty. He just happened to have special forces hiding in the underground bunker right below the Uijeongbu base. While they didn’t have guns, all members were experienced fighters. Knowing this, the president thought they had a good chance to loot the HQ, but he didn’t think the plan would fail.

“You injured my men and even killed some. Despite doing so, you dare to raise your voice against me?”

Kwang Hwi didn’t yell, but rage seeped from his voice. Naturally, Kwang Hwi never intended to let the president go. He wanted to acquire some new recruits. That’s why he agreed to the unfavorable conditions the president offered. However, he didn’t think the president would plot something behind his back, killing his men. With great effort, he calmed himself and remembered the original objective.

“Now that it comes down to this, we’ll take everything from you.”

“W-what do you plan to do with me?!”

“Don’t worry. We don’t plan to kill you or torture you. You’ll become something like the Emperor of Japan.”

“Emperor... of Japan?”

‘A Japanese Emperor? No way, he wouldn’t?!’

The president face became dark.

“We have already acquired the necessary strength. Now that we have you, the president of South Korea, we obtained the justification. This means that we’re the only power in this era that have obtained both strength and a cause.”

Kwang Hwi smiled inwardly. Now that he had the president, it became much easier to grow his influence. It was going to be easy to win over the people and have them surrender. He could even find hidden facilities to re-establish and absorb them into the Kwang Hwi Faction. Existing soldiers of the ROK Armed Forces would join the Kwang Hwi Faction without making a fuss. As for the president, he was trembling from the humiliation of becoming a puppet.

“H-how cruel!”

Kwang Hwi ignored the sharp look the president gave and started walking away.

“We’re leaving this place.”

He looked at the Security Chief Officer who was shot and lying on the floor.

“I don’t want to hear about him coming back to life. Make sure he stays dead.”

The soldiers subdued all the survivors, excluding the president. Most survivors were staff working at the Blue House. Kwang Hwi planned to win over them at a later date. He didn’t have a good reason to kill all of the politicians as they couldn’t revolt like the security guards. If he couldn’t reconcile with them, he would just send them to the farm. It was up to them to take the opportunity he offered.

The remaining soldiers went to confirm the security guards were dead because they couldn’t know if someone was wearing a bulletproof vest. Pressing their guns to the heads of the men lying on the floor, the soldiers pulled their triggers. In the meantime, Kwang Hwi’s subordinates protected the president. They treated him as a precious good.

“Sitrep.”

— “Monsters outside of the Blue House are being attracted by the gunshots, but their numbers aren’t threatening. It’s safe to come out.”

“Confirmed. We’ll move the package.”

Kwang Hwi and his men exited the corridor and arrived above ground. It was noisy outside as there were monsters charging at the Blue House and helicopters shooting at them.

“Send the survivors and the president to Mi-26.”

Soldiers shooting near the landing site began to retreat one by one. The Dragonflies moved diligently to buy them time.

— “Mi-26 ready to take off!”

“Go first.”

The large helicopter slowly rose into the sky. Unlike the quiet Dragonfly, the rotor blades of the Mi-26 produced loud noises. Following Mi-26, other helicopters also hurried up to the sky. Just after Kwang Hwi got on his helicopter, monsters he had never seen before appeared. He aimed his shotgun toward the monsters and fired. 12 gauge rounds penetrated through the monster’s skin and flesh without resistance and tore apart their internal organs. The closest ones were practically shredded to death as red shells fell on top of their corpses. Then, the last Dragonfly rose into the sky.

— “Boss!”

“What’s the matter?”

— “An unidentified flying object is approaching us from the rear.”

“UFO?”

Holding onto the safety rails, Kwang Hwi looked outside. He could barely see a black line on the other side.

“Raise the speed.”

The helicopters raised their speed. Leaning forward, they navigated through the sky. The dashboard displayed the speed exceeding 250 km/h. Fortunately, the black line seemed to have difficulty keeping up with the helicopter, and the distance was no longer narrowing. The problem was that a new silhouette appeared above the black line. Despite the distance, one could easily notice its massive size.

— “A new object appeared on radar! It’s a large one!”

“What?”

Kwang Hwi recalled the giant bird monster that triggered the emergency mission.

— “It’s getting closer!”

The maximum speed of the helicopter was 280 km/h. Despite so, the monster bird was quickly closing the gap. In response, the pilot spoke out of concern.

— “Boss, at this rate it’ll catch up to us.”

Kwang Hwi didn’t panic. Rather, he looked around and confirmed his current location.

— “Boss?”

“Don’t worry.”

Kwang Hwi changed the radio channel.

“Pansir.”

— “Pansir, waiting for orders.”

“There’s currently a giant bird following us from behind. Were you able to confirm it?”

After a momentary silence, Kwang Hwi heard a response.

— “Yes! We’ve confirmed the coordinates.”

“Shoot it down.”

— “Roger that. Pansir. Target Lock. Missile... fire!”

From the launch tube, a 57E6 missile shot forward. It was 3.2 meters long and capable of reaching 1300 m/s. As it soared through the sky, it covered great distances and quickly reached its target. Right behind it, another missile was following its tail. Late to realize its being attacked, the monster bird hurried to evade the missiles. Betraying its massive body, the bird was quite agile.

The first missile barely grazed past the monster. However, the missile was designated to explode on command. The explosion engulfed the monster’s vision, creating a smokescreen. From the smokescreen, the second missile emerged and flew towards its target. It hit the target and the 90kg missile swallowed the monster bird. The bird flapped its wings and wobbled. More missiles arrived on time, penetrating the monster’s back. As explosions continued, the monster disappeared within the black smoke. With one last shriek, its dismembered body fell to the ground..

『You have defeated the ‘Giant Bett.’』

『You have obtained 200,000 MP.』

『You have defeated a member of the Armata family.』

『Armata will now be taking action personally, despite the hassle.』

『As a reward, you have obtained 200,000 MP.』

— “Target eliminated!”

With a sour face, Kwang Hwi closed the notifications.

‘That giant bird was just a pet?’

Angered by the death of their leader, the other birds screeched. They didn’t seem to have any intentions of running away, as they frantically flapped their wings. The distance started closing.

— “Boss! Shouldn’t we take care of the ones following us? They don’t look like they’ll give up.”

After a thought, Kwang Hwi nodded. He concluded that if they were to chase him back to HQ, there was a possibility he could suffer unnecessary losses. It was best to take care of them now and then return.

“Two Dragonflies will continue to escort the Mi-26. The rest will turn to engage with the enemy from behind.”

— “Understood.”

Dragonflies turned their heads, including the one Kwang Hwi rode. They faced the monster birds and charged at them.

“Use the Hydra rockets and proceed with the autocannons.”

— “Missile away!”

In unison, the Dragonflies spat Hydra rockets which left a trail of white smoke in the clear blue sky. Perhaps due to their extreme hostility, the monsters did not turn their backs even after spotting the missiles. It was certainly good for the Kwang Hwi Faction

as the monsters flew straight to their deaths. Fireworks erupted in the sky, swallowing the Bett. The damage was amplified by the fact that the monsters stuck close to each other. Each explosion left an empty gap in the black line they formed.

『You have defeated 10 Bett faster than anybody else in the world.』

『As a reward....』

『You have defeated 100 Bett faster than anybody else in the world.』

『As a reward....』

『You have defeated 200 Bett faster than anybody else in the world.』

『As a reward....』

After exhausting their supply of Hydra rockets, the Dragonflies proceeded to attack with their autocannons. While the autocannons lacked the explosive firepower of the rockets, they were still more than enough to deal with the leftovers. The bird monsters were drilled with holes. Black blood gushed from their wounds and its foul stench pricked Kwang Hwi's nose. Despite the one-sided carnage, the monsters didn't give up and continued to rush at them.

"Hurricane duo, it's your time to debut."

— "Yes, boss!"

Seung Chan and Jin Hyun extended their arms towards the Bett.

"Attack separately."

— "Roger."

Invisible blades shot from Seung Chan's hand, slicing the Bett in front. Each attack hit the vital spots as he had better control of his power after the practice. The monsters had their wings sliced apart and their eyes split in half. In contrast, Jin Hyun released a powerful wind from his hand. The Bett which frantically tried to close the gap were being pushed back. Surprised by the sudden phenomenon, they flapped their wings even harder. However, they couldn't win against the wind pressure. Given the window of opportunity, Dragonflies shot down the ones that were slowed.

Kwang Hwi's Dragonfly, which was flying in place, quickly flew up. A monster had attempted a suicide attack and collided with the helicopter skid, shaking the helicopter. Checking that his safety belt was on, Kwang Hwi pulled out his AA-12. He fired and the monster let out a final cry before falling. Even as the helicopter shook, Kwang Hwi fired with great precision at the incoming monsters. On one corner of his eye, notifications of his achievement continued to appear. When the helicopters almost ran out of ammunition, the Kwang Hwi Faction had completed subjugated the monster horde. On command, each unit reported their condition.

— "Mi-26 and the two escorting units have safely arrived at Uijeongbu forward operating base."

— "Portion of Dragonfly-2's front glass shattered."

— "Vertical tail of Dragonfly-4 slightly damaged."

Thankfully, none were taken out or seriously damaged. Naturally, no casualties were reported.

"Let's return to base."

Chapter 44
44. Use It

Armata's eyes widened. A bat like monster appeared in front of him, flapping its wings. It had just returned after engaging with the Kwang Hwi Faction. Meeting Armata's eyes, the Bett lowered its head.

"What happened?" Armata asked. He pointed toward a spot and the Bett carefully landed there. Soon after, the monster transferred memories of what it had witnessed to Armata. As if he had seen it in person, vivid images flashed past Armata's eyes.

He saw the humans riding something and flying toward the building with blue tiles. It was an open territory he had given to the Keku so that they could settle in. However, the lack of obstacles made it difficult for the monsters to find shelter against the flying objects that spat fire. Before they could even counterattack, the Keku were slaughtered.

Armata thought that the long range weapons that humans possessed were too powerful. All that Keku had were crossbows or blunt weapons to throw. Their defeat was a natural outcome.

He saw the humans land on the ground and disappear into the building. Soon after, they reemerged with new faces and took off. While the Bett chased after the humans and engaged in another fight, they were completely annihilated. Only a small one managed to survive.

"Tsk."

After seeing what had happened, Armata gnashed his teeth. He thought that if he put a pile of Mud Golems to block all exit paths, the humans wouldn't be able to leave the city. Never did he expect them to ride flying vehicles. If he could, Armata wanted to go after the humans and crush them under his feet. However, he couldn't do that right now. If he were to leave his current position, the dimensional transporter would collapse and his remaining comrades wouldn't be able to cross worlds.

From the sound of a whimper, Armata was snapped back to reality. He raised his head and found a Bett looking at him with glittering eyes, filled with anticipation.

"You did great."

A blue aura sparked from his fingertip and Armata carefully caressed the Bett with it. In response, the Bett rubbed its head against the finger with affection. Then, Armata opened his mouth and a soundless reverberation headed towards the small bat.

"r■■■■n■■■■z■■■■k■■■■g■■■■f■■■■f■■■■r■■■■f■■■■k."

In response, the blue aura swallowed the Bett. The monster rapidly grew in size, going through multiple stages of instantaneous growth. Its wings that produced feeble winds were now causing strong gales. Its cute appearance disappeared and was replaced by a dignified look. Long horns grew on its forehead, distinguishing it from the Giant Bett the Kwang Hwi Faction had defeated. Its horns emitted a blue light, while the blue aura wrapping around the monster slowly disappeared. Soon after, the small and weak Bett was nowhere to be seen. Instead, a large creature sat in front of Armata. After receiving Armata's power to evolve into a Giant Bett, the monster bowed to its master.

"Now, go."

The Giant Bett flew into the sky. Seeing that, Armata waved his hand in the air. Above him, odd symbols appeared once again.

'They can fly? Then, I'll make it harder for them.'

"Try flying now."

Armata grinned, flashing his teeth.

After capturing the president, Kwang Hwi stayed at the Uijeongbu forward operating base before returning back to the Dongducheon HQ. His schedule was hectic. Once he returned to HQ, he attended the funeral for the men who had died for him and then discussed how to utilize the captured president.

"We should milk everything out of him we can."

"I agree!"

"Scrap every ounce of his flesh, down to the bones."

Kwang Hwi agreed with his subordinates' sentiment. He had always intended to do so when they went to pick up the president.

"Are there any broadcasting stations in Dongducheon, Yangju, and Uijeongbu?"

"We would need to confirm it, but there should be one."

"Find one and put the president to use."

The president's existence allowed the Kwang Hwi Faction to strengthen its cause. Although the world had been overrun by monsters, the citizens wouldn't ignore the representative they had elected.

Up to this point, his militia had been ruling over the people with military power. From here on, it was going to be reborn as a legitimate power of the Korean Peninsula. The president was not just a pretty face. He was a puppet controlled by the Kwang Hwi Faction. Once his use was gone, there was no need to keep him alive.

“Do you have the laptop?”

“It’s here.”

Soo Min carefully removed the laptop from his thick bag and placed it on top of the desk. Unlike the regular laptops that were thin and slim, this one in particular was thick and sturdy looking. It even had the Blue House’s logo in black and white.

“The Blue House staff cooperated with our technician to remove and replace the president’s access.”

“Soo Min, grant yourself an access too. If I’m not here, you’ll need to use this in my place.”

“Understood.”

Kwang Hwi put his hand on the laptop’s touchpad. With a flash, his palm was being scanned. After verification, the laptop automatically turned on and its screen became bright.

[Welcome, Commander Kwang Hwi Baek.]

[You can use Speech Recognition, Direct Search, and other features to work on the tasks you want.]

A unique interface greeted Kwang Hwi.

“Satellite.”

[Speech Recognition Keyword : Satellite]

[Searching for task...]

[Currently connected satellites]

[Heaven’s Eye Reconnaissance Satellite]

– A spy satellite in sun-synchronous orbit that observes the Earth.

[Heaven’s Ear Military Communications Satellite]

– Satellite in geostationary orbit. Deployed to ensure smooth communication system for the ROK Armed Forces.

“Current location of Baengnyeongdo-class.”

[Dokdo-class Amphibious Assault Ship, Baengnyeongdo (LPH-6113)]

- Location : 100km off the coast of Jeju Island.
- Status : Limited operations.
- Weapons : None.

“What? Jeju Island? These bastards lied to us.”

“Sons of bitches!” exclaimed Jackson.

The notebook had many capabilities. It had removed the facility lock placed on the underground military and granted Kwang Hwi access to the satellite. He could now find and control any military or government facilities in the country.

“I like it.”

It was similar to the nuclear button carried by the president of the United States. As a matter of fact, it was highly likely that nuclear weapons were damaged beyond use. If so, it was better to have the notebook rather than a weapon that lost its functionality.

“We should be able to smoothly absorb the ROK Armed Forces. By doing so, we’ll be able to recruit all the talented people we need,” said Soo Min.

From Kwang Hwi Faction’s standpoint, the president was a figure of hatred and love who served his purpose all too well. If it wasn’t for that, he would have killed the president for taking away the lives of his loyal men.

“For the time being, focus on stabilizing our internal structure.”

“Yes, sir.”

Seoul had a population of 10 million people. The metropolis was now overrun by monsters. The men did not know how many monsters or survivors were at Seoul. Given that they barely had enough people to maintain current operations, trying to eat Seoul now would only make their stomach burst open. Not to mention that once they absorbed Seoul, they needed personnel to train the new recruits. While it was impossible to take in all of Seoul, it was necessary to gain access to the northern part.

“To avoid problems, we should secure Paju and Yeoncheon County.”

Both territories were bordering North Korea. They were a must get locations for the Kwang Hwi Faction which needed to bolster its strength. To fend off against an invasion from the North, the best military facilities were located there. If the Kwang Hwi Faction were to secure them, they didn’t need to worry about their backs and could focus on expanding south.

“Isn’t Pocheon also a military area?”

“We’ll visit Paju and Yeoncheon County first. We can get Goyang and Pocheon City later. For now, use the president as a propaganda device and then double check the government and military facilities in our territory.”

“Understood.”

— “Greeting to all survivors. This is the Kwang Hwi Faction’s radio broadcast on 108.5 MHZ. On the 22nd, the Kwang Hwi Faction rescued the president from an underground bunker at the Blue House. President Shin Myeong Lee praised the Kwang Hwi Faction for its hard work in restoring the Korean Peninsula during its lowest time.”

