

Level 4 Human in a Ruined World

#Chapter 251 - Read Level 4 Human in a Ruined World Chapter 251

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 251: The Great Migration (6)

‘Wow, these people... they’re more extreme than I thought!’

Yeongwoo’s mouth dropped open as he saw the approval rating quickly reach its target.

He only meant to squeeze some money out of them, calling it colonial rule, but he hadn’t expected such a passionate response.

|Approval: 66.8%|

|Disapproval: 13.7%|

Yeongwoo’s approval rating had slightly risen to 66.8%.

Meanwhile, the disapproval rating was only 13.7%.

The voters were at least tolerating extreme responses when it came to foreign powers.

So what if he pushed things even further?

Vrrrooom...

Suddenly, the screen darkened again, and an ominous presence was felt.

‘No way.’

Yeongwoo instinctively looked up at the sky.

An all-too-familiar metallic sound echoed across the sky.

Clang, clang!

‘...This sound.’

It was the sound of the alien metal horse, Negwig, a long-time comrade and a gift from the planet Dogo.

—Screeeech!

Negwig's footsteps, belonging to an unidentified alien origin.

Clang, clang!

Soon, the previously dark screen lit up again, showing Negwig charging down Gangnam Boulevard.

Scattering Dogo's wedge symbol along its path.

'This is the reception mode?'

Realizing a lot from this, Yeongwoo saw a massive anchor dropping on the other side of the screen.

Swoosh, crash!

This was the signature of the universal weapons manufacturer Dogo's founder, the Destroyer King, Dogo.

Soon, a tombstone-shaped ship of Chairman Dogo appeared above.

It was replaying the moment he visited Gangnam to deliver a weapon manual to Yeongwoo.

—Chairmaaaaan!

Next, the screen showed Yeongwoo riding on the back of the giantized Pofu Tenta to greet the chairman.

Yeongwoo, raising both arms and chanting 'Chairman,' looked like a sycophant.

「Jeong Yeongwoo07, adopts servile diplomacy!」

What a brilliant caption.

“.....”

But Yeongwoo had no way to refute it.

It was true that he was fawning over Dogo.

Just by greeting him well, money and manuals came pouring in; how could he not serve Dogo?

“Hey! On Earth, we might be a developed country, but in the universe, we’re paupers! Sometimes you have to beg to survive!”

Yeongwoo protested, but this wasn’t broadcasted on the screen.

On the screen, Jeong Yeongwoo was still there.

—Chairman! Stay healthy……!

Waving off the chairman in a melodious voice.

Of course, in a broader perspective, this could be seen as a reception for the interests of South Korea, or rather Earth……

|Approval: 66.8%|

|Disapproval: 20.3%|

The public opinion wasn’t so good.

The disapproval rating surged quickly, tightening the noose around Yeongwoo’s neck.

‘Damn. 20 percent?’

To win this election, Yeongwoo needed an approval rating of 70%.

But this was only possible if the disapproval rating stayed below 30%.

If the disapproval rating hit 30.1%, even a 0.1% shortfall in approval would mean a confirmed loss.

‘How many votes are left?’

Yeongwoo quickly calculated while looking at the graph on the screen.

With the total approval and disapproval combined at 87.1%, the percentage of voters yet to cast their votes was 12.9%.

So, the election’s outcome would now hinge on where the remaining 12.9% of the voters’ sentiments lay.

[The disclosure of the candidate’s diplomatic history has concluded.]

Finally, the council wrapped up the disclosure of Yeongwoo's diplomatic history, and the screen returned to standby mode.

'Phew, I almost got screwed at the last minute.'

If the council had shown just one more scene of him greeting the chairman, the disapproval rating might have shot past 30%.

But the worst-case scenario did not occur.

[The final history to be disclosed is the candidate's view of the nation.]

'It's the last one. This time, there are no choices at all.'

Yeongwoo waited for the screen to light up, contemplating his views on the nation.

Patriotism.

In its purely dictionary definition, it means 'the view on the purpose, meaning, establishment, and form of the nation.'

It's a fairly comprehensive concept.

So, what part of this concept would the council focus on?

The answer was revealed soon enough.

Whooooosh...

'Oh, it's starting.'

Finally, the rough sound of something breaking through the air was heard on the screen, revealing a view of the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula from a dizzying height.

'Ah.'

It was Cheongsapo in Busan, where there had been a skirmish with Japan not long ago.

The perspective was from when Yeongwoo had urgently dispatched himself to Busan, paying a hefty sum to use the Guppy Express.

Craaaash!

Soon, the distant Cheongsapo rapidly zoomed closer, and the angle changed to show the elevator of the Guppy Express descending to the ground.

Whooooosh, boom!

The elevator almost crash-landed, and the screen showed Yeongwoo and the Mon-O tribe warriors disembarking.

After a brief pause, accompanied by the sound of a cash register, a caption appeared.

Chirick, ding!

「Jeong Yeongwoo07 used 13 million Karma for transportation to protect Busan.」

This was crucial evidence showing that the candidate had made considerable efforts to protect national territory.

However, for Busan, it was also an opportunity to learn about Yeongwoo's corruption.

Yeongwoo had demanded 15 million Karma from Busan for the transportation at that time.

Although those who knew this fact had already cast their votes, the disapproval rating did not increase.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Flash!

Next, the scene of Yeongwoo confronting two Chinese at the Imjin River replayed.

—If you turn back without crossing that bridge, I will let you go. Turn back now.

A preemptive warning reflecting Yeongwoo's value for life, despite being a demon.

However, the video's would-be victims ignored the warning, as if following the cosmic script.

They extended a bridge over the Imjin River, indicating their intent to invade South Korea.

Thus, eventually.

—Earth! 482! 184! 3041! 27!

Yeongwoo uttered twelve death-bringing numbers, and soon his asymmetric weaponry, planetary-scale bombardment weapons, sent laser beams down on the heads of the two warriors.

Kraaaaack!

「Jeong Yeongwoo07, adopts action-oriented defense!」

‘These guys... Their captions are spot on.’

Despite becoming a servile diplomat, the votes garnered through ‘action-oriented defense’ were significant.

|Approval: 68.6%|

|Disapproval: 21.4%|

‘The laser bombardment effect is solid. Not only is it powerful, but it also has great publicity.’

Now, only 1.4% of the votes remained to reach the target approval rating of 70%.

On the other hand, there was still a margin of 8.6% before hitting the 30% disapproval threshold that would spell failure.

As long as nothing major happened, Yeongwoo’s election seemed promising.

[Next, we will examine the candidate’s view of the nation, automatically calculated based on their activities.]

“What? What do you mean, automatically calculated my view of the nation?”

In other words, they would evaluate the candidate based on AI-provided data.

“Hey!”

While Yeongwoo waved his hand toward the sky, the screen turned white and a series of questions followed.

[In the current world, what is the reason for a nation’s existence?]

A critical question to probe the ideological foundation of a candidate representing the Korean Peninsula.

So, Yeongwoo hurriedly opened his mouth, wide-eyed.

“Well, that’s...!”

However, he wasn’t given a chance to speak in the first place.

On the screen, the AI answered instead.

|Because we need to divide into sides, after all?

“What.....?”

Yeongwoo’s mouth gaped even wider.

Then, the AI, having learned from Yeongwoo, continued.

|If we don’t divide into sides, we’ll kill each other to the last, so it’s the minimum safety measure to prevent mutual destruction.

“...Oh my God.”

To release such an answer officially, were they insane?

Yeongwoo covered his mouth.

But the AI’s extreme remarks didn’t stop there.

|If 100 people fight, up to 99 might die, but if they split into 10 teams of 10, at least two or three, maybe even up to ten people might survive.

|However, even in chaotic times, there is a way for 50, no, even all 100 people to survive.

“...?”

The AI made a sudden turn.

Yeongwoo perked up his ears.

“What is that method...?”

Then, as if waiting, the AI answered.

|Overwhelming power! One team should subdue the other nine teams! This world doesn’t grant any decision-making power to weaklings. Only strong power can determine peace.

“.....!”

Yeongwoo felt as if he had been struck on the back of his head by the AI's lecture.

It spoke of something he had vaguely sensed during an early encounter when, despite being the early bird, he was attacked by multiple bandits.

To achieve complete peace, one must be so strong that no one dares to disrupt it.

Being half-strong would only provoke challenges, that is, war.

Thus, perfect peace means.

‘...It can only be realized through overwhelmingly dominant power.’

While Yeongwoo wore a dazed expression, the AI concluded.

[The reason for a nation's existence is to bring peace to the world. But paradoxically, to achieve peace, we must prepare for war.

[Ranked first in the Earth's integrated dungeon ranking! Vote for Jeong Yeongwoo07.

[I will become your asymmetric power.

As soon as the AI finished its last line, the approval graph for Yeongwoo shot up rapidly.

Flash!

[Approval: 73.6%]

[Disapproval: 21.9%

‘Seventy-three percent?’

A sudden leap from 68% to 73%.

A figure well above the target approval rating of 70%.

While Yeongwoo stared blankly at the sky, the screen switched to show the candidate in real time.

Flash!

[Finally, let's hear the candidate's closing remarks.]

[Voters, please finish voting promptly.]

A signal beeped from above.

-Beep...!

It meant the candidate should now make their final statement.

So, Yeongwoo.

Gulp.

Swallowed a heavy gulp, pointed at the screen, and shouted.

“For a rich and strong nation, we must achieve peace in the world.....!”

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

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Chapter 252: The Great Migration (7)

Prosperous country and strong military for inevitable unification.

Yeongwoo’s declaration to cultivate overwhelming power to dominate every nation on Earth and achieve a peaceful golden age brought shock and euphoria to all Koreans.

This was because, since the founding of Joseon by Taejo Yi Seong-gye, there had never been a conqueror-type leader on this land.

But now, things are different.

The Reset, considered the worst catastrophe in human history.

In this era where power has become everything, Korea has coincidentally gained tremendous power.

It was about Jeong Yeongwoo, the cosmic being who commanded mutants as subordinates and fired laser beams from outer space.

An asymmetrical power that might be stronger than nuclear weapons in this world!

The public’s yearning for this power was clearly reflected in the voting results.

Flash!

| For: 76.8%

| Against: 23.2%

Yeongwoo's approval rating soared to a staggering 76.8%.

And soon after.

Swoosh...!

Like soda bubbles rising in a glass, tiny letters filled the sky screen.

"What, what is this...?"

Yeongwoo, with wide eyes, saw the 'words' of the voters.

As the voting ended, the thoughts cast by the voters were visualized and appeared on the screen.

—Could our country finally become a great power?

—The beginning of Joseon-style imperialism!

—Time for conquest...!

—If someone has to hold the sword, it's better that we do.

Of course, not all phrases were supportive or advocating for Yeongwoo.

—Does being competent mean a reprobate can represent the nation?

—To deal with foreign monsters, we have no choice but to send out our monster.

—Is this really okay? Aren't we becoming a major belligerent in a world war?

—We should be grateful if we don't become the Axis Powers.

Some phrases were from those who voted against Yeongwoo or chose him reluctantly as the lesser evil, reflecting sharp criticism.

"....."

Yeongwoo couldn't entirely disagree with the dissenting opinions either.

After all, the radical idea of crushing all nine other teams was the AI's claim.

But looking at it another way, that Al...

'Ultimately, it's the result of learning from me, isn't it? So, maybe it's very honestly representing my true feelings.'

Still, he didn't believe war and conquest were the only answers.

However, he agreed that if inevitable, they must be fought and won.

And it had been somewhat confirmed through past records that he was the only one in Korea capable of achieving that 'victory.'

'If it has to be done, I will do it! Peaceful unification...!'

As one anonymous voter said, if someone has to hold the sword, it's better that we grab it quickly.

So Yeongwoo willingly accepted the will of the people.

"I will not forget your support!"

Flash!

As Yeongwoo raised the sword high and looked at the screen, the council's announcement echoed in the sky.

[Jeong Yeongwoo07 has been officially elected as the strongest in Korea.]

[The final approval rating is 76.8%, and the excess over the minimum required 70% for election will be set as the tax rate.]

"Huh...? Tax rate?"

It was indeed the tax rate.

'This is going to cause some commotion...'

People elected someone to represent them in international conflicts, not to collect taxes.

Moreover, if the excess over the 70% approval rating directly translates to the tax rate...

'Simple calculation would make it 6.8%.'

It would be a tax imposed on all Koreans, and if collected daily...

‘Roughly speaking, that would generate billions every day. And if that happens, I won’t be able to keep my head for long.’

Voters, like Yeongwoo, were curious about the nature of the tax.

Yeongwoo would receive the money, but the people would have to pay it.

Soon, the awaited council’s elaboration followed.

[The tax levied by the elected strongest in Korea is called the ‘Defense Tax.’]

[The Defense Tax is classified as an indirect tax, automatically collected from any income exceeding the minimum cost of living necessary for survival.]

In simple terms, it meant that the taxpayer couldn’t decide whether to pay at the point of collection; it would be automatically deducted from any earnings above the system-defined minimum living cost.

Thus, anyone earning above a certain amount would see their post-tax income reduced by the Defense Tax.

‘So those barely making a living would be exempt from the Defense Tax. That’s some consolation.’

As Yeongwoo anxiously awaited the next explanation, the council finally specified the rate of the Defense Tax.

[The current Defense Tax rate in Korea is 6.8% annually, collected daily.]

“Ah...!”

