

Level 4 Human in a Ruined World #Chapter 321 - Read Level 4 Human in a Ruined World Chapter 321

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 321: Special Planet (3)

Congratulatory money.

All the humans in the room were left stunned, their mouths agape at the unexpected suggestion.

“Are you seriously planning to collect congratulatory money... in this situation?”

—Has he completely lost his mind?

Most of all, Jeonggu and Jiseon, the bride and groom, were utterly taken aback, while Yeongwoo merely tilted his head as if he couldn't understand their confusion.

“What, are you going to let an opportunity like this pass?”

—What kind of opportunity, exactly?

“A chance to receive additional tribute. My parents are getting married... isn't that a perfect justification?”

“...Yeongwoo, you can't just call a wedding gift a tribute, no matter what.”

Jeonggu cautiously raised an objection, but Yeongwoo had already turned to Kubu for confirmation.

“Kubu, is it okay if I collect money from the guests? Is there a tradition like that in space?”

Kubu glanced back and forth at Jeonggu, still visibly uncomfortable, and Jiseon, now entirely blue with embarrassment, and then spoke with a somewhat resigned tone.

—Yes, in some cases, guests bring a modest gift to celebrate, depending on the status of the couple or the host of the ceremony. However, it's not legally obligatory...

“That's fine, then. If such a tradition exists, I'll handle the collecting.”

Yeongwoo's eyes gleamed with satisfaction as he got the answer he wanted, and then Bantubangtong, who had been listening quietly, asked a question.

—Wedding gift? Do guests pay money in Earth weddings?

“Of course! Even siblings bring gifts when they attend each other's weddings, don't they?”

Yeongwoo asked back as if it were obvious, and Bantubangtong's face grew complicated.

—We also have marriage ceremonies, but there's no exchange of money. Only sentiments are given and received.

“...!”

It was indeed a culture fitting of the fiercely loyal brethren.

Feeling his heart warm unexpectedly, Yeongwoo approached Bantubangtong and, with a click-clack, placed his hand firmly on the orc lord's shoulder, speaking sincerely.

“Then why not take this chance to learn about a new culture?”

—...?

“Go back to your country and bring the money. Since Chief Bang isn't familiar with our culture, we'll proceed with a fixed rate. Just bring an additional 20 million karma.”

In other words, he was asking for a total of 120 million.

—Tw... Twenty million?

“This is a bargain price. So go quickly, before I raise it any higher.”

As Yeongwoo pointed towards the high-speed transit path, urging him to depart, Chief Bang left with a bewildered expression.

Now, all that was left was...

“.....”

Only Kang Yechan, self-proclaimed number one warrior in Gyeongbuk.

Shhk.

Yeongwoo, having sent off Chief Bang, looked naturally in Yechan's direction, and Yechan's eyes widened.

"You don't mean I have to pay too?"

"Of course, it's my parents' wedding. Are you not going to come?"

"Well, I..."

When Yeongwoo brought up his parents, Yechan couldn't find a suitable excuse.

The reasoning seemed a bit shaky, but after all, it was true that his uncle's parents were getting married.

In the end...

"...How much do I have to pay?"

Yechan asked about the going rate for wedding guests, and Yeongwoo, as before, placed a hand on his shoulder.

Thud!

"You don't need to pay anything. What's a wedding gift between us?"

"...Really?"

"But in return, travel to as many cities as you can today to spread the word about the wedding."

"...Are you saying I should tell people to pay the gift as well?"

Judging by his actions, it seemed he was a tyrant through and through.

"If you do that, you might end up getting stabbed."

"That's why I'm sending you. I trust you'll return safely."

Then, Yeongwoo turned his gaze back to Kubu.

"Kubu, when is the wedding ceremony? Can we decide the timing?"

Kubu blinked his large eyes and looked up at the sky.

—According to Earth's standard, the ceremony takes place 24 hours after the decision-making.

This meant that the wedding of Yeongwoo's parents would be tomorrow at around 3 PM.

"Perfect timing. By then, we'll have handled the issue with the mutants in each city...."

However, if the distance to the Korean Peninsula were too great, it would be impossible to arrive on time, so lifting restrictions on the high-speed transit path on the day might also be necessary.

'I could make a real profit from this.'

As Yeongwoo imagined the potential gains, Kubu hastily added further explanation.

—However, each officiant requires a unique token that corresponds to the number of participants.

"A unique token corresponding to the number of officiants? What do you mean—is it possible to have more than two participants?"

—Yes. It's quite common.

"What?"

Yeongwoo was shocked as well.

Apparently, it was rare in space to have just one spouse.

According to what Kubu had just said, it was also common for people to have multiple partners simultaneously.