“Huh? What was that?”

“Pardon?”

“Increase the volume!”

The Sergeant Major next to the radio hurried to raise the radio’s volume.

“Did they just say the president?”

“Y-yes!”

The gathered men looked at each other in astonishment. While they have been keen to follow the radio broadcasts by the Kwang Hwi Faction, this was the first time they heard the news about the president.

“Did they... really rescue the president?”

“There should have been a lot of monsters in Seoul. How were they able to break past all of that and safely reach the Blue House?”

— “President Lee has issued a public statement to all citizens that are currently hiding. Please listen.”

— “Dear citizens, how have you been? I’m the president of the Republic of Korea, Shin Myeong Lee. The past month was no different from hell. All weapons we possessed had broken. Due to this, our military could not respond properly to the crisis. Unidentified monsters stomped over our soil and brutally slaughtered our citizens. Seeing it pained my heart. I felt so bad, at one point I thought it would be better to just die. Thankfully, I found a new ray of hope.”

The military soldiers held their breath as they listened to the radio broadcast. For an entire month, they hadn't heard or received any orders from the higher ups. Naturally, they thought the president, their commander-in-chief, had died.

— “The Kwang Hwi Faction. They saved the powerless me trapped at the underground bunker and gave me a new hope. Hope that we could return to our peaceful world without monsters.”

Silence ensued the shelter, only to be interrupted by the sound of someone swallowing their saliva.

— “My dear citizens. We plan to recreate the Republic of Korea with the Kwang Hwi Faction. Our first mission is to reclaim the northern part of Gyeonggi Province. Very soon, Kwang Hwi Faction will conduct military operations at Pocheon and Yeoncheon County. Please lend us a hand in creating a new Republic of Korea during this time of crisis. Kwang Hwi Faction will always welcome citizens and military soldiers alike. Thank you.”

The broadcast ended soon after the president's speech. In return, the military soldiers discussed among themselves. They didn't have anything better to do as they were essentially trapped in the shelter.

“The voice does sound familiar. Maybe it's not fake.”

“How can you decide with just that?”

Suddenly, the soldiers heard a knock. The noisy shelter became quiet once again until the interim commander issued an order.

“Corporal Kim, check the cameras! As for the rest, be combat ready!”

“Yes, sir!”

Soldiers rushed to pick up bayonets and blunt weapons that were placed nearby. Their primary arms had rusted, so all they could use were these. After checking the visuals, Corporal Kim yelled.

“T-there are armed soldiers!”

“Armed?”

The Captain looked at the screen. Just like what Corporal Kim said, there was an armed group waiting in front of the entrance. Unlike the ROK Armed Forces, they wore a black military uniform and carried various equipment typical soldiers could never get hold of.

“W-What do we do, sir?”

The Captain couldn't answer. Biting onto his lips, he grabbed the walkie-talkie and pushed on the transmission button.

"Who is it? This is a military shelter. It's off-limits to unauthorized personnel."

— "We from the Kwang Hwi Faction. Under the president's order, we are rescuing surviving soldiers. Please open the gate."

Hearing what the Kwang Hwi Faction had said, the shelter became noisy once again. They still couldn't believe the news.

"R-rescue?"

"Under the president's order?"

"Everyone quiet!"

After calming the soldiers, the Captain pushed to talk once again.

"I'm sorry, but we would need to verify the legitimacy of that order."

As if they were expecting it, the commanding officer from the Kwang Hwi Faction nodded his head.

"Smartpad," he ordered.

A soldier from behind pulled out a smartpad and passed it to the officer. The officer turned the smartpad so that those in the military shelter could see. On screen, a tired looking president was present. Unconsciously, the Captain saluted.

"M-Mr. President! Captain Sang Hoon Lee present!"

— "Nice to see you, Captain. I'm President Shin Myeong Lee. These are our allies, so don't be afraid. Open the gate. We'll move you to a new HQ so that you can all rest until we assign you a new mission."

"U-understood! We will immediately open the gate!"

The Captain could tell that this was not a pre-recorded video as the president was able to recall his name. Immediately, he pushed on the switch. The orange warning light flashed as the iron gate opened.

Chapter 45. Operation Paju

[Combat Force Info]

*Name

– Kwang Hwi Faction (See Symbols)

*Commander

– Kwang Hwi Baek (Top Status)

*Possession of Areas

- Republic of Korea, Dongducheon City, Gyeonggi-do Province (HQ)
- Republic of Korea, Yangju City, Gyeonggi-do
- Republic of Korea, Uijeongbu City, Gyeonggi-do

*Total Troops

– 303 (+1)

*Possession of Equipment

- 2 K-9 Self Propelled Guns (Top)
- 5 Medium Namer Armoured Personnel Carriers | APC (Top)
- 2 Merkava Mk.4 Tanks (Top)
- 1~10 Light Tactical Vehicles (Top)
- 5 Medium Tactical Vehicles (Top)
- IAI Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Heron | UAV Heron (Top)
- Night Intruder-300 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Heron | UAV Heron (Top)
- Pantsir missile system S-1 (Top)
- Mi-26 Cargo Helicopter (Top)
- 1~8 AH-8 Little Birds (Top)

In the past few days, the size of the Kwang Hwi Faction had increased.

Using the President's laptop terminal, shelters and facilities were found throughout Dongducheon and Yangju—many facilities.

Among them, the surviving soldiers were distributed to different forces and facilities, ranging from only a couple soldiers to a few dozen. The total number of people in the Kwang Hwi Faction increased by around 100. In some cases, they weren't able to join immediately. The Kwang Hwi Faction utilized the President's order, which had been written in advance. Although the world was ruined, the name of the commander in chief remained unexpectedly powerful and useful.

They also gained a significant amount of useful equipment. This was mainly due to the variety of roles of the soldiers that had joined. For example, soldiers who had operated K-9 Self Propelled Guns. These were common in the old Korean military, with some having over 10 years of maintenance just to keep them in good working condition. The executives, officers, and soldiers had continued to use them because they remained reliable.

However, because of the increase in their human resources, equipment was becoming scarce, even after factoring in what they had gained. The Kwang Hwi Faction had been deploying more armored vehicles and distributing more equipment.

Last time, Kwang Hwi had bought an extra Mercaba tank, which was a major contributor to the removal of Armata's power, so the number of Namer APC's increased. Apart from the UAV Herons found earlier, the RQ-101 Falcon Hawker was found at a new facility. It was 180 kilometers worse than Heron, which had a maximum operational distance of 3300 km, but it was always better to have more UAV's.

A loud, rumbling sound filled Kwang Hwi's ears.

There was a massive march happening in the city, including the transportation of a large number of trucks and various types of heavy equipment in the lineup.

The survivors in the buildings carefully drew back the curtains to look outside. The parade of Kwang Hwi Faction troops exited the center of the city and headed to the highway.

[▲PyongYang] [▲Kesong]

It was telling him that they were getting closer to North Korea.

-“Squad Leader? We are entering Tongil Bridge soon.”

-“Confirmed.”

The Kwang Hwi Faction was heading toward the Inter-Korean Immigration Office.

Located past Tongil Bridge, you could get to North Korea by passing through the entrance gate.

-“Attention all units. This is your Squad Leader.”

-“Before we take over the city of Paju, we are going to block off the land connected to

North Korea. This will prevent monsters from North Korea from running after and attacking us. As soon as we finish the blockade, we will enter into Paju. This is not an advance against North Korea. We are only blocking the way, just in case.”

[The gateway of Tongil!]

[Preparing Paju for unification]

There were usually armed military police waiting at the gateway. But after the start of the end of the world, Kwang Hwi could only imagine where they had gone. The large amount of dirt and dust covering things was a testament to the fact that it had been some time since anyone had last been here.

On the road, rusty guns that seemed to have been carried by the military police were thrown away.

With a rumble, a bulldozer drove past Kwang Hwi. It lowered its digger and drove forward. The barrier that blocked the road wasn't able to withstand the force and was pushed back. Other vehicles of the Kwang Hwi Faction followed the path that the bulldozer broke through. Four wide lanes welcomed them on the highway.

After crossing Tongil Bridge, an entrance gate that was similar to the one at the highway came into view. Unlike IC gates on expressways, thick iron doors were installed in both directions. Even during this chaos, someone must have locked all the doors.

The armored vehicle stopped at the entrance gate.

“Start the blockade.”

-“Yes sir! Members, get off.”

Dozens of soldiers of the Kwang Hwi Faction appeared. Today, he was the least armed of them all.

The advance team began trying to force the tightly closed gates to open. Fortunately, there was nothing more than a simple lock keeping the gates shut, so there was no need for the hassle. After a few moments, the gates flung open.

Passing through, the soldiers of the Kwang Hwi Faction carried large boxes with them. One they were a reasonable distance from the gate, these soldiers carefully opened the boxes.

The senior member of the group raised his voice.

“Everyone remembers, right? The most important thing is safety.”

The soldiers that were watching their senior nodded.

“If you don't know, just ask. Our first priority is to keep you all safe.”

“Yes sir!”

The soldiers took off the covers of their respective boxes; they were filled with landmines. The usually expressionless Kwang Hwi Faction soldiers were currently

visibly nervous. They had been told the mines were safe until their safety devices were released, but if even a single one of them exploded, they would all get blown sky high.

The soldiers carefully picked up the land mines and started to install them. The rules for their installation were daily straightforward. They would leave a clear passage in the center, while installing the landmines on either side.

The anti-tank mine was centered around anti-tank mines and distributed in a semi-circular manner.

.....

— Passage —

.....

All of the anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines were used, just in case there were a large number of enemies.

While the soldiers were slowly working on the mines, in the back, shipping containers were being installed.

“Slowly! Good! Like that!”

Rich Stacker, who was active in the early days, had come to help pile up the shipping containers. Luckily, it did not take too much time since the road they were blocking was not wide. Three containers were lined up in a row and two more were stacked on top of them.

The Kwang Hwi Faction soldiers who remained at the gate were building signs near the gateway and Tongil Bridge.

[Warning! No Trespassing!]

[Landmines are buried to prevent monsters from entering.]

[The Kwang Hwi Faction is monitoring the surrounding area. Unauthorized access is prohibited.]

In one hour, the shipping container wall was complete. Because of the container wall blocking them, any monsters that came this way would not be able to pass. Afterward, the surveillance facilities were scheduled to monitor it at all times. These facilities were only active for as long as they were supplied with electricity, but the cost was worth the added security.

“Squad Leader, the blockade is complete.”

“What about the Falcon Reconnaissance?”

“It is said that the North is quiet. We don’t have to worry about it for the time being.”

“Heavy machinery and transport trucks should be returned. Send an armored vehicle to cover them so that they don’t get lost.”

The heavy machinery and transport trucks departed for Dongducheon, guarded by a lone armored vehicle.

In the meantime, the rest of the soldiers boarded the remaining vehicles.

“SPG.”

-“Yes Squad Leader! It’s a launch controller gun.”

“Fire 3 rounds into the confirmed nest.”

“3 rounds at the nest! Fire!”

Dwarfs were located in the area around Paju. They were a humanoid monster, about the size of an elementary school child. They could move quickly because of their light monkey-like bodies. These things lived together in large groups, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. Around Paju, there were five tribes, with around 500-1000 Dwarfs per tribe.

The SPG fired shells around Dongducheon. These shells traveled a distance of 37 km in an instant.

The ball that the Dwarf kicked flew into the net. Another Dwarf, who was playing goalkeeper, cried out in anguish. Meanwhile, the ones that had just scored were hugging each other and laughing.

However, a sudden whooshing sound caused the Dwarfs that were gathered around to raise their heads. A dark object was falling from the sky.

As it hit the ground, a large boom shook the earth. The explosion of the shell swallowed up the monsters. At the foot of one mangled dwarf body was the ball they were just playing with; it was a human head.

[You have eliminated 10 shorters before anyone else.]

[The reward for your achievement...]

Surprised by the sudden explosion, the dwarves got up to leave. However, before they could take even one step another shell exploded over their heads.

It was another shell shot by the second vehicle. Hundreds and thousands of fragments flew past the Paju Stadium. The monsters hit by the fragments started bleeding and eventually collapsed. The artificial grass was scratched up and sprayed by dirt. Blood from the monsters bodies seeped through into the turf.

[You have eliminated 100 shorters before anyone else.]
[The reward for your achievement...]

[You have eliminated 200 shorters before anyone else.]
[The reward for your achievement...]

[You have eliminated 300 shorters before anyone else.]
[The reward for your achievement...]

Some of the dwarves tried to hide in the tents. A coarse tent made of branches and woven fabric that seems to have been picked up from somewhere. Something like that could not protect against the debris. The weak support broke off. There were countless holes in the tent, which could only block out the wind. The dwarves that were hiding in the tent suffocated under the debris.

[You have eliminated 400 shorters before anyone else.]
[The reward for your achievement...]

[You have eliminated 500 shorters before anyone else.]
[The reward for your achievement...]

-Paju Stadium Nest has been eliminated!

“You will arrive in 3 minutes.”

The Kwang Hwi Faction was receiving reports while running in downtown Paju.

The operation was simple. Since there were monsters in each nest, a self propelled artillery would be fired first. Attack the weak nest and clean it up. The dwarves were too quick so the soldiers didn't get off; they were to engage in combat while on the vehicle.

Medium sized tactical vehicles that are carrying the troops were covered with bullet proof panels. Although boarding could be a little frustrating, they didn't have to worry about getting attacked from somewhere higher. Kwang Hwi was going to shoot from the side.

“Engage in combat once you see them.”

-“Yes sir!”

The Kwang Hwi Faction arrived at the Paju Stadium. At the entrance of the stadium, expressionless dwarves were running out in a hurry. The dwarves stopped after seeing the armored vehicle. The atmosphere suddenly changed due to the overwhelming appearance of the Namer armored vehicle.

A coaxial machine gun fires out 7.62 mm bullets. The bodies of the monsters that stood still from shock collapsed onto the ground. These bullets were stronger than the 5.56 mm bullets used in personal firearms and penetrated the dwarf's bodies and even struck those behind the first line. The dwarves that reacted too late fell in droves.

Seeing a path, Kwang Hwi dodged into the tower's square. He picked up the knife at his waist and started stabbing the bodies. However, he couldn't pierce the hard exterior with the knife. The knife that he was holding was going to slip out of his hands or break before making a dent.

Some nimble dwarves climbed over the rubble and onto the vehicles as if they were rock climbing, but the troops remained inside. Even if they wanted to get in, there was no way to open a door that was locked from the inside. The soldiers in the medium sized tactical vehicle quickly extend their guns outside the small shooting holes.

Even if their bullets couldn't pierce the dwarf's armor, they could still distract them.

The soldiers fired the guns everywhere, overpowering the dwarves with the large amount of bullets peppering them.

The artillery kept hitting the tent that had yet to collapse. The tents that were half down failed to withstand the power of the shells. Some of the dwarves ran to hide themselves in the stadium. The armored car that saw them rotated its turret.

The wall they were behind collapsed after one hit. The dwarves that were hiding were surprised but were torn apart by the oncoming bullets of the machine gun.

In between the loud noises of the guns, the sounds and screams of the dwarves slowly became quiet.

— Ω —

46. Os

[Paju Ecological Park]
[Please Do Not Litter]

The sign was destroyed by the vehicle's grenade attack.

The APCs pursued the dwarves. Realizing they were no match against the brute features of the APCs, the dwarves hurriedly fled without putting up a fight.

The driver of the APC hit the gas. The vehicle accelerated and crushed the dwarves. It met little resistance and left behind unrecognisable piles of crushed flesh in its tracks.

Some dwarves jumped into a nearby small pond in an attempt to avoid the Kwang Hwi Faction. The vehicles which had been driving over the green bushes stopped and shifted their muzzles at once.

Bullets of varying sizes, from 7.62mm to 30mm, shot into the water. Given the shallow depth of the pond, the bullets hit at full force and penetrated the monsters hiding in the pond easily. The initially clean pond became more and more contaminated, its clear waters turning black.

Other dwarves hid amongst the thick bushes. Thanks to this, they were able to avoid being hit by the bullets. However, they could not avoid the vehicles that charged into the ecological park.

