

Level 4 Human in a Ruined World #Chapter 271 - Read

Level 4 Human in a Ruined World Chapter 271

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 271: Starry Night (1)

“Mara!”

“Revenge!”

“Maraaa...!”

While Yeongwoo and the orcs chanted Mara’s name with voices filled with madness, Choi Moonsoon, the only one maintaining her sanity, sensed a swift presence in the sky.

Swooosh!

“What is that...?”

As she tried to call out to Yeongwoo, the Strongest Sword, upon sensing the sudden threat, Yeongwoo, who had seemed half out of his mind until now, suddenly reached up into the sky.

Swish!

With his fingers, he grabbed a pitch-black metal card that had appeared out of nowhere.

Snap!

‘This bastard? He was in his right mind all along?’

Choi Moonsoon gaped in shock.

Yeongwoo had returned to his dry, emotionless gaze in an instant.

She finally realized that the Strongest Sword had been playing along with the orcs all this time.

“We’re in the middle of a very important ceremony, so play along, will you?”

Yeongwoo whispered quietly to Moonsoon, then raised his arms back into the air as if nothing had happened.

“Marrraaaa...!”

Moonsoon had no choice but to join in, raising her weapon to the sky along with the surrounding orcs.

“Mar, Mara!”

In her 47 years of life, Moonsoon had never experienced anything like this before.

After all, when else would she ever swear a bloody vengeance mingling with orcs on the Australian continent?

Meanwhile,

‘It’s been properly deposited.’

Yeongwoo checked the metal card that had come down from the sky.

[50,000,000]

A metal object containing a whopping 50 million in cash.

This was the reward Dogo promised for the completed quest.

[Quest Complete - “Finally, Global Village”]

[Reward Granted]

| 50,000,000 Karma

Thanks to this, Yeongwoo’s balance was nearing the billion mark.

* Available Karma: 98,492,500

‘The money isn’t decreasing at all?’

98 million Karma.

Although he had to pay taxes tonight, it was still more than enough money.

‘It’s perfect timing since I have to clear the night dungeon tonight...’

Feeling generous due to his ample funds, Yeongwoo decided not to collect the welcome tribute for the first time.

“Chief Bang, I won’t be collecting today’s tax. For now, bringing in more brothers is more important.”

- What? Of course, for today...

Bantubangtong started to argue but closed his mouth to avoid causing any trouble.

Especially since the Strongest Sword of Jeju had gestured for him to be quiet.

- Then... how do we break through that path?

As Bantubangtong got to the main point, Yeongwoo handed him something as if he had been waiting.

Thump.

It was a hologram cube.

Since the ‘super-high-speed transit route’ was constructed using multiple spacers, the design and construction video could be shared with others.

“Seeing it yourself will be quicker, Chief Bang.”

Yeongwoo was quite nervous at this moment.

If Chief Bang decided to nullify all agreements after watching the insane road construction video, there would be nothing Yeongwoo could do.

- Huh.

Eventually, as Bantubangtong reached the ‘spacer launch’ scene, he opened his mouth wide in astonishment and took a deep breath.

Then, he gave feedback that was beyond Yeongwoo’s expectations.

- Indeed... the path of revenge, which will witness countless bloodsheds, must also be opened with blood.

“Ah, Chief Bang...!”

- Mara! Is Mara really beyond that darkness?

Bantubangtong asked, pointing to the considerably darkened northern sky, and Yeongwoo nodded vigorously.

“Yes! With high probability...!”

This also meant there was low probability, but Bantubangtong, the lord of the Red-footed Orcs, was already rallying his brothers, pointing north.

- Finally, it's time to open the path of revenge! Brothers! Open the path to become the stars in that sky! We will extract a thousand times the blood we shed from Mara!

Amazingly, thousands of orcs in the area responded by thrusting their weapons into the air.

- Stars!

- Let's become stars!

- Open the path of revenge!

Then something even more astonishing happened.

Swoooooosh!

As if on cue, a pillar of white light shot down from the sky's edge.

“Dogo...?”

Seeing countless Dogo symbols mixed in the light pillar, Yeongwoo immediately understood.

It meant that Dogo had been observing all the scenes so far, and seeing that the ‘spacers’ were ready, the company had begun the actual construction.

Shhhhh!

Swoosh!

In the blink of an eye, the pillar of light that struck down on the Australian land left behind a massive tower before it disappeared.

The tower, resembling a very tall lighthouse, had intricate engravings of Dogo's wedge symbols on its metallic surface.

- What is that?

Soon, Bantubangtong approached the tower's base, touching the surface with his hand and flaring his nostrils.

"This is probably the first step to the highway... no, the path of revenge."

- First step?

"Yes. To become a star... you have to climb very high first."

As Yeongwoo said this and looked up to see the top of the tower, the orcs around him followed suit and lifted their heads.

- What is that...

- It's really high.

- It might really reach the stars.

The orcs spoke poetically about stars, but to Yeongwoo, the tower seemed only about 700 to 800 meters tall.

Still, it was excessively high for an elevated road.

'Orcs are supposed to build the road up there? What on earth...'

Even though it was his doing, Yeongwoo found it absurd.

Creeeak.

The side of the tower slowly opened, forming an archway.

Entering it would likely lead to the top of the tower.

Yeongwoo wanted to proceed before the excitement died down.

"Who wants to become a star first?"

But this wasn't the way orcs communicated.

Unlike with Bantubangtong earlier, there was no response this time.

- Hmph.

As expected, Bantubangtong snorted and grabbed his chest with his right hand.

- You still can't speak with your heart.

“.....?”

When Yeongwoo expressed confusion, Bantubangtong looked up at the sky, still clutching his chest.

- The bravest one, the first brother to become a star, will shine the brightest even in the heavens.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Then he swung his hand that was holding his chest and struck the alien tower.

Boom!

- Who will light up the sky first? Who will be the first milestone on the path of revenge? The bravest one, step forward and proclaim your shining name!

‘Indeed, a lord.’

Yeongwoo felt a surge of emotion, clutching his own chest.

And at that moment,

Thump!

Every orc stepped forward, casting heavy shadows on the tower.

- Today, we all become stars!

- There will be no night. Countless stars will light up the sky.

- The brave ones, step forward!

- Forward!

As the orcs, each shouting a word, rushed towards the tower entrance, the tower flashed white and shot white beams to the top each time.

That was probably it.

“Are the orcs... ascending?”

As Choi Moonsoon, her mouth covered, spoke in a dazed voice, Yeongwoo shook his head.

“Don’t call them orcs. They are brothers. And now... they are becoming stars and shining.”

Yeongwoo pointed somewhere far up in the sky.

Then,

Piaat!

With a faint popping sound, a barely visible light beam shot out from the top of the tower, towards somewhere in the northern sky.

It wasn’t the brightest star in the sky, as the orcs had claimed, but it still looked like a star.

“Wait, just now?”

Seeing this faintly, Choi Moonsoon looked at Yeongwoo with a puzzled expression, and at this moment, Yeongwoo,

“.....”

Trembled slightly at the fingertips and bit his lips tightly.

“Strongest Sword...?”

Moonsoon closely examined Yeongwoo’s contorted face.

“... Are you crying?”

Then the Strongest Sword, Jeong Yeongwoo, shook his head again.

“No, that’s not it. I was just thinking about how I must kill Mara.”

“Okay.”

Moonsoon didn’t press the Strongest Sword further.

She had already seen enough.

The faint twinkle in the corner of this madman’s eyes, like the starlight she just saw.

* * *

「The lodging service has begun.」

「From now on, all buildings classified as ‘residences’ will be under the inviolable state influenced by the lodging system.」

「By the way, tonight’s weather is black fog.」

「Be cautious of physical loss.」

By 9 PM, despite the start of the lodging period, not a single orc who had gone up the tower had returned.

Indeed, they were all becoming stars in the night sky, paving the way.

And still, countless orcs, or brothers, were lined up at the tower’s entrance.

“How many more brothers must we send before the path is fully opened?”

To his surprise, Bantubangtong responded,

“Isn’t that something I should be asking? You’ve grown soft, human.”

“I have no honor. I realized that after seeing those starlights.”

Bantubangtong laughed heartily, his throat fully visible.

“Ha ha! Honor is not something one can claim for oneself. If you want to reclaim your honor from us, ensure those stars shine forever.”

Though the last statement was somewhat ambiguous, Yeongwoo soon understood its meaning.

“I will definitely kill Mara.”

“If that time comes, you will be our true leader.”

“Hah.”

Yeongwoo wasn’t sure if this red-skinned otherworldly being truly understood the implications, but he couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Bring the red!”

Bantubangtong ordered his brothers to bring a large inkstone.

“If you wish to take revenge with us, first become a Red Foot.”

He pointed to the red liquid in the inkstone, instructing Yeongwoo to step into it.

The message was clear: they couldn't allow someone with white feet on the road they had paved with their stars.

“.....”

Without hesitation, Yeongwoo submerged both feet in the inkstone.

Bantubangtong approached roughly, grabbing Yeongwoo's neck and shaking his body in the inkstone, making sure his feet were thoroughly stained red.

“It is done! Now you are our brother, and we are yours.”

Bantubangtong struck Yeongwoo's chest hard.

Thud!

And at that moment,

Piaaaat!

Unlike before, the tower glowed with multicolored lights, drawing bright lines on its lower surface.

Swaaaah, shiaaaah!

It looked as if lines were connecting constellations.

“...Ah.”

It was a kind of route map.

A high-speed transportation route map.

Beneath the brightly shining lines, the outline of New Pangea was engraved.

According to the map,

“Th-the path to Seoul is already open?”

The high-speed transportation route that the brothers had opened stretched from Australia to Seoul.

Judging by the intermittently flickering dots,

‘...Those are towers. They're like stations.’

By looking at the map, Yeongwoo could tell how the high-speed transportation route would function.

The travel between towers would be almost at the speed of light.

The way the brothers opened the path was likely to move rapidly to the tower left by the previous stargazer and then launch themselves from there.

Then, a tower would remain where they disappeared as stars.

“Is this your city?”

As Yeongwoo stared intently at the engraved Seoul, Bantubangtong pointed it out with his stubby finger.

“Yes.”

“Then what are you hesitating for?”

“.....?”

“Time is up. Go.”

It was then that Yeongwoo noticed the night had grown much darker.

The time for tax collection was approaching, and soon, the night dungeon would come with abnormal weather.

Swish.

Bantubangtong was already pointing to the entrance of the tower.

“Master Bang...!”

As Yeongwoo bowed deeply in gratitude, Negwig quickly ran up from a distance, realizing it was time to leave Australia.

Thump!

Once Yeongwoo mounted Negwig, Bantubangtong traced the white route extending from northern Australia to Seoul with his finger.

“Go up and follow our brothers. I hope the brightness isn’t too blinding.”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 272: Starry Night (2)

9:48 PM.

Parnas Hotel in Gangnam, Seoul.

At this moment, most of Seoul's prominent "Strongest Swords" had gathered here.

From Oh Yeonhee of Songpa to Jo Sangik of Gwanak, and even Kim Doha, the Yongsan Strongest Sword.

These individuals, who were still the strongest in their respective districts, were wasting their precious time in front of a hotel room for one reason only.

"No matter what, I don't think so."

"You never know."

"True... if he couldn't make it by now, wouldn't he have contacted us?"

Rumors that Jeong Yeongwoo, who was supposed to collect their money, had still not arrived had spread throughout Seoul.

This was why the Strongest Swords had started gathering one by one in front of Yeongwoo's room, leading to this situation.

"Oh, right. At the very least, Yeongwoo could have contacted us, right?"

Lee Yoobin, the Seongbuk Strongest Sword, widened her eyes and spread her hands, signifying the unique ring 'Wave,' Jeong Yeongwoo's signature as the Gangnam Strongest Sword before becoming a Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula.

If something had come up, couldn't he have used the Wave to contact Seoul?

The Strongest Swords of Seoul had gathered urgently because of this delay in Yeongwoo's return.

What could have happened if Yeongwoo hadn't returned to Seoul without a word?

"He had a way to contact us but didn't... what could it be?"

Kim Doha, the Yongsan Strongest Sword, rubbed his chin and asked meaningfully.

This essentially implied that something might have happened to Yeongwoo.

In response, Kim Jeonggu shouted loudly in front of the room door.

“What nonsense is that? Our Yeongwoo didn’t fail to contact us; he just chose not to!”

“Yes, Father. Of course. I didn’t mean anything else.”

Jo Sangik, the Gwanak Strongest Sword, smiled bitterly and tried to soothe Jeonggu.

But Sangik also considered the possibility of Yeongwoo’s unexpected death.

Otherwise, it didn’t make sense.

‘If he couldn’t return by this time, there was no reason not to use the Wave.’

Of course, it could be because he was too impressed by something to even think of using the Wave.

But what could be more surprising than killing Kim Jong-un of the North with a laser?

“What was Yeongwoo’s last known destination?”

At Sangik’s question, Jeonggu thought momentarily and then looked west.

“I believe it was China.”

“China...”

They had seen some of Yeongwoo’s relationship with China through the Strongest Sword selection vote, but that was just a part of China as a country.

‘It’s such a big country; he could have encountered a much stronger opponent than expected.’

If that were the case, it was unfortunate.

They had been supporting Yeongwoo, thinking it wouldn’t hurt to have a crazy genius from the Korean Peninsula in this insane world.

But...

‘Did Yeongwoo dive into the big leagues too soon?’

The sea might have swallowed the frog that should have stayed in the well.

“ ... ”

Sangik inwardly sighed but outwardly said something different.

“China is such a vast land, he might just be too busy returning to contact us.”