"What about the tokens? What do they need to be made of?"

—The token must be a tangible object shared among the participants, serving as a sort of symbol.

This wasn't much different from Earth's wedding tokens.

—Once the ceremony concludes, the family court assigns a unique code to the token, making it a distinctive symbol, which thereafter signifies the participant's marital commitment to their spouse.

"...Hmm. So, it doesn't have to be equipment or anything like that."

—Correct. Depending on the family tradition, some use swords or armor as their token, while others use a part of their body.

“...A part of their body?”

Yeongwoo wasn't keen on subjecting his parents to that sort of wedding.

However, as the officiant, or host of the ceremony, he wanted the family's identity to be proudly displayed.

So, what Yeongwoo produced as the token was...

Shh.

“Would something like this work as a wedding token?”

It was none other than a commemorative coin bearing Yeongwoo's own face.

A coin minted on Earth with the face of the person who would be both the officiant of this wedding and the future head of the family.

“You're planning to use that coin as the wedding token...?”

—Seriously, is that a magic coin or something? This kid brings that out for everything.

As expected, the bride and groom showed reluctance, but Yeongwoo held all the authority to carry out this marriage.

“Can either of you summon the witnesses and blessers? It's all happening through my connections, isn't it? I think there's some confusion here—the officiant is me.”

Yeongwoo handed the commemorative coin to his parents.

“And your true wedding token isn't this coin.”

“Huh?”

—What are you talking about?

Yeongwoo raised the coin close to his face.

“The real wedding gift is me. Your beloved, powerful son. So, if you ever feel like ending this family, remember me first. Consider if you can handle your son's wrath.”

“.....”

—This lunatic... is he threatening his own parents?

With that, Yeongwoo raised his sword and swung it between his parents with a shout.

Screeeeetch!

“Quit whining, you idiots!”

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“...Huh?”

—What?

“You’re not my parents yet. If you want to say anything as my parents, first complete the ceremony. Then I’ll treat you with the respect you deserve.”

Tired of the unproductive argument, Yeongwoo sheathed his sword, and Jiseon, who had been about to protest, fell silent.

—Indeed, many things have become irreversible.

Among those “many things” was the word “dear” that she had already let slip.

At this point, what use was there in debating anything further?

A grand journey was already underway.

“How do we make the guest—no, the blessing list?”

Yeongwoo asked Kubu, and a large hologram box appeared in the space between Yeongwoo, Jiseon, and Jeonggu.

Fwoosh!

“What is this?”

—This is a list of potential blessing candidates, as currently tracked by the family court.

"A candidate list? But there's nothing here?"

As Yeongwoo looked curiously at the empty box...

Beep!

Suddenly, the hologram box flashed, and names began to fill in rapidly from the top.

- Kubu the Mediator

- The Representative of Chargho's Merchant Guild
- Mir Alliance
- Boltak's Wandering Merchant
- Cheok's Weapon Merchant
- Shamil Guild
- Rohm's Prisoners
- Pegua's Blacksmith
- Guppy Express Corporation

The list continued, and as the unfamiliar combination of characters scrolled on, Jiseon took a step back.

—W-what is all this?

“What else could it be? It's a list of all the aliens I've met so far.”

Some names were unfamiliar even to Yeongwoo, but seeing many he recognized, he felt sure.

After all, wedding invitations could be sent to anyone with even a slight connection.

And most importantly...

Flash!

- Dogo Corporation
- Lemu Corporation
- Toma Corporation
- Destroyer King, Dogo
- Mara, King of Ten Thousand Demons

Starting with Dogo Corporation, names of prominent figures even within the universe confirmed his suspicion.

Weren't Lemu and Mara rivals competing for Earth's development rights?

Yet it was indeed possible to send wedding invitations even to such entities.

"Um... isn't there a risk of the venue being destroyed?"

Yeongwoo's voice, sounding unusually concerned, prompted Jiseon to ask quickly.

—Who exactly are these people?

"Explaining everything would be way too complicated; let's just say they're cosmic arch-nemeses who will all be in the same place."

—Then... can't you just not invite them?

Jiseon made a fair point.

And Kubu also supported her position.

—A marriage pact is an official ritual guaranteed by the family court. Therefore, uninvited individuals cannot attend.

"Oh, really?"

Yeongwoo raised his eyebrows, looking slightly surprised.

Then, cautiously scratching his chin, he murmured.

"But... aren't you at least a little curious?"

—Curious about what? If they don't come, there's no problem. What's the issue?

Better safe than sorry.

Jiseon now felt compelled to protect her unavoidable wedding from potential disaster.

But...

Swoosh.

Her crazy son had already drawn his sword and pointed it at the sky.