Monsters were crushed as they laid low in an attempt to hide, and bodies were sprawled across the area.

“Confirmed destruction of Paju Ecological Park!”

The Kwang Hwi Faction defeated the nests located in the Paju Ecological Park and the Paju Industrial Complex. Initially, all of the troops had gathered together to deal with the situation—however, upon realizing the dwarves’ weak combat capabilities, they separated to divide and conquer.

Only a few of the dwarves had survived the artillery bombing and those few numbers were easily cleaned up by dividing the troops. Even though they were divided, the troops were mechanized infantry armed with machine guns and autocannons—a natural enemy of the dwarves who had no means of penetrating armor.

It was overkill, in a sense.

“What is the progress of the other troops?” Kwang Hwi asked over comms.

“Progress at Paju Stadium has been completed.”

“Progress at Paju Ecological Stadium has also been completed.”

“Assault on Paju LCD Industrial Complex still in progress!”

“Remnant forces at Byeokchoji Arboretum have been successfully suppressed!”

“Progress at Paju Samreung is nearly complete.”

The destruction of the monsters was going smoothly.

Kwang Hwi ordered for the reserves. "Confirmed. Reserves, are you on stand-by?"

"Yes, Commander. Waiting for orders."

"Start rescuing the survivors."

The reserves, who had all been waiting outside of Paju, were now put into action. Hoping to prove just as effective as they were in the Blue House operations, the AH-6 Little Birds, a.k.a. dragonflies, entered into Paju City's airspace.

However, unlike last time, a speaker was now attached to the dragonflies instead of a hydra rocket. The dragonfly helicopters played pre-recorded announcements as they flew around the city of Paju. "The Kwang Hwi Faction has a message for all survivors in Paju City! We are almost done with our operation to eliminate all of the monsters in Paju. Survivors, please join Kwang Hwi Faction if you hear this. We can provide safety, accomodation, meals and medical treatment."

People in hiding stuck out their heads.

The Kwang Hwi Faction slowly went around the city to collect people. The survivors boarded buses that were acquired from another area. Even though they were not vehicles purchased from the Merit Stop, the symbol of the Kwang Hwi Faction was painted on a large scale.

"No need to rush! There are still many seats left!"

"Please maintain order!"

"Commander, this is the reserves. The rescuing of survivors is going smoothly."

The main force led by Kwang Hwi circled a military base of Paju. Paju was one of the frontline regions of South Korea. Therefore, many troops were stationed in Paju in case of an emergency attack from North Korea.

[2nd Armored Brigade 1st Corps]

They first headed towards the armored brigade base, but there wasn't much to be salvaged. APCs and tanks were all damaged and unusable.

"Oh man, if only these were fine..."

"If these were fine, we wouldn't be here, you fool."

They were only able to obtain Light Tactical Vehicles with no weapon attachments and some engineer equipment.

The other bases—1st Division, 9th Division, and 30th Division—were no different. Fortunately, as expected of a highly military-concentrated region, many soldiers were found. 50 new soldiers were added to the combat force even after discharging injured ones and giving them civilian duties.

The Kwang Hwi Faction conquered Paju City within a day. Out of all the operations undertaken thus far, this was the smoothest yet.

[All monsters within Paju City have been eliminated.]

[You have obtained 100,000 MP as a reward.]

[Rumors of the Kwang Hwi Faction are spreading across Northern Gyeonggi Province and Kangwon Province.]

[Gyeonggi Province's Paju 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.]

Kwang Hwi Faction's next target was Yeoncheon County.

Located in the utmost northern part of Gyeonggi Province, Yeoncheon County prided itself as the holder of the lowest population in the province. Neighboring Yeoncheon was Cheolwon County, belonging to Gangwon Province. 98% of the county was off-limits to non-military personnel, but seeing how North Korea seemed to be wiped off the radar, none of that mattered.

The monsters in Yeoncheon County were known as Os. They resembled ostriches, if ostriches had a comb like chickens and sharp feathers encompassing their neck. It was a shame that these monsters flocked in small groups, making it unnecessary to use the SPGs. It would be a waste to use them.

In the end, Kwang Hwi Faction moved in directly to take them out after marking their whereabouts using the UAV.

"Night Intruder, how much farther do we have to go?"

"...turn left now!"

The APC that Kwang Hwi was riding in made a sharp turn. The sudden turn caused the vehicle to graze the side of a building. Pieces of concrete scattered from the impact.

The sudden appearance of the APC Namer caused a ruckus. It was the thickest and hardest-looking APC the Os had encountered thus far. The formidable exterior imposed such fear that the monsters could not think to challenge it. Cawing furiously, the Os turned abruptly and ran.

The bipedal monsters stampeded furiously. They gained distance from the APC. It was unbelievable that such speed was possible with just two legs.

“Quite fast, huh?” Kwang Hwi mused.

The Os were running away, and successfully at that, but he kept his cool. There was no need to be fazed. They might be fast, but they couldn’t outrun bullets.

The gunner operated the machine gun remotely connected to the control panel. The crosshair eventually overlapped one of the running Os.

A ray of light pierced through the atmosphere.

An unlucky Os crumpled, screeching pitifully

Panicked, the other Os worked their legs faster. Veins bulged from their already inflated thighs as if they were going to burst.

The Os steadily gained more distance. However, the average range of the machine gun was 1-2km. The distance the monsters gained wasn’t even close to 1km. The 7.62mm bullets penetrated the Os without mercy.

Suddenly, the Os changed direction.

A stray bullet streaked towards an idle vehicle in the corner. It missed its mark and pierced the window, boring a hole in the car.

The APC followed suit and changed direction as well. Just as it turned the corner, the Os rushed out. This startled the driver. He tightened his grip on the handle.

The Os flew about 5-6m into the air and rushed past the APC, heading in the opposite direction of Kwang Hwi’s forces.

“W- We lost them!” cried the driver.

Kwang Hwi observed the monsters through the exterior camera. He didn’t blame the driver. He radioed the pilot waiting behind him. “Dragonfly 3, it’s your turn.”

The helicopter following the APC proceeded to chase the Os. An APC’s movement was limited as it had to stick to land, but a helicopter followed no such rule. A helicopter created its own rules; after all, the sky was the limit. It just had to watch out for some skyscrapers and utility poles here and there.

“This is Dragonfly 3, target acquired. Engaging target.”

The 25mm autocannon rained down fire. The monsters fell without the chance to even let out a gasp as the cannons found their target. The dead ones brought down their brethren with them as their lifeless bodies crashed into them.

Flames suddenly sparked from the rear end of the Os.

The pilot squinted his eyes to make sure he wasn't seeing things. "Huh?"

The Os' body launched straight into the air. After rocketing dozens of meters into the air, the Os gently landed back on the ground.

"What's wrong?" Kwang Hwi asked.

"Th-There were flames coming out of the targets' asses and... for a bit they flew into the air!"

"They were shitting fire?"

Kwang Hwi zoomed in the footage of the UAV to make sense of what he just heard. The footage showed the Os rocketing themselves into the air. It was as the pilot said. Pillars of fire were blasting out of their bums, just like a jet.

Kwang Hwi wiped his forehead with his palm and ordered calmly, "...huuuh, whatever they're shitting out of their asses, eliminate all targets."

"Roger that."

The pilot came to his senses and pulled the trigger. The autocannons resumed hailing down pain upon the enemy.

The pilot generously fired round after round as if in an attempt to erase what he had just witnessed from his mind.

The Os, using their ultimate move, did their best to gain more distance, but their flames grew weaker and weaker after each use. Despite their fancy efforts, the Os failed to increase their chances of survival against a helicopter. To a helicopter, fire-shitting Os were all the same—all destined to become mincemeat.

Dozens of Os stumbled past Kwang Hwi's APC. Several of them fell under machine gun fire as they neared Kwang Hwi's position. A wrong decision on the Os' part.

Light Tactical Vehicles with heavy machine guns attached to them pursued the Os. The APC driver quickly followed behind.

The newly-found Os pack seemed smaller than the ones they had encountered so far. They looked like chicks yet to have entered adulthood. The little ones' speed failed to

match that of their adult counterparts. The Light Tactical Vehicles were able to catch up and stay toe-to-toe to them.

The Os chicks glared at the vehicles that managed to catch up. The feather covering their necks started to shake. The machine gunner instinctively ducked back into the vehicle. What seemed like normal feathers at first launched out like knives.

But they were no match against the vehicle's armor. The sharp feathers ricocheted off of the vehicle and pierced another Os chick instead.

Squawking, the chick writhed in pain until it was knocked to the ground by a bullet.

Black blood spat across a nearby vehicle. The monsters had fallen for their own trick.

The other Os changed tactics after watching their brethren's blunder.

They jumped and landed on top of the Light Tactical Vehicles. The gunners frantically swirled the machine guns around to aim towards the Os, but their efforts were contested by the Os' sharp claws. Some of the Os managed to catch a piece of the gunners with their claws as a few of them failed to dodge entirely.

The soldiers riding in the passenger seat quickly grabbed their rifles and aimed at the Os. They counterattacked from inside.

Many Os flew back, gushing blood. The rapid gunshots scared off the rest and they jumped off of the vehicles.

The APC Namer that was trailing behind seized the opportunity and fired at the Os. The fire-control system offered pin-point accuracy. One by one, the Os fell as each round exited the barrel.

[All monsters within Yeoncheon County have been eliminated!]

[You have obtained 100,000 MP as a reward.]

[Kwang Hwi Faction's reputation is spreading further in all directions.]

[Nearby monsters will now be cautious of the Kwang Hwi Faction.]

[Armata is scheming up a plan to prevent the Kwang Hwi Faction's advancement into Seoul.]

[Gyeonggi Province's Yeoncheon County 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 —

47. Same Platoon?

The host stepped up to the podium. "We will now begin the promotion ceremony. Candidates, please stand at attention."

The soldiers ceased their whispering and fixed their gaze forward.

"Commander Kwang Hwi Baek is entering!"

All attending troops straightened their backs and stiffened up.

Familiar faces entered Dongducheon City Hall's lobby which was being used as the main headquarters. The commander of the Kwang Hwi Faction, Kwang Hwi Baek himself, and his most trusted executives who have been with him since the beginning were now in plain view.

The pre-recorded fanfare blared out of the speakers.

"To the commander, present arms!"

The soldiers raised their right arm in unison.

Kwang Hwi lightly saluted in return.

"At ease."

The soldiers lowered their arms in perfect sync as if they were one body. Meanwhile, the executives all sat down on seats specifically arranged for them, except Kwang Hwi.

"First off, a few congratulatory words from our commander." The host stepped back and Kwang Hwi took over his position in front of the microphone.

Kwang Hwi tapped on the mic twice to make sure it was working, then opened his mouth. "Candidates, step forward."

Soldiers from the top of each column stepped forward. Unlike the others, these soldiers were wearing their pre-issued service uniform. The insignias on their chests glistened as they reflected rays of sunlight.

"Today, we are here to welcome our newest lieutenants," Kwang Hwi continued. "They are the first to have climbed the ranks of lower enlisted and NCOs, and come out victorious." A warm breeze enveloped the bright candidates. "Are you thinking of the clumsy second lieutenants of the past? Then you are gravely mistaken. Forget the weakness of the past. You are invaluable soldiers, incomparable to them."

During peaceful times, second lieutenants were practically useless. They received the necessary training and education, but their utter lack of experience caused them to underperform on many levels.

But the new lieutenants of the Kwang Hwi Faction were different. They weren't West Point or ROTC by any means, but they were molded through grit and blood from the bottom-up in the field. They were second to none in battling monsters.

And what the world needed most right now was the ability to fight monsters.

Kwang Hwi laid his gaze on the candidates. Their eyes sparkled. Despite their efforts to seem stoic, their excitement and anticipation betrayed them. It was obviously written on their faces. "Today you become commissioned lieutenants, but this is not the end."

As soldiers who started as privates, becoming an officer would be a dream come true, but there were more feats to be achieved. They were just now taking their first steps into becoming officers. They still had a long way to go.

"Will you be satisfied with just being second lieutenants?!"

"No, sir!"

Kwang Hwi shifted his gaze and looked beyond the candidates to the rest of the soldiers. "Will you be satisfied?!"

"NO, SIR!" All of his men in the lobby roared in unison. They didn't need to be addressed to know what Kwang Hwi meant. Theirs was a thunderous voice, echoing throughout the space.

Kwang Hwi roared in response. "Every single one of you can reach this spot! Do not be content! Strive for more! Survive! When all monsters have been eradicated! When peace has been restored! We will be the center of the new world order! Understand?!"

"YES, SIR!"

Satisfied, Kwang Hwi stepped down from the podium and approached the candidates with a smile.

The host hurried to Kwang Hwi's side. He held in his hands the rank badges Kwang Hwi purchased from the <Combat Gear> category in the Merit Shop.

Kwang Hwi pinned the Second Lieutenant badges onto the candidates himself. The candidates shouted their rank and name each time Kwang Hwi's hands touched their uniform.

"Second Lieutenant Sun Mo Yi!"

"Second Lieutenant Eun Hoo Kim!"

"Second Lieutenant Sahng Sup Lim!"

“Second Lieutenant Myun Young Kim!”

“Second Lieutenant Hyun Soo Moon!”

Ten names rang out through the lobby.

Kwang Hwi motioned with his hand after all badges had been pinned. All of his officials rose from their seats. In each of their hands was a small black case. “This is a little promotion gift.”

Engraved onto each case was a candidate’s name. Kwang Hwi opened one of them. A standard-issue Glock-17 was revealed, resting comfortably inside the case.

However, there was a slight difference. Instead of the manufacturer’s name, the candidate’s name, in Korean and English, was engraved onto the weapon. It was one of the many wonderful add-on features of the Merit Shop.

[Yi Sun Mo / 이순모]

On top of that, different color pigments were applied to the weapon, unlike its default counterparts. The distinction was impossible to miss.

Dumbfounded, the candidates received their glocks: their very own personalized pistols, none like them in the whole wide world. They were the ultimate surprise gifts.

Kwang Hwi applauded. The rest of the soldiers behind the candidates followed suit and began to clap as well.

He was confident he made the right choice. All eyes were gleaming with fire, not only the candidates but the soldiers behind them as well. He glanced at his Command System briefly to see that some soldiers had increased amounts of loyalty. Spending 5 MP to gain loyalty had not been a bad deal at all.

“Right! That’s all for today. Everyone, back to your posts! Fall out!” Kwang Hwi dispersed the soldiers back to their places. It was unnecessary to drag out these events; he’d rather let his soldiers celebrate amongst themselves and rest up.

Despite his command for them to fall out, Kwang Hwi’s soldiers left in formation.

Kwang Hwi made his way back to the office in the building.

Jackson was already there, waiting for him. “Boss, I came to give you a report.”

Kwang Hwi, now seated, nodded in response.

“Remember that facility we visited around the time all this shit began?”

“You mean where we got the Heron?”

It was the underground facility where the army general had presented the Heron. Multiple supplies and military vehicles were acquired on top of the Heron from that facility.

“Yep, that place. It was on lockdown under some protocol, but we unlocked it and resetted access authorization as well. It’s completely under our control now.”

This was good news. With the laptop already in hand, their status-checks and control were limited to a bare minimum. But under a more professional facility, operations could be widened exponentially.

“When can we start moving the Heaven’s Eye recon satellite?” Kwang Hwi asked.

“Right this moment... but we don’t exactly have the appropriate talent to control it so please understand if it’s a bit slow. Where do you want it?”

His chin resting on his hand, Kwang Hwi became lost in thought for a moment. “Have it directed towards Seoul.”

“Towards Seoul?”

“Yeah, I got a bad feeling.”

Kwang Hwi still remembered the alert he received after he conquered Yeoncheon County.

[Nearby monsters will now be cautious of the Kwang Hwi Faction.]

[Armata is scheming up a plan to prevent the Kwang Hwi Faction’s advancement into Seoul.]

He wasn’t sure exactly what the enemy was planning, but he couldn’t afford to sit idly by. The least he could do was keep eyes on them and monitor them as much as he could.

“Then we’ll deploy the UAV over Uijeongbu and Seoul.”

A successful resolution was reached, but it was merely one of many reports Kwang Hwi needed to take care of. There were many more matters that needed Kwang Hwi’s attention.