Yeongwoo’s expression brightened with relief.

Excluding those at the minimum subsistence level, and with an annual tax rate of 6.8%, it wasn’t excessively harsh.

Of course, this didn’t mean the public opinion on the defense tax would be favorable.

After all, being forced to pay money is still being forced to pay money.

‘Collecting 6.8% of the annual GDP daily... It should still amount to a substantial sum.’

Strictly speaking, it meant collecting 6.8% of Korea’s GDP over 365 days.

For Yeongwoo, it would be like receiving a salary.

‘So, if our country’s GDP increases, my salary increases as well.’

Viewed this way, it seemed like a reasonable system.

However, if he showed no results, he might be beheaded by an uprising.

‘Can I use the money collected from the defense tax however I want?’

As Yeongwoo scratched his chin and thought about this, the council’s explanation continued.

[Since the defense tax is also a national tax, the representative must record the usage and purpose of the defense tax.]

In other words, he would have to create a ledger.

A new interface would probably be added for this purpose.

Since he was elected as the strongest in Korea, a crown-shaped icon had been attached to the upper left of his field of vision.

[We announce that all official procedures for Jeong Yeongwoo07 have been completed.]

[The only way to change Korea’s strongest, ‘Strongest Sword,’ is through assassination.]

The method to change Strongest Sword was always chilling.

With this, the screen in the sky disappeared, and the council’s presence vanished entirely.

“What? Those bastards!”

Yeongwoo looked around the sky as if ready to kill them, but there was no trace of the council.

Instead.

Swoosh!

From somewhere in the sky, a white beam of light curved down and landed on Yeongwoo’s head, emitting a radiant glow.

『Strongest Sword』

This was when Yeongwoo's title changed to the plain 'Strongest Sword.'

"What... what is this?"

Yeongwoo blinked in confusion and then realized.

It wasn't that the title had no embellishment, but rather that no embellishment was needed.

What additional description would be necessary for the strongest in Korea, holding the title Strongest Sword?

For the one who had reached the pinnacle of the Strongest Sword system, it was simply:

'...Strongest Sword itself.'

As Yeongwoo stared blankly at his plain title, a tooltip for the new title appeared in his vision.

Flash!

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

「Strongest Sword」 – Legendary Title

【Majesty of Strongest Sword】

【Voter】

【Collector】

【Strongest Sword Law】

'Quite grandiose.'

After checking the tooltip, Yeongwoo turned his head to look west.

Having obtained the highest title in Korea, it was as if he had accomplished all possible feats on this land.

Thus, his next destination was.

‘Did they say a collection team would come from Beijing today? I should meet those guys first.’

To consistently extract 20 million Karma daily from Shandong Province, he had to conquer Beijing, the capital of China.

And to do that.

‘It’s best to reduce their forces as much as possible. Who knows how strong Im Doopyeong is.’

How did he manage to withstand so much killing intent?

For Yeongwoo, the most mysterious figure at this point was China’s president, Im Doopyeong.

Of course, before meeting the masters dispatched from Beijing, there was one more thing to take care of here.

And that was.

“Con... congratulations, Strongest Sword.”

The issue of handling the Korean Chinese people cautiously offering their congratulations and the mutant Heo Geumhwa still cowering in the distance.

“Thank you.”

Yeongwoo nodded in acknowledgment while scanning the surroundings sharply.

Although the leader had been decapitated, making them less of a threat for now, they were still potential rebels.

He felt like beheading all those with a certain level of martial prowess to cut off any threats.

‘But if I keep handling things that way, I’ll end up with a mountain of corpses and a massive accumulation of bad karma.’

Yet, he couldn’t just let those who ravaged Yeongdeungpo walk away.

So, Yeongwoo ordered the goblin to bring the Evil meter.

-Kikik!

Then, he spread the majesty of Strongest Sword, binding all the Korean Chinese in the area.

Whoosh!

“It might be a bit uncomfortable, but bear with it. It’s better than dying.”

“...!”

“What, what?”

Some Korean Chinese masters bristled at Yeongwoo’s unilateral display of power but quickly fell silent.

They were soon confronted with Yeongwoo’s title, “Strongest Sword,” in their glaring eyes.

A title so peculiar it lacked any descriptive modifiers.

“I’m going to investigate your bad karma. If recent bad karma includes the murder of a Korean, I can consider you one of the main culprits of the Yeongdeungpo massacre.”

Click.

Yeongwoo loaded the Evil meter, which looked unmistakably like a gun, and without any hesitation, he pulled the trigger aimed at a Korean Chinese man right in front of him.

Bang!

Immediately, the man’s basic information and details of recent bad karma were displayed.

[Recent Increase in Bad Karma]

| Murder of Kim Juhan131: +39.

Kim Juhan131.

A person recently killed by this man.

Judging by the identification number, they likely weren’t a Strongest Sword-level survivor...

‘Probably a resident of Yeongdeungpo. It seems all Korean Chinese with some combat power participated in the massacre.’

While Yeongwoo, still holding the gun to the man, pondered, the man whose bad karma was exposed began sweating profusely and barely managed to speak.

“PI-please spare me!”

“.....”

Instead of answering the man, Yeongwoo surveyed the relatively large number of Korean Chinese, as it would be too tedious to point the gun at each one individually.

So, he decided to lower his sword and made the following announcement.

“This gun can display the names of people you’ve killed recently.”

“.....?”

“From now on, I will check everyone’s recent murder records with this gun.”

“What is this...?”

“What are you talking about?”

As expected, everyone in the room gaped, but Yeongwoo continued without care.

“If it shows that you’ve recently killed a Korean, I will execute you here today.”

“.....!”

“However, if you have no murder records, I will spare you and repatriate you to China. So, everyone stay in your place. If anyone tries to escape before the verification process is completed, I will assume they are Korean murderers and execute them immediately.”

In other words, if you had nothing to hide, stay put and wait for verification.

Finally,

Whoosh!

Yeongwoo released the restraint imposed by the majesty of Strongest Sword.

And then.

“Run for it!”

“If we all run in different directions, half of us can survive!”

Those who believed they couldn't survive the verification process attempted to flee all at once.

Just as someone shouted, they ran in all directions.

Thud thud thud!

“.....”

Yeongwoo calmly watched the fleeing people, then turned to Heo Geumhwa, still crouching on the ground with a bewildered expression.

“Geumhwa, think carefully about whether you can handle what's about to happen.”

「Huh? What do you mean...?」

As Geumhwa looked up and glanced around, Yeongwoo picked up an amber-colored whistle from the equipment scattered on the ground.

Then,

Beep!

He blew the whistle, summoning those who might soon become Geumhwa's colleagues.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 253: The Great Migration (8)

CRACK!

A sound like the sky tearing apart echoed from somewhere above.

Then.

—Yaaaah!

—Aaaaah!

—Uuuuuh!

Yeongwoo's fellow mutants, Yeongtae, Taejoon, and Younghyeom, plummeted down in quick succession.

From the very heights of the sky, no less.

And the one who was most shocked by this sight was, undoubtedly,

「Wh-What is that.....?」

Heo Geumhwa, a 6-day-old mutant of Gwangjin District.

According to Strongest Sword Jeong Yeongwoo, she too would soon have to do that 'thing.'

BOOM!

Yeongwoo's three friends landed on the ground, kicking up clouds of dust.

Amidst the thick dust, General Kim Younghyeom's cold blue eyes glowed as he spoke.

—There are quite a few enemies today. Just follow those guys?

“Yes. Just take care of the people who are fleeing now. It shouldn't be too difficult.”

The 'friends' who entered the Returnees' Room experienced a boost in their stats according to their reset date, making them formidable opponents that even the Strongest swords found challenging.

So, these escapees, who were likely just monster hunters at best, wouldn't pose a threat to the three friends.

—Today's opponents are a bit bland.

Hearing Yeongwoo's words, General Kim Younghyeom released a massive aura and burst through the dust cloud.

SWOOSH!

His appearance was so terrifying that it made the ethnic Koreans standing still to claim innocence instinctively step back, as if witnessing a tiger from his youth.

—Grr!

With a thunderous roar, General Kim chased after the ethnic koreans suspects.

Soon, Yeongtae also excitedly started running in the opposite direction of the General.

—Stop right there, you bastards.....!

Meanwhile, the most mild-mannered of the three friends, CEO Kim Taejoon, set off last with a slightly uneasy expression.

Even though he knew they were murderers, the thought of chasing down and killing fellow humans weighed heavily on him.

And this was likely the case for Heo Geumhwa, whom Yeongwoo was considering as the next 'friend' candidate.

「Could it be a... a death squad?」

“Sometimes we do that kind of work. But don't worry too much, we never harm good people.”

Yeongwoo reassured her while putting back on the equipment he had tossed aside earlier, but Geumhwa's expression remained dark.

Because the people those fierce mutants were chasing were her own kin.

Although she knew they tried to harm her, a fellow ethnic Korean mutant and not just Koreans, it still didn't feel right.

“Mostly, we fight mutants or alien monsters, but there are times like this when we have to fight people. If you can't do it, you'll have to die today.”

As Yeongwoo coldly stared at her while strapping on the 'Cosmic Etiquette' equipment, Geumhwa trembled, her damaged wings shaking as she shrank back.

Then, Yeongwoo softened his gaze and suggested in a more lenient tone.

“If you find it hard to attack people, you can just fly around and keep watch. But you must participate when fighting mutants.”

After all, when facing foreign experts, the other three friends, seasoned combat veterans, would suffice.

‘And even if it's not a battle, there's plenty to do. Pedalling and assembling statues, for example.’

As Yeongwoo gazed at her, waiting for an answer, Geumhwa looked at her shattered wing and murmured.

「Th-That's better than dying.....right?」

In truth, she had no other choice unless she was ready to accept death stoically.

“Far better.”

The thought of potentially gaining another laborer brightened Yeongwoo's expression.

“If you make a contract with me, you'll be transferred to another space immediately. Even your current injuries will heal as if they were washed away.”

He was referring to the Returnees' Room.

However, instead of being relieved, Geumhwa looked fearful.

「Transferred? To where exactly.....」

Then, she realized something and her eyes widened.

She recalled the moment when those terrifying mutants appeared out of nowhere.

Where would they have been before being summoned?

「Will I go to the same place as those people?」

“Yes. Once you get there, you'll find plenty to pass the time, and you'll see that your companions are actually good people.”

Saying this, Yeongwoo shifted Bastard to his left hand.

TUP!

Then, he extended his right hand toward Heo Geumhwa.

It was a handshake to seal the friendship.

However,

“Umm.....”

As a Harpy, Heo Geumhwa had no hand to shake.

“You were informed about the return method before coming here, right?”

「Yes? Ah, that.....」

As expected, Heo Geumhwa knew about it.

A function designed to be executed when one regretted returning to this world as a mutant or when they deemed their mission complete.

That was precisely it.

「Is... is this it?」

As Geumhwa stared into the air, a hand-sized door-shaped mark appeared near the nape of her neck.

Whoosh!

In the case of Harpies, the return button was located at the back of the neck.

“Well... it seems I need to grab your nape for a moment. Is that alright?”

「.....?」

At Yeongwoo's words, Geumhwa looked surprised but then lowered her neck.

“...Then, excuse me for a moment.”

As Yeongwoo slowly approached the unarmed Geumhwa, General Kim Younghyeom, who had taken care of all the escapees, was seen running from afar.

His mouth and forelegs were stained with human blood.

—Oh.....?

Being the youngest in terms of the order of entering the Returnees' Room, General Kim couldn't help but be excited at the moment of welcoming a new 'friend.'

—What's this, is another one coming?

Whoosh!

Excited, Kim Younghyeom approached at high speed, his silver-white fur fluttering.

Soon after, Yeongtae and Taejoon, who had finished their tasks, also began to return from different directions.

—Huh?

—Whoa.....

Sure enough, upon seeing the return mark glowing on Geumhwa's nape, the two men's eyes widened.

Yeongwoo then introduced his friends who were approaching from three sides.

"This is General Kim Younghyeom, who was with the Army Headquarters. And that's CEO Kim Taejoon of VCSoft....."

This time, Geumhwa's mouth fell open.

She was surprised to learn that the people she thought were complete thugs were actually quite decent before the reset.

"Oh, and this is Hong Yeongtae. He might be a bit different in style, but... anyway, Yeongtae was also an internet broadcaster."

When Yeongwoo finally pointed to Yeongtae, he bowed his head and greeted her.

—Hehe, we're practically in the same business. Nice to meet you!

As Yeongtae smiled brightly, Geumhwa seemed a bit more relieved.

Of course, she had no idea that the moment she contracted with this demon, she would be spatially and temporally separated from this world, forced to pedal and assemble products without knowing what time it was.

"Well then, let's do something like a handshake."

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

As Yeongwoo took another step forward and extended his hand toward Geumhwa's nape, his three friends surrounding them watched expectantly as the fourth friend was born.

Tap.

Yeongwoo's palm touched the return mark on Geumhwa's nape.

Then, Geumhwa's body was soon enveloped in white light.

Whoosh!

「Oh?」

Startled by the sudden change, Geumhwa looked at Yeongwoo, who quickly informed her.

“When you go to the Returnees’ Room, there might be some labor involved. Is that alright?”

「...What?」

And with that brief question,

Whoosh!

Her body, transformed into a mass of light, soared into the sky.

Bang!

She was likely transferred to the Returnees’ Room somewhere outside our galaxy.