However, most of the Strongest Swords seemed to have different thoughts.

“No, no matter what, he could have said a word into the ring. How could he forget that?”

“There’s a limit to being late. It’s almost time to pay taxes, and he still isn’t here?”

“Exactly. He used to come back punctually at sunset because of the dungeon.”

With the situation completely different from Yeongwoo’s usual pattern, they all secretly predicted something had happened to the Strongest Sword.

Logically speaking, their words made sense.

The Strongest Sword, who left Seoul for China, had not returned by almost 10 PM.

Negative interpretations were inevitable.

“Then what if...”

Finally, Lee Hanwook, the Dongjak Strongest Sword, uttered the words “what if.”

What if the Strongest Sword Jeong Yeongwoo had indeed died in an unexpected accident? Who would be his successor?

Who would manage the enormous defense funds he had collected from Seoul and parts of China?

Could it even be managed?

“ ... ”

As everyone waited tensely for Hanwook’s next words, suddenly—

BOOM!

An enormous explosion was heard from somewhere outside the hotel, possibly beyond Gangnam.

“What, what was that?”

“It sounded like something fell!”

“Where did that sound come from? Wasn’t it quite far away?”

While the Strongest Swords in the hotel corridor looked around out the windows, Kim Jeonggu, the Dobong Strongest Sword and also Yeongwoo’s biological father, raised his head abruptly.

Then—

“Move aside!”

He began pushing aside the Strongest Swords in the corridor and moved forward.

“Wh-where are you going, Father?”

Jo Sangik hastily followed him and asked, and Jeonggu, sweeping his finger across the Strongest Swords present, said,

“Can’t you tell? That’s the sound of Yeongwoo returning. Now, everyone, grab your money and follow me.”

“...?”

Some of the Strongest Swords still wore skeptical expressions, but others had already placed their bets.

Thud!

They slung their bags of money over their shoulders and started running after Jeonggu.

“F-Father! Please slow down!”

“Father...!”

Seeing this, the remaining Strongest Swords, who had been standing idly, also picked up their money bags.

* * *

9:54 PM.

Six minutes left until tax payment time.

Jeonggu and about a dozen Strongest Swords hurriedly ran south of the city.

This was because the explosion had undoubtedly come from the south.

Soon—

“Ah...!”

Someone gasped and pointed towards the southern sky between the buildings, causing them to stop.

“What is that?”

“...My God.”

They saw some sort of structure descending from the sky, splitting it in half.

It looked like a tower but was so tall they couldn't see its top with the naked eye.

“What is that, Father?”

Everyone looked at Jeonggu and asked.

‘Didn't that old man say so?’

He had said just a while ago that the loud noise signalled that Jeong Yeongwoo was returning.

But now, the true cause of that noise, seen with their own eyes, was...

“Isn't that... an alien?”

When Lee Yoobin from Seongbuk proposed the alien theory, some of the Strongest Swords agreed and looked back at Jeonggu.

Of course, Jeonggu was equally bewildered by the unexpected situation.

“What the hell is that?”

Did Moses, who led the people in the Exodus, feel like this when he stood in front of the Red Sea?

Even Jeonggu could see that it wasn't his son, Jeong Yeongwoo.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

No, it wasn't human at all.

The scale of the structure was beyond imagination.

“ ... ”

While everyone stood there with their mouths agape, Songpa's Strongest Sword, Oh Yeonhee, spoke up.

“Prepare for battle. Whatever it is, it's clearly not human.”

Swish!

With those words, her crescent blade cast a long shadow on the ground, and some of the Strongest Swords thought:

‘As expected of Oh Yeonhee.’

‘If Jeong Yeongwoo is really dead, Oh Yeonhee will be the next Strongest Sword.’

Oh Yeonhee, the Strongest Sword of Songpa.

Before and after Jeong Yeongwoo's appearance, she held the second-in-command position in Seoul.

Although Jo Sangik of Gwanak had recently been rising in prominence, she was still undoubtedly the second-in-command.

“What are you all doing?”

Seeing that many hadn't yet drawn their weapons, Oh Yeonhee frowned.

“It might already be too late, that's definitely...!”

An alien invader.

Before she could finish her sentence, it happened.

Fshhhh!

A thin beam of light descended from the sky, and a large pillar of light enveloped it.

Boom!

“What?”

“It’s an attack!”

Finally realizing that the structure had reached Gangnam, the Strongest Swords drew their weapons.

Swish, swish!

And simultaneously.

“Instead of the Strongest Sword, monsters have come! But you’re gravely mistaken if you think Seoul will fall easily!”

Oh Yeonhee, pointing her crescent blade at the massive light pillar, solidified her position as not just the second-in-command, but the future Strongest Sword.

She declared that she was still the representative of the Seoul Alliance.

Then, suddenly.

Whoosh!

The unidentified light pillar, which had been just a mass of light until now, began to take shape.

The light pillar descended right opposite COEX, in a large construction site.

Rumble!

The pressure from the light pillar suddenly intensified.

Swoosh!

In an instant, all the light dissipated, revealing a huge tower in its place.

“...What.”

“It’s really a tower?”

Current time: 9:58 PM.

Two minutes left until tax collection.

Because of this coincidental timing, some present thought it might be another stage of the reset.

The sudden appearance of this foreign structure was that astonishing.

“I can’t see the top.”

“How tall is it...?”

As the Strongest Swords cautiously approached the tower with their weapons, Oh Yeonhee warned in a sharp voice.

“Be careful, everyone. Inside there, most likely.”

Something non-human would be in there, no need to finish the sentence.

Swoosh!

Suddenly, one side of the tower opened, forming an archway, and large orcs with red skin poured from it.

-Seoul!

-It’s Seoul!

Standing 3 meters tall, these orcs chanted “Seoul” as they lined up beside the tower’s entrance.

As if preparing for someone to emerge from the tower.

And soon after.

Clank, clank.

Someone with metallic hooves leisurely emerged from within the tower between the orcs.

“...?”

As expected, the dazzling light from inside the tower caused the pupils of the Strongest Swords to dilate again.

Because.

Clank!

“The Strongest Sword?”

“Jeong Yeongwoo...?”

The person emerging, guarded by orcs, was none other than Jeong Yeongwoo, the only elected Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula.

“Ah, you all came out to greet me?”

Amidst the strange bright light, Jeong Yeongwoo’s characteristic nonchalant voice rang out.

And right on cue.

—Taxes will now be collected.

At exactly 10 PM, nationwide, no, planet-wide tax collection began.

And specifically for the Korean Peninsula, there was an additional tax.

—Defense tax will be collected shortly. Prepare for payment.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 273: Starry Night (3)

Defense Tax.

It was a tax collected by the only elected Strongest Sword on the Korean Peninsula, and its rate was 6.8%, identical to the excess support rate at the time of the Strongest Sword’s election.

A characteristic of the defence tax was that it was automatically levied only on additional income that exceeded the “minimum expense amount” set by the tax system.

And it was collected daily in installments.

Therefore.

“What, what is this?”

“Do they start collecting taxes as soon as they arrive?”

The Strongest Swords were understandably astonished.

They were already paying tribute for defence, and now they had to pay the defence tax as well.

Especially since the Strongest Swords, having significantly higher incomes than ordinary citizens, would pay a substantial amount in defense taxes.

Being individuals overseeing entire regions, their basic income far exceeded the “minimum expense amount.”

“Isn’t this essentially double taxation?”

“We already pay defense fees, and now defense taxes too?”

As the Strongest Swords in Seoul voiced their anger while wielding their weapons, the orcs surrounding the tower bared their teeth.

“Silence!”

“Is it so begrudging to pay your brothers?”

“Greedy beings.”

The Strongest Swords did not back down and raised their swords more threateningly, instantly turning the situation into chaos.

“What, you bastards?”

“Unbelievable.”

“Yeongwoo, what is all this? Where did these guys come from?”

In response, Yeongwoo calmed the situation with a single statement.

“Australia.”

“...?”

-...!

The Strongest Swords of Seoul hesitated, taken aback by the unexpected place name, while the orcs, whose new home on Earth was Australia, looked sentimental.

“From now on, Northern Australia is an Orc Autonomous Region. Everything has already been discussed. No objections will be accepted.”

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“An Orc Autonomous Region...?”

Simply, it sounded like they had sold Australia to the orcs.

At least to those unaware of the full context, it could only be interpreted that way.

“Yeongwoo, what are you talking about? Why is Australia an Orc Autonomous Region?”

Unable to bear it any longer, Jeonggu asked, and Yeongwoo pointed to the top of the towering structure.

“We will soon engage in a large-scale war with China. And for that, we need very fast transport routes... which these brothers have provided.”

“...Brothers?”

Jeonggu’s gaze turned to the giant red-footed orcs.

Given how Yeongwoo acted, it seemed he had already made all the arrangements with the orcs.

He had formed an extraordinary bond with the previously unknown orcs in just one day.

“You must have had your reasons, but do you think people will accept this?”

“...”

At his father Jeonggu’s words, Yeongwoo looked up at the sky again.

“As I said before, no objections will be accepted.”

“...What?”

“Without the brothers, we couldn’t have built this road so cheaply. They did what no human could do.”

“What exactly did they do?”

At his father’s question, Yeongwoo touched the surface of the towering structure with his palm.

“Life.”

“...?”

“Each tower contains the life of a brother. Nearly a hundred brothers have already died....”

As Yeongwoo spoke, a faint beam of starlight shot out from near the top of the tower.

“Even at this moment, the brothers are sacrificing themselves. So, no one can object to the rights to this road and the northern Australian autonomy.”

This was Yeongwoo’s way of stating that he, the Strongest Sword of Korea, would personally handle any objections.

“That’s absurd.”

“No matter what, you just gave Australia to the orcs?”

Even so, some Strongest Swords couldn’t easily accept this, prompting Yeongwoo to take drastic measures.

“In exchange, I will immediately suspend the collection of defense fees in Seoul.”

“Oh...?”

“Really?”

The mood shifted instantly.

In a world where karma was directly linked to survival, eliminating a fixed expense was a welcome change.

“Yes. Thanks to the road laid by the brothers, my operational range will expand significantly from tomorrow. So, I can collect the defense fees overseas instead of in Seoul.”

In fact, he was already extorting considerable money from China.

“Oh....”

“Great idea.”

“As expected... globalization is the way.”

The Strongest Swords in Seoul unanimously supported this decision.

In contrast, Gwanak Strongest Sword Jo Sangik, with his background in public affairs, was focused on something entirely different.

“Um... Yeongwoo?”

“Yes, go ahead.”

“These towers that your brothers built, do they serve as the pillars of a high bridge?”

“That’s correct.”

“If one of these pillars collapses, the entire road might become unusable.”

“That’s uncertain, but it would definitely make using the road very inconvenient if one of the mid-passages were broken.”

As Yeongwoo said this, Jo Sangik nodded and suddenly started walking towards the tower.

The orcs blocked his path with threatening looks.

-This is our sacred ground.

-No one but a brother may enter.

Jo Sangik looked up at the orcs and smiled faintly.

“I don’t intend to enter the tower. I just want to demonstrate something that might happen someday. If you allow me.”

He then looked at Yeongwoo, realizing that the Strongest Sword had command over the orcs.

So Yeongwoo said,

“Sure, I don’t know what it is, but go ahead and demonstrate.”

Trusting Jo Sangik’s wisdom, he permitted him to proceed.

The orcs glared at Jo Sangik but stepped aside, and soon he stood right in front of the tower.

“How many of these towers are going to be built worldwide?”

“At least several hundred, maybe over a thousand.”

“As I thought. You won’t be able to guard all those towers.”

“That’s correct.”

At this point, Yeongwoo seemed to understand what Jo Sangik intended to do.

“Then, excuse me for a moment.”

As expected, Jo Sangik rolled up his sleeves and suddenly grabbed his weapon with both hands, looking as if he was about to strike the tower.

-What, what is he doing!

-Human!

The orcs were startled and widened their eyes, but Yeongwoo’s command froze them in their tracks.

“If it truly is sacred ground, the blade of one who doesn’t shine will not be lifted.”

-Ah...!

A line from the heart.

The red-footed orcs, moved by the words from their human brother Jeong Yeongwoo, stepped back in admiration.

And in that moment.

Whooosh!

Jo Sangik swiftly swung his curved sword.

Towards the pillar of the high-speed transport route, which was the sacred ground of the red-footed orcs.

Thud!

A resounding impact echoed through Gangnam.

Both the orcs and the Strongest Swords watched with wide eyes.

Because.

'Was Jo Sangik always this strong?'

‘What’s this... I can feel the shockwave.’

This act was not just a test of the tower’s durability but also a display of Jo Sangik’s own martial prowess.

A kind of announcement, or a warning, that there was someone potentially stronger than Oh Yeonhee within the Seoul Alliance.

‘...This guy.’

Sure enough, Oh Yeonhee, who had briefly dreamed of filling Jeong Yeongwoo’s void, clenched her teeth.

Jo Sangik’s ‘full swing’ was an undeniable provocation towards her.

Of course, it also served as a thorough durability test.

“My goodness, this is incredible.”

As Jo Sangik withdrew his sword, the tower’s surface remained unscathed.

Despite all the training and strengthening Jo Sangik had undergone since Jeong Yeongwoo’s appearance, he couldn’t leave a mark on this tower, or rather, the ‘sacred ground.’

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

“With this level of durability, it seems other strong figures from abroad won’t be able to topple the towers either.”

Yeongwoo summarized the demonstration, and Jo Sangik nodded.

“I expected as much, but it appears the towers are built to be indestructible.”

In reality, his arms were now trembling from the exertion.

However.