“We secured a large amount of resources from Paju and Yeoncheon,” Jackson continued.

“Food supplies?”

“Food, gear, you name it. We even managed to get a hold of an ARV and a Chinook from one of the bases in Yeoncheon.”

“An ARV and a Chinook? What a catch.”

ARV stood for Armored Recovery Vehicle and it possessed the ability to pull damaged armoured and tracked vehicles behind the frontlines for repairs. There was definitely no harm in keeping it. Even if Kwang Hwi was capable of instant repairs through MP, there was no guarantee that he would be aware of all damaged equipment.

The CH-47 Chinook was a transport helicopter often used by the U.S. and its allies. It was a medium-to-large sized heavy-lift helicopter, capable of transporting 33~55 foot soldiers or 13 tons of cargo. But the Kwang Hwi Faction was already in possession of the Mi-26, which was capable of carrying twice as much as that of the Chinook. The only edge the Chinook held over the Mi-26 was that it could be equipped with three machine guns, allowing it to provide limited fire support.

The price of the Chinook in the Merit Shop was an outrageous 8,000,000 Merit Points. Kwang Hwi was able to save 8,000,000 Merit Points.

“Alright then, anything else?”

“The active-duty soldiers we acquired from the two areas are going through training smoothly, but there was something I wanted your opinion on, Commander.”

“And that is?”

“These active-duty guys... we can mix the lower enlisted with our current lower enlisted members. That won't be an issue, but we weren't sure how the NCOs and officers would fit into our ranks.”

If ROK military members were allowed to retain their previous ranks in their transition into the Kwang Hwi Faction, there could be internal issues. Aside from the beginning members of the Kwang Hwi Faction, the organization just recently gained newly commissioned Second Lieutenants.

Despite Jackson's concern, Kwang Hwi responded lightly with an indifferent expression. “Just clump them together based on rank, like batchmates dorming together.”

“**What?** I-I mean, what, sir?”

“Group them together by rank or as close as possible, and our boys can join in when they rank up.” Demoting them was not an option. But then again, so was letting the ones who did nothing but hide order around soldiers. They too needed to build field experience. The most logical solution was implementing the batchmate platoon concept,

courtesy of the ROKA. “Work the shit out of them. No promotions until they rack up the adequate amount of experience.”

“For sure, sir.”

“Did we manage to collect the Unmanned Monitoring System deployed around the MDL?”

“We’ve obtained control over them and we’re currently figuring our way around their overall status. Some of them seem to be malfunctioning though.”

Throughout the Military Demarcation Line which faced North Korea, high-quality CCTVs were deployed under the control of a monitoring system. The system also came with unmanned turrets, but these had wasted away along with all other functioning weapon systems.

“It’s a shame that the mines are useless,” Jackson mused.

“It is too bad. But the monsters aren’t coming this instant so let’s just observe for now. We can always use the SPGs if we confirm monsters approaching.”

The world’s largest number of mines were buried in the DMZ and its vicinity. If the mines were functioning, they could repel fairly large waves of monsters all by themselves.

‘Current MP in possession.’

Small text appeared in front of his eyes in response to his thought.

[Current MP : 1,070,000]

The previous mass purchase of Dragonflies drained 800,000 MP, but they had all been restored after a few conquests and killing a couple thousands of monsters.

“Any equipment we need at this very moment?”

“An Apache for the big guy!”

“ ... ”

Jackson was quick to shut his mouth after shouting with enthusiasm. He saw veins popping out of Kwang Hwi’s forehead. “**No, sir.**”

“...good. Let’s buy actual things we need first, like ammo and other essential consumables.”

Displayed on the bottom of the electronic document was a file that summarized the amount of munitions the Kwang Hwi Faction had spent. The amount was not small by any means. They did skirmish with the enemy at least once every few days so it wasn't a surprise. Fortunately, small weapons munitions were relatively cheap so supplying them wasn't an issue.

"I'll take care of this today so—"

The fizz of static interrupted Kwang Hwi before he could finish. "Commander! Reporting in from the Situation Room!"

Kwang Hwi grabbed the walkie-talkie. "What's up?"

"We caught something on the long-range radar!"

— Ω —

48. Preemptive Strike

"What do you mean? Be specific."

— We've detected movement in the air headed this way from Seoul. There are approximately 200 of them!

"Did you try contacting them through comms?"

— We got no response.

No radio response? That made things much easier.

"Take them down."

— Roger!

There was no way in hell he would allow strangers to set foot on his base.

— Data link established.

After a few moments, the target's information from the long-range radar was sent to the Pantsir. This Pantsir Missile System, an anti-aircraft artillery vehicle, was the reward for completing the emergency mission.

Although it was quite expensive, its performance reflected its value. Its maximum firing range was around a staggering 20km.

— Target Locked! Fire!

With a boom, a 57E6 missile shot up into the air. Flames burst out of the missile's rear as it sliced across the blue sky, leaving a trail of white smoke behind. At the launch site, clouds of dust and smoke blinded everyone. For a brief moment, the missile seemed to pause mid-air.

A blast rang throughout the air. Right as it stopped, the missile shot off again, raising its altitude. As the second booster came alive, the missile reached its maximum speed in an instant.

It landed right in the center of the spherical unidentified flying object.

The flash from the explosion was bright enough to reach Kwang Hwi's office. The rest of the missiles followed suit in small intervals and found their own spheres to strike.

Thunderous booms sounded in succession, accompanied by black smoke and blazes of light.

– All Hits! Target neutralized!

Although mission success was confirmed on the radar, four new targets popped up. The Pantsir responded in kind, and four missiles soared through the air, piercing the sky one after another. Kwang Hwi's eyes were glued to the radar display that was being transmitted to the office.

A monster disappeared from the radar each time the Pantsir roared.

– We are black on missiles! Switching to the Vulcan rounds!

The Pantsir automatically maneuvered its 2A38M 30mm Autocannon, as it had run out of missiles. The monsters were within 4km of the Pantsir, in the firing range. The autocannon raised its barrel towards the sky, aiming at the monsters who dared challenge its authority.

Streaks of bright red lined the sky. It was a sight to behold; beautiful, almost.

In an instant, the projectiles found their mark, and the flying spheres crumbled into pieces. The Vulcan adjusted its aim and continued to maintain fire superiority. Thick shell casings poured out of the ejection port like raindrops pelting the ground. Once the casings hit the ground, a pleasant melody rang out, only to be buried underneath the symphony of rapid gunfire.

Around 50 monsters were now left from the original 200. Once their numbers deteriorated to such a degree, the monsters began splitting themselves. Little offsprings of the sphere monsters began spreading themselves across the atmosphere, like specks of ink on an empty canvas.

The radar display was soon filled up with little dots. The airborne monstrosity from before, 'Bat', paled slightly in comparison to the massive clump of dots. 50 had become 150 in an instant.

The control operator stuttered in disbelief.

– Th-their numbers have tripled.

Kwang Hwi kept his cool, though. As the commander, he must calm both his nerves and his men.

“Deploy the LPWS.”

– Roger! Deploying LPWS.

The Pantsir was a formidable anti-air vehicle, but it fell short when faced against numerous targets in the sky. So, another anti-aircraft system was needed to make up for its weakness. However, anti-air weapon systems were too costly.

They were expensive even for Kwang Hwi, who had accumulated a significant amount of Merit Points. The LPWS, however, offered a solution. Simply put, it was a Land-based Phalanx Weapon System.

[LPWS]

[The Phalanx, originally installed on warships, was remodeled to befit land-based vehicles and is now ready for land ops. Initially utilizing 20mm cartridges, its recent upgrades now allow it to operate 30mm autocannons, dramatically increasing its firepower. It is fully capable of detecting and responding to small objects such as mortar rounds. Estimated maximum firing range: 2km.]

[Price: 150,000 MP]

The autocannon raised its muzzle and made it rain. In the blink of an eye, the small spheres disintegrated before they could reach the Kwang Hwi Faction's headquarters.

Dust swept across the battlefield, running far as the breeze gave chase. Maybe, the LPWS was a bit too much of an overkill. The dots filling up the radar began to quickly fade away.

150 became 100.

100 became 30.

– Our defenses have been compromised!

Despite the best efforts of the Pantsir and the LPWS, several spheres managed to survive like cockroaches. They found their way into the vicinity of the headquarters. However, the monsters shouldn't have split themselves so close to the base.

The troops on standby quickly aimed their guns towards the spheres, ready to make them pay. Kwang Hwi was observing everything through the action cameras attached to the soldiers. Although it was impossible to tell from the radar, the sphere was composed of mud.

'Mud?'

Mud. It reminded Kwang Hwi of something.

Just as Kwang Hwi was lost in thought, the sphere began to undergo mutations. Its round shape warped as arms grew out. When its arms touched the ground, a pair of rods extended out of its back, acting as its legs.

Even though the head hadn't formed yet, it was already evident what this creature was. It was smaller than the ones that the Kwang Hwi Faction had faced before, but it was definitely a Mud Golem.

Having come to the same conclusion, the field commander hastily hurled out orders, "It's a Mud Golem! Fire!"

As the rounds struck the Mud Golem, the unformed golem began shaking. Clumps of mud even dripped from the golem's gunshot wounds, as if it was bleeding. This version was definitely weaker than its previous brethren, which were highly resistant to small arms.

A grenade launcher blasted the Mud Golem's torso away. The golem trembled on its remaining two legs, but there was no reprieve for it. Another grenade flew towards the golem to end its misery.

It returned to the earth, failing to display the remarkable regeneration ability the previous Mud Golems possessed.

Jackson, who was paying attention to the radio, made an additional report. "Boss, all monsters in HQ have been taken care of.

"Maybe it's because they're smaller, but these ones seem less durable."

The newer Mud Golems dropping from the sky had limited powers. They were smaller than the original and had lower resistance. The original Mud Golems would've brushed aside these rifle attacks. However, these ones were vulnerable to them.

This proved in favor of the Kwang Hwi Faction, as they suffered no casualties.

“Are we linked to the satellite right now by any chance?”

“We’re connected to UAV, which is currently pointed towards Seoul.”

“Connect it to a monitor. Towards Dobong-gu.”

As requested, the bottom camera on the UAV aimed towards Dobong-gu. The golems towards Uijeongbu were holding their ground, not even budging an inch. Kwang Hwi tilted his head in confusion.

‘They’re standing still?’

It was an odd ambush, too ambiguous to push through an opening. If Kwang Hwi was Armata, he would never have done such a meaningless action.

‘Then... a misdirection?’

Kwang Hwi raised his head.

“Let’s check someplace else. Start with the areas bordering Seoul.”

“Then we’ll scan through Goyang City first.”

His bad intuition rarely missed its mark. After around thirty minutes since the camera changed direction, thousands of Mud Golems were spotted walking amidst Goyang City.

The silence of the empty streets was overwhelming. These streets were supposed to be full of life, people, and cars. But now, lost objects, no longer reminiscent of their past, were strewn about both the sidewalk and the road.

At long last, the silence was broken, and the streets miraculously became alive once again. Only this time, the source of the noise and vibrations wasn’t people nor cars. They were Mud Golems.

Each time a golem’s massive foot landed, the ground would shake and the windows of nearby buildings would rattle, as if it was an earthquake. Thousands of golems were acting as one. They stepped in unison, amplifying the effect.

Artillery shells from the K9 SPGs rained down on the Mud Golems’ heads, and the series of explosions demolished their ranks. The golems were reduced to mud, mixing with the ground they were treading on before.

However, the Mud Golems remained indifferent to the destruction and chaos. They continued to march forth like an emotionless machine. It was like looking at dolls—not even a single hint of emotion was visible.

The artillery strike continued on for a long time. Whenever the rounds were exhausted, they would be replenished by the K-10 Ammunition Resupply Vehicle.

Realistically, a decent period was required for the K9 SPG to exhaust all of its default 48 rounds, alongside the 104 rounds provided by a supply vehicle. When the artillery ceased its action, once a tightly strewn pristine formation of the golems was littered with numerous craters.

[You have defeated 700 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]
[You have obtained...]

[You have defeated 800 Mud Golems faster than anybody else in the world.]
[You have obtained...]

Kwang Hwi opened the Merit Shop.

[K307 HEBB 155mm Artillery Shell]
[Designed for the K9 'Thunder' SPG. Equipped with new drag reduction technology, the K307 HEBB is able to travel farther than its previous versions. Maximum firing range is up to 40km and blast radius is up to 30m.]
[Price: 115 MP]

[Bundle purchase is available.]
[x48 bundle price: 5000 MP]
[x96 bundle price: 10000 MP]

Kwang Hwi purchased the 96-rounds bundle. His Merit Points were converted into the shells now laid out in front of him. The loaders on standby proceeded to carry the rounds to their designated SPG.

“Fire when ready.”

“Roger.”

Just because the SPGs were on a break didn't mean that the Kwang Hwi Faction was done with its assault. Rather, two Merkava MK. 4 Tanks were approaching the Mud Golems.

The tanks stopped once the enemy entered their firing range. The required data was already inputted into the control system and a round was loaded into the chamber.

“On the way!”

Deafening blasts echoed in the surroundings as tank rounds fired from the MG253 smoothbore covered the distance of 2km in a flash. The targeted Mud Golem's body shook. A fissure had formed where it was hit.

The golem crumbled without any chance of retaliation, powerless under the might of war machinery. The gunner then switched to HE rounds. When the ammo door opened, half of an HE round revealed itself. The loader grabbed the round, pushed it into the barrel, and screamed, completing the process in one swift motion.

“UP!”

Without pausing, the gunner aimed at its next target. The necessary values were calculated automatically beforehand.

“On the way!”

Each time the tanks spewed fire, golems would fall one by one. Although 120mm was a bit smaller than 155mm, unlike the SPG, a high-angle weapon, a tank shell directly hit its targets. It was more powerful in terms of raw strength.

The Namer APCs refused to let its Merkava compatriots bathe in all of the glory.

While the immense explosions and firepower stole all the enemy's attention, the APCs went around and flanked them from the rear.

The APCs lined up in a straight file, ready to engage and rain hell. All vehicles except defensive carriers were now gathered together.

“Commander, we've reached their backs.”

Kwang Hwi's command was simple.

– Light 'em up.

“You guys hear that? Commander said light 'em the fuck up!”

The Namer APCs blasted their 30mm autocannons at the golems' backs. They weren't as devastating as a high-angle 120mm, but 30mm was more than capable of inflicting pain on the enemy.

The Mud Golems in the rear were torn apart as rounds slapped their backs. Some of them turned around once they realized the presence of another threat. But it was too late. The autocannons had done their jobs already.

What the 30mm autocannons lacked in power, they made up for it in the rate of fire; they were fully capable of firing in auto mode. The APCs took advantage of this feature.

The rain of bullets pelted the approaching Mud Golems. They were like sitting ducks caught in the barrage of autocannon fire.

“Driver! Start backing up slowly!”

The APCs didn't just stand there, though. They moved back to keep their distance, making the golems' efforts to close in on them meaningless. The APCs left piles of mud and brass in their wake each time they backed up.

Amid the whirring of blades, familiar silhouettes rushed past the APCs. The AH-6 LittleBirds had made their appearance. The Dragonflies had ditched their default 25mm autocannons and Hydra rockets to be fully endowed with the Hellfire anti-tank missiles.

The adjustment aimed towards absolute victory.

[AGM-114 Hellfire Missile]

[Anti-tank missile equipped with a percussion fuze. It can reach up to a maximum speed of Mach 1.3, and its name reflects its absolute firepower. Its high speed and piercing capabilities allow it to destroy even third-generation tanks. Being second to none, the Hellfire Missile is the world's best anti-tank missile.]

A distinct whistle sounded in the chaos of autocannon and tank fire. One of the Dragonfly had let loose all of its missiles and raised altitude. The rest of the Dragonflies followed suit and carried out the same actions: exhaust all missiles and take off.

A total of eight aircrafts exhausted their missiles in an instant. Dozens of Hellfires shot through the air, leaving traces of white. Dashes of red and white whizzed toward the golems, and none of the missiles missed their target.

It was destruction and annihilation everywhere, truly proving to be hellfire.

[You have slain more than 1000 Mud Golems.]

[Additional MP will be rewarded for every golem-type monster slain.]

[All monsters within Goyang City have been eliminated.]