—We’ve gained another team member.

General Kim briefly expressed his thoughts.

Meanwhile, CEO Kim Taejoon seemed a bit worried.

—She didn’t seem very combative... Depending on her disposition, she might have found dying easier.

“...You’re not talking about yourself, right?”

Yeongwoo asked playfully, but CEO Kim replied seriously.

—Though I work hard due to personal motivations, even I sometimes get scared.

“.....”

He was probably referring to being summoned to an alien planet.

If even CEO Kim Taejoon sometimes got scared, it might be truly unbearable for Geumhwa, who had been scared stiff the moment she arrived in Gwangjin District.

“Well... if things really don’t work out, she can stay out of battles.”

This was a loss that Yeongwoo, who wasn’t heartless enough, had to bear for choosing her as a friend.

'I don't want to fill all my friends with villains. Besides combat, they need to get along well in the Returnees' Room, right?'

This concern for the well-being of his friends was also for Yeongwoo's benefit.

Tasks like the laser bombardment supported by Toma and the assembly of player statues could only be done if the friends got along well.

—Oh, seems like our time is up.

Noticing his toes starting to fade, Yeongtae looked up at the sky and muttered.

CEO Kim Taejoon also looked up at the sky.

—I'll have to go and greet Geumhwa.

And finally,

—Well then, see you! I wonder who will be enlisted next time?

General Kim Younghyeom used the term 'enlist' as he disappeared into thin air.

Then what remained was.

“.....”

Only the ethnic koreans waiting grimly for Yeongwoo's decision.

Yeongwoo thought for a moment and then took out the ring 'Wave' to summon the Strongest Sword of Gwanak, Jo Sangik.

《Deputy Minister Jo, please come to Daerim-dong immediately. Bring as many people as you can.》

* * *

2:48 PM.

Although Yeongwoo had only summoned Jo Sangik and the Swordmasters of Seoul National University, the ones who actually arrived in Daerim-dong were the Strongest Swords from eight different regions.

Using Yeongwoo's request for as many people as possible as an excuse, they came to see the highest title in the Korean Peninsula.

“Wow, what's this?”

“...There’s no regional name?”

Even Oh Yeonhee from Songpa, who still prided herself as a strong figure in Seoul, and Jang Jeongho from Dongdaemun, who had a past rivalry with Yeongwoo, couldn’t hide their astonishment.

『Strongest Sword』

They immediately recognized the value of this title as soon as they saw it.

A title that didn’t need a regional name to display its grandeur, the ultimate title of the Korean Peninsula.

At a certain level, there’s no need to embellish its grandeur.

However, unlike the dignified title, its owner was still Jeong Yeongwoo⁰⁷.

He was the same peculiar person who had unilaterally started a war with North Korea and reported it afterward.

“Ah, why did you go through all the trouble to come here?”

As Yeongwoo came out barefoot to greet them, Jo Sangik represented everyone by greeting him.

“It’s been a while. So, what did you call us for?”

Yeongwoo pointed to the ethnic koreans lined up behind him.

“I’m going to send these people back to China. If we take them to Shandong Province, they will handle the rest.”

“Ah.....? Is that so?”

Jo Sangik, momentarily taken aback, quickly regained his composure.

Compared to Yeongwoo’s previous actions, this was nothing.

“Then... shouldn’t you go home and rest?”

Jo Sangik looked at Yeongwoo, hoping he would say yes.

But Yeongwoo’s gaze was already fixed somewhere to the northwest.

“.....”

“Where are you looking at?”

“Beijing.”

“What?”

“They were extorting our money from Beijing. Are we just going to let them?”

“.....?”

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 254: Beijing’s Great Evil (1)

“What... what do you mean by that? We haven’t been exploited by China yet.”

Gwanak’s Strongest Sword, Jo Sangik, looked at Yeongwoo with a face that screamed, ‘Stop talking nonsense.’

He had already sensed it.

This crazy Strongest Sword was just spouting nonsense with the intent of striking the capital of China.

‘Why is he acting like this? Is he really thinking of targeting the Chinese capital already...?’

To Jo Sangik, who was relatively moderate compared to Yeongwoo, this was terrifying.

Of course, he had watched the entire vote for the strongest person on the Korean Peninsula, so he had expected this maniac to actively engage in national defense to win votes.

But strengthening one’s power to prepare for foreign invasions and outright attacking the enemy’s capital were entirely different matters.

“I’ve never heard of Beijing taking away our assets. On the contrary, the ones receiving money right now are...”

Jo Sangik trailed off, quietly looking at Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo, not even bothering to clear his throat, shamelessly continued.

“At present, my combat power is practically the nation’s power, isn’t it?”

“...That could be said.”

“So, the expenses used to enhance my combat power could be considered defense taxes, defense expenses, right?”

Yeongwoo subtly lumped defense expenses with the defense tax.

The defense tax was an official tax guaranteed by the system, but defense expenses were essentially tributes that Yeongwoo had extorted forcefully.

But, unable to point this out here, Jo Sangik had no choice but to nod.

“Yes... that’s not entirely incorrect.”

“Right? Then the money I could’ve collected is effectively part of our national power.”

“.....?”

Feeling something off at this point, Jo Sangik looked at Yeongwoo again instead of answering, but the Strongest Sword’s absurd reasoning was already in full swing.

“Shandong Province, bordering our country’s west, is practically an ally. I know the person in charge there.”

“You must have met them in a dungeon.”

Indeed, the astute Jo Sangik quickly understood Yeongwoo’s rambling explanation.

“Yes. We’ve already formed an alliance and signed an agreement.”

“By agreement, you mean...”

“They agreed to pay us defense expenses in Shandong Province as well.”

“Aha...”

So he had gone and wreaked havoc even in China.

Jo Sangik rested his chin in his hand, deep in thought.

Of course, he had to admit this man’s business acumen was impressive.

“But as you said, isn’t Yeongwoo the one exploiting China? Why do you think our money is going to China...”

“Shandong wants to pay us, but they don’t have the money.”

“.....?”

“They said Beijing is already extorting 30 million daily.”

“Ah, I see. So, the money that should have been our defense tax is now flowing into Beijing, and that’s the problem.”

“Exactly. You’re quick to understand.”

Yeongwoo’s bright response made Jo Sangik feel his mind spinning.

This must be the thinking circuit of a new human who adapted quickly to the world after the reset.

‘This guy’s assumptions are out of this world.’

But perhaps it was this kind of thinking that allowed him to unify the chaotic Korean Peninsula in just six days and achieve a 76.8% approval rating.

After all, there’s a fine line between a brilliant leader and a madman.

“So... are you planning to go to war with China this time?”

As Jo Sangik asked this, a large map was already forming in his mind.

If they went to war with China, they would need to maintain at least two fronts.

The western front towards Shandong Province, as Yeongwoo mentioned, and the northern front extending above North Korean territory.

Therefore, unless they could clone Jeong Yeongwoo, a war with China would be overwhelmingly disadvantageous for the Korean side.

‘And there’s Japan. Their population is more than twice ours, so the average skill level or number of experts must be much higher.’

So, considering Japan as well, there would be at least three expected fronts.

“Considering all this...”

Just as Jo Sangik, having finished his calculations, was about to dissuade Yeongwoo from his reckless challenge, the strongest man on the Korean Peninsula said something unexpected.

“Who said I was going to fight China?”

“What?”

“What exactly did I say earlier?”

“You said you couldn’t stand by while Beijing was taking our money...”

Retracing Yeongwoo’s words, Jo Sangik realized what he had missed.

“Ah, you meant not the whole of China.”

“Right. Beijing is taking our money.”

Then, as if exasperated, Yeongwoo added.

“Do you think Shandong is the only place paying that much money daily?”

“No way... Yeongwoo.”

Jo Sangik’s gaze completely changed.

Even knowing the accomplishments of this man, he had unknowingly underestimated him again.

While Jeong Yeongwoo was undoubtedly reckless, he wasn’t stupid.

“If we fight all of China, we obviously have no chance of winning. But if we only fight Beijing?”

Yeongwoo probably turned his head in the direction of Beijing.

“If we cut off the money supply to Beijing and use that money to enhance my combat power, don’t you think we have a good chance?”

“If we can instill confidence that they don’t need to pay tributes to Beijing, it seems entirely possible.”

“Yes. Shandong has already bet on me. So there’s no reason we can’t persuade other cities.”

Of course, in Shandong's case, it helped that Shandong's Twin Evil, Zhang Jaham, was well aware of Yeongwoo's prowess, making the negotiations smooth.

But even Shandong's Twin Evil, Wu Qingjin, who initially tried to stab Yeongwoo, was eventually persuaded.

'If I effectively demonstrate my power and offer to take less tribute than Beijing, they have no reason to refuse.'

Yeongwoo's strategy was to isolate Im Dupyeong by rallying all the surrounding cities except Beijing and then confront him one-on-one.

"Impressive. I didn't fully grasp Yeongwoo's profound thinking."

Half-genuinely impressed, Jo Sangik bowed his head, and Yeongwoo glanced at the Seoul University swordsmen Jo Sangik had brought.

"Then let's get to work quickly."

"What do you mean...?"

"Take the ethnic Koreans here to Shandong. We can discuss the attack on Beijing after we've repatriated the ethnic Koreans."

As Yeongwoo summoned Negwig, Jo Sangik asked with a puzzled look.

"If you're not going to Beijing immediately... where are you heading?"

Yeongwoo answered as he climbed onto Negwig's back.

"I'm going to cut the first supply line. By now, Shandong is probably being extorted."

* * *

Heading west.

Yeongwoo, who had left Daerim-dong and shot through Bucheon City, had already entered Incheon by a little past 3 p.m.

Kwa-jat, kwa-jat!

Since the mutants had already been dealt with, many citizens were out on the streets, and they all drew their swords, ready to fight as Yeongwoo appeared on his black iron horse.

'Impressive.'

Yeongwoo couldn't help but feel satisfied.

However, there was no confrontation with the warlike citizens of Incheon.

– Kwee-i-i-ik!

In urgent need, Negwig soared above the heads of the citizens blocking the road.

Hwaa-at!

As Negwig, carrying Yeongwoo, leaped into the sky, the citizens clutching their weapons began to swarm, following Negwig's trajectory.

'Hasn't anyone heard that they've formed an alliance with Seoul?'

Yeongwoo made a weary face as he watched the angry citizens rapidly recede behind him.

In any case, with citizens that combative, there would be little worry if Chinese troops ever pressed against the western borders of the Korean Peninsula.

Kwa-jat, kwa-jat!

Soon, the distinctive salty smell of the sea tickled his nose, and the boundary between Yeongjongdo and Incheon Port appeared ahead.

This was the point where the aftereffects of 'Pangaea' had created a small mountain range.

And at the top of that mountain range.

"Huh? Brother...!"

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Recognizing Yeongwoo immediately, Incheon Leader Kim Yongkwan⁰⁴ waved his arms.

"Yongkwan, what are you doing here?"

As Yeongwoo rapidly slowed Negwig and looked at Yongkwan, he turned his head west.

"This is the most noticeable spot. I was waiting for the Chinese."

He had been standing watch, waiting to see when Shandong would deliver the money.
Which meant.

“So, you haven’t received the money yet?”

“No. Could it be that they tricked us?”

“That’s unlikely. Unless a coup occurred within Shandong.”

Even as he said this, Yeongwoo was confident that the possibility of a coup was nearly zero.

He had firmly allied with Zhang Jaham and Wu Qingjin.

After showing them how he remained unfazed even with a sword in his heart, there couldn’t be a more convincing argument.

‘It’s more likely that I arrived a bit late than that Shandong changed its mind.’

Current time, 3:29 p.m.

China must have also finished dealing with the mutants by now, so the tax collectors sent from Beijing were probably already in Shandong.

In other words.

‘Those bastards must have already taken the money. My money...!’

Thinking about how those guys were happily returning to Beijing with 30 million karma from Shandong made his blood boil.

“We need to cross over to Shandong immediately. We have to find out where the money went.”

Just as Yeongwoo said this, adjusting Negwig’s reins.

Pee-ing!

With a clear signal tone, a system message appeared in Yeongwoo’s view.

It was:

[Quest Complete – “Recognition and Fame”]

[Reward Issued]

|30 million karma

It was the quest condition given by Dogo to select the strongest person.

For some reason, the reward was given just as he was about to chase down the Beijing tax collectors.

Swae-ae-ae-at!

Soon, a welcome sound of something cutting through the air was heard.

“Huh?”

Startled by the sharp aura, Yongkwan quickly stepped aside.

Meanwhile, Yeongwoo caught the black metal card descending from the sky.

Ta-at!

[30,000,000]

As expected, the card contained 30 million karma, and Yeongwoo's available cash balance surged upward.

* Available Karma: 66,938,500

A staggering 60 million karma.

‘I was saving up to buy some equipment later... but it looks like I need to boost my stats immediately.’

Given the circumstances, it made sense.

There must be a reason why Dogo issued the reward now.

Im Dupyeong, who survived the first day of the reset by fending off countless threats.

It was clear that the people he entrusted with tax collection were not just ordinary top-level fighters.

‘Then I’ll have to fund my equipment purchases with what I take from the tax collectors.’

Just as Yeongwoo was thinking that it was going to be another busy day.

Swaa-at.

This time, the air in front of Yeongwoo split open, revealing Kubu, his transaction broker and tax accountant.

“Huh? Kubu, what brings you here?”