“There is no such thing as ‘indestructible’ in this world.”

Then, as Yeongwoo drew his sword, everyone in the hall took a step back.

Jeong Yeongwoo’s display of power was rare and highly anticipated.

At the same time, everyone hoped that even Yeongwoo wouldn’t be able to scratch the tower.

If the tower remained intact, they could still regard Yeongwoo as someone just within reach.

However.

Swish!

With a light swing.

Slash!

Yeongwoo left a visible scratch on the tower's surface.

"What?"

"What is this?"

".....!"

".....!"

The scene was enough to embarrass Jo Sangik, who had swung his weapon with all his might.

"If there's someone out there at a similar level to me, it would be possible to destroy this bridge,"

Yeongwoo remarked briefly.

Then he added,

"So, we need to find that person quickly and kill them. We can't let the sacrifices of my brothers be in vain."

As usual, Yeongwoo's words were crazy.

".....!"

Hearing such a demonic line from Yeongwoo for the first time in a while, the people of Seoul were left speechless.

But their surprise didn't last long, as the moment for tax payment, which had swept the entire planet, also finally arrived here.

Whoosh!

—Commencing tax collection.

With a brief notification, a tax bill appeared in everyone's view, and for Yeongwoo:

—It is an honor to see you again, Master of the Bastard, Dragon Slayer, Jeong Yeongwoo07!

Tax Officer Kubu appeared, slicing through the air.

—Today's final tax amount is 7,380,000, including the acquisition tax, and the total is 13,280,000 Karma.

|Calculated Tax Amount: 16,420,000

-Acquisition Tax: 13,110,000

|Deductions: Single Parent Household, Dependents

|Final Tax Amount: 7,380,000

-Acquisition Tax: 5,900,000

*Acquisition Tax Payment Deadline: 23 hours 56 minutes

This included the acquisition tax for the weapon encyclopedia he obtained through the chairman.

A total of 13,280,000 Karma.

He would have had to pay a hefty amount close to 30 million without the deductions.

'It's not yet an enormous amount of tax.'

However, not all business activities were immediately reflected, so today's tax might just be the tip of the iceberg.

"Let's pay it all today. The more taxes we pay, the closer we get to owning shares."

At Yeongwoo's words, Kubu blinked his large eyes rapidly.

—Yes, I will process it as you instructed.

Shortly after, a slight chill ran through Yeongwoo's body.

Whoosh!

*Available Karma: 85,212,500

His Karma balance decreased to 85 million.

'I've practically bought 13.28 million Karma worth of Earth.'

But today's asset change didn't end there.

—Defense funds for the Korean Peninsula amounting to 78,967,105 Karma are awaiting receipt for today.

"What, that's for just one day?"

78.96 million Karma.

It was more than enough to cover today's taxes, including the acquisition tax.

'Am I really making 78.9 million just by sitting around?'

Of course, this was national funds, requiring a separate ledger, making it somewhat cumbersome.

However, considering the national sentiment seen in the Strongest Sword election, any reasonable outcome would likely be accepted, no matter how bizarre the investment.

'I'll definitely show the value of our hard-earned money.'

While Yeongwoo made this vow internally, he also had a clever thought.

'Wait a minute. If the national income rises, there'll be more tax revenue, right?'

Especially since the defense tax is collected from excess beyond the minimum necessary living expenses.

In other words, higher living standards would mean more defense taxes from citizens.

"Ah...!"

Having this deep realization, Yeongwoo quickly turned around.

Two figures immediately caught his eye.

Songpa's Oh Yeonhee, the traditional strong figure of Seoul.

And Gwanak's Jo Sangik, who had ties with him since his early days in Seoul.

'This task would be better suited for the former deputy minister who handled national affairs.'

Their expressions revealed mixed feelings as Yeongwoo alternated his gaze between the two.

“Do you have something to say?”

Jo Sangik asked, sensing something.

In response, the only elected Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula, Jeong Yeongwoo, announced his first domestic project.

“Starting tomorrow, we will survey the entire Korean Peninsula. Deputy Minister, you will take full charge.”

“A survey of the Korean Peninsula... what do you mean exactly?”

Jo Sangik cautiously inquired about the Strongest Sword’s intentions.

However, as the only elected official, Yeongwoo saw no need to hide his motives.

He didn’t even bother to sugarcoat his words.

“If there are still those across the eight provinces who haven’t distributed the Golden Ratio, severely discipline them to contribute to the public good.”

“...?”

“Improving the lives of our people! That is the first task of our Seoul... no, Korean Peninsula Alliance.”

Unbeknownst to everyone, the Korean Peninsula Alliance had been inaugurated for the people.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 274: Starry Night (4)

10:21 PM.

Having dismissed the Strongest Swords, Yeongwoo hurried to his room.

He had little time to rest, as the night dungeon would soon appear along with the abnormal weather.

“Phew.”

As Yeongwoo groaned and sank into the sofa, Jeonggu, who had followed him, sat down on the living room floor and looked at him.

“What have you been doing? What about those orcs from earlier?”

“What do you mean? I told you already. They were the ones who conquered northern Australia with their own strength. But now we’re allies, so you’ll be seeing them more often.”

“You mean we’ll have to deal with them again?”

“Yes. The brothers will also handle the bridge maintenance, and we’re planning to invade China together.”

The latter was especially part of the official agreement.

And in the case of the former.

‘The deputy minister couldn’t even scratch it, so the bridge won’t collapse easily. But...’

Yeongwoo recalled the moment the Bastard easily damaged the tower’s surface.

That definitely wasn’t because of Yeongwoo’s own strength.

At that time, it was.

‘A mythical weapon. The tower can’t withstand attacks from a mythical weapon.’

This meant that the high bridge could collapse at any time.

If there was another owner of myth on this planet.

“... I’m a bit worried.”

“About what?”

“This country, no, this world. Anything too radical is never good.”

Jeonggu felt that the planet was changing too rapidly and expressed his concern.

But Yeongwoo’s concerns were a bit different.

"I don't think adding one more species to the planet's inhabitants is a radical change. It won't drastically alter our way of life because of them."

"Then what?"

"A much bigger change is already happening. For instance, a cosmic pornography production company is getting involved in the planet's development rights."

"What?"

Jeonggu's eyes widened in surprise.

It was something he couldn't even imagine.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just be aware of it. Right now, we're choosing the lesser of evils to avoid the worst situation."

There wasn't enough time, nor did he have the energy to explain in detail.

Yeongwoo closed his eyes again, hoping to recover even a little.

Then he suddenly remembered and asked Jeonggu.

"What's today's abnormal weather?"

Each country had different abnormal weather.

So, since they moved from Australia to Korea, the expected weather must have changed, too.

Jeonggu quickly responded.

"They say it's extreme cold."

「Just so you know, tonight's weather is extreme cold.」

「Beware of freezing and ruptures.」

Korea's sixth abnormal weather event, extreme cold.

"Extreme cold? Why does that sound familiar?"

Lying on the sofa trying to sleep, Yeongwoo reopened his equipment codex.

Swish!

Soon, he found a necklace related to extreme cold in the accessories codex.

「Heated Stone」 - Heroic Necklace

【Ignores extreme cold.】

Fortunately, he had the entrance ticket to tonight's dungeon.

“...What?”

“Oh, I don't need to procure any equipment separately to enter the dungeon today.”

Yeongwoo said this and closed his eyes again.

Thinking about the “radical” events that might happen starting tomorrow.

‘The brothers will also find it hard to endure the abnormal weather, so they won't work at night. Then they'll resume construction in the morning.’

And since this side started construction, the other two forces might also be up to something.

Lemu and Mara.

‘We're building a road... I wonder what the other two are doing? Which one of them is behind Im Dupyeong?’

As Yeongwoo pondered over the weight of the “Strongest Sword”, his consciousness slowly sank.

Then.

“...”

He fell completely asleep in front of Jeonggu.

Snore.

As Yeongwoo began to snore loudly, Jeonggu left the living room and headed to the bedroom.

There, Seok and her children, who had been watching television, turned to Jeonggu.

“Madam, is everything alright?”

Jeonggu glanced at the television and asked, and Seok nodded.

"I'm watching them work."

"Work? Oh."

At Seok's words, Jeonggu properly rechecked the television and saw the now four returnees working.

"That's..."

"They say it's a statue of a player. It must be really big."

Although Seok kindly explained, Jeonggu tilted his head not because the four people were assembling a statue of a player.

"That's... my son's face?"

Although only part of the forehead, the right eye, and 30% of the lips were assembled and scattered around the room, Jeonggu could recognize it.

He could tell that if it was put together well, it would form Yeongwoo's face.

"What? Are you saying that's Yeongwoo's face?"

"Yes. Look closely. If you attach here and here, and fill in the gaps properly..."

"Oh my, it does look like him?"

Although Seok still seemed half-convinced, Jeonggu was sure.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

'What on earth are these people making...?'

Even though only the face was fragmented, the statue's body was almost complete.

The body of a man drawing a sword and pointing forward.

The armor he wore was very different from Yeongwoo's current appearance, but Jeonggu was convinced.

'That's Yeongwoo. But why are they using a model of Yeongwoo as a statue of a player?'

While Jeonggu had a questioning look in his eyes, the four people on the screen were diligently carrying the pieces of the statue.

Then finally.

“Oh.”

A short sound came from behind Jeonggu.

“Huh...?”

When Jeonggu turned around, he saw Yeongwoo staring at the television with half-open eyes.

He had taken a short nap and woken up.

“When did you wake up?”

“Just now. We need to get to the dungeon in time, right?”

Come to think of it, quite a bit of time had passed, and the wall clock in the room already showed 10:54 PM.

Six minutes until the abnormal weather and the start of the night dungeon.

“Well, look at that. Isn’t that your face?”

“I don’t know. I’m not sure.”

Yeongwoo scratched his chin with an indifferent expression.

Then, tilting his head again, he said.

“No matter how I look at it, that’s our chairman’s armour.”

* * *

11:00 PM.

「From this moment on, [Abnormal Weather] Extreme Cold is generated.」

A snowstorm began to rage outside the room’s window, and Yeongwoo prepared to leave.

Of course, the mystery of the “statue of a player” remained unsolved.

“Why is that statue wearing your chairman’s armor?”

“I don’t know. Since most of my assets came from the company, it might mean commemorating the chairman...”

“But why is your face on it?”

“That armour is the chairman’s signature, and the chairman is the company itself, so they might have dressed it like a uniform.”

Yeongwoo had nothing more to say about it.

Ultimately, that statue was provided not by Dogo but by another military company, Toma.

A pan-galactic military company ranked third in hazardous companies for planetary development.

[List of Hazardous Companies]

*Ranking of companies unsuitable for planetary development.

1- Dogo

2- Hammer of Kwaya

3- Toma

4- Hexagon

5- Cerium

And the fact that Yeongwoo was directly associated with two of the five companies listed as hazardous companies indicated that he himself might not be living rightly.

‘But what other choice is there? Can a mere human walk the straight path and protect a planet?’

Yeongwoo sheathed the ‘Bastard’ and stood up.

“I’m leaving now. Father, keep an eye on how the statue turns out.”

As Yeongwoo opened the room’s door to leave, Jeonggu asked, looking at the snowstorm outside.

“Where will you come back from tonight? Are you coming back here?”

He said this knowing that the orcs had built a suspicious road for his son.

Now, if the kid wanted, he could leave this land in the blink of an eye.

That's why Jeonggu felt a bit scared for some reason.

Everything was happening, changing, way too fast.

"Man, even demons are fundamentally human. Got it?"

"Yes?"

"Behave like a human wherever you go and whatever you do."

"Why are you cursing at me all of a sudden?"

Yeongwoo frowned.

Still, he waved his hand lightly while walking away, bidding farewell to Jeonggu.

"I'll try to come back here. The bridge isn't finished yet."

* * *

11:11 PM.

Having left Gangnam, Yeongwoo, as always, headed towards Gwangjin-gu over Cheongdam Bridge.

Pushing through a snowstorm so severe that visibility was almost zero.

"Why not just make it cold? Did they really have to make it snow so hard?"

When Yeongwoo grumbled like this, the golden goblin hiding under his cloak to avoid the snow also made an agreement sound.

-Kit!

On the other hand, Pofu Tenta, curious about the falling snow, sat at the edge of the back seat, waving his arms through the snowflakes.

- Bat...!

"What, doesn't it snow on your planet?"

Well, the climate differed vastly from planet to planet.

And unlike the goblin, Pofu Tenta didn't seem to feel the cold much.

Yet, he was seeing snow for the first time.

Crack, crack!

Meanwhile, Negwig passed through Cheongdam Bridge and reached Gwangjin District.

A region, once a ruin, that Yeongwoo used as a battleground with the Dragon race.

Also, every night.

"It's time to bring it out."

It was used as a summoning area for the night dungeon where warriors from all over the world gathered.

- Kikik!

Soon, the golden goblin opened the subspace pouch and took out a golden sphere.

Swish.

The sphere immediately turned pitch black, losing its radiant glow.

"....."

It was always a bizarre phenomenon to witness.

Flash!

Yeongwoo then stopped Negwig and landed on the ground, confirming that no people were around.

Then.

Thud.

He placed his hand on the black sphere laid down by the goblin.

Paahhh!

As usual, an ashen wave spread out from the sphere.

Then, the surroundings turned grey as the abnormal weather suddenly ceased.

- Kiii...

- ...Bat.

The goblin flattened his pointy ears, and Pofu Tenta narrowed his large eyes, showing signs of tension.

But after that, nothing happened.

Only the occasional sound of Negwig stomping its feet in place broke the ashen silence.

So, as Yeongwoo looked around again.