[You have obtained 100,000 MP as a reward.]

[Gyeonggi Province's Goyang City is added to the Controlling Area category.]

[It is strongly suggested to deploy troops in the area. If troops are not stationed there, other forces may take over the territory.]

While Kwang Hwi was bombarded with Merit award notifications, one of his executives looked at him with excitement.

“All threats have been neutralized.”

“Good work, everyone.”

Kwang Hwi smiled back and voiced his acknowledgement. They had tided over another monster wave and took control of an additional region.

“We’ll have to clean all this up later.”

“Not anytime soon. It’ll probably stay like this for a while.”

The La Festa area in Ilsan City, where the Mud Golems attacked from, was now an absolute mess. Buildings were in shambles and ruins, and piles of mud decorated the surroundings. However, it was to be expected since hundreds of artillery shells, autocannon rounds, and anti-tank missiles had carpeted the place before.

“What’s our status?”

“No human casualties, thanks to long-range weapons. But our armored vehicles need an overhaul due to overuse.”

Simply put, they had to be disassembled to check everything, part by part.

“Looks like maintenance is gonna have a rough time.”

“It’s good that we have actual engineers this time. We could only do little maintenance before.”

“Although the engineers have to toil for a while, make sure the rest of the troops get a well-deserved break.”

“Yes, Commander.”

— Ω —

49. Don’t mess with us!

In front of the National Museum of Korea in Yongsan lay a pond named ‘Mirror Pond’. It had earned its name from the reflection it gave off of the sky and its surrounding.

The pond was complemented with a blue-roofed gazebo on one side, allowing the visitors to gaze at the beautiful scenery in peace. Below the gazebo, a three-eyed Armata was muttering something with closed eyes, “xkdhffkfk!”

Armata raised his hands from his chest and stretched them towards the sky, as if he was going to hug it. With two eyes still closed, his third eye flashed open.

An invisible shockwave blasted through the area, spreading outwards in a circle. The trees and various plants around the pond shook violently. Buildings and plants reflected on the pond began to fade away. Its effects also reached the pond. It began to dye itself black—dark as ink. As soon as the pond turned completely black, a sizzling sound went off, clear even amid the rustling of leaves.

A dark flame had emerged.

Its heat was so intense that the surrounding temperature began to increase. The black burning flame on top of the water was not only strange but also terrifying. That was not the end of eeriness, though; a faint silhouette was moving inside the flame. Inside the gazebo, Armata opened all three of his eyes.

White skeletons, set off by the black flame, emerged out of the pond. They were not fazed by the intense heat from the flames whatsoever. The undead, without any feelings, had stepped foot in this world.

Armata frowned, his eyes full of contempt while staring at the skeletons.

“Sending the underlings first, huh. How cowardly.”

The skeletons formed a circle around the pond. Each grabbed its spear, shield, or whatever weaponry it had on its back and scanned the surrounding with caution.

One skeleton stood apart from others; it was the commander. Unlike its counterparts, whose bones seemed brittle, this one was much larger and sturdier.

The leader of the skeletons approached Armata inside the gazebo and lowered its head. The greatsword on its back jutted out, enhancing its charisma as the commander.

Armata opened his mouth and asked curtly, “The hell are you supposed to be?”

“Pleased to meet you, Lord Armata. I am Sten, under Lord Bannis.”

“Sten? I’ve heard that name before.” Armata’s head tilted in thought, and his eyes widened at once. “Were you with the Human Alliance?”

“Yes, my Lord. However, my past is no more. I have since been born anew under the graceful arms of Lord Bannis.”

“Hah!”

Armata chuckled in disbelief. He might be a subordinate of an ally, but he was once an infamous enemy feared by many in the past. Even the ignorant and reckless Kekus would turn tail when facing Sten.

How such a figure died and turned undead was a mystery, and it was quite baffling, to be honest.

“Right. So, when is Bannis going to show up?”

“Lord Bannis will arrive later with all of his forces... my Lord.”

“Huh! He’s bringing them all?”

“At least that’s what I have been told.”

Armata clicked his tongue in disapproval. “Undeads can be formed here. They’re not worth the trouble.”

“..”

Sten kept silent with his head lowered.

Armata’s irritation crept onto his face. He waved his hand towards Sten, signaling him to go away.

“Alright then. Go tend to your soldiers. I’ll rest for a bit and open the portal again.”

“As you wish, my Lord.” Sten kept his head low as he backed up.

Armata turned his gaze towards the Mirror Pond again. The black flames were still raging, and the pond was plunged into darkness.

“Well, since I started it, I should also finish it.”

The flames grew larger and roared fiercely, as if understanding his words. However, little did Armata know that he was being watched.

The images taken by the Heaven’s Eye Recon Satellite were delivered to Kwang Hwi. At the moment, his core commanders were huddling around the footage. The new changes had them all concerned, as it represented an unknown enemy.

A pond was, simply put, a large puddle of water. But from that large puddle of water, flames and skeletons one would see in movies were rising. And that was not all—the flames were unusually black.

No amount of common sense would be enough to explain the scene unfolding before their eyes. Without the satellite, they wouldn’t even have known that something as ridiculous as this was happening.

Kwang Hwi was aware that nothing about this was normal. In fact, this was far from normal.

[Emergency Mission!]

[Destroy the portal by eliminating Armata.]

[Reward: 2,000,000 MP]

[Failure: Complete annihilation of the Kwang Hwi Faction and rapid spread of chaos across the Republic of Korea]

A second emergency mission was presented to Kwang Hwi, and the reward was a staggering 2,000,000 MP. Given that 300,000 was the most he had received when unlocking a new Category in the Merit Shop, it was clear just how crucial this mission was.

“A dimensional portal?”

The mission description proved that Kwang Hwi and his executives had assumed correctly. The monsters belonged to another world.

“How about a fire mission first? From the Gyeonggi Province Northern Government Building area, they’ll be barely within reach of the SPG.”

The K9 SPGs were conveniently stationed in the Uijeongbu base at the moment.

“Good idea.” Kwang Hwi immediately gave the green signal.

The SPGs were done with maintenance and were on stand-by when the order came down. They immediately raised their guns and prepared the pre-emptive strike.

– Target confirmed. Loading one round.

After Soo Min confirmed that everything was good to go, he turned to Kwang Hwi, who nodded in response.

“Fire!”

The bullet path of the rounds fired by the SPGs was displayed on the digital map. With the speed of the projectiles, the distance of 38km was covered in an instant.

“Huh?”

However, an unforeseen change took place. The rounds disappeared without a trace before the impact zone. The trajectories, now incomplete, also vanished from the map.

“Heron, HQ. Status on impact zone, over.”

A brief pause.

The atmosphere was so tense that seconds felt like hours. The wait was excruciating for everyone in the command center.

– HQ, this is Heron. We must have missed. Negative effect on impact zone, over.

Even the surrounding areas of the Mirror Pond showed no traces of any impact. After calmly observing the whole situation, Kwang Hwi broke the overwhelming silence.

“Ready fire for effect.”

– SPG 1 ready for fire for effect!

– SPG 2 ready as well!

“Fire.”

Six trajectories were now visible on the map as the missiles headed for their targets. The executives held their breath. Every single one of them was wholly focused on the digital map.

– H-HQ! You need to see this!

Live footage was connected to the office as the Heron operator’s cries sounded from the transmitter. The screen showed the impact zone, the Mirror Pond. Out of the corner of the display, a giant bird monster popped out.

“That’s...”

It was a familiar sight for Kwang Hwi and his executives. The monster was similar to the Giant Bett they had taken down with the Pantsir earlier. This one was slightly different, though: it had a horn.

It was no ordinary horn, either, since it gave off a bluish light. What happened next was even more surprising. The bluish light grew in intensity, and explosions suddenly went off in the air.

A total of six explosions sounded, indicating what was happening. All six rounds from the SPGs were cut off in the air. The trajectories simultaneously disappeared from the map as well.

“It... intercepted the... shells?”

This was, of course, not impossible with modern technology. Even the LPWS was more than capable of such a feat. However, that was the case for modern technology. To see a monster do so was baffling, to say the least.

The Kwang Hwi Faction continued to send rounds afterward, but it was futile. They tried waiting it out, but the Giant Bett continued to roam the vicinity.

'An emergency mission indeed, huh.'

Their efforts were useless. So far, none of their tactics had borne any results. It was to be expected, though; things were going a bit too smoothly after all. Some hiccups meant a challenge, and they were certainly up to it.

Kwang Hwi stood up. The executives stared at him as they sat nervously, swallowing their breath.

"The hell are you guys doing? Time to go."

As soon as the siren blared throughout Dongducheon, the soldiers grabbed their gear and rushed out from their downtime.

"Jackson, can you..."

"No need to say it. I got you, Boss."

"You sure?"

Kwang Hwi stared at Jackson, his eyes full of skepticism. Jackson pounded his chest in absolute confidence.

"Trust me. Sir."

Kwang Hwi shook his head as he walked out, equipment in hand.

The whirring of blades stirred up clouds of dust in the air. The Kwang Hwi Faction had mobilized all its helicopters and headed towards the National Museum of Korea. The executive next to Kwang Hwi handed him a smart tablet connected to the UAV.

– They're still coming out!

From the initial hundreds, the skeletons were now over a thousand strong. It was only moments ago that they dotted around the pond here and there. Now, the pond's surroundings were teeming up with them.

– Commander, Giant Bett detected.

“Fire as soon as you lock-on.”

– Roger! Initiating lock-on procedure.

In this operation, eight Dragonflies had been deployed, equipped with 25mm autocannons and Stinger anti-air missiles. The Stinger was preferred over the Hydra to handle the Giant Bett, which had rendered their SPGs useless.

– Lock-on complete... Firing!

Dragonflies lined up in a row and fired missiles in unison in a magnificent display. Amid sharp whistles, eight streaks of white decorated the sky blue canvas. The missiles sped up to 2.2 Mach in an instant.

The Giant Bett circling the museum raised its head and let out a sharp screech. Its instinct was screaming about the impending danger. Something was approaching. Fast. The Giant Bett's horn intensified its blue glow in response.

Its defense didn't disappoint it. The Stinger missiles headed towards the monster blew up midair, three missiles exploding in an instant.

– Firing remaining Stingers.

The cold war machines once again let loose eight missiles, and new white lines formed a beautiful visual before its predecessors could vanish. Thirteen missiles were now baring their fangs at the Giant Bett.

The Giant Bett's horn flashed continuously, and a missile would vanish with each flash. Still, the missiles were too fast to keep up. They rapidly shortened the distance to their target.

The first set of missiles that blew up midway were too far to cause any damage, but the latter few missiles were close enough for the Giant Bett to feel its impact. By the time half of the sixteen missiles were intercepted, it was too late.

The rest of the missiles were now a mere fingertip away from their target. Just one was more than enough to do heavy damage. Unfortunately for the monster, eight missiles charged at it from all angles.

The Giant Bett violently exploded, not even having a chance to let out its final scream.

– Target neutralized!

[You have slain 'Giant Bett'.]

[You have obtained 200,000 MP as a reward.]

[You have defeated a member of the Armata family.]

[You have defeated a unique variation possessing minor levels of fragments. You have obtained 300,000 MP as a reward.]

Just one single monster had gifted them an outrageous 500,000 MP. This Bett was worth 100,000 more than its regular counterpart.

“Armata will know we’re coming now.”

Perhaps the chopper had become lighter after firing the Stingers, but it seemed to move faster. Less than a few minutes later, a green forest began to cover the landscape. They were approaching the National Museum of Korea and the Mirror Pond.

“Proceed to engage immediately.”

The autocannons spat out bright yellow flames, kicking off their direct assault at the Armata family. The bone monsters on the ground, who were cautiously watching the choppers, were reduced to pieces under the heavy fire.

[You are the first person in the world to defeat a 'Skeleton'.]

[You have obtained 500 MP as a reward.]

“The bone freaks will be called Skeletons from now on.”

– Roger, Skeletons in sight.

The Skeletons were dummies, though. They retaliated only after dozens of their comrades were shredded apart. However, their choice of weapon was anything but modern like their foes in the sky.

Bows materialized out of thin air into the Skeletons' hands. Despite being torn apart, the Skeletons remained unwavering and pulled back their bowstrings.

Loud twangs sounded like a sweet melody on the battlefield. The fully taut bows loosened, and the bone arrows were released from their strings. Unlike the invisible bullets, the rain of arrows painted a hellish landscape.

– EVAC! EVAC!

The helicopters carried out evasive maneuvers at once as the aircraft broke even-flight and dodged the arrows with wild movements. The majority of the arrows missed their targets and whizzed past the helicopters. However, the few that did manage to hit did nothing.

The Dragonfly, while it might seem relatively small and weak, was fully equipped with enhanced bulletproof armor capable of fending off 50 caliber bullets. Arrows, let alone rifle rounds, stood no chance against the hard exterior.

“Their ranged weapons are useless! Maintain fire superiority!”

The Dragonflies roamed all over the place. They were like fish in the water and continued to baptize the Skeletons with fire. Although the monsters were still emerging from the pond, the autocannons were much faster in disposing of them.

– Woah, woah!

The point chopper turned sharply. At the same time, Kwang Hwi’s eyes widened in surprise. A Skeleton was flying towards the lead helicopter that Kwang Hwi was on.

It was the undead commander from the first group of Skeletons.

It was Sten.

He was holding a greatsword as big as himself with both hands.

“Kwaahhh!”

The Skeleton leader and his greatsword gave Kwang Hwi goosebumps. For a moment, he was dazed, but he forced his wits together and grabbed the AA-12 on his lap.

The greatsword slashed out the transport door. It was an act to behold—unbelievable, despite seeing it in person.

The wind rushed into the aircraft as it saw an opening. Along with it, a hand, devoid of flesh and blood, reached out to Kwang Hwi. However, Kwang Hwi turned his barrel towards Sten and roared at the top of his lungs.

“Who the fuck do you think you are?!”

A squeeze of Kwang Hwi’s finger gave Sten a warm welcome.

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Chapter 50. New Bastards

The impact from the shotgun shells blasted Sten away from the aircraft. Kwang Hwi squeezed the trigger until the magazine was empty.

Sten crashed into the ground and tumbled violently from the landing. An unfortunate tree was caught in his path, and it snapped in half, scattering dust throughout the air.

“How dare you, mortal!”

Sten quickly drove his greatsword into the earth and stopped himself from sliding further. After regaining his footing, he drew out his greatsword, which had cut deep as the earth failed to hide its inner flesh.

On the other side, the executives frantically confirmed Kwang Hwi’s safety.

– Boss, you good?!

“I’m fine.”

– That bastard went after the commander! Get his ass first!

– Roger!

The Dragonflies encircled Sten.

– Smoke ‘em!

With only a moment’s rest, the autocannons began to spit fire again. The high-caliber bullets tore up Sten’s vicinity without mercy. The harmless trees standing by the side had their branches split into two, and then to dust. Clumps of soil were forcibly dug up and tossed into the air.

Sten braced himself to leap out of the way, but he quickly changed his mind and raised his sword forward. He had decided to stand his ground.

“Shield.”

The magic runes etched into his bones let off a disheartening glow. In the blink of an eye, a dark force field barrier emerged out of thin air, protecting Sten from all directions. A shell landed a second too late and collided with his defense field.

Fortunately for Sten, the magical force field successfully withstood the shell’s firepower.

– He’s got a protective shield.

“Focus all firepower till it breaks.”

– Roger!

Multiple autocannon rounds poured down onto the force field from all angles. The impact of each round started accumulating at an exponential rate. Soon, Sten was forced to back off. The autocannon’s destructive power was stronger than he had imagined.

The seemingly sturdy barrier was reaching its limit under the relentless assault. This became more evident as the dark force field started to lose its opacity. What was initially impossible to see through was now becoming brighter.

Darkness was now a slightly darker grey.

As the color brightened, the cracks in the force field started spreading like a spider's web. While Sten was at the receiving end of a one-sided beating, a few of the choppers landed near the museum.

It was now time for the soldiers to shine. Heavily armed troops disembarked the aircraft and aimed their guns at the nearby Skeletons. The next second, all hell broke loose as the sounds of guns and soldiers' yells shook the air.

The Chinook that was on stand-by in the rear also flew forward. The heavy lifter was carrying a Light Tactical Vehicle by a wire. The helicopter carefully lowered its altitude until the tires of the LTV met the earth.