Because Yeongwoo was always so busy, he unintentionally sounded less than pleased.

Kubu blinked his eyes twice and, looking at the reins already in Yeongwoo’s hand, said:

—You seem busy, so I’ll get straight to the important point.

“Yes. Let’s skip the pleasantries today.”

Kubu blinked once more and looked up at the sky.

Srrk.

Things descending from the sky were usually rewards or disasters.

“Why... why?”

Feeling a sense of foreboding, Yeongwoo urged Kubu to get to the point, and Kubu, rolling his eyes, got to the heart of the matter.

—The reward for defeating the second dragon species, the heart of the steel dragon, is ready for collection.

“Oh...!”

The heart of his formidable uncle had arrived.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 255: Beijing’s Great Evil (2)

“Heart? Of course, I’ll take it. Give it to me quickly!”

Yeongwoo’s eyes gleamed at the news that his uncle’s heart had arrived.

He was in a situation where he had to grab anything that could help increase his combat power.

Wasn't he planning to persuade the masters of the Chinese region with strength to cut off all supplies to Im Dupyeong?

Therefore, the dragon heart, which comes with various effects, was a very welcome gift at this point.

However,

"Uh, wait a minute."

Yeongwoo, who was looking up at the sky waiting for the heart to drop, suddenly recalled something and stopped.

"Do I... have to undergo surgery again?"

Yeongwoo asked this because he currently had a physical Catalog.

Hadn't the heart of the poison dragon he had obtained earlier already been classified as 'physical' and registered in the Catalog?

So if the heart of the steel dragon was the same, then...

'Then I might not need surgery and can directly activate it by putting it in the Catalog, right?'

[Physical Catalog]

[4]

The number of pieces of equipment currently registered in the physical Catalog is 4.

So if he registered the heart of the steel dragon this time, the first collection effect of the physical Catalog would be unlocked.

Thanks to his uncle, he was on the verge of double enhancement.

'Indeed, blood is thicker than water.'

When Yeongwoo placed his hand over his heart, feeling a warm sensation inside his chest for some reason, Kubu blinked.

— Since you have the physical Catalog, you can use the effects of the new heart without having to wear it directly.

“Oh... as expected, right?”

The Catalog had amazing effects that allowed the use of two hearts simultaneously.

— However.

“...?”

— The heart of the steel dragon you are about to receive is also a ‘dragon heart,’ just like the heart of the poison dragon.

“...Right?”

There seemed to be something more.

When Yeongwoo gestured for Kubu to continue speaking, Kubu blinked again.

— Dragon hearts have a unique function called ‘fusion.’

“Oh, I know what that is.”

This was a function that was also attached to the tooltip at the bottom of the poison dragon’s heart.

【Heart Fusion】

| It will be fused if you obtain another dragon heart.

“I thought it would automatically combine because it said it would fuse. Is that not the case?”

— If the heart is processed as a talisman, automatic fusion occurs, but in the case of someone like you who wears it directly, physical surgery is required.

“Oh, I see.”

Apparently, it seemed necessary to remove the existing heart and combine it with the new one.

And if that was the case...

“I’ll have to see that crow guy again.”

But the surgery cost a hefty amount of money and significantly increased evil karma.

“Is the heart fusion effect that good? Is it worth paying the surgery fee every time?”

Yeongwoo asked, hoping it wasn't, and after a moment of thought, Kubu answered.

— Generally, from the point of obtaining the third heart, it is recommended to proceed with fusion if possible.

“So it's not essential right now, right? Since I only have two hearts.”

—...You could see it that way.

“Alright then.”

Yeongwoo looked at the clock.

The current time was 3:34 PM.

If Shandong Province had already paid tribute to Beijing, he had to quickly chase the collection team, so time was of the essence.

He didn't have time to leisurely open his chest in Yeongjongdo.

“Let's quickly receive the new heart. I'm quite busy right now.”

— Understood.

At Yeongwoo's order, Kubu rolled its eyes.

And soon,

Boom!

A sound like a cannon being fired echoed from beyond the sky, and a heavy presence descended from the air.

Woosh!

With a loud breaking sound, something appeared between Yeongwoo and Kubu.

Thud...

It was the heart of the steel dragon, a gigantic heart made entirely of steel plates and metal pipes.

“Why, why is it so big?”

Yeongwoo stared blankly at his uncle's heart, which was much larger than the heart of the poison dragon.

Soon, the tooltip of the new heart filled Yeongwoo's field of vision.

Flash!

「Heart of the Steel Dragon」 – Legendary Heart

【Steel Dragon Emergence】

【Iron Armor】

【Heart Fusion】

【Steel Dragon Emergence】

| Increases the effects of all physical attributes by 10%.

【Iron Armor】

| Reduces all physical damage, except for crushing attacks, by 15%.

【Heart Fusion】

| Fuses with other dragon hearts when obtained.

‘This is amazing.’

The heart has an unexpectedly well-balanced offense and defense.

Especially ‘Steel Dragon Emergence,’ which increases the effects of all physical attributes, was an option that applied to both offensive and defensive capabilities as understood from the tooltip.

‘Physical attribute effects’ included not only increased physical damage but also reduced received physical damage and special effects like ignoring 50% of the opponent's physical damage reduction.

— Would you like to use it in its original form without processing it into a talisman?

As Kubu asked about processing, just like last time, Yeongwoo immediately nodded.

“Yes. I will put it in the Catalog as is.”

As Yeongwoo approved the receipt, the gigantic heart of the Steel Dragon, which cast a large shadow on the ground, began to turn white.

Ssssh!

Then, in an instant,

Paang!

It became a thick beam of light and permeated above Yeongwoo's head.

The heart of the Steel Dragon was truly registered in the physical Catalog.

'Thanks to this, you will live forever, uncle.'

Although only the heart remained, Song Taeho, the eldest son of Jinhyeon, would be with Yeongwoo in all sorts of adventures from now on.

As Yeongwoo stood proudly to welcome his uncle's heart, the physical Catalog reacted soon.

「1st stage collection effect unlocked!」

Unlike other equipment Catalogs, the physical Catalog unlocked collection effects every 5 pieces.

So, as soon as he obtained the heart of the Steel Dragon, the first effect was triggered.

Piiing!

[Physical Catalog]

[5]

[Collection Effect: 5]

| Increases the optimization limit of the body by 10%.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

'What does this mean?'

The collection effect was somewhat unfamiliar, fitting the physical Catalog.

It increased the optimization limit of the body.

“ ... ”

Yeongwoo stared at the tooltip for a while, then he understood it.

‘Oh, I see.’

Optimization of the body.

In other words, it referred to the form of the body that could be enhanced through karma.

The length of limbs, thickness of the torso, total muscle mass, skeletal ratio, and even height.

The first collection effect of the physical Catalog meant that the optimization level of these body components was increased by 10%.

‘Does that mean I can grow up to 2.2 meters tall?’

While it was currently possible to increase height, it was not efficient due to the human body’s functional limits, making the system discourage it.

But now, that recommended limit was increased by 10%.

‘10% doesn’t sound like much, but applied to height, it means I can grow 20 centimeters taller.’

If his height increased, his stride length, reach, and maximum jump height would change significantly.

It was another way to get ahead of others beyond equipment.

‘Won’t I become a complete giant at this rate?’

Despite thinking this, Yeongwoo was already biting a karma coin to alter his appearance.

‘The preset has really changed.’

As expected, the optimized height for his body, as recommended by the system, was now 2.2 meters.

And the cost required to readjust his skeletal muscles and body ratio was a whopping:

[8,406,000]

‘Huh? It’s not that much? It’s much cheaper than heart surgery.’

The cost to transform into a bigger being was 8.4 million.

It would have been an enormous amount a few days ago, but as the acknowledged strongest person in the Korean Peninsula, now even receiving tributes from China, this amount didn't seem that large to Yeongwoo.

'This is an immediate payment.'

As Yeongwoo was about to approve the 8.4 million payment, a severe warning message appeared.

Pop!

「All physical alterations are permanent, and some elements may be inherited by the next generation.」

「Do you wish to proceed?」

Yeongwoo nodded again, and almost instantly, his karma balance dropped to 58 million.

* Available Karma: 58,532,500

He still had a lot of money left, but Yeongwoo couldn't even check that balance.

Because,

“Huff!”

A peculiar pain that accompanied the change in his muscles and bones tingled from his toes to the crown of his head.

'Right! This is something the Berserker Talisman can't block.'

With the pain enhanced from last time, Yeongwoo unconsciously almost fell to his knees but managed to endure it.

He thought this scene might be broadcasted somewhere in the universe or used in some future materials for voters on the Korean Peninsula.

“Grr...!”

Yeongwoo swallowed the pain, making a strange noise.

Then, his entire body was enveloped in white light, and his body began to grow slowly.

His line of sight gradually elevated in real-time as he grew taller.

'This world is really crazy.'

While Yeongwoo marveled anew, his clothes fell off his body as his growth process neared completion.

Shaa!

As the light that covered his entire body slowly receded, his newly formed skin was revealed, and the sea breeze of Yeongjongdo wrapped around his longer arms and legs.

"Is it over?"

As Yeongwoo inspected his new body, he saw Kim Yongkwan, the Incheon Strongest Sword, who had fallen on his butt.

Kubu, who had delivered the heart of the Steel Dragon, had disappeared without a trace.

'No way, did he leave without even saying goodbye just because I said I was busy?'

Yeongwoo considered calling Kubu back, then reminded himself he was indeed very busy.

Quite a bit of time had passed while he was enlarging his body.

"Are... are you alright?"

Kim Yongkwan cautiously asked about Yeongwoo's well-being as he slowly stood up.

Typical Earthling courtesy.

In response, Yeongwoo picked up his equipment from the ground and put it back on before mounting Negwig again.

Hop!

"I'm fine, but are you really okay, Mr. Yongkwan?"

"Pardon? What do you mean?"

"You won't receive your commission because the money from China didn't come in today."

"...Oh? Is that how it works?"

Yongkwan's eyes briefly flashed with anger at the mention of money but quickly softened.

"Not working means no commission, that's fair."

"That's true, isn't it?"

Yeongwoo nodded at Yongkwan and then took the reins of Negwig, looking beyond Yeongjongdo to the Chinese mainland.

"But don't worry. You'll probably get your commission starting tomorrow. I'll take care of it."

* * *

Yeongwoo had agreed to pay a commission of 5 million won per day to Incheon as a brokerage fee.

Although they agreed not to pay today, he would have to start paying again from tomorrow.

Therefore, Yeongwoo planned to use Incheon as the main brokerage point for dealings with China.

He intended to receive tributes from regions near Beijing mainly through Incheon.

'Receiving money through various places means paying a commission to each brokerage point. It's a daily expense, and it can add up to a significant loss over time.'

Of course, for Yeongwoo's ambitious plan to receive tributes from various regions of China to become a reality, he had to first resolve the issue with Shandong Province.

Clop, clop!

As Negwig carrying Yeongwoo passed through Yeongjongdo and reached the coast of Shandong Province, there was not a single welcoming crowd in sight.

The place was utterly barren.

'Did they all go to welcome the collection team?'

Even if the locals greeted the Beijing collection team with flags just as they had for him, it wouldn't matter at all.

Shandong Province was caught between Beijing and Seoul, so it was an inevitable situation.

However, what Yeongwoo worried about was,

‘Or maybe Zhang Jaham... that guy didn’t defy the collection team, did he?’

Zhang Jaham was hot-tempered and loyal, so he might have refused to pay tribute to Beijing, thinking he was now on Yeongwoo’s side.

And if that really happened, the furious collection team might have made an example out of Shandong Province, turning it into a wasteland.

Otherwise, there would be no reason for the place to be so deserted.

Clop, clop!

Negwig continued westward, running into Shandong Province.

Soon, a familiar sight of residents carrying flags entered Yeongwoo’s view.

“...!”

They were the same hand flags that had welcomed him at the Shandong coast that morning.

They were returning after finishing some event somewhere.

“Hey! Over here!”

When Yeongwoo pointed to the flag-bearing people and gestured to stop, the residents, who had recognized him, showed fearful expressions.

However, they couldn’t dare to run away and instead subtly lowered the flags they were holding.

“Uh, Mr. Yeongwoo.”

One person who managed to remember Yeongwoo’s name stepped forward, representing the group.

Yeongwoo tried to maintain a gentle expression and asked,

“Where is it? The place the Beijing people visited.”

Sensing that Yeongwoo had already guessed a lot, the representative resident pointed with a trembling finger to somewhere in the north.

“Yes, Yantai.”

Yantai, also known as Yantai City, is one of the port cities in Shandong Province and wasn't far from where Yeongwoo was now.

However, since Yeongwoo wasn't very familiar with Chinese geography, he had to rely on the direction indicated by the resident.

"Thank you. I'll take care of the rest."

Yeongwoo handed a 10,000 Karma coin engraved with his face to the person who had bravely stepped forward.

Then,

Clop!

He immediately urged Negwig northward, quickly distancing himself from the line of residents.

'I'm already late. But if I chase them with Negwig, I can catch up before they reach Beijing.'

And above all,

'So they're carrying 30 million now? Originally, I was supposed to receive 20 million... so I'll be earning an extra 10 million?'

As he unconsciously thought about making an extra 10 million today, Yeongwoo corrected himself.

'No, Yeongwoo. Think big.'

The tribute agreed upon with Shandong Province was 20 million.