“What, where’s the dungeon...?”

Whooooosh!

A sharp sound of something breaking through the air came from above, through the grey mist.

Something was descending.

“Is it falling from above this time?”

Yeongwoo wasn’t too surprised, having seen various dungeon entrances before.

However.

Boom!

His jaw dropped in astonishment when he saw the dungeon entrance fall nearby.

Because.

“What...?”

The object that fell from the sky was in the shape of a gigantic anchor.

“No way, it couldn’t be...”

Yeongwoo muttered incoherently, walking quickly to the anchor.

When he got within about five meters, a holographic text finally appeared.

Paaat!

◇ Dogo awoke to find his bedroom filled with assassins.

To which Dogo said.

【Do you not understand morality? Your numbers are too few, bring more.】

However, the immoral did not listen, and the next day, their heads were displayed by the bed. It was inevitable.

“What... What is this...?”

As Yeongwoo stared blankly at the unfamiliar message, the dungeon interface appeared.

[Moral Lecture]

| Dungeon Grade: Ancient

| Difficulty: B

| Required Personnel: 8

| Recommended Personnel: 16

The first ancient-grade dungeon since the reset.

But the issue was.

‘Is this... a dungeon created by the chairman?’

While Yeongwoo was still in a daze, another unfamiliar message appeared.

「In this dungeon, no equipment can be used.」

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 275: The Strong and the Weak (1)

The equipment was unusable.

And it was a B-grade difficulty in an ancient level he had never seen before.

"....."

Every indicator was signalling 'danger'.

But.

"How could I not experience the dungeon the Chairman created!"

Yeongwoo exclaimed loudly, looking up at the sky, then bravely touched the 'anchor'.

Thunk.

Immediately, the problem anchor started vibrating lowly.

Drdrdrrdr.....

Like Golden Trail starting to move.

'I have to ride this up.'

Intuiting that this anchor would soon be pulled up, Yeongwoo quickly clung onto the anchor.

"See you later! Take care of yourselves!"

Waving at the two slaves and Negwig on the other side, Yeongwoo saw Pofu Tenta putting both hands on his bulging belly and bowing.

At that moment.

Chrrrr!

The chain connected to the anchor began to wind upwards into the sky.

'The time has come.'

And shortly after.

Whoosh!

The large anchor Yeongwoo was on shot up into the sky quickly.

"Ugh...!"

It felt like riding a high-altitude amusement ride without any safety measures, so Yeongwoo clung tightly to the anchor's shaft.

'This already feels ominous.'

Other participants ascending on anchors must have felt the same.

Thinking they had chosen the wrong dungeon this time.

Swoosh!

Piercing through the grey mist, a gigantic portal opened in the sky.

".....!"

The scene was very similar to when he dragged his father into the Temple of Valor.

'Seriously, the Chairman has the authority to create something like this?'

Yeongwoo gaped at the endlessly vast portal.

The Chairman's universal law level is 3rd grade.

That meant that those who created other dungeons were also close to 3rd-grade beings.

'What kind of things exist in the universe?'

While feeling a renewed awe for the vast world beyond Earth, Yeongwoo was pulled into the portal with the anchor.

Chrrrt!

The last sound of the chain's noisy friction stimulated Yeongwoo's hearing, and then.

Thud.

".....?"

All senses were cut off.

Sight, hearing, smell, and even touch.

Perhaps the mutants who had claimed they were in indefinite stasis in a dark space were in a place like this.

With only his consciousness awake, Yeongwoo stared into a completely dark space.

No, he thought he was in such a space since he couldn't perceive it at all.

'Is this the void? The one that Mara governs?'

Without any external information coming in, all sorts of random thoughts occurred.

Then finally.

Flash!

The dungeon system appeared in Yeongwoo's consciousness.

「Welcome to the ancient level dungeon 'Moral Lecture'.」

'Oh... this is the first dungeon with a welcome message.'

Whatever it was, seeing something was better than being immersed in darkness, so Yeongwoo read the next line with a sense of relief.

'Before the full start of the dungeon... all equipment... does it include the body? What?'

「Before the full start of the dungeon, all equipment will be removed to cleanse the body and mind. Note that the term 'equipment' also includes the body.」

A shocking announcement.

When it said all equipment, he naturally thought it referred to the tools he was wearing, including the Bastard, but here, equipment also included his body.

In other words, for Yeongwoo, it meant the mutated cornea and the mutated stomach and.....

'Spine, heart? If these are included, that's truly insane, right?'

Yeongwoo was appalled, but the dungeon system in Dogo didn't care about individual circumstances.

「Commencing equipment removal.」

With a brief directive, warning alarms immediately began to appear in succession.

—Essential bodily component 'stomach' is absent. A rubber stomach is temporarily inserted.

—Essential bodily component 'spine' is absent. A spinal model is temporarily inserted.

'What the, what?'

But it didn't end there.

—Essential bodily component 'heart' is absent.

'You.....!'

—A wooden heart is temporarily inserted.

—All stats are reduced by 50% due to the incomplete state.

'These bastards are turning me into a cripple?'

Yeongwoo was screaming in the pitch-black consciousness, when the final pre-notification appeared.

「Entering the dungeon in 5 seconds.」

'Is this really starting like this?'

Yeongwoo questioned, but of course, there was no answer.

Instead.

「4」

「3」

Only the mechanical countdown filled his vision.

「2」

「1」

Finally, the countdown ended.

Then immediately.

Flash!

Yeongwoo's vision returned to normal.

“Hah.....!”

Also, the fact that he could hear the sound of his own exhalation meant.

'Hearing is back too. Has it already started?'

Regaining all his senses, Yeongwoo blinked a few times.

Although his vision was back, everything around was still shrouded in darkness.

However, seeing that the view in front felt like a ceiling.

'I'm in a dark room.'

He was lying somewhere in what seemed to be a fairly large room.

'It's hard. Is it marble?'

He felt something cold and smooth against his back and palms.

So Yeongwoo tried to get up to examine the space more closely.

"Hup."

But then.

"...Huh?"

His upper body wouldn't move.

To be precise, his waist and entire back wouldn't respond.

'No way.'

—Essential bodily component 'spine' is absent. A spinal model is temporarily inserted.

'No, are you seriously crazy?'

Yeongwoo finally realized.

The 'spinal model' the dungeon system had inserted instead of his original spine was literally just a model.

Something with no operational function was essentially just a support.

'So I have to complete the dungeon with a crippled waist?'

As Yeongwoo sensed impending doom, he noticed a presence near his feet.

Sss.

“Huh...?”

Yeongwoo tried to use his arms to lift his upper body.

‘Damn it.’

But his arms wouldn’t move either.

Of course, with the entire spine essentially gone, it made sense that his limbs wouldn’t function properly.

‘I’m screwed.’

Meanwhile, the number of presences near his feet quickly increased, and Yeongwoo finally understood.

◇ Upon waking, Dogo saw his bedroom filled with assassins.

That strange message he saw just before entering the dungeon.

The scenario described in that message was the opening of this dungeon.

‘No, the Chairman still had his spine intact at that time, right?’

In other words, the place where Yeongwoo was now lying was somewhere that replicated Dogo’s bedroom.

Naturally, the identity of those presences.

‘Assassins!’

As Yeongwoo widened his eyes, someone approached his side.

‘He...help.’

Yeongwoo rolled his eyes to look at the figure in the darkness.

He could vaguely make out their form.

-.....

The assassin prepared by Dogo's dungeon system was a tall figure in a black hood.

The person seemed to be at least 4 meters tall, implying that the room was equally large.

‘How big is this place?’

Just as Yeongwoo was starting to reimagine the layout of the room in his mind, the assassin raised a knife.

“Huh? Wait, wait!”

Clearly an attempt to assassinate.

“Wait! I am a disabled person who cannot use my limbs! Don’t you know morality?”

Yeongwoo desperately appealed his vulnerable state, but the assassin paid no mind and swung the knife.

Whoosh!

The blade headed straight for Yeongwoo’s chest.

And without hesitation.

Thud!

“Ugh!”

With an ugly groan, the blade pierced the centre of Yeongwoo’s chest.

“Aaah!”

Yeongwoo desperately lowered his eyes to look at the knife penetrating his chest and suddenly realized.

“What?”

It didn’t actually hurt.

“Huh?”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

As Yeongwoo blinked, starting to understand something.

Thud!

The assassin pulled the knife out of Yeongwoo's body.

They probably intended to stab again since Yeongwoo wasn't dead.

Simultaneously, rough presences emerged from all directions of the bed.

The bedroom was indeed filled with assassins.

"Damn it!"

Yeongwoo cursed at the air, and immediately, a fountain of blood spurted from the hole in his chest.

Whoosh!

'Excessive bleeding...!'

At the absurd amount of blood loss, Yeongwoo opened his mouth wide, and the assassin, who was preparing a second attack, suddenly staggered and fell backwards.

Sizzle!

As soon as the assassin was drenched in Yeongwoo's blood, their body melted away.

【Corrosive Blood】

[The blood has become corrosive.

The effect of Yeongwoo's 'Poison Dragon's Heart' was still active.

'No way.'

Only then did Yeongwoo notice the icon in his vision indicating excessive bleeding and maximum physical damage.

「Body Deficiency」 - Epic Chestplate

【Power increases up to 80% depending on the degree of limb damage.】

'The saga! The epic still works!'

However, his body still wouldn't move, and other assassins in the room rushed toward the bed.

Swoosh, swoosh!

Yeongwoo reflexively shouted.

“Don’t you know morality? There are too few of you; bring more...!”

For some reason, the Chairman's line popped into his head the moment he sensed numerous assassins presence.

As soon as Yeongwoo finished saying this.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, a tremendous chill swept through the room, and all the assassins turned to smoke and disappeared.

“...Huh?”

Of course, Yeongwoo was still lying on the bed, unable to move.

“Chair... Chairman?”

Yeongwoo called out, hoping the Chairman might be watching, but instead, the system message appeared.

「Problem solved.」

‘Huh?’

「You solved the problem faster than anyone else, so you receive an additional 1 morality point.」

Then Yeongwoo saw the status of the score in his vision.

[Morality Points: 2]

So, he received 1 point for basic completion and an additional 1 point for solving the problem quickly.

「From now on, participants must form teams of up to 2 and escape from Vesedel Fortress.」

‘Vesedel....?’

A very familiar word, but attention shifted due to the crucial rule reveal.

「There are two main rules.」

「First, find the fortress exit and escape within 4 hours.」

「Second, secure as many morality points as possible for final settlement upon escape.」

‘Well, at least this is straightforward.’

Yeongwoo mentally nodded his head that wouldn’t physically nod.

In other words, they needed to gather as many morality points as possible and escape the dungeon within 4 hours.

「Ways to earn morality points include killing other participants, defeating elite monsters, and concealing the fortress exit.」

“...?”

「Participants who fail to escape within the time limit will die, so please be aware.」

With this somewhat ominous final warning, the door to the bedroom where Yeongwoo was lying opened.

Sssss, thud!

The thick stone door that occupied one side of the room slid open entirely.

‘Uh-oh, this is bad.’

One way to earn morality points was to kill other participants.

In other words, participants were bound to encounter each other within the dungeon.

Before earning points, the system mentioned that teams of up to two were allowed.

It implied that forming a duo would be beneficial since they were starting without any equipment.

‘It’s advantageous to team up, considering everyone’s starting without their gear.’

So, everyone would likely be cautious and try to meet other participants first.

‘...Which means I’ll obviously become a target for points.’

Yeongwoo tried again to move his body but to no avail.

At this rate, he'd be found and killed by another participant or die without moving an inch within the time limit.

'Damn it.'

Yeongwoo clenched his teeth, and a blue light appeared near the doorway, showing a system message in his field of vision.

「The shop has opened. Touch the emblem to purchase items.」

'Of course, there had to be more.'

Yeongwoo strained his eyes to the side to see the Dogo emblem appearing near the door.

That must be the 'shop.'

And the currency used for purchases would be.

'Morality points.'

Considering they might sell a proper spine there, Yeongwoo's mind raced to devise a plan. It wasn't the best plan but better than the worst scenario.

The plan was.

「Self-Destruct」 - Mutation Bracelet

【Causes a powerful explosion.】

【Durability +300.】

'Cause an explosion to launch my body!'

This might alert all nearby participants to his location, but it was better than lying there helplessly waiting to die.

"Anyone with morality! Come to me! I'll take on everyone!"

Half-mad, Yeongwoo activated the self-destruct function.

Boom!

As expected, the explosion from the self-destruct function bounced Yeongwoo off the sturdy bed.

“Whoa...!”

Yeongwoo’s cheer was as loud as the explosion.

Although he rolled in the opposite direction of the door, it was still encouraging.

Boom!

Boom!

Yeongwoo caused an explosion every time the self-destruct’s cooldown was up, and meanwhile.

Pop.

[Morality Lecture]

|Participants: 16

|Deaths: 1

The dungeon status was displayed.

One death.

One person had already died in the bedroom phase.

‘Well, coming in without any gear, facing all those assassins wouldn’t have been easy.’

They had to fight barehanded.

So, they must have allowed participants to buy weapons with morality points at that shop.

However, the reason the dungeon system showed the participant status was different.

「Four participants have entered the hallway.」

‘The hallway?’

No further explanation was needed.

There must be a hallway connected to each of the assigned bedrooms.

‘Oh, please.’

Cold sweat formed on his forehead.

As Yeongwoo looked at the open door, he activated self-destruct again.

Boom!

Then.

Whoosh!

“Whoa...!”

Miraculously, Yeongwoo’s body was propelled into the air, hit the wall, and rolled to the opposite side.

Right in front of the doorway.