After confirming a successful landing, the Chinook disabled the wire and took to the skies. Kwang Hwi Faction's soldiers rushed toward the vehicle—one to the driver's seat, the other to the machine gun seat.

"Skeletons approaching from NW!"

Following the driver's call, the gunner, heavy machine gun in hand, squeezed the trigger with all his might.

The Skeletons also responded to melee warfare. They ditched their bows and pulled out their swords while nearing Kwang Hwi's troops. At the same time, the Skeletons gathered together into a small group. Their target: the Light Tactical Vehicle.

However, even though they had high aspirations, to Skeletons, who were nothing but bones, a .50 cal round was overkill. The small force of calcium was eviscerated long before they could even reach the vehicle. Limbs, rib cages, and even skulls were shattered and turned into bone powder. The yellow earth was now turning white.

Meanwhile, the Chinook hadn't left the scene after delivering the Light Tactical Vehicle. Rather, it was still circling the area.

"Opening rear door!"

Gusts of nose-piercing gunpowder smell escaped the rear compartment as the door opened. A soldier, cringing slightly from the gunpowder smell, grabbed hold of the minigun installed at the end of the rear compartment. Once he double-checked the safety rope secured around him, the soldier scanned the scene below.

Thanks to the Chinook operator adjusting its position, they were now in the perfect spot to engage the Skeletons. Without further ado, the gunner pressed down on both levers. The main body's axle in the center supported the minigun as the six barrels initiated their rotation. Gas and the searing flame became one and blasted down fire and fury.

The Skeletons aiming their arrows at the Chinook were, simply put, wiped out. The sight reminded one of a skiff breaking into pieces after crashing into a reef. In a similar manner, bone fragments were sprawled about everywhere.

Hot shell casings poured out of the ejection port and hit the floor with a clang. It was a torrential downpour of brass, one might say.

The might of a minigun capable of spitting 4000 rounds per minute was there for everyone to see. While the Skeletons disintegrated on this side, Sten's magical force field welcomed its own disintegration.

Just as the force field shattered like glass, Sten dove to his side to avoid the hail of bullets. The bullets drew a line on the soil, grazing Sten as it whizzed by.

Once Sten's protection was out of the picture, another chopper quickly turned its nose to join the fray. The chopper leaned slightly to the side and pointed its autocannon towards the bone leader.

Seeing the muzzle pointed at him, Sten quickly raised his greatsword to defend. His weapon was bombarded by the autocannon fire, and a sharp metal sound rang out as faint sparks flew off of the sword.

Sten's fleshless skull formed what seemed to be a frown. His most trusted ally, his sword in which he prided in being the sturdiest one of them all, was beginning to crack. Of course, this heartbreaking shock was only in Sten's mind.

The Kwang Hwi Faction's pilots were experiencing a different type of disbelief: a mere metal blade was able to withstand so much.

The minigun, the annihilator of Skeletons, also turned its barrel towards Sten. Even the choppers taking a brief pause after unloading troops were headed here.

Then came an unrelenting barrage of 7.62mm and 25mm rounds. Sten rushed to change his position after realizing the true gravity of the situation he was in now. But it was too late. No matter how much he moved, he couldn't last more than 3 seconds in a single position.

There was no way that airborne choppers would miss Sten. The trees and statues he used as cover all melted away against the absolute dominance of modern weaponry.

Sten came to another realization: they had gravely underestimated the humans of this world.

Once again, it was another realization that came too late.

“I... I must warn Lord Bannis...!”

A 25mm autocannon round demolished his head before Sten could finish his words. He had done his best to shield his skull, but his arms were already in pieces. His pride, the greatsword, was also riddled with holes.

Like splashing blood, white bone pieces scattered apart into the air. Next, tiny fragments rained down onto the ground. The persistent skeletal body failed to stand any longer and turned to white dust, mixing into the mud.

[You have defeated ‘Skeleton Knight Sten.’]
[You have obtained 200,000 MP.]

[You have defeated a member of the ‘Bannis’ family.]
[You have defeated a figure of renown in their former world. An additional 300,000 MP will be rewarded.]

After witnessing the final moments of Sten, Kwang Hwi turned his head. Under the gazebo attached to the Mirror Pond stood a bizarre-looking creature with three eyes. At the moment, the creature had both his arms forward towards the pond.

Although Kwang Hwi had never seen him before, he instinctively knew this creature.

‘Armata!’

Words failed to explain the dreadful discomfort overwhelming Kwang Hwi. For someone who always managed to maintain his cool no matter how dire the circumstances, this was quite baffling.

Armata, on the other hand, aggressively embraced Kwang Hwi’s gaze.

‘How dare you, puny human!’

What Armata was feeling was different. It was rage. The bottled-up hostility against the man who constantly managed to get in his way was now erupting, inciting him to finish him once and for all. Armata retracted his left arm from his stance.

Despite his desires to crush the humans with all his might, much of his strength was required to maintain the portal. In the end, Armata just waved his left hand around in the air. A complex magic circle was formed out of nowhere.

It was not the end, though. Dark crystals emerged from Armata's body, reaching dozens in numbers.

"Maximize creation speed."

Next, the magic circle glowed brightly.

"Stone Golem, feature settings, Destruction Beam."

The magic circle reacted to Armata's words and vibrated each time he opened his mouth. Towards the end, it shook violently, as if it was going to explode.

"Complete."

The dark crystals floating in the air soon expanded. At the same time, pieces of rock and stone from the vicinity flew towards the crystals and attached themselves. What was once a small fragment moments ago was now taking a familiar form.

It was something that the Kwang Hwi Faction had dealt with countless times. A Mud Golem, but not quite at the same time. Instead of mud, these ones were made of stone. The eyes of these new Stone Golems gave out bright red glows as they stared at the humans.

"Scatter!"

Kwang Hwi's soldiers quickly dove to the sides. A red beam pierced the air and drew a line where the soldiers once were.

The beam left ashes and embers in its wake. The Stone Golems shot their Destruction Beams toward the skies. Realizing the danger, the choppers were quick to engage in evasive maneuvers. Fortunately, the beams were slow enough to be dodged.

While the Stone Golems were busy attacking the skies, Kwang Hwi's soldiers refused to sit still and let their enemies dictate the pace of the battle.

"Over here. I can see them well."

"Right on."

The soldier reached for the launcher on his back and brought it forward.

[RPG-7]

[Also known as 'Allah's Magic Wand', the RPG-7 is an anti-tank rocket-propelled grenade launcher. Due to it being relatively cheap and easy to use, it is popular in many countries across the world, including its manufacturer, Russia. While it may be lacking

in armor-penetration, it is more than capable of incapacitating vehicles by attacking weak points, such as a vehicle's tracks and gun barrel.]

Invented in Russia but cherished and loved by the terrorists, no anti-tank rocket launcher was superior to the RPG-7 when it came to cost-effectiveness.

"Hurry up."

The soldier carrying the warhead quickly proceeded to assemble the warhead and the booster. Thanks to countless hours of practice, the assembling did not take long. The warhead was now one with the booster, and they were carefully inserted into the launcher. The soldier didn't forget to fully twist them in with a quick snap of the wrist.

After helping the gunner load the launcher, the spotter tapped his helmet. He was clear to engage.

The gunner eyed a Stone Golem shooting out laser beams. The distance between them wasn't that far. He had practiced hitting targets at the maximum range; this was nothing compared to that. He was confident in landing a clear shot.

'Hwooooo-op.'

A deep breath. And then a gentle squeeze.

The propellant charge within the booster blasted the warhead out of the launcher. The shockwave shook the grass around the gunner, and gas from the launcher's rear dissipated in the atmosphere.

After the warhead traveled a few meters, the stabilizing fins at the front were deployed to give it drag. And then the final bastion of the warhead, the fuse safety, was disengaged.

The RPG warhead landed squarely on the Stone Golem's dome, and the impact shook the surrounding. The superman-like red beam ceased pouring from its eyes. Although the force wasn't enough to penetrate tank armor, for Stone Golems made entirely out of stone, it was menacing.

Thus began a crude symphony of rockets and blasts echoing from multiple points across the area. A symphony played by RPG warheads. They soared through the air, eager to baptize the Stone Golems with unholy fire.

The explosions continued without any pause in sight. The Stone Golems were being reduced to sharp stone shrapnel, which ricocheted off across the impact zone. The formation of mighty Stone Golems was breaking apart, and their fierce attacks were forcibly halted.

Leaving the RPG operators, the remaining Kwang Hwi's forces stopped dodging. They were now busy joining the counter-attack. In the sky, the choppers transitioned from their evasive maneuvers to aiming their autocannons toward the enemy. The machine gunners of the Light Tactical Vehicles followed suit and turned their muzzles as well.

In an instant, the tables had turned. The concentrated assault was proving a bit too much for the Golems. Under the carnage of high caliber rounds and shells, they began to shake even more violently.

Bullet holes now decorated the rough surface of the Stone Golems. As the number of holes increased, their movements became slower. Kwang Hwi was not someone who would stand by and watch from the side. He took out his beloved M32A1 Grenade Launcher and joined in on the fun.

The grenade round formed a gradual curve as it flew. Another explosion occurred in the backside of the first Stone Golem to be hit with the RPG, which now had half of a face. Perhaps it had reached its limit. The Stone Golem crumbled helplessly.

Like falling dominoes, the Stone Golems began kneeling down one by one. The troops engaged the enemy even more aggressively once they witnessed their fall.

'Now it's that fucker's turn.'

Kwang Hwi's sharp gaze traveled past the Golems and caught sight of Armata. As long as the Golems were out of the way, Armata was nothing.

Unlike Kwang Hwi, who was closing in on his objective, Armata was anxiously biting his lip.

'Come on, any minute now!'

He had also realized that death was an actual possibility here. But stopping the summoning was no longer an option either. Moreover, he couldn't afford to create more minions since most of his strength was used in maintaining the portal.

Bannis, the one Skeleton leader served, needed to come out faster to obliterate the humans. As Armata prayed in his heart, the blazing flame suddenly started to grow smaller.

A dull thud rang in the vicinity, pounding the hearts of everyone. An enormous bone structure was emerging from the water. At the same time, the shrinking black flame finally burst out of control.

The few remaining Skeletons turned toward the Mirror Pond and bowed their heads. Although the barrage of rounds rained on their bodies, they did not even budge an inch.

“Co-commander.”

“Wh-what in God’s name is...”

For a brief moment, the fighting stopped, as the newcomer was too big of a shock for the humans. Rising out of the pond was a gigantic creature. A creature made entirely of bones.

The humans were not unfamiliar with the sight. The bone creature had been a part of myths, novels, and movies, after all. Kwang Hwi regained his wits and opened his mouth.

“A *Yong* of the West. It’s a Dragon.”

A dimension-traveling Bone Dragon, Bannis opened his jaws and let out an earth-shaking roar.

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51. Bone Dragon

The Bone Dragon roared with sheer might. Its aura and prestige overwhelmed Kwang Hwi’s soldiers, who found themselves taking a step back. Faint hints of fear had now seeped into their faces, erasing their determined expressions.

In the sky, unsettling sounds of laughter began to creep out of Bannis the Bone Dragon’s mouth. “Keh, keh, keh, my dear humans, all the way out here to greet m—”

Before Bannis could finish, a grenade round exploded in his eyes.

Kwang Hwi yelled after unloading all his grenade rounds on the new foe, “EVERYBODY GET YOUR F*CKING SHIT TOGETHER!”

The Bone Dragon’s roar paled in comparison to his roar. His leadership aura broke the overpowering image in the soldiers’ minds. They jumped in shock, and their shit and their wits were shoved back into their heads.

“You dare!”

Bannis was enraged when a mere mortal dared challenge his majesty. He spread his wings wide, as if he was going to cover the whole sky. The wings were made up of hundreds and thousands of bones tightly weaved together; they were a terrifying sight to behold.

A powerful wind buffeted around the surrounding. It was strong enough to push the heavily armed troops of the Kwang Hwi Faction.

“Dragonflies, intercept the dragon.”

– Roger!

Unfortunately, the Stinger missiles were already used up on the Giant Bett. The Dragonflies had to face the dragon with a limited amount of autocannon ammunition. Bannis let off a crooked smile as he scanned his surroundings.

“Flying machines... quite amusing you are, humans of this world.”

As the Bone Dragon’s massive body lurched forward, the choppers gathering to fire autocannons quickly turned to dodge the dragon’s body slam. Fortunately, his speed wasn’t as superior due to his huge size.

The Dragonflies continued to dodge Bannis by a hair’s breadth. When the Bone Dragon noticed this, he became irritated, lashing out in anger.

“You’re nothing but mere mortals!”

The Bone Dragon’s mouth opened once more. Inside was nothing but darkness, but all of a sudden, a faint silhouette began to emerge.

Amid sharp whistles, bone arrows zoomed past the Dragonflies. Although the arrows merely grazed the choppers, the impact was strong enough to rip away their armor. These arrows were on a completely different level from the bone arrows shot by the Skeletons.

The pilots were struck with a sudden wave of fear.

– Flare!

The decoys covered the Bone Dragon’s sight, halting its pursuit. These were no ordinary decoys, though. They were flares with enough heat to deceive heat-seeking missiles. Even a Bone Dragon couldn’t help but pause slightly in caution.

The choppers took this opportunity to distance themselves from the dragon. The Chinook, which was already positioned far away, started raging fire at the dragon, getting its attention.

However, the 4000 rounds per minute lost all weight against the mighty Bannis. The bullets bounced off of his bones and fell into the pond. They were like needle pricks to the dragon.

Having caught sight of the Chinook, Bannis opened his mouth and fired his bone arrows as if he was swatting away a fly. The heavy-lifter did its best to avoid the incoming attack, but a slightly delayed reaction resulted in catastrophe.

An arrow penetrated the front main rotor, causing it to explode.

A Chinook was a transport helicopter lifted into the air by two sets of rotors. If one of the rotors lost its functionality, then the aircraft would fail to stay in the air. The pilot tried to restart the rotor, but this caused another smaller explosion, entirely separating the rotor from the body.

– Mayday! Mayday! We’re going down!

The Chinook pilot desperately pulled the control stick to reduce the upcoming impact. His effort and desperation were enough to move even the heavens, as there was a miracle. The helicopter avoided the troops and landed on the west pavilion of the museum.

A deafening sound rang across the battlefield, followed by a wave of dust rising from the ground. The Dragonflies turned around and started firing back at the bone Dragon.

Against Bannis, the autocannon rounds proved superior to their 7.62mm counterparts. His expression darkened since the impact definitely felt stronger. A much angrier Bone Dragon was now rushing towards the choppers. However, the choppers retreated after exhausting their ammunition.

Grinding his teeth, Kwang Hwi yanked the receiver.

“Jackson.”

– Yes, boss!

“We need close air support.”

– ETA 2 minutes.

Two minutes. Kwang Hwi instantly issued new orders.

“Dragonflies! I don’t care what you do, but stall that beast for two minutes. TWO MINUTES! The rest of you, get the fuck out of here! All remaining ground forces, retreat NOW!”

As he was hurling out orders, the Light Tactical Vehicle pulled up in front of Kwang Hwi. He then began to shove his soldiers into the vehicle. “Squeeze in as much as you can!”

Following their leaders, the Kwang Hwi Faction soldiers hastily fled the battlefield. Kwang Hwi also jumped onto the vehicle, hanging on its side, and took out a small stick from his pocket.

The laser automatically detected and transmitted the Bone Dragon's coordinates.

– Target Confirmed!

Accompanied by an ear-piercing noise, the cross-shaped aircraft pierced through the skies. An angry lion, Kwang Hwi Faction's symbol, was drawn into the cockpit. Even the Bone Dragon was startled by the sharp whistle and turned around.

The Dragonflies were quick to flee the scene. It was risky enough for multiple helicopters to engage in battle together, and if a jet was to join the fray, the airspace would turn into a disorderly mess.

[A-10C Thunderbolt II]

[An attack jet aircraft of the US Air Force, the A-10C was the first one of its kind to be designed for close air support. It is not only compatible with a multitude of armaments, but it also possesses superior maneuverability at low altitudes. The high durability and ability to carry out long-duration flights make the A-10C an exceptional model that satisfies various needs for carrying out missions. The aircraft can be equipped with a 30mm GAU-8 gatling autocannon and up to 11 explosive missiles at a time.]