Although the collection team was taking 30 million today, taking it all wouldn't be any different from Beijing.

'Returning 10 million to Shandong Province is the right thing to do. That's what chivalry is about, right?'

To repay those who believed in and helped him—this was what Yeongwoo considered to be chivalry.

So, today on Chinese soil, that chivalry...

"Ah!"

Yeongwoo's eyes widened suddenly.

He saw the city that seemed to be Yantai in the distance, and Zhang Jaham and Wu Qingjin, the Shandong Twin Evils were coming out to greet him.

'Oh, fortunately, both are safe!'

While feeling relieved inside, Yeongwoo couldn't help but blurt out,

"My money! Where is my money going right now?"

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 256: Beijing's Great Evil (3)

Shandong's First Evil: Zhang Jaham.

Shandong's Second Evil: Wu Qingjin.

Together, they were known as the Shandong Twin Evils.

These two individuals were exceptionally tyrannical and combative, living up to their notorious title.

They never avoided a fight, regardless of the challenger, and if there were stakes involved, they wouldn't hesitate to challenge even the strongest opponents.

However, there were exceptions for these notorious figures.

There were opponents they wouldn't even dare to challenge because the mere thought of fighting them didn't arise.

One such person was the enigmatic Im Dupyeong of Beijing.

And the other was:

"Where is it? Where did the tribute money go!"

Charging fiercely from afar on a black iron horse was the great evil of the Korean Peninsula, Jeong Yeongwoo07.

『Strongest Sword』

“...!”

“What’s this? A new title already?”

Zhang Jaham and Wu Qingjin, who had come out to greet Yeongwoo following the territorial rule, widened their eyes in surprise at the new title beneath the mark.

Common sense dictates that all titles, regardless of the affiliated country, should include a regional name.

Yet, no matter how they looked at it, this strange being’s title had none of that...

“Great warrior!”

Zhang Jaham quickly dismissed his random thoughts and ran towards Yeongwoo.

What had that monster said first?

—My money! Where is my money going now?

In other words, this guy was here to find his money.

Moreover, he seemed to know that the money had already left Shandong province.

Thus, he must be quite furious right now.

“What brings you all the way here?”

Zhang Jaham asked, sweating nervously as he tried to host Yeongwoo.

Wu Qingjin added, trying to soothe the Korean evil.

“We were just about to prepare the money to send to you, great warrior.”

This was an attempt to prevent the dreadful Strongest Sword from drawing his sword in Shandong province.

They had quickly learned that if they had enough money, they could divert this monster’s attention.

However, Yeongwoo was too busy scanning somewhere beyond Yantai with anxious eyes.

“I won’t ask three times. Which direction did my money go?”

This time, Yeongwoo's voice was filled with considerable irritation and killing intent.

It meant that the Twin Evils holding him back right now was a huge nuisance.

Understanding the situation quickly, Zhang Jaham pointed northwest and then due north.

"Normally, it would have gone to Tianjin, but today it might have headed towards Dalian."

Tianjin acted as the port city of Beijing, and Dalian was a port city in Liaoning province.

Originally, Dalian could only be reached by crossing the sea from Yantai, but with the Pangaea incident, the land had connected, making Dalian the closest city to Yantai.

In other words, the changing geography could have altered the money collection routes.

"Hmm."

After hearing Zhang Jaham's explanation, Yeongwoo quickly deliberated.

'Normally, Tianjin would be the returning route. But thanks to Pangaea, we can walk to Dalian, which was previously across the sea.'

According to the Twin Evils, the Politburo Standing Committee members assigned to each collection team were immensely skilled.

[PR/N: The Politburo Standing Committee members are the center of political power in China. Organizationally below them are the Politburo, and then the Central Committee.]

So much so that the Twin Evils couldn't withstand even three moves from them.

'Then they would have enough strength to handle the situation... There's no reason not to visit a suddenly appeared collection point, right? If it were me, I would definitely check it out.'

The heart of a villain is best understood by another villain.

Though he hated to admit it, Yeongwoo had a common ground with those Standing Committee members: they were all collectors.

The only difference was the amount they collected: 30 million, 20 million respectively.

"I think they went to Dalian. I'll go meet them, get my money, and also cut off some heads."

“...!”

As Yeongwoo really turned his horse towards the north, Zhang Jaham and Wu Qingjin quickly moved to his side and asked.

“Is there anything we can help you with?”

Yeongwoo thought for a moment and then looked around the vast land.

“Make a simple map of the cities that pay tribute to Beijing.”

It was a request to create a kind of business map.

What Yeongwoo needed to do from now on was visit the cities paying tribute to Beijing and convince them to pay tribute to him instead.

So he needed to know the exact collection areas of Beijing to plan his route efficiently.

“Ah... understood. We will make the map as detailed as possible.”

“Yes. Please take care of it. See you later.”

As Yeongwoo waved his left arm to indicate he was leaving, the two Shandong evils clasped their fists and saluted.

* * *

Leaving behind the excessively polite Shandong Twin Evils, Yeongwoo sped towards Dalian, which was no longer a port city.

Swoosh, swoosh!

‘Wait, but aren’t all Politburo Standing Committee members quite old?’

Although Yeongwoo wasn’t well-versed in Chinese politics, he at least knew that there were no young people among China’s top leaders.

In other words, if the Politburo Standing Committee members serving Im Dupyeong were the same old members, that would also be a strange thing.

‘Of course, it’s not that there are no middle-aged masters, but considering the chaos on the first day of the reset... it’s definitely disadvantageous.’

The more Yeongwoo learned about Beijing, the more mysterious it seemed.

And while he was thinking this,

swoosh, swoosh!

Wide green fields and low mountains appeared to the left of the galloping Negwig, followed by houses and low-rise buildings gradually coming into view.

“Is this the outskirts of Dalian?”

Though Yeongwoo had a few Chinese titles, he still seemed to be judged as an outsider.

Unlike in the Korean Peninsula, the regional status interface wasn't supported here in mainland China.

‘It seems that the affiliation is fixed according to the initial profile.’

Of course, it could also be because he was considered an intruder due to the territorial mark of China.

‘I still don't know much about this world.’

It was a familiar situation.

But now, with the world's languages unified, the true ‘global village’ era had dawned.

“Hey!”

Yeongwoo called out to a man who had poked his head out from a house nearby and then started running away like a squirrel.

Tatat!

However, the man did not respond to the call to stop, so Yeongwoo ultimately...

“Just want to ask for directions!”

Chasing the man on Negwig like a Mongolian cavalryman pursuing a fugitive.

Screech!

And within seconds,

Thump!

He succeeded in catching the fleeing man trying to hide between buildings.

Yeongwoo grabbed the man's nape with one hand and lifted him.

“Aaah!”

The Chinese man, who had come outside and then got caught by a monstrous cavalryman, turned pale and screamed as if he were about to die.

“.....”

This scene strangely reminded Yeongwoo of the insects he used to catch and play with as a child.

Like a grasshopper caught in his hand, foaming white or laying eggs.

The sight of the man writhing in midair with his legs hanging reminded him of those insects he had caught long ago.

‘What... what is this feeling?’

An indescribable strange emotion lingered somewhere inside the back of his mind.

Yeongwoo stared blankly at the man who was desperately but powerlessly struggling, then regained his senses.

“Ah...! If you answer this one question, I’ll let you go immediately. Is this Dalian? Which direction should I go to get to the center of Dalian?”

The man, whose face was smeared with tears and snot, pointed northeast while struggling in the air.

“Dalian! Da-Dalian...!”

As promised, Yeongwoo gently placed the man back on the ground.

Then,

“Eek!”

The man made a strange noise and ran madly between the buildings.

Today would probably be the most terrifying day of the man’s life.

‘Looks like I gained some bad karma.’

The man soon disappeared from Yeongwoo’s sight completely.

So, without any more guidance, Yeongwoo resumed his journey in the direction the man had pointed—northeast.

Swoosh, swoosh!

'The cat isn't reacting yet... Is it still quite far? Or.'

He might have chosen the wrong destination from the start.

Contrary to his expectations, the collection team might have chosen to quickly return to Tianjin after their stop.

'If that's really the case, it's a bit disappointing.'

It could be his second fruitless trip of the day, following his journey to Busan.

As Yeongwoo continued northeast, finally,

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

-growl.

The "fearful cat" in his pocket started to shiver and let out a low growl.

"Oh...!"

He still didn't know what the target was, but at least it meant that there was a fairly strong presence nearby.

And the direction was,

Swoosh.

'Northeast. Dalian city center.'

-growl!

The fearful cat Yeongwoo pulled out was indeed looking northeast.

This indicated that there was a high probability that Beijing's collection team was in Dalian.

'Perfect. Showing strength by taking down this so-called Standing Committee member will be ideal. Seeing a collector killed right in front of them, the representatives in Dalian would have no choice but to align with me.'

Yeongwoo knew from experience that the most effective persuasion in this world was a display of power.

Especially when persuading in a foreign country with completely different history and culture.

‘In the first meeting, fists speak louder than words.’

While Yeongwoo was having such fearsome thoughts, the fearful cat’s ears folded even flatter, and its head slowly tilted more to the east.

This meant that the target was quite close now.

‘Wait for me, Dalian! I’m coming...!’

As Yeongwoo gripped the reins tightly, Negwig, understanding his intent, increased its speed even more.

Swoosh!

And at almost the same moment,

“.....!”

He saw Dalian citizens moving busily in the opposite direction.

They were relocating to avoid something inside the city.

‘Oh... is the named one in Dalian rebelling?’

After all, hadn’t Shandong Province also started paying tribute only after a skirmish with a Politburo Standing Committee member?

It made sense that Dalian, which had been surviving independently until now, wouldn’t easily pay the 30 million karma tribute every day, even if it was to Beijing.

‘Today, right here, I’ll cut off one of Im Dupyeong’s limbs!’

As the battlefield seemed to be getting closer, Yeongwoo moved the “White Fire” he was wearing to his hand.

And at that moment, he saw people gathering in the city square ahead.

There were far more people than he had expected.

Dozens of highly skilled warriors surrounded the square, and in the center of the square,

“Ha, the Politburo? How can you still use the name Politburo when the Party no longer exists?”

“You insolent wench! How dare you deny the existence of the Party!”

Sharp, biting words were exchanged.

‘Dalian...? Is that the pronunciation of Dalian?’

Yeongwoo looked at the middle-aged woman standing defiantly in front of a middle-aged man who appeared to be part of Beijing’s collection team.

『Dalian Sword Guild』

Dalian Sword Guild.

It seemed Dalian had only one named one.

Would this mean their martial prowess was greater than regions with multiple named ones?

‘I’ll have to see about that.’

As Yeongwoo thought this and moved straight toward the square, the Dalian Sword Guild leader shifted her gaze to him.

She had sensed the territorial mark he was carrying.

“Huh...?”

As the Sword Guild leader squinted at the strange shape of the intruder, the middle-aged man facing her belatedly turned to look at Yeongwoo.

It was then that Yeongwoo realized,

‘What’s this? He doesn’t have a title?’

The middle-aged man, who was surely one of the Politburo Standing Committee members, had no title.

It was possible he was hiding his title like Yeongwoo, but...

‘He doesn’t seem to see my mark at all? That means he’s not a named one.’

Territorial marks could only be seen by regional powerhouses, the named ones.

In other words, no matter how strong he was, an unnamed master wouldn't be able to see Yeongwoo's position.

'How did someone without a title overpower the Shandong guys in three moves?'

As Yeongwoo, puzzled, closed the distance to the square to about 100 meters, the collector's face twisted.

"Strongest Sword...?"

He was mulling over the unfamiliar title.

Meanwhile, Yeongwoo's eyes caught sight of the bags of money piled up behind the middle-aged man.

"My money! You bastard, leave my money and your head behind!"

"What?"

The middle-aged man's expression turned vicious at the phrase "my money."

"How dare some nobody...."

As he reflexively started to curse, he saw the "Strongest Sword" suddenly drawing his bow, and his eyes widened.

"Die...!"

The coins wouldn't be destroyed even by a laser bombardment.

So Yeongwoo shot his arrows at the middle-aged man without hesitation.

Whiz!

At a distance of less than 50 meters, it was virtually impossible to dodge Yeongwoo's stealth arrows.

'Even I couldn't dodge at this range. Let's see how tough a Standing Committee member is!'

Yeongwoo watched the multiple arrows cutting through the air.

Then, soon enough,

Boom!

A violet explosion of supernatural energy occurred right in front of the middle-aged man.

He was hit without any chance to evade.

‘Got him!’

Certain that all his arrows had hit, Yeongwoo leapt off Negwig to decapitate his opponent.

Leap!

However,

Hiss...

Contrary to his expectations, a powerful presence remained where the supernatural explosion had occurred.

“.....!”

The middle-aged man was still standing there, unharmed.

‘Danger!’

Instinctively sensing an impending counterattack, Yeongwoo tried to draw his sword quickly.

But having just leapt off his horse, his feet hadn’t yet touched the ground, and his opponent’s attack exploited this brief moment of vulnerability.

“Kiyaaaah!”

The middle-aged man’s right arm, wrapped in a violet glow, extended with a sound like crashing waves.

‘...What?’

An overwhelming amount of supernatural energy emanated from it.

Yeongwoo recognized it instantly upon seeing the attack.

“You, you bastard, you’re an alien lackey...!”

And as he spoke these words,

Thud!