‘I made it!’

Now, only 30 centimetres separated him from the Dogo emblem.

One more explosion, and he could touch it.

‘Most start with just 1 point, but I have 2, so I can buy quite a bit.’

And what he wanted most now was a new spine.

‘Just a little more time.’

As Yeongwoo waited for the next explosion’s activation, keeping an eye on the door, he heard footsteps from somewhere outside.

Step, step.

‘Yikes.’

One of the participants who entered the hallway was heading his way.

‘Time? How much time until the next explosion?’

Desperately trying to use self-destruct, Yeongwoo saw the message indicating 16 seconds remained.

But Yeongwoo didn’t have that much time.

Thud!

Two blunt feet and the tip of a sword entered his field of vision.

Another participant had discovered Yeongwoo's room.

"Uh."

The person seemed surprised, and Yeongwoo twisted his eyes to look up at them, also startled.

"Ottavio...?"

Ottavio Simone.

The Sicilian man who manned the harpoon on the boat Yeongwoo pulled in the first dungeon.

All titles were confiscated in this dungeon, so the title 'Guardian Sword of Sicily' that should have been above his head was not visible.

"Oh... Jeong Yeongwoo?"

Ottavio remembered Yeongwoo's name.

"What are you doing there?"

Ottavio looked puzzled at Yeongwoo lying on the floor like a corpse.

Yeongwoo rolled his eyes to point at the Dogo emblem.

"You haven't found a partner yet, have you?"

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 276: The Strong and the Weak (2)

"Ah, a team member?"

Ottavio's eyes wavered.

It was true that the memory of Jeong Yeongwoo's virtually one-man show in "Iria's Pain" was as vivid as if it had happened just yesterday.

But...

"Why are you still lying down? Don't tell me..."

Ottavio stepped into the room.

Step.

Despite this, his eyes widened immediately when his counterpart didn't respond.

"...Yeongwoo?"

"Yes. I'm completely paralyzed."

"What?"

Ottavio let out a scream-like exclamation and quickly covered his mouth.

Because...

「Seven participants have entered the hallway.」

In the meantime, the number of people who had passed through the bedroom area and entered the hallway had increased.

They were competitors who could ambush and potential team member candidates at any moment.

Additionally, since only a team of up to two could be formed, it had to be now if he were to recruit a member.

Coming out into the hallway meant they had somehow dealt with the assassins in the bedrooms, implying strength.

"Y-Yeongwoo. If your body is in that condition, in this dungeon..."

"I know, the best team member candidates are in the hallway right now."

"....."

"But do you know this?"

"Know what?"

“I’m the one who first dealt with the assassins.”

“.....?”

At Yeongwoo’s words, Ottavio chuckled but soon changed his expression.

Come to think of it, the doors to each bedroom only opened after dealing with the assassins.

So the fact that this room’s door was open meant that this Asian man had dealt with all those assassins.

Even in a paralyzed state.

“...How is that possible?”

「Nine participants have entered the hallway.」

“There’s no time, so help me up first.”

As Yeongwoo rolled his eyes urgingly, Ottavio reversed his grip on his sword and approached Yeongwoo.

“Should I just lift you up?”

“Yes. I need to use the store too.”

This meant Yeongwoo had also earned moral points, and Ottavio began to take Yeongwoo seriously.

“I’m always amazed whenever I see you.”

“I didn’t expect to end up like this either.”

“But if you can’t walk, how will you find and exit...”

Of course, Ottavio could carry Yeongwoo, but then how would they fight?

It was an unfavorable team formation in many ways.

However, Yeongwoo remained calm.

“Wait, there must be a way.”

No matter how harsh it was, Yeongwoo thought they wouldn’t leave a participant in such an absurd situation.

‘There must be a new spine or something.’

Finally, with Ottavio’s help, Yeongwoo touched the store emblem, and soon he saw the store interface appear in his vision.

Flash!

[Random Weapon]

=One melee weapon will be given.

|Moral Points: 1

[Random Armor ×2]

=Two pieces of armor, excluding shields, will be given.

|Moral Points: 1

*Participants with lost body parts, please refer to the ‘Aid’ section below.

One weapon for 1 point and armour had the same price, but you got 2 pieces.

It was a fairly reasonable setup.

‘And I can steal someone else’s weapon, right? If you’re confident in your strength, you could buy armor first and then go looking for someone with a weapon.’

But no method could apply to Yeongwoo.

He couldn’t move properly in the first place.

So, following the separate guide, Yeongwoo moved his gaze to the ‘Aid’ section at the very bottom of the store interface.

“.....”

Then additional items, not normally visible, appeared.

[Crutches]

=They won’t break and can be used as weapons.

|Moral Points: 2

[Wheelchair]

=With 5 moral points, you can use a miracle to restore your body.

|Moral Points: 2

‘They’ve lost their minds.’

Although Yeongwoo clicked his tongue, he instinctively knew he would soon rely on a wheelchair.

Since he couldn’t move his body properly, buying crutches would be useless unless he handed them over to Ottavio.

“Mr. Ottavio.”

“Yes. Did you find something in the store?”

“You’ll need to push a wheelchair for me.”

“.....?”

Ottavio made a peculiar expression again.

It was hard to tell if this crazy Asian man was joking or being serious.

“...Are you serious?”

To confirm, Ottavio asked, and Yeongwoo answered by purchasing the wheelchair.

Swoosh.

When the wheelchair appeared next to the sprawled Yeongwoo, Ottavio’s face twisted as if he were about to cry.

“Stop joking. This is a very unreasonable request.”

Even though they had a connection, it was hard to accept pushing someone else’s wheelchair in this deadly dungeon.

“So, are you just going to leave me here to be stabbed by anyone passing by?”

“.....”

Ottavio, the Guardian Sword of Sicily from the Mediterranean.

He not only thought his actions in this dungeon represented his country but also inherently wasn’t a mean-spirited person.

That's why, seeing Yeongwoo with his limbs not fully functional, he couldn't just leave.

"You can only take one team member."

"You're really lucky then, because you've got the chance to be my only team member."

"....."

Ottavio was at a loss for words again.

Then he glanced around.

It seemed he heard the sound of blades clashing at the end of the hallway.

"Can't you push the wheelchair yourself?"

"No, I can't. But."

"But?"

"I can stand on my own when the time comes."

"When?"

"When I gather 5 points."

"...Damn."

The sound of clashing blades had gotten a bit closer.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Ottavio bit his lip, resigned, and slipped his arms under Yeongwoo's armpits.

"I'll help you. But I have a condition."

"Anything, just say it."

"No team formation. I'll find my own team member. At least someone with all their limbs intact."

He would push the wheelchair, but that meant that Yeongwoo had to gather the 5 points needed for the miracle on his own.

“You won’t regret it later? If that’s what you want, fine.”

Yeongwoo agreed to be a one-man team.

Click!

Finally, with Ottavio’s help, Yeongwoo sat in the wheelchair.

But he still felt more like an object than a participant.

Even sitting in the wheelchair, he couldn’t move unless someone pushed him from behind.

“Let’s go. Let’s avoid any combat zones as much as possible.”

Ottavio quickly pushed Yeongwoo’s wheelchair down the hallway outside the bedroom.

Without any map or basic knowledge of the structure, running along the path seemed the best option for now.

Meanwhile.

「Thirteen participants have entered the hallway.」

A notification announced that most participants had passed through the bedroom section and spilled into the hallway.

“Hmm.”

Ottavio made a sound indicating his burden, and Yeongwoo encouraged him.

“Don’t think you’re alone.”

“I didn’t think that. I thought you might be worse than alone.”

From Ottavio’s perspective, he now had to protect Yeongwoo while fighting, making it an additional burden.

But Yeongwoo remained calm.

“I’m sure I’ll be helpful. Don’t worry too much.”

“If you have any amazing skills, tell me quickly...”

While Ottavio was speaking, someone appeared in the hallway ahead.

“Ah...!”

Ottavio hesitated and stopped the wheelchair, while the other participant turned his head at the distinct sound of the wheels.

“What?”

“...A wheelchair?”

The two opponents were also in a pair.

In other words, they had already formed a team.

“Entering here without being able to walk?”

One of them said seriously, while the other stood threateningly with a sword, blocking the hallway.

“Let’s take them down quickly before others come. We might not get another chance like this.”

They were thinking of one of the dungeon’s main rules: earning moral points.

「Ways to earn moral points include killing other participants, defeating elite monsters, and hiding exits from the fortress.」

Since it was impossible to gauge how strong the elite monsters in this dungeon would be, the only thing that could give a sense of the difficulty was killing other participants.

After all, without equipment, it would essentially be a battle of abilities.

“Let’s go! It’s basically two against one!”

As the participant blocking the path shouted confidently, Yeongwoo quickly rolled his eyes and spoke to Ottavio.

“Stab me.”

“Huh? Who?”

“Me. My blood can melt people. So, stab me three times in the chest. Hurry!”

Although Yeongwoo gave clear instructions, Ottavio only gaped and couldn’t bring himself to stab him in the chest.

Being particularly sensible and conservative, even among the strong ones of the world, Ottavio couldn't wrap his mind around Yeongwoo's strategy.

"What... what happens to your blood?"

While Ottavio hesitated, the two participants occupying the other end of the hallway approached.

"Kill the European first!"

"Let's go...!"

The two, who were lucky to get easy points early on, swung their swords enthusiastically.

Swaaaash!

Of course, Ottavio, who had passed the bedroom section with a high rank, wasn't an easy target either.

"Where do you think you're going?!"

He skillfully used the narrow hallway, where at most three people could stand side by side, to establish a 2-on-1 battle.

Clang clang clang!

With Yeongwoo in the wheelchair behind him, three blades clashed continuously in the air.

"Ottavio! Why are you taking the hard way...!"

Yeongwoo exclaimed, alarmed at the precarious situation, but, facing away from him, Ottavio only shouted back.

"I don't prefer such strange methods!"

"It's better than dying! And if you die, I'll be in trouble too!"

If Ottavio died from being reckless, who would push the wheelchair?

'Damn it. If I had a coordinate tracker, I'd wipe them all out.'

Yeongwoo considered jumping into the battle using the explosion of his trap.

As long as his head wasn't severed or his skull wasn't crushed, he thought he could somehow recover.

'There's no other way for now.'

Just as Yeongwoo was about to attempt self-destruction, a swift presence emerged from behind the wheelchair.

"What...!"

Another participant had appeared from the rear.

'Right, there were over a dozen people in this hallway alone.'

They must have run over after hearing the loud sounds of Ottavio's battle.

'What the hell kind of dungeon is designed like this?'

Reaching the limits of his patience, Yeongwoo gritted his teeth and looked up at the ceiling.

Just then, something flashed brightly in his vision.

Flash!

[Dogo] "Beginnings"

[Mission] Don't forget the support from Dogo.

[Reward] 5 Morality Points

It was a quest from Dogo, the dungeon master.

Whether the quest issuer was the president or the company itself was unclear, but the blatant mission content made one thing certain: the company was trying to tighten discipline.

'These bastards, this was all set up.'

Enraged, Yeongwoo's eyes rolled wildly.

Despite his anger, his mouth diligently continued its task.

"Dogooo!"

At that moment, the wheelchair supporting him began to shine brightly.

Whooooosh!

— Since morality points have reached 5, the miracle of the cripple is activated.

It really started to restore Yeongwoo's body.

"Aah...!"

Already feeling strength in his legs, Yeongwoo kicked off the wheelchair and stood up.

Immediately, he sensed a blade flying towards him from behind.

Swaaash!

The participant who had appeared from behind had already launched an attack.

"These crazy bastards, I'll kill you all!"

With that, Yeongwoo grabbed the opponent's blade with his bare hand, broke it, and then threw the remaining shard at the ceiling.

Crash!

"President, always take care of your health so you don't go insane...!"

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 277: The Strong and the Weak (3)

"...What the...?"

"That guy, he stood up...?"

Everyone in the audience gaped as the man, who had just moments ago been sitting motionless in a wheelchair, suddenly stood up.

The fact that he broke a sword with his bare hands was surprising enough, but his physique was much more imposing than they had anticipated.

Especially...

"Y-Yeongwoo?"

Ottavio, a conservative from Sicily, looked more shocked than anyone else.

He knew better than anyone that this man had been genuinely paralyzed.

"Why is he suddenly...?"

If he was going to stand up now, why did he pretend to be weak earlier?

As Ottavio wore a confused expression, Yeongwoo grabbed the participant who had attacked him and effortlessly slammed him into the wall with one hand.

Thud!

"No matter how desperate you are, isn't it a bit cowardly to attack someone in a wheelchair first?"

He then attempted to break his opponent's neck with a knee strike.

"Uh, ugh...!"

But seeing his opponent, who had already lost the will to fight, made him reconsider.

Although he now had the upper hand, there was another reason.

'Damn, now that I think about it.'

He realized that he wasn't exactly in a position to demand fairness from his opponent either.

[Moral Points: 5]

The moral points glaring in the corner of his vision were proof of that.

'Yeah, there's no one more unfair in this dungeon than me.'

Wasn't he receiving excessively biased treatment because he was associated with Dogo, the organization that designed this dungeon?

Sure, his confinement to a wheelchair was due to Dogo's schemes, but the fact that he was now able to move around so freely was also thanks to Dogo's absurd quest rewards.

In other words, this wasn't a power Yeongwoo had earned fairly.

The fact that he was tormenting other participants with it right away made him feel like he was playing right into Dogo's hands, which annoyed him.

'I need to line up those bastards and give them a good beating someday.'

With that thought, Yeongwoo loosened his grip on his opponent's head.

'Besides, this is a dungeon. It's not like I can't stab a few people.'