[Cost: 1,260,000 MP]

– Hellooo! You motherfucker!

It was an A-10C Thunderbolt, aka the 'Warthog,' making an appearance. The GAU-8 gatling gun equipped at the front of the jet started to spit fire. The recoil shook the jet's interior, almost powerful enough to slow down the aircraft to a grinding halt.

The recoil reflected the gun's firepower, though. Bannis' bones, which were able to withstand 25mm autocannons without a scratch, began to fracture.

"Kwwwaahhh!"

After completing its strafe, the A-10 casually flew past above the Bone Dragon's head. Which, of course, given Jackson's exciting personality, was no casual stroll by any means.

Under each wing, a land attack missile was conveniently placed. When the thunderbolt was going past the dragon, both missiles were released from their shackles. Their timing couldn't have been better.

Even the Bone Dragon wasn't able to withstand a direct hit from the missiles, and his bones began to break. Realizing the danger he was in, Bannis quickly opened his mouth, muttering inaudible words.

Several surviving Skeletons near the pond shattered into smaller bits and flew towards him. Although it was minor at best, some cracks and wounds were healed.

"Dammit!"

His minions were all disposed of, which meant that he wouldn't be able to restore his wounds any further. Bannis glared at the A-10 making a semicircle in the distance. He wasn't able to respond aptly since such weaponry didn't exist in his world. On top of that, he wasn't able to cast magic since he wasn't a real dragon.

He only had one ranged attack in his arsenal. The Bone Dragon's jaws opened once again. Within the depths of his mouth, bone arrows started materializing. This time, there were several dozens of them.

Bone arrows rushed out of his mouth in a wide spread. A shotgun of bones. But it was nothing more than mere child's play for the A-10. The warthog shifted sideways and dodged the arrows with ease.

At the same time, Stinger missiles were launched at the Bone Dragon. Bannis instinctively sensed the threat and spat out another round of bone arrows. His goal was to use the arrows to counter the strange projectile. It wouldn't have been a bad response...

If the Stinger missiles weren't exponentially faster than the bone arrows.

It was apt to say that the missiles were swift like lightning. Flying at twice the speed of sound, the Stingers rushed past the bone arrows and landed squarely at the dragon.

One missile even landed inside the Bone Dragon's mouth and exploded, scattering large shrapnel of bones in the air.

"Kwaaargh! You damn bastards!" Bannis swung his claws at the air.

However, his struggles were futile when confronted with the A-10. The jet used this as a chance to close in and rain down 30mm rounds. Vicious ballistic roars echoed throughout the atmosphere.

Glowing red streaks of light stabbed the struggling Bannis. His sturdy bone plates gave way eventually. It was too much firepower for them to handle. The thing was, these bones were components of the wing. And once Bannis lost his thrust power, he sank to the earth.

The ground caved in, and a large pit formed where he landed. The impact was so big that a shockwave swept the surroundings, raising dust into the air. Despite being entirely made up of bones, his weight was still overwhelming.

– Dropping all remaining explosives!

The A-10 grazed past the skeletal claws and dropped its remaining bombs. The drop might seem careless, but these explosives were equipped with precise guidance capabilities. Every single one of them hit the Bone Dragon.

Flashing lights and shockwaves swallowed the Bone Dragon whole. The carpeted strike rose clouds of dust, making it impossible to see. Jackson stayed vigilant and continued to fire the GAU-8 into the dust.

Soon, a blood-curdling shriek faintly resounded. A new notification popped up in front of Kwang Hwi's eyes.

[You have defeated 'Bannis the Bone Dragon.']

[You have obtained 1,000,000 MP.]

[You have defeated a member of the '10 Kings.']

[The Undead will trouble you no more. You have been rewarded another 1,000,000 MP.]

The haze slowly cleared away and presented a graveyard of bones—bones that belonged to Bone Dragon Bannis—where the National Museum once stood. It was quite the sight.

Enjoying the new scenery, Kwang Hwi thought of an idea. *'Maybe we should build a museum here.'*

It was the founding step for the <Seoul Museum of Monsters> that would be built in the future.

Kwang Hwi strolled towards the Mirror Pond as he thought of future plans. However, this battle wasn't over yet. The inter-dimensional portal was still open, and Armata was yet to be apprehended.

The A-10 streaked across above Kwang Hwi's head.

– Boss, Armata stepped out of the gazebo.

“Dragonflies, surround Armata. Smoke his ass if he tries anything weird.”

– Roger, commander!

Unlike Kwang Hwi's concern, Armata seemed to be having a hard time moving. As a result, the choppers encircled him without any trouble. Armata, as if showing his will to surrender, nonchalantly sat still on the ground. Kwang Hwi's soldiers quickly raised their guns.

When Armata saw Kwang Hwi, he raised both hands into the air. "Beaten. By a mere human."

Kwang Hwi wasn't sure how, but he fully understood Armata's words. The man wasn't speaking Korean. The language that came out of Armata's mouth was definitely alien and unheard of. But for some reason, the gibberish became clear in Kwang Hwi's head.

To confirm his suspicion, Kwang Hwi spoke in his own language to the monster, "In our world, humans are considered the most supreme of all creations."

"Hah! Supreme of all creation, you say?" Despite being spoken to in Korean, Armata understood every single word and responded in his own language, "To think that I'd run into more humans after running away from them. My luck seems to have run out."

"What do you mean?"

Armata kept his mouth shut, not bothering to entertain Kwang Hwi.

Kwang Hwi's gaze shifted from Armata to the pond. The portal was still active there. Fortunately for the Kwang Hwi Faction, nothing was traveling through the portal. Unfortunately for Armata, however, the portal had to be closed.

Kwang Hwi pointed at the pond. "Shut it."

"Kuhk, you dare command me?"

"Need a bit of motivation?"

"Do what you want. You're mistaken if you think my death will cause the portal to close."

For a brief second, Kwang Hwi almost believed him. However, it was almost only, as texts popped out in front of his eyes.

[Emergency Mission!]

[Slay Armata to destroy the inter-dimensional portal.]

[Reward: 2,000,000 MP]

[Failure: Complete annihilation of Kwang Hwi Faction and accelerated levels of chaos across the Republic of Korea]

An emergency mission was given to Kwang Hwi. *'Why is this coming up now...?'*

'Oh.'

Kwang Hwi firmly shut his mouth. The answer was obvious.

"Motivation it is."

Kwang Hwi swung around, his back facing Armata. Both Armata and Kwang Hwi's executives were flustered by his response.

"Dragonflies, turn him into powder."

– Roger that!

The choppers immediately spewed fire as if they were waiting for the command their whole life. The soldiers weren't the ones to be left behind. Their fingers squeezed the triggers of their rifles, and RPG rockets flew across the air, accompanied by the glorious music of war.

"Shit." Armata smiled helplessly. He had used all his strength powering up the portal, so all he could do now was watch as his demise came closer.

Armata's body was ripped apart into pieces. Black blood showered the earth, and chunks of flesh flew into the sky.

[You have defeated 'Armata the Golem Master'.]
[You have obtained 1,000,000 MP.]

[You have defeated a member of the '10 Kings'.]
[Your deeds are still unknown to the remaining members of the '10 Kings,' but they will eventually be aware. You have been rewarded another 1,000,000 MP.]

[You are the first person in the world to defeat 1100 'Mud Golems'.]
[You have obtained...]

[You are the first person in the world to defeat 1200 'Mud Golems'.]
[You have obtained...]

[You are the first person in the world to defeat 1300 'Mud Golems'.]
[You have obtained...]

The black flame dissipated.

The pond found its pure color.

The blue skies returned to shine down once more.

The inter-dimensional portal was no more.

[Emergency Mission Complete!]

[You have slain Armata and destroyed the inter-dimensional portal.]

[You have been rewarded 2,000,000 MP.]

— Ω —

52. Reorganize

The entire National Museum of Korea had been razed to the ground under the merciless onslaught. The battle was over in a jiffy, and Kwang Hwi emerged as the obvious victor. He immediately visited the Merit Shop to purchase 25mm rounds.

All munitions were used up in the previous fight.

They would be helpless if more enemies showed up in their current state.

“Yeah! Put it there.”

“Grab it and stay put!”

As the pilots and soldiers resupplied themselves, the clangs and dull rustling of iron resounded throughout the field.

“Hurry! Take off now!”

The Mi-26 Transport Helicopter took to the sky, bringing the wounded and the Light Tactical Vehicle along with it. Fortunately, the injury count was reduced to the minimum, and they only belonged to the Chinook helicopter that was shot down by the Bone Dragon: three pilots, an engineer, and the gunner manning the minigun.

Kwang Hwi stared at the fading helicopter. “How are they?”

“The medic says it’s pretty bad. A miracle, really, for them to be breathing...”

“Phew.”

Avoiding instant death was more than one could ever hope for. Kwang Hwi silently prayed for the injured to be healed.

‘Hold on.’

“We’ll head back once we finish loading up autocannon rounds into the choppers.”

“Commander.”

Kwang Hwi turned to the executive.

“We checked with the UAV; Yongsan district seems clean, with no monsters anywhere. How about we check it out while we’re out here, sir?”

“Our troops need rest, no?”

“They do... A tiny bit of rest with some energy bars might do the trick, though.”

While Kwang Hwi hesitated, Soo Min chimed in from all the way in HQ to help persuade Kwang Hwi.

– We might as well check out what the Ministry of Defense and Joint Chief of Staff have been up to. About a month ago, we confirmed records of several VIPs, including the Secretary of Defense entering an underground facility below the government complex.

“The Secretary of Defense?”

When they had secured the president last time, they did not find any secretaries of any government department.

– If our findings are correct, there should also be a Blackhawk and some armored vehicles stored there.

Kwang Hwi nodded eventually. With no more monsters left to fight, now was a good time as any to check it out.

“Pack some food into Mi-26 and send it over here. It should be on its way there with the wounded.”

– Roger!

Kwang Hwi sat down on the bench next to the pond. This bench was surprisingly untouched, unlike its brethren that were mangled beyond recognition by shrapnel and pieces of monsters.

A few clumps of bone powder here and there were quickly brushed off.

[Combat Force Info]

Title

– Kwang Hwi Faction (View Symbol)

Commander-in-chief

– [Absolute Leader] Kwang Hwi Baek

Controlling Area

- [HQ] Dongducheon City, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea
- Yangju City, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea
- Uijeongbu City, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea
- Paju City, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea
- Yeoncheon County, Gyeonggi Province, Republic of Korea

Total Force

- 300(+1)

Equipment

- (Operating) 2x K9 SPG
- (Operating) 2x Namer APC
- (Operating) 2x Mk-4 Merkava Main Battle Tank
- (Operating) 10x Light Tactical Vehicle
- (Operating) 5x Medium Tactical Vehicle
- (Operating) 1x IAI Heron UAV
- (Operating) 1x Night Intruder-300 UAV
- (Operating) 1x Pantsir S-1
- (Operating) 1x Mi-26
- (Operating) 8x AH-8 Littlebird
- (Operating) 1x A-10C Thunderbolt
- (Inoperative) 1x CH-47 Chinook
- (Operating) Heaven's Eye Reconnaissance Satellite
- (Operating) Heaven's Ear Military Communications Satellite

And at the very bottom, the total amount of Merit Points in Kwang Hwi's possession was displayed.

[Merit Points: 8,240,000]

'Quite the haul today.'

He had spent 1,260,000 MP earlier on the A-10C Thunderbolt. With the current amount of Merit Points, it was possible to buy even more A-10Cs or attack helicopters. The Ah-64D Apache that Jackson clamored about was 4,780,000 MP.

Another possible substitute mentioned during their discussion, the AH-1Z Viper, cost 3,200,000 MP. The cheapest one, the Russian Mi-28 Havoc, was 1,500,000 MP. The Kamov KA-50 from the same country had a price tag of 1,610,000 MP. He could buy up to five of those.

However, even if he bought them now, these choppers wouldn't be in use immediately. Although the Kwang Hwi Faction had launched its own pilot training program, it was still taking its baby steps.

Smashed helicopters could be repaired through Merit Points. But the same couldn't be said for losing pilots.

'Any pilots out there...'

Kwang Hwi could only pray that there were pilots hiding in the underground facility.

The troops filled their stomachs with the food brought by the Mi-26.

"Alright, let's head out."

"Yes, sir!"

The group in Seoul was divided into two. Kwang Hwi personally led one team to investigate the Ministry of National Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff offices, and, if possible, meet the Secretary of Defense.

Until a few years back, the United States Forces Korea headquarters was located in Yongsan, but then they moved down to the countryside. In the end, it meant less work for Kwang Hwi.

The other remaining team was tasked with investigating the densely populated areas of Yongsan. Their goal was to rescue the survivors in hiding. Kwang Hwi permitted them to use the Mi-26, which was big enough to fit 90 people at a time.

"Send out the rescue team first."

"Roger."

Three Dragonflies and the sole Mi-26 headed off first. Attached to the transport helicopter was a large speaker to lure out survivors.

– People of Yongsan district! We're here to rescue you! If you can hear this broadcast, please come outside! We will provide you with food and shelter.

The broadcast was loud enough to almost bury the rotor sounds from the chopper. People would've called the cops for noise complaints if things were still the way they were.

"We'll head out as well."

Kwang Hwi's team boarded the Dragonflies and took off. The Ministry of Defense offices weren't far, and they soon saw the two buildings standing proudly in the distance. They were the Ministry of Defense building and the newly built Joint Chiefs of Staff building.

<Defending our Nation together with the People!>

“Doesn’t look too intact, huh.”

“It looks like the Golems came by first, sir.”

Traces of destruction and slaughter left by Armata’s minions were clear and visible for the eyes to see, especially so in the building’s front garden. Pieces of ripped human torso dirtied the green with red.

Although they were decomposed beyond recognition, Kwang Hwi was still able to see through the decay. He had once seen a similar horrific sight back when he was in Africa.

Green grass was turned crimson, and it was not a sight to see for people with weak stomachs.

The Dragonflies landed softly on top of the grass, and the soldiers disembarked from the transport compartment to scan the area. Confirming that all the members had exited, the choppers lifted off again. They had to be airborne, just in case they had to react to any uncertainties.

The team quickly moved into the government building. These soldiers had already turned into experts at this point. With no monsters barring their way, they swept through the building like a tornado.

Kwang Hwi kept eyes on the status of the wounded as he awaited the recon results.

– Commander, we’ve finished searching through the building.

“Even the Joint Chiefs of Staff building?”

– Yes, sir. We’ve checked everything minus one area, which was crumbled down from Golem attacks. No survivors were found.

Kwang Hwi nodded. The results were expected.

“Alright. Head back to the 1st-floor lobby.”

Kwang Hwi grabbed his HK416C and also went upstairs.

“Soo Min, I’m all yours now.”

– Roger that, Commander. Head down to the 1st basement floor.

Kwang Hwi led his troops to the underground structures. The staff dining hall was located in the basement. When the men stepped foot inside, they were greeted by wafts of rotten food.

“We’re here. Where’s our next location?”

– Men’s room, the very last stall.

A mere bathroom being the next target surprised an official moving with the team. He wore a baffled expression. Kwang Hwi remained indifferent, though, and followed his guide.

Dust was piled thick in the bathroom, as it had been left unattended for a long time. Still, it was in much better shape than the garden outside. The team moved to the last stall.

A cautious push. It had the same structure as any other stall one would find anywhere: a toilet in the middle and a large bin in a corner.

– At one side of the bin, there should be a small button. Press it three times in a row.

Kwang Hwi felt across the bin with his hand. Certainly enough, there was a small button at the side. The button was white, matching the bin, so it was really easy to miss.

Click. Click. Click.

The response was immediate as the wall on the opposite side split open. Shocked, the soldiers aimed their guns towards the new opening. Fortunately, there was nothing but a downward passage beyond the wall. There were no monsters or other hints of danger.

– Do you see the passage? You just have to follow it.

Kwang Hwi entered the passage and walked down the hall. The automatic sensors detected movement and switched on the lights, chasing away the darkness. The lights illuminated the end of the passage. The team was greeted with the same set of doors as the ones seen under the Blue Palace.