The middle-aged man's monstrous arm pierced through Yeongwoo's chest.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 257: Beijing's Great Evil (4)

"Ugh?"

Seeing his own chest being pierced in real-time, Yeongwoo's eyes widened as he quickly pulled himself back.

Taaat!

It was the first time his body had been pierced by a human bare hand instead of a blade.

'What kind of guy doesn't use weapons?'

Indeed, the continent was different.

Yeongwoo felt a sense of tension he hadn't felt in a long time.

He no longer thought of himself as invincible.

'...That was close.'

Although the Berserker talisman was blocking the pain, the foreign sensation he felt was enough to realize it.

The attack had narrowly missed his heart.

And the reason was surprisingly...

「Combat Assistance from the Strongest Sword Technique has been activated.」

'...Combat Assistance?'

The Strongest Sword Technique, acquired in exchange for the unification of the Korean Peninsula, had a new feature called 'Combat Assistance' included.

The tooltip for Combat Assistance filled Yeongwoo's vision.

[Combat Assistance]

| If the user fails to perfectly execute combat instructions, forced correction within a margin of error of 15% will be carried out.

'...Ah.'

In other words, even if Yeongwoo did not perfectly follow the hologram guide's instructions, it would adjust up to 15% for him.

It would forcefully move his body, increasing not only the precision of his attacks but also his defense...

'Since Combat Assistance was activated just now, it means my heart would have been pierced otherwise?'

A crazy feature that might have saved Yeongwoo's life.

".....!"

Finally understanding the situation, Yeongwoo's mouth fell open.

Of course, whether the purple hand of that middle-aged man could have pierced the heart of the indomitable dragon was unknown.

'But at the very least, he could have ripped out my heart.'

As Yeongwoo stood with a complex expression and a hole in his chest, the middle-aged man with a similarly confused look glanced at his own right hand.

Chuuuuaaak...!

As a punishment for damaging the Strongest Sword's body, his right hand was being rapidly corroded by the toxic blood.

"That arm... It won't heal, will it?"

As Yeongwoo looked at his opponent's half-melted arm, he asked.

The middle-aged man frowned deeply.

"I am Zhang Jinshan, the 6th Standing Committee member of the Central Political Bureau."

"6th... what?"

Yeongwoo tilted his head at the somewhat grand title.

However, everyone except Yeongwoo knew who the middle-aged man was.

Zhang Jinshan, 61 years old.

One of the highest-ranking officials in China, and the youngest member of the Standing Committee, known to all Chinese people.

"...Who exactly are you?"

As he said this, Zhang Jinshan's gaze was fixed on the hole in Yeongwoo's chest.

Unless it was a hallucination, the hole seemed smaller than before.

The wound on his chest had begun to heal.

With this realization, Yeongwoo looked at the piles of money bags behind Zhang Jinshan and spoke.

"I am the Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula, Jeong Yeongwoo."

"Korean Peninsula...?"

Zhang Jinshan made a subtle expression.

Although somewhat expected, hearing it directly from his opponent's mouth confused him a bit.

"The Korean Peninsula is still divided into two, isn't it?"

"Not anymore. I just told you, I'm the Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula."

"Are you saying the Korean Peninsula has been unified?"

"Yes."

Yeongwoo's statement caused not only Zhang Jinshan but also all the Chinese experts around them to buzz with excitement.

Then Zhang Jinshan revealed the reason for the commotion.

“...But there’s Kim Jong-un in the north.”

That infamous Kim Jong-un.

‘Indeed, he is well-known.’

But Yeongwoo knew better than anyone what had happened to him.

“Kim Jong-un is dead. Seems like your news is a bit slow.”

“What? Kim Jong-un is dead?”

Finally, Zhang Jinshan showed genuine shock.

Then he looked at the hole in Jeong Yeongwoo’s chest with a slightly different gaze than before.

“So, you’re not just some wandering oddity, but something bizarre from Joseon.”

However, the one facing the 6th Standing Committee member Zhang Jinshan was not just someone who could be described as bizarre.

“That money was collected from Shandong Province, right? Hand it over first.”

Jeong Yeongwoo was a nationwide robber who had come to China.

* * *

When Yeongwoo pointed at the money bags with the tip of his sword, Zhang Jinshan, who had been composed until now, exuded a very cold aura.

“You crazy bastard, you must be dying to get killed.”

A muscular body that did not match his gray-haired age of sixty.

Standing at a towering 2 meters, Zhang Jinshan wrapped his entire body in a purple energy, making him look like a demon.

When Yeongwoo coveted the money meant for Beijing, in other words, the national treasury, Zhang Jinshan decided to demonstrate his true power.

Of course, even in this situation, Yeongwoo was analyzing his opponent’s traits.

‘Ah, but at least his severed arm isn’t regenerating. So, he’s not invincible either.’

Moreover, hadn’t his skin melted from the toxic blood?

That meant the blade of Bastard would penetrate his body quite well too.

'It seems he usually doesn't use weapons and employs some kind of martial arts.'

That meant the reach difference was at least 6 meters.

With the Dullahan Sword's traits registered in the weapon catalog, Bastard's blade could now extend up to 6.6 meters.

Swoosh.

With a certainty of victory, Yeongwoo slowly extended the Bastard's blade to the ground and spoke.

"If you can kill me, go ahead. Let's see what tricks you have up your sleeve."

"You...!"

Finally provoked by Yeongwoo, Zhang Jinshan bent his left hand fiercely and charged.

Crash!

「Sensory stats have temporarily increased from 3,400 to 7,042.」

And with an incredible amount of sensory stats unleashed.

'What... what is this?'

Yeongwoo could be certain at this point.

As expected, the Standing Committee members, including Im Dupyeong, were undoubtedly agents of an alien force.

'Which company are these bastards sponsored by?'

Despite being flustered by Zhang Jinshan's unexpectedly high stats, Yeongwoo stuck to his initial plan and instructed the golden goblin.

"Grab the money! Hurry! Now's the time!"

Yeongwoo shouted this command loudly not only to ensure the golden goblin obeyed promptly but also to distract Zhang Jinshan, whose primary mission was obviously guarding the tribute money.

-Kiiik!

The goblin dashed towards the money bags with its characteristic swift movement, causing Zhang Jinshan to momentarily turn his head.

Whish!

In that instant...

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

-Swaaack!

With the horrific trumpet sound of Pofu Tenta, Yeongwoo swung Bastard with unbelievable speed.

Ssssh!

Even Tian Zhulin of the Dalian Sword Guild, who was watching the battle closely, could hardly perceive the speed.

Swish!

In the blink of an eye, a red line slashed across Zhang Jinshan's left arm.

And then...

"Huh?"

With a short cry, Zhang Jinshan's left forearm fell to the ground.

In just three exchanges, he had lost both arms.

"What... what was that?"

"Did you see that? Just now?"

The other spectators, surrounding the area, only realized what happened after Zhang Jinshan's arm hit the ground.

While Tian Zhulin at least sensed the movement of the sword, the other regular swordsmen couldn't follow the sword's movement at all.

'Where did this crazy guy come from?'

Tian Zhulin couldn't close her gaping mouth, staring at the title of the outsider consisting of three simple characters.

『Strongest Sword』

In this world, a master was not made overnight.

Especially a master of such a high level.

‘Literally the Strongest Sword.’

While Tian Zhulin cautiously sheathed her own sword, the golden-skinned goblin picked up the money bags.

-Kikiki!

At the same moment, Zhang Jinshan...

“Kraaaaah!”

...lost all the composure he had maintained until now and screamed in agony.

But this wasn't because of his severed arms.

It was purely due to the pain.

He was finally experiencing the effect of the golden punishment's pain-inflicting effect.

‘What's this, why now?’

Did he have some equipment to delay the pain?

Yeongwoo tilted his head in confusion but kept a safe distance from his opponent.

If Im Dupyeong and his subordinates indeed had alien sponsors, it wouldn't be surprising if they possessed some desperate final technique.

“Hey, Jinshan.”

“Grrrr...!”

“You're an alien henchman, right? Which company?”

An outer-space conversation incomprehensible to an ordinary person.

However, Zhang Jinshan's answer was unexpectedly ‘I don't know.’

“I don’t know! That kind of thing!”

“That kind of thing...?”

And oddly, from Zhang Jinshan’s phrase ‘that kind of thing,’ Yeongwoo glimpsed his sincerity.

If this man really had alien sponsors, he would have kept his mouth shut rather than calling it ‘that kind of thing.’

“Then where did all this power come from? I don’t see any equipment on you.”

As Yeongwoo tapped near Zhang Jinshan’s groin with the flat of his sword, the latter managed to speak through gritted teeth.

“This... power was directly bestowed by Chairman Im Dupyeong! It’s not some alien thing!”

“...Ah.”

Yeongwoo nodded at Zhang Jinshan’s statement.

“So, Im Dupyeong is the henchman. Or maybe...”

Yeongwoo started to say more but stopped himself.

‘Isn’t Im Dupyeong just an alien?’

No matter how high-level a master, he’d never heard of someone being able to share their power.

Of course, pre-reset China had a population of 1.42 billion, 28 times that of South Korea.

So, it would be arrogant to claim he knew everything about the world with his limited experience in the Korean Peninsula.

But still, there should be a limit.

‘It’s not like he’s creating zombies; how could he produce so many masters of this level?’

In Yeongwoo’s eyes, Zhang Jinshan’s prowess was such that even six or seven of Seoul’s Strongest Swords would struggle to ensure victory.

So, if Im Dupyeong had reached a level where he could create such masters, wouldn't it be more realistic to view him as an alien rather than a human?

Considering this was the world after the reset.

'What's going to happen to Earth with these scoundrels running rampant?'

Although he had planned to kill him anyway, if Im Dupyeong really was an alien, there was even more reason to do so.

As his deceased uncle had said, Seoul... no, this Earth belonged to humans.

For the greater good, Yeongwoo pointed his sword at the Dalian Sword Guild and the experts of Dalian City.

"Alright, everyone, put down your weapons and hand over all your money."

Thus, Yeongwoo began his first official duty as the elected 'Strongest Sword' of the Korean Peninsula.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 258: Beijing's Great Evil (5)

"Who the hell are you? Demanding money out of nowhere?"

This was Tian Zhulin, a renowned swordswoman and the guardian of Dalian.

She looked at Yeongwoo with genuine confusion.

She wasn't asking about his title, of course.

She had already heard it before and could see it written on him.

『Strongest Sword』

The infamous figure who killed Kim Jong-un and unified the Korean Peninsula, the monster Strongest Sword Jeong Yeongwoo.

Judging by his martial prowess just now, it didn't seem like an exaggeration.

‘But why is he here committing robbery instead of stabilizing his power?’

She had heard rumors a few days ago.

The thugs of Dandong City had crossed into Sinuiju, North Korea, intending to loot but were all killed except for one.

‘Could it be because of that incident?’

They say a gentleman’s revenge is never too late, even if it takes ten years, but this Korean monster seemed to be back for revenge within days.

However, Yeongwoo was saying something entirely different from what Tian Zhulin had expected.

“To strengthen the country.”

“.....!”

“And to bring peace to the world!”

“What.....?”

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are in a time of chaos.”

As Yeongwoo stepped forward, the swordsmen surrounding him backed away in fear.

“The Reset has destroyed the law and the borders of our continent. In this chaos, extraterrestrial forces are invading our world.”

As he said this, Yeongwoo approached Zhang Jinshan, who was groaning with his arms cut off.

He placed his hand on Zhang Jinshan’s head.

Thud.

Immediately.

“You bastard, how dare you!”

Zhang Jinshan’s body glowed purple with rage.

Whoosh!

His body was instantly enveloped in a strange power, and his right leg twisted at an impossible angle, kicking upwards.

Bang!

Attempting to strike Yeongwoo's chin.

"Hmph.....!"

Yeongwoo, seemingly prepared, dodged the attack by tilting his body and then swung his giant sword at Zhang Jinshan's leg.

Whoosh!

The Golden Trail was a massive sword, 2 meters long.

However, Zhang Jinshan's leg, instead of being cut, deflected the golden sword.

Though not unscathed, it was evident that Zhang Jinshan had reached a state where swords couldn't harm him.

"What?"

"That's impossible."

As Tian Zhulin and the dozens of swordsmen watched in shock, Yeongwoo finally drew his Bastard.

"Eeek!"

As expected, Zhang Jinshan flinched and drooled in fear at the sight of the Bastard.

He had learned firsthand that this weapon was not something he could withstand.

Thanks to that, he had lost both of his arms.

Zhang Jinshan then decided to.

Dash!

Flee.

He decided to return to Beijing while his legs were still intact.

Yeongwoo pointed at the fleeing Zhang Jinshan.

“Look at that! That purple energy is the power of the extraterrestrials!”

Thud!

As Yeongwoo pointed out the power wrapping around Zhang Jinshan’s legs, everyone watched in a daze as he fled.

“That, that’s the power of aliens?”

“Is that so.....?”

“I’ve never seen anything like it, though.”

But hadn’t the arrow shot by the Strongest Sword caused a purple explosion as well?

Some who remembered this fact had their doubts, but they kept them to themselves.

They instinctively knew that speaking up would mean ending up like Zhang Jinshan.

“Traitor to humanity, Zhang Jinshan! Take my blade!”

With a determined shout, Yeongwoo threw his Bastard at Zhang Jinshan.

Whoosh!