"Aren't you even a bit curious? What kind of gifts those guys might bring?"

—What? Why would I care? It's all just going into your pocket, isn't it?

"Your pocket? It's our pocket now."

While Yeongwoo proudly displayed the commemorative coin to be used as a wedding gift, the candidate list continued to grow.

Beep beep beep!

- Five-Colored Credit
- The Pilgrimage of the Forthcoming In-Laws
- The Sacred Heart Envoy
- The Non-Believer, Named
- Temporary Office 0601142 Jiazol
- Planet Court Promotion Review Team 9

—This is insane! When does this list end?

“It just means your son has lived a busy life.”

Of course, attendance wasn't likely to be 100%, and some names on the list were potentially very dangerous.

But Yeongwoo's unique curiosity had already taken hold, leaving him nearly unable to resist the urge.

What on earth would happen if those guys gathered in one place?

And what gifts might they bring?

“Inviting them all wouldn't be illegal, right?”

When Yeongwoo asked this, Kubu blinked and responded.

—That's correct.

“And the planet won't get destroyed, right?”

This time, however, Kubu couldn't answer immediately.

—...The list includes many entities classified as Rank 4 or higher under cosmic law. But since it's an official ritual, the court will take special precautions, so I think it's unlikely anything you're worried about will happen.

“So, theoretically, the planet could be destroyed, but the probability is low. Is that what you’re saying?”

—Exactly.

With about two seconds of thought, Yeongwoo gave his answer.

“Then let’s invite them all. At least three of them want planetary development rights, so they’ll probably hold back.”

—...Understood. Now, moving on...

“What else is there?”

—You need at least two guarantors for the pact. It’s essential to meet the requirements of an official ritual.

Kubu’s firm tone made Yeongwoo respond more mildly.

“What exactly does a guarantor do?”

—They hand out the gifts to the participants and oversee the entire ritual.

“What? So, basically...”

It was essentially the role of an officiant.

Immediately, Yeongwoo thought of his mentor and benefactor, Dogo, a successful businessman from outer space and a prince from the Vesedel royal family.

But a cosmic wedding required at least two guarantors.

That left one more spot.

“I’m having trouble deciding on the other.”

As Yeongwoo hesitated, Kubu offered a suggestion.

—It’s customary to assign one guarantor to represent each participant.

In other words, if Dogo were to represent Jeonggu, someone related to Jiseon would ideally fill the remaining spot.

—What are you talking about? I don’t know any aliens.

True to her words, Jiseon had virtually no network in this reset world.

"That's true. And if I try to do it, I'm already the groom."

So, who could they possibly choose?

Yeongwoo's mind wandered across the cosmos and beyond, searching for a candidate, until suddenly, a thought sparked.

"Ah!"

—Why? Is there someone?

When Jiseon, his mother, asked, Yeongwoo's eyes gleamed.

"There's still one family member left, isn't there?"

—Who?

"My second uncle!"

Another relative of Yeongwoo and Jiseon who had yet to arrive in this world.

Jinhyeon's second son, Song Jeongho.

—What are you talking about? He hasn't even arrived here yet.

"But there's a good chance he'll arrive tomorrow. Right here, in Seoul."

Once again, Yeongwoo's eyes sparkled with mania.

"The wedding is at three, and Uncle arrives at one, right?"

—So...?

"That gives us two hours, right? In that time, we'll give him a good beating, and then make him serve as Mom's guarantor."

In short, it was a plan to "civilize" their wild second uncle into an officiant.

—...Would that work? That guy's no ordinary nutcase.

Jiseon looked at her son and spoke.

Yeongwoo replied in an ominous tone.

"If he resists, we'll just shove him into a coffin. And in an emergency, we can pick anyone as the guarantor."

—But what if it goes better than expected?

“Then we can invite my second uncle to be the guarantor. And once the ceremony’s over, we’ll just shove him in a coffin.”

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Chapter 322: Special Planet (4)

It was inevitable.

Someone had to enter the coffin.

Because of the effort to keep his mother alive, the empty spot in Aratubank had never been filled.

【Coffin】

| You can place blood relatives into the coffin. Special effects are granted depending on the phase and condition of the stored targets. (0/2)

‘Aratubank is a sacred artifact containing my brothers’ kin’s history and his ancestors’ spirits. I can’t just leave it neglected like this.’

Thus, the fate of the second uncle was as good as sealed.

He was destined to be sealed in the Great Coffin.

Shh.

At last, Yeongwoo looked back at Kubu.

Then he asked, wrapping up the preparations for the ceremony.

"Is everything finished now? Earlier, you mentioned something about witnesses. Do they serve a special role?"