However, letting his opponent go without any consequences didn't make sense.

Shook.

Yeongwoo took a step back and sized up his opponent.

"Do you want to die here?"

"...?"

The opponent, who had been dazed for a moment, slowly extracted himself from the wall and looked at Yeongwoo nervously.

"I-I'd rather live, if possible."

"Right? Then let's make a deal and walk out of here alive."

"What kind of...?"

Of course, the opponent responded positively, so Yeongwoo held up three fingers.

"Thirty million. Next time we meet, you give me thirty million Karma."

Hearing this, not only the opponent but also Ottavio and the other two participants who were facing off with swords were left speechless.

"...What are you doing?"

Ottavio now looked genuinely terrified.

"What do you mean? There's no one here who can kill me now. So instead of shedding pointless blood, I figured I might as well make some money."

"...?"

As Yeongwoo spoke seriously, the four participants were momentarily confused.

But Ottavio, of all people, dared to speak frankly to him.

"Y-You're insane."

"Choosing to die instead of accepting my offer is what's truly insane."

Without a moment's hesitation, Yeongwoo refuted and then turned back to his "business target."

"Thirty million. Then you're free."

"H-How do you plan to collect the money...?"

"Just tell me your name and where you live. I'll find a way to collect it at an appropriate time."

At Yeongwoo's words, his opponent blinked in confusion, speechless.

Because...

"I'm... in India."

The opponent whose life Yeongwoo was planning to collect later was an Indian.

While the world had been unified due to the Pangaea event, India was a huge country.

And while the land was connected, the borders between nations hadn't been opened yet.

So the opponent was questioning whether Yeongwoo could really come and find him.

But Yeongwoo didn't mind.

"Yeah? Where in India?"

"India... Assam State."

"And your name?"

"...Anubhav."

"So, your name is Anubhav, and you live in Assam, India?"

When Yeongwoo confirmed, Anubhav nodded.

"That's right."

"Good. Now you're thirty million in debt to me. I'm Jeong Yeongwoo from South Korea, your savior."

"..."

With a single stroke of the sword, a debt of thirty million was created.

Anubhav, the man from India, was left in a daze.

Then, he finally nodded.

"...I understand."

He had no choice but to agree.

After all, it was far better than dying a meaningless death in this dungeon.

He was also betting on the fact that this Korean wouldn't be able to track him down to collect the money.

In the meantime...

"Oh no!"

With a startled cry from Ottavio, the two participants who had been facing off against him suddenly bolted.

Tat tat!

They ran in the opposite direction down the corridor.

"Yeongwoo! They're getting away!"

Ottavio quickly reported the escape attempt, and just as Yeongwoo was about to chase after them...

Thud!

The two fleeing participants were struck by something and fell flat on the ground.

"Huh?"

"Wha...?"

Yeongwoo, Ottavio, and even the stunned Anubhav all widened their eyes at the unexpected situation.

Then, suddenly...

Clang!

A knight clad in full armor appeared from the side of the corridor where the escapees had just entered.

"Chair...!"

The knight's armor bore a resemblance to that of the Dogo Chairman, causing Yeongwoo to instinctively begin to shout "Chairman!" before quickly closing his mouth.

The knight had a different name displayed above his head.

「Vesedel Royal Guard」

"...Royal Guard?"

Then, the knight swung his massive sword and beheaded the two escapees in one swift motion.

Shhhk!

At that moment, Yeongwoo realized something.

Not only were the assassins who had infiltrated the Vesedel fortress, but also the knights defending it, all dungeon monsters.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

"You might want to step back a bit."

Ottavio took a few steps back, glancing at the heads rolling on the ground, but Yeongwoo instead took a step towards the knight.

"No, that's how you gain points in this dungeon."

「You can gain moral points in this dungeon by killing other participants, defeating elite monsters, or concealing exits from the fortress.」

According to the dungeon rules, defeating elite monsters also earned moral points.

In other words...

'If this knight can kill participants in one strike, he must be an elite monster.'

If Yeongwoo could defeat this knight, he wouldn't have to kill innocent people to gain moral points.

Step!

With his mind made up, Yeongwoo took two more steps forward.

The Royal Guard pulled his massive sword closer to his body and stared at Yeongwoo.

-

The weight of the atmosphere emanating from the knight was no joke.

It made Yeongwoo wonder if this was what the Chairman might have looked like in his prime, and his excitement grew even more.

'Could the Chairman have been a Royal Guard of the Vesedel royal family?'

It wasn't an impossible idea.

The strong resemblance between the knight's armor and the Chairman's, as well as the fact that the mythical weapon "Bastard" given to Yeongwoo by the Chairman was Vesedel's ultimate weapon, supported this theory.

'It wouldn't make sense for an ordinary guard to possess the royal family's ultimate weapon... Maybe he was the captain of the guards.'

Whatever the case, it was clear that this dungeon was designed based on the Chairman's memories or nightmares.

Clang!

Finally, the Vesedel Royal Guard assumed a full battle stance.

As Yeongwoo clenched his fist and prepared to charge, Ottavio, from behind, tossed him his weapon.

"Do you have a death wish?"

"Oh, thanks."

Tat!

Catching Ottavio's sword, Yeongwoo charged straight at the Royal Guard.

Tat tat!

The Royal Guard then executed a wide swing, similar to the one that had just decapitated the two participants.

Whooosh!

The power behind the swing was enough to make anyone question if it could even be blocked.

But Yeongwoo had no intention of foolishly trying to counter the attack directly.

After all, his reach was much longer than his opponent's.

「Dullahan's Sword」 - Mutant One-Handed Sword

【The length of the sword is proportional to the user's height.】

When Yeongwoo swung his sword, its length extended to six meters, allowing him to strike at the Royal Guard's side from a distance.

Bang!

- ...!

Though the knight's face was hidden beneath his helmet, his startled reaction was evident.

Meanwhile, Yeongwoo was already launching his second attack.

Bang!

Yeongwoo's strike hit the knight's left shoulder, causing the armor to dent significantly.

For the first time, the knight took a step back.

"It seems you're not invincible. Your durability is decreasing, right?"

Yeongwoo taunted the knight with an excited voice.

Anubhav, who had been contemplating leaving, cautiously offered,

"Should I lend you a broken sword or something? It might be better to have two weapons..."

Anubhav had finally realized the safest way to survive in this dungeon.

He instinctively knew that following this strange man might be his best chance of making it out alive.

"No, I'm good now!"

As Yeongwoo shouted this, the knight, now on the defensive, hastily swung his sword.

Whoosh!

Almost simultaneously,

Crack!

Yeongwoo's lightning-fast thrust pierced through the front of the knight's helmet.

Since this was still a dungeon, it wasn't designed to be unbeatable.

Thud!

The knight, with a hole in his helmet, fell backward, emitting a white smoke.

Ssssss!

「The problem has been resolved.」

「As the fastest participant to solve the problem, you are awarded 1 additional moral point.」

With this, Yeongwoo's moral points increased by 2.

Defeating an elite monster alone was worth 1 point.

"Wait!"

Yeongwoo quickly moved closer to the fallen knight to check his face, but it was too late.

The armor and everything inside it had already disintegrated.

Instead,

"Huh?"

A small blue orb was left where the knight had fallen.

Whoosh.

When Yeongwoo picked up the orb, something completely unexpected happened.

Fwoosh!

A wide holographic map projected itself above the orb.

"...This is..."

"Isn't this the fortress map?"

Ottavio and Anubhav, who had approached from behind, pointed excitedly at the hologram.

The map detailed their current location and the entire structure of the Vesedel fortress, complete with small notes.

"It looks like we're on the west side of the fortress, next to the moat,"

Said Ottavio, pointing to the west side of the hologram.

A blinking blue dot indicated the orb's current location, which Yeongwoo was holding.

"And this might be... the exit?"

Ottavio's finger moved to the eastern edge of the map, where an icon of a door was marked on a section of the fortress wall.

According to the map, they would have to cross the moat and garden to reach the eastern exit.

"It seems quite far, even on the map. We should hurry."

This fortress was patrolled by knights capable of killing participants with a single strike.

Regardless of the points, Ottavio and Anubhav were eager to escape as quickly as possible.

But Yeongwoo, the one in control, wasn't looking at the exit.

"....."

Instead, he was fixated on a completely different part of the map.

"Y-Yeongwoo? What are you looking at?"

Ottavio shook his head and followed Yeongwoo's gaze.

Soon, he noticed an icon with a wedge symbol, located in a large room further west from their current position.

Small text was written next to it:

—Commander of the Royal Guard, First Prince Dogo Vesedel.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 278: The First Prince (1)

‘The Chairman is... a prince?’

Yeongwoo couldn’t believe his eyes as he repeatedly read the text marked on the map.

‘But now he’s a space gangster?’

Dogo Vesedel, the First Prince and commander of the royal guard.

The exact timeline of this dungeon’s reconstruction was unclear, but one thing was certain: at one point, Chairman Dogo had been a figure of prestige.

However, after some unknown event, he established a weapons manufacturing company and became a notorious villain, infamous even among the galaxy’s government officials.

‘Well, being a prince probably gave him the power to kill government officials without consequence.’

Yeongwoo started to understand more about the situation.

Dogo didn’t just have immense strength; he had a powerful background, being of royal blood...

‘Wait a minute.’

As his thoughts progressed, Yeongwoo suddenly paused.

‘But the weapons of the Vesedel royal family are called “Bastard”...’

Surprisingly, the Chairman had given him his family's ultimate weapon, but that wasn't what had caught Yeongwoo's attention.

'Why is the weapon called "Bastard"?'

According to the testimony of the giant Gameta, whom Yeongwoo had encountered in the "Sanctuary of Valor" dungeon, a "myth" was something that was created.

— Only those who write their own myths can leave behind a tangible legacy. Vesedel killed a transcendent being and gave birth to Bastard.

In other words, mythical equipment is created when a feat worthy of myth is achieved, and the Vesedel royal family became a myth by killing a transcendent being.

And the manifestation of that myth was...

'...The cursed sword Bastard.'

But why would the name of that myth be associated with the word "Bastard"? With few clues, Yeongwoo could only speculate.

The only Vesedel royal family member he knew who possessed the weapon Bastard was the Chairman.

'Could it be that the Chairman himself is a bastard? No, that doesn't make sense. He's the First Prince, after all.'

In most cases, a royal bastard would find it difficult to become a prince, let alone the First Prince.

Other legitimate princes would never allow a bastard to ascend to such a rank.

However, if this particular bastard had been the only remaining option, an exception could have occurred.

'For example, if all the other princes had died.'

In any case, the truth was still out of reach.

"Hmmm."

As Yeongwoo finally tore his gaze away from the map, Ottavio and Anubhav, who had been watching him closely, hastily pointed to the corridor behind them.

"Let's go quickly. The exit is that way."

But Yeongwoo, looking in the opposite direction, said,

“No. I’m heading west.”

“W-what?”

“Isn’t it a bit of a waste to just find the exit and leave? We don’t know what else is in this fortress.”

“That’s true, but…”

‘That’s easy for someone as strong as you to say’, Ottavio thought, but the words caught in his throat.

“...What exactly is in the west?”

“Probably the strongest entity in this fortress.”

“...?”

Ottavio and Anubhav were left speechless at Yeongwoo’s words.

If this madman was truly planning to go further into the west, they would have only two choices:

First, to separate from Yeongwoo and try to escape the dungeon on their own.

Second, to trust that Yeongwoo would somehow survive and follow him to face the dungeon’s strongest monster.

“.....”

At least Ottavio had some reference points, having seen Yeongwoo’s performance in the previous dungeon, but Anubhav, who was from India...

“Are you seriously planning to go deeper in there?”

It was truly a moment of agony.

While he knew this man from the East could break swords with his bare hands, he was unsure if that level of prowess would be enough to solve all the problems in this dungeon.

“Yes. Now that you know the exit’s location, feel free to leave first if you’re really worried.”

As Yeongwoo started walking alone down the corridor to the west, Ottavio reluctantly followed.

Turning back to Anubhav, who was left standing, Ottavio warned,

“Remember, the obstacles to survival aren’t just monsters. The other participants are basically enemies too.”

Ottavio was implying that sticking together was safer than wandering alone.

“.....”

After a moment’s hesitation, Anubhav had no choice but to follow them into the west.

* * *

Just as the holographic map had indicated, the destination wasn’t far away.

After passing through the narrow corridor where the three had first met, they entered a wide central passage, where they encountered two more guards.

However, since Yeongwoo had already defeated a guard once and knew that their durability decreased with each hit, these guards weren’t much of an obstacle.

Boom!

Within nine moves, Yeongwoo had taken down both guards, and by now, he seemed almost like a local guide to the other two participants.

“Your adaptability is incredible,”

Ottavio remarked as he watched the guards dissolve into smoke.

Yeongwoo opened the map again and muttered,

“That’s the reason I’m still alive.”

He then pointed to the large door ahead.

“There’s probably something inside. If you want to preserve your life, you might want to stay out here.”

“.....”

The door Yeongwoo pointed to was marked as the First Prince's room on the map.

The map didn't indicate whether the First Prince was physically present in the room or if it was simply marked as his chamber.

Regardless, the important thing was...

'If I'm lucky, I might get to see what the Chairman looked like in his younger days. And if I'm even luckier...'

Yeongwoo clenched his fist.

'I might even get to fight him.'

The Chairman in the room was likely a replica, like the guards, but that was more than enough.

Beating the real Chairman would only get him killed.

"I'm going in."

Yeongwoo left the other two with a brief farewell and strode toward the large door ahead.

Despite being the chamber of the First Prince, the commander of the royal guard, there were no guards stationed at the entrance.