As the Bastard traced its path, it drew the seal of the peach blossom and soon pierced Zhang Jinshan’s back.

Thud!

“Aargh!”

As the giant Zhang Jinshan, a two-meter-tall behemoth with white hair, crashed to the ground, Yeongwoo extended his hand again to remotely retrieve his weapon, the ‘Bastard.’

Shhh!

For the first time, appreciative murmurs arose from the experts.

“Oh?”

“Wow!”

“Is that...?”

It seemed like a technique that every Chinese person aspired to, resembling the art of wielding a sword with the mind.

However, Zhang Jinshan, the person who had been attacked, was gnashing his teeth and raging furiously.

“You crazy bastard! If you kill me, you’ll be making an enemy of the entire regime. Do you think you can escape unscathed after meddling with state funds?”

At this, Yeongwoo tilted his head.

“Who decided it was state funds? Until the people support it, it’s just plunder.”

But in a world where strength dictated everything, there wasn’t much to argue if Im Dupyeong called the tribute taxes.

Just as Yeongwoo had collected ‘defense fees’ from the Strongest Swords in Seoul.

Of course, Yeongwoo had progressed beyond that now.

“The reason I came here today is to bring down Im Dupyeong. He not only collects tributes but also colludes with alien forces? That makes my blood boil.”

“What? What does that have to do with you? You’re not even... Chinese...”

As Zhang Jinshan protested with a look of incomprehension, Yeongwoo’s figure rapidly closed the distance and overwhelmed him.

Wham!

“Ugh!”

Zhang Jinshan’s body slammed into the ground again.

Then, Yeongwoo whispered softly into his ear.

“Having two guys lining their pockets with tributes while serving aliens is a bit much, don’t you think? If you truly care about China, you should sacrifice yourself.”

“What? What do you mean by th-...”

Just as the terrified Zhang Jinshan tried to say more.

Wham!

The ‘Bastard’ in Yeongwoo’s hand pierced through Zhang Jinshan’s head.

Finally, one of Im Dupyeong's minions was dealt with.

'Now the wealth of Shandong Province is mine.'

As Yeongwoo straightened up with a sense of satisfaction, something unexpected happened.

Wham!

A pillar of light suddenly erupted from Zhang Jinshan's lifeless body.

"What?"

Yeongwoo, startled, took a step back and watched along with everyone else.

Wham!

The purple light beam that burst from Zhang Jinshan's corpse shot towards Beijing.

"Was it true?"

"What was that?"

It was a scene reminiscent of a demon lord's minion retrieving their power, and everyone in Dalian City stared at Yeongwoo with their mouths agape.

The words of the Strongest Sword from the Korean Peninsula, which had seemed like nonsense, now appeared to have a high probability of being true.

"Ah... what did you say again? That Chairman Im and his subordinates are alien collaborators?"

Dalian Sword Guild's Tian Zhulin, now speaking much more respectfully, asked Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo quickly erased his puzzled expression and looked in the direction the light beam had flown.

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

"Yes. There is a very high probability."

The special abilities one could gain from equipment usually converted physical or elemental damage into special powers.

It was rare to see someone like Zhang Jinshan, whose power itself was a special ability.

Except for an arrow made by the Dogo, that is.

‘But Zhang Jinshan was almost saturated with special abilities. It looked like his power was being reclaimed upon his death... Im Dupyeong’s identity is becoming increasingly suspicious.’

Moreover, Zhang Jinshan referred to himself as the 6th member of the Standing Committee.

If that ‘6th’ was related to combat power ranking...

‘Then there are at least five more above him?’

Imagine at least five monsters of Zhang Jinshan’s level spread across China, collecting money.

“ ...”

An uncontrollable anger welled up within him.

However, if the process did not result in casualties, it might actually benefit Yeongwoo.

While it would take considerable effort to persuade regions that hadn’t yet started paying tribute, regions that had already been visited by the collection teams would be different.

‘I only collect about 60% of what Im Dupyeong does. It’s like a debt refinancing, so persuading them would be easier.’

If they could bear paying tribute to the Korean Peninsula instead of within China, Yeongwoo could gain a million karma daily.

He saw a good chance of success.

By sheer luck, the ‘alien collaborator theory’ had gained traction in Dalian City, inadvertently clearing a path for him.

“As you just saw, Im Dupyeong in Beijing is oppressing all of China with power he brought from aliens. If no one stops him, everyone will eventually have to pay daily tributes to aliens.”

As Yeongwoo added that Im Dupyeong would grow stronger with the money they paid, Tian Zhulin naturally voiced a doubt.

“But why does it have to be you? Isn’t this a matter for China to handle...?”

“Because there’s no one else.”

“What did you say?”

“You people can’t even handle a minion sent to collect tribute; how are you going to capture Im Dupyeong?”

“You...!”

Tian Zhulin instinctively tried to retort with “Then why you,” but she quickly shut her mouth.

The man before her had already sufficiently proven his skills.

“To be honest, I could extort money from you all without using Im Dupyeong as an excuse. But I genuinely have a just cause, so I’m mentioning it as well.”

Then, Yeongwoo thrust the ‘Bastard’ into the ground and spoke in a grave tone.

“If I hadn’t killed Zhang Jinshan, you would have been extorted for at least 30 million.”

“...!”

“But I’ll only take 20 million. Just 20 million karma. If everyone here can pool together and raise it, that would be ideal.”

Yeongwoo then put on a sorrowful expression.

“If you do your best but still can’t raise enough money, I’ll have no choice but to squeeze it from the citizens’ blood.”

“That... that crazy...”

“You’re telling us to raise 20 million right here and now?”

The reactions were fiery, but Tian Zhulin, who had practically been defending this city, responded with a cool head.

“It’s impossible to produce 20 million in cash right here. Your demand is unreasonable. Even if we ransacked the entire city, it would still take quite some time to gather the money.”

At this, Yeongwoo asked as if he’d been waiting for this response.

“How much time would you need?”

“What?”

“How much time would you need to gather the missing money?”

“Well, I’m not sure.”

Tian Zhulin looked around and then cautiously offered an opinion.

“At least two hours...?”

Yeongwoo checked his wristwatch and then informed Tian Zhulin.

“Then I’ll go extort money from another city and return in two hours. Make sure you have the money ready by then.”

“You’re going to another city?”

“My goal is to prevent Im Dupyeong from receiving any tribute. That means every city should already be paying their tribute.”

“To you...?”

“Yes.”

“...”

Tian Zhulin no longer had the energy to be surprised.

Only one thought kept swirling in her mind.

‘This guy is pure evil.’

Im Dupyeong, the alleged alien collaborator, couldn’t possibly be this bad.

But Yeongwoo’s next words caught her attention.

“Of course, I could meet with an unexpected accident in another city. The commissioner I encounter there might be too strong.”

“So?”

“If something like that happens, I won’t be able to return here in two hours, and you won’t need to prepare the money.”

“Oh.”

It was a logical statement, but to the cornered Tian Zhulin, it sounded strangely plausible.

After all, it wasn't an entirely hopeless option.

She could at least hope that this crazy Korean would die somewhere.

“Is that good? Do we have a deal?”

“...We don't really have any other choice, do we? Let's do it.”

“Good. Then from now on...”

“There's more?”

Seeing Tian Zhulin furrow her brow in apprehension, Yeongwoo pulled out the ‘Bastard’ and said.

“I'll take recommendations for the next city I should visit.”

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

Chapter 259: The Greatest Worry (1)

Recommending the next city to be extorted... It was indeed a devilish idea.

Considering Jeong Yeongwoo's martial prowess and objectives, his visit would be disastrous.

‘It's like playing hot potato with a bomb. Where should I send this guy?’

Tian Zhulin pondered seriously.

Which city could take down this madman?

‘It must be a large city with many powerful fighters.’

To the north of this place was Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province, with a population of nearly 9 million.

There would undoubtedly be many masters there, but...

‘To keep him in check, ordinary masters won’t do. It has to be a monster-level expert.’

Thus, Zhulin thought it had to be an unusual city.

So, which city in the area was the most peculiar?

‘Hmm.’”

As Tian Zhulin fell deep into thought...

“Tongliao...?”

One of the swordsmen in the group mentioned the city of Tongliao.

It was a city in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region that could be reached by traveling north past Shenyang.

The distance from Dalian was also several hundred kilometers, making sending the Strongest Sword far away advantageous.

Additionally, Tongliao was where Han Chinese and Mongolians lived in equal numbers, and there had been recent anti-government protests.

The atmosphere had been agitated since the Reset, and crucially...

‘Given its history of being a problematic city, Im Dupyeong would be aware of it.’

Therefore, the senior official dispatched there would not be an ordinary person.

Among the nearby major cities, if there were one most likely to advance on Beijing, it would undoubtedly be Tongliao.

“Tongliao? Is it alright there?”

Yeongwoo, catching the swordsman’s suggestion, asked, and Tian Zhulin nodded.

“Yes... If we have to pick one place, I would recommend Tongliao.”

“It seems to be a rather fierce place.”

Knowing the intent behind the question, Yeongwoo subtly probed, and Tian Zhulin's expression hardened.

“ ... ”

However, Yeongwoo was hoping for a strong area to be recommended.

Since new variables appeared daily, he thought it best to weaken the enemy's forces from the start significantly.

'If they're recommending it as a strong place, then Im Dupyeong wouldn't have sent just anyone there. I might even meet a high-ranking official sooner than expected.'

It was time to leave Dalian.

Yeongwoo sheathed his sword and bowed slightly to Tian Zhulin.

"I'm sure you don't feel good about this, but I have no personal grudge."

“ ... ”

"But since the times are chaotic, someone needs to hold power and establish at least minimal order."

Tian Zhulin's expression darkened in a flash of anger.

"Order? Extorting money from city to city is establishing order?"

"It's a process to establish order. In any case, someone needs to become stronger than Im Dupyeong to defeat him."

“ ... ”

Tian Zhulin fell silent again.

She partially agreed but also found it challenging to agree entirely.

She consistently believed that Im Dupyeong, who aimed to become a dictator before and after the Reset, should not seize control of China again.

However, the idea that the person to replace him might be the madman in front of her, someone from the Korean Peninsula, was distasteful.

It wasn't just about agreeing or disagreeing; it evoked an emotional repulsion.

"I don't think I'm being unreasonable. Most cities probably think the same way. As a Chinese, being ruled by a foreigner is unpleasant."

"That would be the same for any country. But..."

Yeongwoo thought of Zhang Jaham of Shandong Province, who had warmly welcomed him.

According to Tian Zhulin, Zhang Jaham, who willingly accepted a foreigner, was an unusual minority.

But thinking in reverse, didn't it also mean that someone like Zhang Jaham was the fittest for survival?

"As I said earlier, it's an era of survival of the fittest. The outdated ones will soon perish."

"..."

"Seeing many martial artists, I've become quite good at judging people. In my opinion, Tian Sword Master is not a bad person. So, I hope you live long. Please prepare the money."

Yeongwoo left with a promise to return in two hours and mounted his four-legged steed.

Thump!

The black iron horse emitted a strange sound and glowed with a menacing light, clearly not of this world.

No one dared to challenge this proof that Jeong Yeongwoo allied with extraterrestrial forces.

Tian Zhulin also raised her hand slightly in a gesture of farewell.

Unlike the two martial artists from Shandong, she couldn't bring herself to salute fully but made a farewell gesture nonetheless.

"See you later. Take care..."

Finally, Yeongwoo turned completely northward.

Then.

Boom!

At a tremendous speed, he sped away from Dalian City.

* * *

Current time: 4:43 PM.

As Yeongwoo headed north toward Tongliao, the next destination recommended by Dalian City, he realized something was off.

‘Wait... the distance?’

According to the map provided by Dalian City, the distance to Tongliao was a whopping 600 kilometers.

Even if Yeongwoo was riding a steed from another world, he couldn’t possibly make a round trip in just two hours.

In other words, it was highly likely that...

‘They pointed out a city that’s not just tough but as far away as possible. I’ve been tricked.’

However, the other cities weren’t exactly close either.

They were all at least 230 kilometers away.

So, in a way...

‘Maybe they did pick a faraway place on purpose, but all the cities worth going to are pretty far.’

Such was the scale of the continent.

When he operated in Seoul, the travel distance was at most 20 kilometers.

But in China, the basic distance unit had become 100 kilometers.

‘At least I’m riding Negwig. Others probably can’t travel around because of the distances.’

Yeongwoo finally understood why the collection team had only arrived in Dalian today.

‘There wasn’t some grand reason; it was too far.’

It might seem laughable initially, but for Yeongwoo, who dreamt of ‘world peace,’ it was troublesome.

‘This makes it physically impossible to collect money from all over China.’

He thought Im Dupyeong was using collection teams to save face, but it turned out there were practical reasons.

‘Dupyeong hyung must have a lot of worries.’

And those worries would soon increase.

He would soon learn that a competitor had appeared in the same line of work.

‘From now on, my dream is to become ‘Im Dupyeong’s greatest worry.’

As Yeongwoo resolved to this new dream and continued northward, he soon encountered a group of swordsmen traveling south along the road.

Yeongwoo slowed Negwig down and blocked their path.

Thud!

“Excuse me, can I ask for directions?”

The man at the front of the ten swordsmen scrutinized Yeongwoo from head to toe.

“...Who are you?”

Assessing the opponent’s equipment and martial prowess quickly was an essential survival skill in this world.

“...”

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

The man at the front made his judgment in about one second.