This was one of the facilities mentioned in the president’s laptop: the VIP emergency underground shelter linked between the Ministry of National Defense building basement and the Joint Chiefs of Staff building basement.

“We’re here.”

– I’ll open the door remotely. There might be an ambush waiting inside, so please proceed with caution.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, I got it. Just open the door.”

Any possible hostiles beyond this door were unarmed. Hence, the chance of Kwang Hwi's team losing against unarmed retaliation was zero.

Fully armed soldiers rushed to the front. They covered the leader with their bodies and raised their barrels towards the front. Kwang Hwi also grabbed his Glock in the leg holster.

The security system located above the doors activated itself. These doors were impossible to open, let alone approach, with low authorization levels. But with their laptop, it was possible to enter into any facilities.

[Top Authorization Level Confirmed.]
[Opening Doors.]

With a hiss, the doors opened, and right away, the soldiers swiftly infiltrated indoors. They swept the place once before shouting, "All clear!"

Kwang Hwi followed through with his official, who was flinching with nervousness.

"This feels more like a hangar than a shelter."

The inside part was a lot more spacious than imaginable. This was no simple bunker by any means. It was more of a combination between a hangar and a shelter.

The doors that Kwang Hwi entered through were in the center. To the left were the command center, office, and living quarters, while military equipment was lined up on the opposite end.

Most of the equipment was firearms or weapons, including the K-2 Assault Rifle, but they were ruined beyond repair. Some features stood out among the rest.

Beside the military equipment, multiple freight elevators were installed. They weren't small elevators commonly seen in civilian facilities or apartments. Instead, these were huge models, big enough to move armored vehicles and helicopters.

Kwang Hwi approached the freight elevators.

[Freight Elevator No. 1]

There was nothing left in the spot where the lift was supposed to be, with only four pillars supporting the elevator remaining in solitude.

Kwang Hwi's eyes moved toward the ceiling. It was wide open, but the elevator shaft was engulfed in darkness. No. 2 and 3 were also in similar shape.

Off to the side of the elevators, K-21 Infantry Fighting Vehicles with several holes in their sides and Light Tactical Vehicles stood unattended. The Blackhawk chopper, on the other hand, was nowhere to be seen.

“I don’t see the Blackhawk anywhere. The freight elevators were already activated as well.”

– Is that so?

After a moment of silence, Soo Min solved the mystery in Kwang Hwi’s head.

– I think the VIPs that were sheltered here took the Blackhawk and escaped Seoul.

“Looks like it.”

Kwang Hwi smacked his lips. The VIPs could always be taken care of later, but losing such critical equipment was definitely a shame. The Blackhawk would’ve come in handy.

“Commander!”

Kwang Hwi turned his head. There were people being dragged out by his soldiers. They weren’t in standard military uniforms but in G-Suits, worn only by pilots.

“We found them hiding in a corner.”

“Are-are you the rescue team?”

“That’s correct.”

‘Just what we needed.’

“I-I’m Captain Jung In Lee, Army Aviation Operations Command.”

“Warrant Officer Ho Jun Kim.”

Kwang Hwi’s expression brightened. Warrant officers usually had more flight experience than most regular officer pilots. After lightly exchanging greetings, Kwang Hwi stopped beating around the bush, inquiring about the Secretary of Defense’s whereabouts.

“We heard that the Secretary of Defense came down here right as the monsters started appearing. Do you know where he went?”

“That son of a bitch? We’re not so sure ourselves.”

“Probably ran off somewhere, with his minions.”

“...Did something happen?”

The two pilots didn't hesitate to mask their anger against the Secretary of Defense. “When the monsters first appeared, the people working in the Ministry of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't think much of the situation. They all believed things would quickly die down. But that was obviously not the case. As you've already seen, firearms and weapons turned to shit, and the military became powerless.

“The few who realized the true gravity of the situation hurried down here. This shelter might be classified, but everyone who worked in these buildings knew about this place. But the Secretary of Defense entered in first and locked the doors.”

“He locked... the doors?”

“This facility is capable of sheltering up to 150 people. But that didn't matter to the secretary. He only opened the doors for his close allies, some bodyguards, and pilots needed for flying the helicopter. He only looked out for himself.”

The two pilots' faces reddened as they continued to recap the scenes back then. “Even though he was our superior, his actions made us furious. We tried reasoning with him... that we had to let everyone in... that this place was more than capable of handling everyone. Next thing you know, he attacked us, and we lost consciousness.”

Recounting those memories caused the pilots to frown and rub the back of their heads. “When we woke up, the secretary was gone with the helicopter... We had no choice but to remain here.”

“I see.”

After listening to their story, Kwang Hwi receded into deep thought. He assumed that winning over these two gentlemen would be as easy as taking candy from a baby.

— Ω —

Chapter 53. To Seoul (1)

His expectations weren't wrong. The two men were more than happy to join the Kwang Hwi Faction.

“I'm in. Can't live in a world run by monsters forever.”

“Count me in as well. My family went on a trip overseas, and I want to see them.”

There was no need to bring up the President.

“Welcome, gentlemen.”

Kwang Hwi was now able to return with some weight off of his chest. The rescue team also managed to secure a large number of ‘human resources’ his faction always lacked.

That was not all. More good news awaited Kwang Hwi as he returned back to the Dongducheon HQ.

“The surgery was finished as soon as possible.”

“How are they?”

“We’d have to wait and see to be sure, but as of now, their conditions seem stable.”

“That’s a relief.”

The soldiers were allowed to rest after a long day, but Kwang Hwi and his executives still had work to do. After taking their seats, the executives turned to their leader to begin the meeting. All executives assigned to outer defenses and the Uijeongbu forward base were assembled here, awaiting Kwang Hwi’s instructions.

Kwang Hwi cut straight to the point. “To Seoul.”

The people on the table remained composed, as if they were already expecting this. Only Jackson yelled YES in excitement. The rest maintained silent approval.

Soo Min, on the other hand, failed to conform and provided realistic criticism.

“Commander, our forces number up to about 300 people. We can’t cover our occupied territories with them alone.”

He wasn’t wrong in any way. It was a valid point. However, the solution was simple too. It would be pointless to try to cover every inch since they lacked the assets to do so. Hence, all they had to do was set up defense lines around key areas and use abandoned facilities as bases.

The city would be naturally filled up as time passed.

“We’re gonna move HQ to Seoul. Our main base in Dongducheon will be temporarily closed off, and we’ll use a facility with satellite control capabilities to cover the northern areas. And of course, we’ll keep expanding our workforce.”

“Then I’m in.”

“How’s the boot camp?”

“Almost done, sir. They should be ready to see action by the time we hit Seoul.”

“So, about 50 more soldiers. I’m guessing we’re gonna need more gear?”

Kwang Hwi’s gaze was fixed on Jackson as he spoke, as if he was expecting him to open his mouth.

“Hell yeah! An Apache hel—”

“Hell is where I’ll send you to if you don’t shut up.”

Jackson’s bright smile turned into a small whimper. Grins escaped the other executives’ faces as they struggled to keep a straight face. Kwang Hwi once again proved to be the only person capable of keeping Jackson under control.

“I think we need additional armored units.”

“Approved. APC or tank?”

“Two Namer APCs.”

“Will that be enough?”

“Yes, sir. We already got a Medium Tactical Vehicle for transport, so two should suffice.”

Kwang Hwi brought up a map on the big screen, displaying it in front of everyone. It was a digital map of the entirety of Seoul. While staring at the map, he muttered to himself, “Where do we start…”

Soo Min managed to catch his silent whisper and pointed to one side of the map. “How about we start here?”

“This is…”

Looking down on Seoul from above, Kwang Hwi grabbed the radio.

“Dismount team, have you reached the target?”

– Dismount team. Yes, sir, we’ve arrived at our target location. Currently searching the interior of the building.

“Roger. We’re almost there.”

The lead Dragonfly with Kwang Hwi on-board entered Sangam-*dong*, Seoul. A lush green forest stuck out like a sore thumb amidst a jungle of grey apartments. In the middle of the forest was a decently large empty lot.

Just as the forest stood out amid the grey, the sandy field was also conspicuous in the green. With the lot in the center, there were paths branching out to each direction, and buildings were built at the end of each path.

This place was originally an oil reservoir but was transformed into a tourist attraction.

‘Oil Tank Culture Park... was it?’

The nearby Goyang City was all cleaned up, and beside them, there was even a place to hold rescued survivors. Oil Tank Culture Park, this would be Kwang Hwi Faction’s temporary HQ for their conquest of Seoul.

The ground troops had arrived earlier and were already combing through the buildings. APCs and Tanks were pulling security around the area.

– Initiating landing procedures.

The signaler waved his signal baton around with vigor, guiding the helicopter in landing. The Dragonfly slowly touched down on the lot.

An official approached from afar, wading through the strong wind.

“Commander! We’ve finished acquiring the base.”

“Alright. Show me the way to the situation room.”

The official led the way in front.

[T6 Community Center]

This space originally housed a cafe for tourists and several staff offices. However, it was now being transformed with various equipment by Kwang Hwi’s soldiers. They must’ve managed to do some cleaning as well because the place was slightly neat and organized.

The officials themselves were installing critical equipment, mainly dealing with encryption and security.

“Is the monitor connected?”

“We’re setting up power!”

“Comms system is linked up.”

“Call HQ and request CCTV access to this area! Make sure we get all of ‘em!”

Overall, the place was still chaotic, but that didn’t stop Kwang Hwi and his officials from immediately starting their meeting. At least, the necessary equipment for a meeting was prepared.

“We should hit Mapo-gu, Eunpyeong-gu, and Seodaemun-gu first.”

“The monsters in those areas?”

“All three areas are overrun by these guys.”

The screen blinked, and a strange monster showed up on display. It was a new type of monster never seen before.

It was tall and built solid like a sculpture, and its full-body armor looked intimidating. A helmet protected its face, a vest shielded its torso, and leather pants with steel plates on top wrapped its lower body, offering both protection and maneuverability.

The armor seemed to have dual functionality, as it also had sharp spikes attached to it. For offense, it held a short javelin in its hand, with several of them equipped on its back. It was even wearing something similar to boots, and they had long steel spikes protruding at the end.

“I’m not sure how sturdy those spikes are, but it’s probably better not to find out.” Whilst tapping his finger on the table, Kwang Hwi opened his mouth. “We’ll deploy APCs and Tanks and engage them from a distance. The choppers will only provide air support for contingencies.”

“Roger.”

Unlike their armored units, the AH-6 Littlebirds fell behind when it came to defense. It was entirely possible for them to be taken down while flying low by one of those javelins.

After almost losing pilots from the Chinook crash, Kwang Hwi wasn’t willing to risk any more uncertainties.

“Let’s begin.”

The Namer APCs rolled forward on its unending track. At the left of the APCs was the Mapo District Hall, whose structure seemed too grand for a mere district hall.

“Halt.”

– Halt!

The driver abruptly stopped the vehicle. Tagging alongside, Track No. 3 slowly came to a halt as well. The gunner immediately got to his job, working the fire-control system.

The camera zoomed in closer and clearly showed the monsters on the screen. The distance between the vehicle and the monsters was automatically calculated and displayed.

“Target ‘Armor’. 12 o’clock 700 meters.”

– Track 3 good copy.

700m in front of the APCs were armored monsters, hence the name, ‘Armor.’ Around five of them were sighted. They were huddling together in the middle of the intersection. It seemed as if they were trying to do something with their hands, but it was hard to tell.

“Seoul Main, this is Seoul One. Five Armors detected near Mapo District Hall. Requesting clearance on further action.”

The response was immediate because Kwang Hwi was observing from the situation room.

– Seoul One, Seoul Main. You are clear to engage.

The gunner grabbed and shifted the control stick. The autocannon gun moved correspondingly towards the Armors.

Along with the rattling of gatling guns, the two APCs opened fire at the same time. The 30mm round shrouded in kinetic energy pierced straight through their steel armor.

The Armor’s back was facing the APCs. When the bullets riddled its body, it slouched forward, and blood squirted out like a water fountain. It fell lifelessly to the side from its seated, hunched position. Once an opening was created, it uncovered what the monsters were fiddling around with.

“They um... they’re grilling uh... people and eating them.”

A person was tied to a tree on the side of the road, and a fire was lit below them. The person tied was already dead, their body burnt to a crisp. The Armor they just dispatched was in the process of eating someone that was already cooked.

Off to the side, there were some alive human captives.

The Kwang Hwi Faction's troops' faces twisted in disgust.

"The hell are you waiting for?! Shoot!"

"Aim! Fire!"

One of the monsters quickly got up and jumped out of the way, but it was staggering. A round had busted its kneecap through its armor. Had it not gotten up in time, its chest would've been turned into a mangled mess.

The sudden onslaught showered blood on the prisoners, who shouted at the top of their lungs. Irritated at the noise, the crippled monster tossed the screaming prisoner into the fire.

"Uwahh!"

It all happened too fast, and the soldiers failed to respond. The prisoner was swallowed in flames in seconds. The screaming ceased in seconds as well.

The Merkava Tank entered the scene, joining its Namer brethren. The Seoul Two squad trailing behind the APCs had joined the fray. The tank's long barrel raised slightly and aimed towards the monsters.

Locked and loaded.

"FIRE!"

The limping Armor stopped limping and was sent flying. The rest of the Armors jerked their heads back. Their eyes fixed on the sight of their companions, now torn in half by the explosion.

A gruesome sound escaped the monsters' mouth. At the same time, the Armors' hands reached behind them, and they held the javelins on their backs. They arched their arms back, ready to swing. As they stored up power to throw the javelins, their forearms, which seemed soft at first, tensed up with veins popping out.

The arms were swung forward from behind the shoulders, and all of the monsters' strength was channeled into the javelins.

The javelins flew into the air.

"Incoming projectiles! Brace for impact!"

Sensing the attack, the gunner shouted urgently. All crew members except the driver fumbled frantically and grabbed onto something.

The javelin flew towards the tank and bounced off the turret like a toy. The turret was clean, all except one barely visible scratch. No signs of penetration or any real damage were to be seen.

“Status report!”

“All clear!”

Even in the midst of all that, the loader stayed focused on his role. A new round was already loaded.

A deafening boom shook the battlefield, and one of the Armor’s head blew up as it was getting ready to toss its javelin once more. The scene was similar to that of a rotten watermelon blowing up. The insides were scattered all across its surrounding, staining the glass window on a nearby building with thick blood.

A bullseye indeed. The tank commander gave a thumbs up. “Good job!”

– Enemies approaching!

Once the monsters realized their javelins were useless, they charged towards Kwang Hwi’s troops. The APCs were quick to respond and let their autocannons do the talking.

The monsters quickly reached out their hands and lifted the taxi cabs by the road, using them as shields. Nonetheless, the cabs were penetrated through, and pieces of metal sprayed about the battlefield.

The autocannon rounds going through the cabs found rest inside the monsters’ shoulders. Their steel plates were blown off, along with chunks of their flesh.

Blood flowed down from the wounds and painted the asphalt red. Although their faces scorched up from the pain, the monsters did not cease their charge. Even they knew it was too late to give up and run away.

– 500 meters!

“Up!”

– Fire!

– On the way!

White fumes exited the gun barrel. The round left the smoothbore and landed squarely on an Armor that was using the cab as a shield.

The explosion ripped through the air, and the monster was sent flying. The cab in its hand had already turned into a rag by the autocannon shower earlier. It had lost its effectiveness as a shield long before the 120mm tank round shredded it apart, along with the Armor seeking refuge behind it. It was super effective.

The Merkava Tank spun around to aim at the last Armor, who rushed behind a building to seek cover. The MG253 Smoothbore gun followed its movement and fired. Like a popping water balloon, the building spilled its contents outward. Office stationeries, glass shards, floor tiles, ceiling tiles, and all sorts of objects poured out onto the street.

The Armor carefully peeked out from behind the building. It was unscathed due to the building tanking the damage.

Everyone was now focused on it. 30mm rounds dug up the ground near the monster, and the autocannon bullets pierced everything.

“It’s running away!”

The Armor had recognized its inferiority and began running. The APCs continued to lay waste, but the buildings provided cover for the monster.

– Give chase and eliminate it.

“Roger!”

As the APCs and tanks accelerated to finish the human-eater, the glorious sounds of engines mightily echoed out.