Without the map, it would have been easy to overlook the door as just another large entryway.

Three low steps led up to the door, and as Yeongwoo ascended them one by one, the door slowly began to open.

Rumble...

"Oh."

Just as the map indicated, the First Prince's room was excessively large—about fifteen times the size of the bedroom where Yeongwoo had started the dungeon.

The wide room had a black steel tile floor in the center, and countless weapons—swords, spears, axes, and more—were stuck into it.

In other words, this was a 'training ground'.

Strictly speaking, it was originally an office, but it seemed that the First Prince, Dogo Vesedel, had converted it into a training ground.

Furniture like desks, bookshelves, and dining tables were piled up in the corners, shattered and broken.

Moreover, the room was littered with massive arrows, up to four meters long, deeply embedded in the walls, hinting at some intense training or battle that had taken place.

‘Is this really a prince's room?’

Yeongwoo marveled at the unexpectedly harsh environment as he stepped further into the room.

Creeeak.

As Yeongwoo entered the large door, he noticed someone in the middle of the steel tiles, clad in gray armor.

"...Chairman?"

There was no need to zoom in; Yeongwoo immediately recognized the figure as the chairman, or rather, the First Prince, Dogo Vesedel.

The armor covering his entire body was almost identical to that of the chairman, with no dents or cracks, right down to the posture.

Of course, to be precise...

‘This is the chairman in his younger days, right?’

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Just by looking at the pristine armor, it was clear that this was the chairman before he had been through countless battles across the universe.

In other words, this was...

‘...A complete rookie.’

And since this was one of the elite monsters of the dungeon, there would surely be loot to obtain.

Gripping the standard sword Ottavio had given him, Yeongwoo confidently stepped forward.

"Hey, Dogo!"

The First Prince slowly turned to look at Yeongwoo.

-.....

It was as if he had been waiting.

Immediately, a dungeon-wide announcement echoed.

「One participant has encountered the First Prince.」

"...Huh?"

Then, a blood-red warning message appeared.

【The boss battle has begun.】

“.....!”

Yeongwoo sensed a heavy presence above him at that moment.

Whoosh!

"What the hell...!"

As Yeongwoo instinctively dodged to the side, the spot where he had been standing was smashed by a black silhouette.

Boom!

‘Is there... a subordinate? Well, it is a boss monster, after all.’

As Yeongwoo backed away a few more steps and looked up, he saw a massive knight, clad in black chainmail that covered his entire head, rising to his feet.

The knight had been lurking on the ceiling above the room's entrance.

"Black Eyes... Desirak."

As Yeongwoo read the name tag above the knight's head, the knight turned to stare down at him.

「Black Eyes – Desirak」

The chainmail that covered the knight's face wasn't ordinary; it was a tightly woven chain that covered the entire front of his face, giving it the appearance of an iron veil.

As a result, it was impossible to discern his expression or even his gaze.

'Is covering their faces a Vesedel tradition?'

The knight was enormous, at least twice as tall as Yeongwoo, who himself was 2.2 meters tall.

The room was lit by a faint blue light from somewhere, casting long shadows that made Desirak's silhouette appear even more ominous.

Ssss...

A sharp, murderous aura flowed from the knight in the form of cold air.

"Haha... is he the prince's personal bodyguard or something?"

Yeongwoo chuckled awkwardly, glancing back and forth between Desirak and Dogo, but he was the only one smiling.

And then, finally...

"Interesting."

The First Prince, Dogo, spoke.

His voice was eerily similar to the current Chairman Dogo.

"Wha-? The prince can talk?"

Yeongwoo's eyes widened in surprise as he asked, and Prince Dogo beckoned with a slight motion of his finger.

Tut.

A formless wave of energy radiated from Dogo, sweeping through the training ground and reaching Yeongwoo's feet.

Whuaaam!

"Ugh...!"

Suddenly, Yeongwoo felt his entire body tremble and his legs give way.

Looking down, he saw that his knees had already hit the floor.

It was the sheer force of the wave that had passed through him.

In other words...

'This must be something like the Aura of the Strongest Sword.'

Though this Dogo was still a novice with an unscathed suit of armor, he had the aura to make Korea's Strongest Sword kneel with just a gesture.

So, naturally, Yeongwoo thought...

'This cunning bastard! If only I had the Bastard...!'

Instead of feeling intimidated by his opponent's power, he was only frustrated that the timing and place weren't in his favor.

After all, the Bastard was supposed to allow him to fight on equal terms with such an opponent.

However, it seemed that the prince Dogo was more generous than the current chairman.

"A mere insect."

Seeing Yeongwoo immediately kneel, Dogo retracted his aura and placed his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Clank.

"Come. If I draw my sword even for a moment, you will no longer be a mere insect."

"So, you're saying if I make you draw your sword, I win the boss fight?"

Yeongwoo dusted off his knees and stood up, and Dogo's silence indicated his implicit agreement.

Meanwhile...

Ssiss...

Another presence slowly stirred from the ceiling.

"Seriously, these guys..."

Desirak wasn't the only personal guard lurking up there.

It seemed that the closer he got to the prince, the more guards would appear.

This boss fight's difficulty was absurd.

"They're basically telling me to just die."

So Yeongwoo blinked rapidly, trying to think.

Was there another way?

A way to make that arrogant bastard draw his sword...?

"Ah!"

Suddenly, an idea flashed through his mind, and Yeongwoo instinctively opened his eyes and mouth wide.

Then, with a swift motion...

Whip!

He pointed a finger at the prince's sword sheath.

"That's not the real Bastard, is it? Why don't you take a look?"

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 279: The First Prince (2)

- What did you say?

When Yeongwoo suggested that the sword in the scabbard might not be the real Bastard, Dogo flinched.

It was a ridiculous provocation, but surprisingly, the First Prince was momentarily shaken.

Of course, despite this, he didn't actually draw his sword to check if it was true.

If Dogo had thoughtlessly drawn his sword to confirm, the battle would have ended immediately in Yeongwoo's victory.

'Damn, it failed, didn't it?'

Just as Yeongwoo regretted that his shallow trick had failed, a very angry voice emanated from within the helmet of the First Prince, Dogo.

- Bastard?

But the level of anger wasn't normal.

No matter how low the provocation, the prince, who had been relaxed until a moment ago, shouldn't have been this enraged.

'...Huh? What... what is this?'

Yeongwoo began to realize something was wrong.

At the same time, Desirak, with black eyes, lay flat on the ground as if he were bowing down.

As if signaling that the prince was furious, and something terrible was about to happen.

'Hey, what's wrong?'

Seeing Desirak bowing his head to the ground, Yeongwoo instinctively took a step back, then belatedly realized something.

"Oh...!"

At this point, during the period that this dungeon had recreated—the time of 'Prince Dogo'—there were no Bastard in the Vesedel royal family.

In other words, the sword in the scabbard had never been Bastard in the first place, and Dogo didn't even know such a sword existed.

'Th-then...'

Even so, why did the First Prince Dogo become so enraged at the mention of a "bastard"?

'Ah.'

The First Prince of the Vesedel royal family, Dogo Vesedel, was actually a bastard child.

And this prince, later on...

'Directly killed a transcendent being and used that legacy to create the mythical Bastard...'

It was in that moment that Yeongwoo understood why the chairman had once said, "I am the myth."

"Wait! Then, Prince, you really are a bast...!"

Just as Yeongwoo, having suddenly realized too much, was about to say "bastard child" again...

BOOM!

A dark blue aura suddenly enveloped Yeongwoo's surroundings, and the furious Prince Dogo came flying at him like a tidal wave.

- Feel the eternity in the void!

"Gah!"

In an instant, Yeongwoo, grabbed by the head by the prince, was helplessly slammed into the wall.

CRASH!

According to the original design, the boss battle was supposed to end the moment the challenger defeated the bodyguards and faced the prince for the first time.

But because Yeongwoo, who knew too much about the real Dogo, appeared as the challenger, everything got messed up.

This was because the "Dogo" within this dungeon had been recreated with an almost perfect level of fidelity, and therefore...

- Vanish!

...his power was also implemented to a level close to the original.

That was why a strange symbol was already being drawn around the wall-pinned Yeongwoo.

It was dimensional magic, opening a door leading to the void.

Of course, Yeongwoo didn't know this, but he could instinctively tell that something terrible was happening.

'I... I think I'm screwed? Chairman, isn't this an NG?'

Yeongwoo looked at the ceiling with desperate eyes, but there was no response.

It meant he had to solve this situation on his own.

'What... what should I do?'

Under Dogo's overwhelming power, Yeongwoo's hands and feet were completely immobilized.

This crazy prince was really determined to lock him, a mere creature, in the void.

This was the price of calling a bastard child a bastard child.

"Hey, Black Eyes! Stop the prince! This is against the rules!"

Yeongwoo cried out for help from Desirak, who was lying flat on the ground, but there was no response.

"Come on, damn it!"

In the meantime, the strange symbol had become semi-transparent inside, and the void beyond it began to reveal itself.

HOOO...

Though the void actually had no sound, to Yeongwoo, who was in close proximity to it, it felt like the sound of a massive airflow.

He didn't hear it with his ears; rather, he felt the vastness of the void in his mind.

"Damn it!"

Was he, after all, just an insignificant creature who had overstepped his bounds?

Was all of this because Jeong Yeongwoo⁰⁷ had challenged a life beyond what was meant for him?

"Ahhhh!"

As his mind began to be swallowed by the endless vastness, Yeongwoo desperately ran toward the still intact part of his consciousness, like a person running on a collapsing bridge. And with all his might, he shouted.

"You crazy bastard! I'm also a bast...!"

Suddenly, his throat tightened.

Could he have lost the ability to speak in the meantime?

"No!"

It was the opposite.

"「Bastard chiiiiild」 ...! I'm a bastard child too! You crazy bastard child!"

Flash!

The moment Jeong Yeongwoo⁰⁷ pronounced 「Bastard」 a faint but intangible wave spread out from him, and simultaneously, Dogo removed his hand from Yeongwoo's head.

- What...?

It was because he had understood the transcendent language he had just heard: 「Bastard」 .

The second transcendent language that Yeongwoo had learned, 「Bastard」 was a complex mixture of Yeongwoo's own history and information about the myth of the 「Bastard」 .

-?

The past echo of the First Prince Dogo, recreated by Chairman Dogo, now had a shocked expression in his eyes.

Hadn't he indirectly glimpsed a part of his own future through the meanings embedded in 「Bastard」 ?

The image of Chairman Dogo, who had forged the myth and created the Bastard himself.

Thus, according to that future, or rather that "present," Dogo himself, who existed here now...

"Your Highness, it's time to rest. My apologies for earlier."

A voice was heard from Yeongwoo's chest, causing Dogo to quickly tilt his head.

Then...

Thud!

A creature was already in his field of vision, its hand on the hilt of his sword.

- You... no, I...

The prince's voice wavered. He had understood too much in that brief moment, including the fact that the timelines of this creature and himself did not align.

If this Dogo had been recreated precisely from the chairman's past, wouldn't his deductive abilities also be extraordinary?

So Yeongwoo drew his sword before his opponent could complete his deductions.

Slash!

The prince, who had cast an imposing shadow just moments before, suddenly dispersed into a cloud of smoke.

"Ah."

Desirak, who had been bowing on the floor, and the other royal guards on the ceiling, all followed suit.

Now, the only things left in the room were Yeongwoo and...

Swish.

...the prince's weapon, still in Yeongwoo's hand.

「Prince's Command Sword」 - Dungeon Item

【You have obtained control over the Vesedel royal guards.】

As expected, Prince Dogo's weapon was a gray longsword, and it was indeed a dungeon-exclusive item.

The fact that the First Prince was the commander of the guards was no lie.

'Wait, does this mean...'

Could it be that he now had control over all the guards in the fortress?

As Yeongwoo's eyes widened with the realization, the system message appeared.

「You have survived the boss battle.」

「As you provoked the boss into a record-breaking rage, you have been awarded 5 additional moral points.」

It was the confirmation that the boss battle had been successfully completed.

Along with this, Yeongwoo's moral points increased significantly.

Flash!

[Moral Points: 14]

'Ah, I guess it's time to leave.'

After checking his points, Yeongwoo glanced around the prince's chamber before turning to see the exit door opening right on cue.

Rumble.

He had defeated the dungeon boss without swinging his sword even once.

"Ye... Yeongwoo?"

Soon, a voice called out from the central corridor outside the door, and Yeongwoo tossed a sword to Ottavio.

Whoosh!

"Thank you, it was very useful."

Yeongwoo said this as he now held the "Prince's Command Sword" in his hand.

"Huh? That's..."

Then, Anubhav, upon seeing Yeongwoo's new sword, looked surprised.

To which Yeongwoo finally pointed east and said,

"This is the key that will get us out of here. You can all relax now."

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

* * *

Now, to the east.

Just knowing that they were finally heading toward the exit made Ottavio and Anubhav's expressions brighten.

With Jeong Yeongwoo, who was undoubtedly the strongest among all the participants, leading the way, escape was only a matter of time.

Especially...

Clink, clink!

The royal guards trailing in line behind the three of them, including Yeongwoo, were a sight to behold.

"...Unbelievable."

Anubhav muttered repeatedly in disbelief.

This was something no one could have imagined.

Who would have guessed that an item allowing you to command elite monsters as your subordinates existed?

"....."

However, to Yeongwoo, who had been commanding mutants as slaves for a long time, this was nothing extraordinary.

"Being able to recruit every guard we encounter does make things easier... but it means I won't be able to gather more moral points."

Yeongwoo scratched his chin with the tip of the command sword as he spoke with a tone of regret.