He naturally lowered the arm that had been resting on the hilt of his sword.

“You’re asking for directions...?”

His tone became much more cautious, indicating his understanding of the situation.

“Where is the largest city around here?”

Yeongwoo asked, showing the map provided by Dalian City.

The man’s expression grew even more tense.

Though, Yeongwoo, who mainly operated in Seoul, didn't know maps in this world were very expensive.

Especially in a vast country like China.

A detailed map that included small towns could cost over ten million Karma.

Of course, the map given to Yeongwoo by Dalian City was a more straightforward form that only showed significant cities and nearby terrain, but still, at least...

"That's a good map. It must be worth at least two hundred thousand."

"Are maps that expensive?"

"Yes, indeed."

The man accepted Yeongwoo's map respectfully and then glanced around.

"If I may ask, why are you looking for a large city? It seems this is your first time in the area."

It was clear to anyone that this outsider didn't fit in here.

Asking about the largest city while carrying a map worth at least two hundred thousand Karma...?

"Hmm."

As Yeongwoo pondered what to say, the man bowed his head slightly and softly waved his right hand, which should have been holding a weapon.

"We're wanderers with no fixed abode. We roam near cities and hunt stray monsters to make a living."

"I see."

When Yeongwoo nodded without further comment, the man continued.

"As you can see, we travel on foot. If we pick the wrong city to visit..."

The man explained that they might not find food or a place to stay.

So if he was going to attack a city, please be honest so they could avoid it.

"You're quite straightforward. Don't you mind that I'm a foreigner?"

When Yeongwoo asked this, the man wiped his nose once.

“For people like us, being overly honest is a way to live longer.”

And this was true.

His words made Yeongwoo feel like telling them his true intentions.

“Strictly speaking, I’m not going to conquer a city. I’m going to collect some money.”

“A businessman, I see.”

“Yes. The city won’t be destroyed so that you can visit it by tomorrow. So, where should I go?”

When Yeongwoo finished speaking, the man looked northwest and shielded his eyes from the sun with his hand.

“If you travel for about two hours in that direction, you’ll reach Ansan.”

“Ansan?”

“Yes.”

Coincidentally, the city had the same name as Ansan in Korea.

‘If he thinks it takes two hours... with Negwig, it could be done in thirty to forty minutes.’

This meant visiting Tongliao late tonight or tomorrow.

The few words from this wanderer had changed the fate of two cities.

“The largest city here is Shenyang, but you won’t reach it before sunset.”

“I see. Thank you.”

Yeongwoo was about to head straight to Ansan but stopped Negwig again.

Thud!

The swordsmen, who were about to leave quickly, turned back in surprise.

“What is it?”

Yeongwoo took out three gold commemorative coins from his pocket and threw them.

“For guiding me.”

“This, this is...”

The man was shocked to see Yeongwoo’s face engraved on the coins.

He blinked at the name ‘Jeong Yeongwoo 07’ written under the portrait.

Since the characters on the coins didn’t translate, the man couldn’t read what was written.

Even though the man didn’t ask, Yeongwoo read it aloud for him.

“Jeong Yeongwoo 07, the Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula.”

[Translator – Night]

[Proofreader – Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 260: The Greatest Worry (2)

Parting ways with the wandering swordsmen, Yeongwoo ran towards the northwest, aiming for a city with a familiar name—Anshan.

[PR/N: After checking, Anshan is a city in China, while the Korean counterpart is called Ansan prev chap I did both as Ansan, which was wrong, my bad guys.]

Boom! Boom!

Even though it wasn’t far in the grand scheme of things, he still had to run at least a hundred kilometers, with only low-rise buildings and fields to greet him along the way.

‘China’s population exceeds 1.4 billion, so even if the Reset happened, at least 400 million should remain, right? Where have all these people gone?’

Yeongwoo glanced at a farmhouse devoid of any sign of life.

Though China’s population was large, the land was even larger, causing such issues.

Even before the Reset, the population density outside the major cities wasn’t exceptionally high, and with the advent of monsters, encountering people became even rarer.

‘And this land is remarkably vast. Unless someone’s significantly boosted their abilities, they could die of dehydration on the road.’

As Yeongwoo looked back, an endless stretch of road lay before him.

‘This won’t do. I’ll waste an entire day just collecting money.’

Yeongwoo finally realized how challenging it would be to achieve ‘world domination.’ Historically, even large empires struggled to continue conquests due to physical distance issues.

The further they got from their homeland, the harder it was to supply resources and manage conquered cities.

If even empires faced such challenges, how could an individual like Yeongwoo succeed?

Currently, the best he could muster was a small team to collect funds.

Conquering the entire world, let alone China, might be a pipe dream.

‘How can I collect tributes on a national scale?’

It was a complex problem.

Even Im Dupyeong, who attempted to conquer China before him, hadn’t solved this issue yet.

“.....”

While Yeongwoo contemplated different methods of collecting funds, the road to Anshan continued endlessly.

‘At best, I can visit three cities in a day.’

Boom! Boom!

‘Managing this vast land is realistically impossible unless I can use the Guppy Express regularly.’

Thinking of the Guppy Express, Yeongwoo’s gaze naturally drifted to the sky.

The King of Destruction, Dogo, who roamed the universe, may know the solution.

‘Something that allows high-speed movement on a regional scale. If not, at least card payment machines or ATMs should be installed in each city. After all, tributes can be transferred electronically.’

Receiving daily tributes via transfer and only visiting cities that miss their deadlines for problem-solving.

This was Yeongwoo’s ideal collection structure.

The technology for this already existed.

‘Aren’t our taxes essentially paid through transfers? Why can’t I use such technology?’

While Yeongwoo’s mind raced, he finally saw the rough skyline of a city in the distance.

“Oh.”

He had arrived in Anshan, Liaoning Province, China.

With a total population of 3.64 million and an active urban population close to 1.5 million, it was a significant steel industry city.

Though not a megacity by Chinese standards, it looked enormous to Yeongwoo from the Korean Peninsula.

In fact, while Seoul’s area was 605 square kilometers, Anshan’s was 9,252 square kilometers.

The central part alone was as large as the entire city of Seoul.

“How do I find anyone in this vast place...?”

No merchant markers were in sight, either because the transactions were already done or simply because the area was so large.

There was nothing to use as a guide.

‘Do I have to capture someone and ask?’

Surely there must be someone akin to the Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula in this region as well.

And if that person was in the city, they should know his presence.

‘Are they hoping I’ll just pass by...?’

That was a possibility.

Just as there were fearless people like Dalian Sword Guild's Tian Zhulin, there were also those like Yongsan's Strongest Sword Kim Doha, who prioritized self-preservation above all.

"Hmmm."

Yeongwoo, riding on Negwig, stared at the city for a while before deciding to take the quickest route.

"General...!"

He unleashed the most impressive attack he could manage to call out the city's person in charge.

"Earth, 084! 362! 1041! 443!"

The coordinates Yeongwoo called out marked the location of a construction site near the city entrance.

Likely an abandoned large building project due to the Reset, it soon found a new purpose.

Boom!

Using the construction site as a makeshift call button, Yeongwoo unleashed a laser beam.

Boom!

The anonymous construction site was instantly flattened, and soon enough...

"Ah, ahh!"

"Help us!"

"Invasion!"

Swarms of Anshan citizens began to pour out, sensing danger as the laser beam struck from the sky.

Those who directly witnessed the laser were outside, while most people, unaware of what had happened, rushed outside.

"What's going on?"

“We don’t know either. We heard a huge noise.”

“Could it be war...?”

War.

Essentially, it wasn’t far off.

Hearing the noise, the Five Masters of Anshan immediately dashed toward the impact site, following the mark of the sovereign flag embedded with the laser.

Thump, thump, thump!

As the five masters of Anshan dashed through the city, the citizens followed them.

Meanwhile, the instigator, Yeongwoo, had jumped off Negwig and strolled towards Anshan.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

‘They should have understood by now.’

Yeongwoo’s message was clear.

If no one came to greet him, he would continue using laser strikes to destroy the city.

Though he valued settlements as rare resources and wasn’t serious about the destruction, the message was compelling.

‘Heh, it worked.’

He sensed several fast-approaching presences ahead.

Five individuals were rapidly closing in on him.

『Five masters of Anshan』

‘There are five of them here? Is it because the region is so large?’

As Yeongwoo stood watching the Five Masters of Anshan approach without drawing his sword, the long-haired man in the lead stopped about 15 meters away from Yeongwoo.

Tap!

The other four also stopped, aligning themselves based on the long-haired man's position.

This was the minimum safety distance the Five Masters of Anshan considered necessary.

“.....”

Yeongwoo couldn't help but tilt his head slightly.

'It seems the level of the Five Masters of Anshan isn't very high.'

Generally, during such a standoff, the distance is determined by one's psychological safety margin.

In other words, it's the distance at which they feel they can react to an attack in time or believe they are outside the expected range of the opponent's attack.

Given that, the current level of the Five Masters of Anshan was...

'15 meters? They're all within my striking range...?'

Yeongwoo blinked.

It had to be one of two things.

Either the Five Swordsmen were underestimating him, or they were so inexperienced that they had never encountered a master who could kill them in the blink of an eye from more than 20 meters away.

Which was it?

He would soon find out.

Thump!

The long-haired man suddenly gave a fist salute to Yeongwoo and spoke.

“What brings you to Anshan? We hesitated to greet you directly, fearing we might hinder your journey.”

Considering they knew well about Yeongwoo's background, this was quite a problematic display of courtesy.

They even knew that the man before them was the one who had seized the title of China.

‘Did they originally intend to be this peaceful, or did the laser strike change their minds?’

Yeongwoo pondered how to broach the subject of tributes while observing the other four, excluding the long-haired man.

As expected, the bald, muscular man standing to the immediate right of the long-haired man wore a very hostile expression.

The Five Masters of Anshan.

Having five people in one city with the same title implied that there were five different personalities and wills behind that title.

It was clear that while the long-haired leader preferred peaceful negotiations, the consensus among the Five Swordsmen was not unanimous.

‘This might not be resolved through dialogue alone.’

The current time was 5:14 PM.

Yeongwoo checked the time and then spoke to the long-haired man.

“I am Jeong Yeongwoo, the Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula, visiting China as a representative.”

The long-haired man’s eyes widened momentarily, and he glanced at the other four ‘swordsmen.’

“I’ve heard of your reputation... but I didn’t realize you were a representative of the Korean Peninsula. I am Jeong Taeryong of the Five Masters of Anshan.”

Jeong Taeryong.

He quickly introduced himself and made another fist salute, but unlike before, he couldn’t maintain a bright expression.

There was a world of difference between a mere troublemaker from the Korean Peninsula and that troublemaker representing the entire peninsula.

The former could be dismissed as an individual rogue, but the latter implied that the entire Korean Peninsula was declaring war.

And predictably...

“You’re the representative of the Korean Peninsula? Are you saying that the peninsula’s residents have united intending to advance into the Central Plains?”

The bald, muscular man, shouted angrily at Yeongwoo.

Jeong Taeryong quickly reprimanded him in a low voice.

“Hwigwang, if you wish to keep your head on your shoulders today, hold your tongue.”

At least Jeong Taeryong seemed to grasp that the Strongest Sword’s skills were extraordinary.

“My brothers can be a bit rash. Please forgive their rudeness.”

Swoosh.

Jeong Taeryong bowed his head slightly in apology to Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo, in turn, accepted the apology with a slight bow of his own.

He could tell that, despite Jeong Taeryong’s courteous demeanor, his pride as a Chinese remained intact.

This was evident from his refusal to refer to Yeongwoo with the title ‘Strongest sword.’

If this were Shandong Province, as soon as Hwigwang made his mistake, Zhang Jaham would have hailed Yeongwoo as the ‘Strongest sword’ while bowing his head to the ground.

‘Shandong’s Twin Evils are truly impressive. We can definitely move forward together.’

If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.

The more Chinese people Yeongwoo met, the more he realized Shandong was his best partner.

“Since our time is valuable, let’s get straight to the point.”

Yeongwoo began to broach the uncomfortable subject.

“Have you met the standing committee members dispatched from the Politburo in Beijing? They’re typically older and wield unusual powers.”

Jeong Taeryong and the other swordsmen looked puzzled.

“Standing committee members?”

“Do you mean politicians?”

“What are you talking about?”

They seemed clueless.

‘Damn it. This complicates things.’

Apparently, the collection team from Beijing hadn’t reached this eastern region yet.

Even Dalian to the south wasn’t initially a target area for collections until the lands merged into Pangaea.

‘Should I explain about Im Dupyeong first... or just start fighting?’

It might be quicker to demand money under the threat of death rather than to explain that the President of China had become a legendary demon collecting money across the continent.

Just as Yeongwoo slowly began to reach for the sheath at his waist...

Boom!

A loud, unsettling crashing sound came from the west.

“.....!”

“What was that?”

“That... that’s!”

Shock therapy indeed worked best for grabbing attention.

Following the Five master’s gaze to the west, Yeongwoo broke into a bright smile.

An old man wrapped in a purple aura of demonic energy was charging towards them.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

With each step he took, the ground upheaved, indicating his formidable martial prowess.

In other words, that must be...

“Standing committee member!”

Yeongwoo shouted the person’s status with glee, causing Jeong Taeryong to stare at him with wide eyes.

“What... what did you say?”

“Standing committee member! That man will explain everything! Why you need to pay me 20 million!”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]