Ottavio and Anubhav were left speechless.

'He's... he's insane...'

'His whole premise is on a completely different level.'

Of course, the royal guards weren't the only monsters in this dungeon.

The assassins encountered in the bedrooms at the beginning were scattered throughout the fortress, but since they weren't "elite" monsters, no matter how many assassins Yeongwoo killed, he couldn't earn moral points from them.

So, Yeongwoo had long since delegated the task of dealing with the assassins to the guards.

Thanks to that...

Clatter!

Every time assassins leaped out of the rooms on either side of the corridor, the guards in the rear would dash out like lightning and swing their swords.

It was like an automatic hunting system.

Slash!

Once again, a guard's large blade effortlessly severed an assassin's neck, and Ottavio, seeing this, moved aside and exclaimed in admiration.

"It's really incredible."

Then, following his train of thought, he continued his line.

"If a murderer had obtained this authority, by now, all the participants would have..."

He stopped mid-sentence, realizing he had said something unnecessary.

Hadn't that monster of a person just said, 'It's a shame I can't gather more moral points'?

He could easily increase his score if he started using the guards to hunt down the remaining participants.

"....."

Sure enough, Yeongwoo, who was walking at the forefront, said nothing.

He was deep in thought.

Then suddenly...

"Eh, forget it. After that boss fight, I'm pretty sure I'm locked in for first place anyway."

In other words, he had momentarily considered hunting humans.

"R-right?"

Ottavio forced a bitter smile and agreed as the ceiling and walls of the building disappeared.

They had finally passed through the fortress and emerged outside.

'...The exit is really close now.'

As Ottavio stepped forward with a face full of anticipation, the sound of clashing metal rang out from a considerable distance ahead.

Clang! Clang!

"Oh, what's that?"

Anubhav, who instinctively realized it was the sound of blades clashing, cautiously moved behind Yeongwoo, while Ottavio gripped his sword tightly and stared ahead.

"Is it a lot of monsters gathered together?"

Ottavio cautiously offered his opinion, but Yeongwoo, who had checked the map, thought differently.

"The exit is just behind where that noise is coming from. So I think..."

Yeongwoo suspected that the remaining participants were fighting each other.

If someone was trying to collect moral points by killing other participants, the best place to do that would be right in front of the exit.

After all, all the participants would be heading there within the time limit.

And in reality...

Clang! Swoosh!

When Yeongwoo's group arrived at the dungeon exit, they found six participants already engaged in a chaotic battle.

"What the...?! These bastards!"

Seeing this, flames of anger ignited in Yeongwoo's eyes.

Ottavio assumed Yeongwoo was furious at the participants for blocking the exit, but the truth was far different.

"Oh no! Don't let anyone die!"

".....?"

Dash!

Yeongwoo suddenly rushed into the battlefield, and the eight guards protecting him darted forward like arrows, slamming the six participants to the ground.

"What the—?"

"W-What's going on?"

"Guards...?"

The participants, who had been taken by surprise by the guards' sudden attack, barely managed to roll their eyes in confusion, only to see a gray longsword looming over them.

"Why are you fighting on such a fine day?"

"What?"

"What nonsense is this...?"

Hearing the unfamiliar voice, the six participants desperately lifted their heads to look at their opponent.

As soon as Yeongwoo confirmed that he had their attention, he extended a single finger.

"Only one early bird. The first person to bid will be released at the lowest price. Starting bid is ten million."

"W-what are you talking about?"

"What bid?"

Amid the confusion, one participant quickly caught on.

The guards seemed to be following the commands of the mysterious man.

There were even eight guards, and the two who had free hands were menacingly holding large swords, ready to strike at any moment.

".....!"

Once the "early bird" confirmed everything, he quickly raised his head and shouted.

"T-ten million!"

"Huh?"

"What did you say?"

"That idiot!"

As the other participants wore expressions of disbelief, Yeongwoo gestured, and the early bird was released.

The remaining five participants nearly lost their minds as they protested, and in the midst of this chaos, Yeongwoo asked again.

"How much should the next person pay to be released?"

This time, he directed his question at the early bird who had just gained freedom.

".....!"

The room fell silent for a moment, and then the early bird stared intently at one of the participants.

The person he looked at was none other than the one who had called him an "idiot" earlier.

"Uh... can I specify just one person instead of the next one?"

"Sure, do as you like."

Yeongwoo nodded in approval, and with a clumsy motion, the early bird slowly raised his hand and extended his fingers just like Yeongwoo had done earlier.

Swipe.

Five fingers.

Was he really going to bid fifty million?

As Yeongwoo's eyes widened at the unexpected turn, the early bird began to extend the fingers of his other hand as well.

"...One hundred million."

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 280: Karma (1)

"A hundred million?"

"A hundred million... you want that much?"

"What...?"

One hundred million karma.

This amount was quite significant even for Yeongwoo, who was already bleeding the continent dry.

"Are you sure? A hundred million?"

Yeongwoo asked in a concerned tone.

It was fine to extort a lot of money in exchange for sparing someone's life, but it had to be an amount that was actually collectible.

If the amount was too absurd, the other party might not even try to gather the money, or worse, decide to die instead, and that would be a problem for Yeongwoo too.

'It's not like I can take back what I said and ask for a lower price now.'

Yeongwoo looked at "Early Bird," who had blurted out the figure of a hundred million.

'This guy is really crazy.'

Then, he carefully examined the facial expressions of the person who would be owing that hundred million.

He wondered if they had a face that looked capable of gathering such a huge amount.

'Hmm.'

The participant, who was in danger of being forced to pay a hundred million due to Early Bird's slip of the tongue, was a rather tough-looking Westerner.

"Where are you from? Which country do you belong to?"

Yeongwoo politely asked the man who was now his hundred-million-customer.

The man furrowed his brow and scanned the rest of the participants.

"...The United States."

"The United States? Which part?"

"Andrew Bolton, Guardian of Vermont."

"....."

Yeongwoo usually had a habit of smashing the heads of anyone who talked down to him, but this time, he held back for the sake of the hundred million.

"Vermont...?"

As Yeongwoo looked up, trying to recall the unfamiliar name, Ottavio chimed in.

"Vermont is in the northeastern United States."

"Oh? You know a lot about American geography."

"No, it's just the hometown of Ted Bundy."

Ted Bundy.

The notorious American serial killer from the 1970s.

Yeongwoo had heard of the name but didn't know the guy's hometown, so he tilted his head in curiosity.

In any case, if Vermont was in the northeastern United States...

'If the American continent is attached to Europe and Africa, it'll take some time to visit.'

This was because the highway being constructed by his brothers was heading toward China, not the Pacific.

So, the road would likely traverse Eurasia first.

'Which means I'll be passing through Europe and the Middle East before reaching the U.S. That's quite a distance.'

As Yeongwoo was lost in these strange thoughts, Andrew, the Guardian of Vermont, asked him,

"How exactly do you plan to collect this money?"

Yeongwoo answered as if he was grateful for the question.

"When the time is right, I plan to visit wherever you are and collect it personally."

"Oh, then..."

This time, another participant spoke up.

"So, it's on credit?"

"Yes. Believe it or not, it's on credit. You survive and pay later."

".....!"

The participants' eyes widened at Yeongwoo's words.

If that were the case, they had no reason to refuse.

'Is he really an idiot?'

'How is he going to find us with so many countries represented here?'

'Once we're out, I just won't pay. Same as getting my gear back.'

The participants sighed in relief, unable to believe the seemingly foolish proposal.

But Yeongwoo, who was well aware of their thoughts, warned them as he memorized each of their faces.

"Let me make this clear. You will see me again. And I will collect every last cent."

"....."

It was a chilling warning for some reason, but despite that, the participants prioritised survival.

"Okay."

"Paying is a hundred times better than dying."

"So, this American has to pay a hundred million, and we'll renegotiate our amounts?"

When someone in the group said this, Yeongwoo smiled and raised his hand again.

Swish.

Then he spread out two fingers.

"But I'm a reasonable man, so I'll only double the price each time."

"What, what did you say?"

This meant the second person would pay 20 million, the third 40 million, and the fourth 80 million.

"The rule is the same as before. First come, first served, one person per round."

As Yeongwoo waved his two fingers, the participants hurriedly shouted out.

"Twenty million!"

"Me! Me!"

"Then I'll pay 30 million!"

Even a person offering to pay more came forward, but Yeongwoo stuck to his principles.

"No, those who were late will pay 40 million next time."

"Goddamn it..."

And watching this crazy scene from a distance, Anubhav reconsidered the 30 million he had to pay for his life.

'What... what is this? That guy... he must have something up his sleeve.'

Even if he had command over the guards in the dungeon, that power would disappear once they left this place, wouldn't it?

Yet, here he was, mocking the strongest fighters from countries around the world...

'Either he's a madman living for today, or he really does have something up his sleeve.'

South Korea.

A small peninsula somewhere in the Far East.

That was all Anubhav knew about the country the man belonged to.

So, strangely enough...

"....."

It made him even more terrified.

The line between mystery and fear was thin.

And no matter how you looked at it, this crazy Oriental belonged to the "fear" side.

"Now, who's next for 40 million!"

As Yeongwoo's auction for lives reached the 40 million mark, Anubhav began to think that he had gotten off lightly.

If things had gone differently, he might have ended up flat on the ground, being extorted for 40 million... or perhaps even 80 million.

'What on earth is happening in the East?'

* * *

"I'm really glad to have made a connection with all of you."

After collecting all his debts, Yeongwoo said with deep emotion, but most of the people in the room still looked like they had swallowed something bitter.

And for a good reason.

Many of them now owed tens of millions, or in the worst case, even a hundred million.

"Now, you'll all be able to leave soon. But first, let's go through the list."

Yeongwoo cleared his throat and began to read out the list of survivors who would have to pay him.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

『White Deer of Lubelskie』

|Burza Janowski, Poland.

*10 million Karma.

『Swordmaster of Hampshire』

|Ricky Brown, United Kingdom.

*20 million Karma.

『Stone Wall of Huancayo』

|Lerana Castillo, Peru.

*40 million Karma.

『Medina Mahdi』

|Bin Ali, Saudi Arabia.

*80 million Karma.

『Guardian of Vermont』

|Andrew Bolton, United States.

*100 million Karma.

And lastly, Anubhav from Assam, India: 30 million Karma.

"Any objections? If your location is incorrect, I'll allow one correction, so speak up now."

Yeongwoo asked to confirm, but no one raised any objections, and the debt collection process was finalized.

"Thank you, everyone."

From Peru to Poland.

Could this man really travel the world and collect all that money?

Some of those present were certain of one thing: by tomorrow, Yeongwoo would forget most of the names on the list he had just read.

However, as if reading their minds, Yeongwoo continued,

"I trust no one here thinks they'll be forgotten, that with so many people involved, I won't remember them, right?"

“.....”

Feeling a sharp sting of guilt, the participants kept their mouths shut, and Yeongwoo issued a firm warning.

"I never forget the money I'm owed."

Swish.

Yeongwoo pointed his command sword at Andrew, the Guardian of Vermont, who owed the 100 million.

"So, make sure to have the money ready. Otherwise, you'll realize that escaping death today was only a delay, not a reprieve."

With that, Yeongwoo gestured to the guards, who released the participants they had been holding.

"Go ahead! You're all free!"

"....."

Before Yeongwoo even finished speaking, the participants were already sprinting toward the exit, heading for the blue portal that had opened on one side of the fortress wall.

Anubhav from India nervously shuffled his feet and looked at Yeongwoo.

"Um... Can I go too?"

"Yes, go ahead."

Yeongwoo nodded, and Anubhav dashed toward the portal with unprecedented speed.

Tap tap!

And with that...

"....."

Only Yeongwoo and Ottavio from Sicily were left standing in front of the exit.

"I had hoped we'd meet in a dungeon again someday, but not like this."

"I don't know what you were expecting, but it might exceed that next time."

As Yeongwoo said this, Ottavio shuddered slightly.

"Are you really going to collect from those people?"

"Of course."

"...How exactly?"

"There's a shortcut being built just for me. I might even stop by Sicily someday."

"There's no need to come by."

Leaving a comment that could be either a joke or a warning, Ottavio also began to run toward the exit.

"Anyway, see you alive next time!"

With that, the man from Sicily disappeared into the portal.

Yeongwoo watched him go, then began to walk toward the exit himself.

Swoosh.

'Looks like I can finally get some sleep tonight.'

All that was left now was a good night's sleep at the hotel and then checking in the morning to see how much work his brothers had done.

At last, he had nearly completed what had been a long, long week.

'Tomorrow will be exactly the seventh day since the reset. Feels like I've lived through seven years.'

With a morality score of 14 points—likely the highest among the participants—Yeongwoo threw himself into the portal.

Flash!

Then, as the brief, peculiar sensation of the portal surrounded him, he didn't immediately return to Earth but entered a sort of waiting state.

'Ah, the settlement!'

Yeongwoo instinctively knew that the dungeon settlement was about to begin, and right on cue, system messages started to appear in his field of vision.

[Moral Lecture]

|Dungeon Rank: Ancient

|Difficulty: B

|Required Participants: 8

|Recommended Participants: 16

「The dungeon is now complete.」

「The instructors will now begin grading for the rewards.」

"What...?"

And then, a name he hadn't expected to see again appeared on the screen.

「Desirak, Head of Military Affairs, is completing the grading sheet.」

「Talgia, Head of Development, is completing the grading sheet.」

「The Thousand Eyes, the Dogo Shareholders' Association, are completing the grading sheet.」

「The King of Destruction, Chairman of Dogo, is completing the grading sheet.」

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]