—That is correct. A minimum of five witnesses are required for the union ceremony, and these witnesses are automatically selected from the first guests to arrive at the ceremony.

"So it's first come, first served among the guests."

—Selected guests are recorded on both the list of blessed participants and the list of witnesses. This record may also be used as a reference in future family court cases.

"What? Does that mean the witnesses are seen as having a significant connection to the married couple?"

He had a vague understanding of the concept.

For example, suppose a prominent politician attended the wedding of a famous criminal.

Everyone would naturally assume there was a strong connection between the two.

In a similar vein, even in space, a guest witnessing the ceremony—and especially being selected as a witness on a first-come basis—was seen as having a notable relationship with the hosts or the newlyweds.

"Does this mean there's going to be a scramble to enter late, so they can avoid being witnesses?"

For Yeongwoo, the only witness who came to mind immediately was Chairman Dogo.

As the chairman, he would behave however he liked, whether he was selected as a witness or not.

However, it was unclear if he could serve as both a witness and a guarantor.

"So at least five guests need to step up and take responsibility. Becoming a witness might be a disadvantage if there's ever a trial."

—It's a sign of trust and loyalty.

"But a lot of my guests are borderline criminals."

The idea of a trial might feel remote to benevolent aliens, but the aliens Yeongwoo knew had different stakes.

This was because many of the primary guests were from weapon-making companies involved in all sorts of shady business or bribed planet inspectors.

"Anyway, the ceremony will proceed as scheduled tomorrow. The current time is...."

The current time, 3:23 PM.

As Yeongwoo checked the time and looked at Kubu, his eyes flashed blue as he answered.

—Arrangements have been made. The union ceremony will take place at 3:23 PM tomorrow.

Then, Kubu asked Yeongwoo for the ceremony venue.

—Where would you like the union ceremony to be held? As your administrative representative, I must provide the coordinates to the family court.

"Oh, right? We have to decide the location too."

Yeongwoo scanned the iron-clad expanse of Metal Seoul with his eyes.

And soon made up his mind.

"How about Gwangjin District? If a fight breaks out, there won't be anyone hurt besides the guests, and there's nothing but buildings to be destroyed there."

—Understood. The union ceremony location will be reported as Gwangjin District.

Thus, the wedding venue for Jeonggu and Jiseon was confirmed to be Gwangjin District.

Although neither of their preferences were reflected, they understood there were no other choices.

—Looks like all sorts of scoundrels will come to my wedding.

Jiseon muttered under her breath, and Yeongwoo shook his head.

"That's precisely why it's more meaningful. This wedding will significantly impact our planet's rank."

—What are you talking about?

"You saw the guest list earlier, right? The mere gathering of those people in one place is already a massive event. It will surely influence the evaluation."

Other planets that requested ranking reviews may also have considerable influence, but there's always a limit.

Yeongwoo was certain not many planets would gather the universe's worst villains under the guise of a parent's wedding.

"Now, the only thing left...."

Yeongwoo looked at the clock again, and Jiseon was startled.

—Isn't everything done? What else is there?

"We're mostly finished with the wedding preparations."

—Right...?

"But today's tasks aren't over yet."

The current time, 3:27 PM.

About three hours and thirty minutes later, the addresses of the three companies competing for Earth's development rights would be revealed.

"From 7 PM tonight, the real battle begins. I don't know how it will play out...."

—What? The ceremony is tomorrow, but the battle starts today? What the hell is this?

"It's okay. I've invited our opponents as guests, so there won't be any issues with the ceremony itself."

—What?

"Though we do have to make it through tonight."

At that moment, as Yeongwoo spoke, the "Tower" in Jongno District began to shine white.

Someone was using a high-speed transit route to get there.

And then.

Poof!

The lower wall of the tower opened, and from within emerged Bantubangtong.

"Master Bang!"

Yeongwoo ran to greet the Orc Lord, who likely brought 120 million in tow, while rows of red-footed orcs followed behind him, carrying large bags.

—Small Foot, I brought the money as promised.

“Money? Let’s call it ‘sentiment.’ What flows between us is only sentiment.”

—....

Bantubangtong, expressing his stance with silence, moved past Yeongwoo to open the bags his brothers laid down.

Whoosh!

As expected, coins were packed densely inside the bags, filling his view, and soon a golden goblin ran over, scooping up the money eagerly.

—Kekek!

With a delighted sound, the goblin, thrilled by the massive haul, made the brothers’ faces harden.

Noticing this, Master Bang quickly turned around.

—I think my business here is done, so I shall return. There’s work to be done on Great Darwin....

But Yeongwoo’s dark hand gripped his shoulder, preventing any further movement.

[Translator - Night]

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“What are you talking about, chief?”

—...?

“You still have one more promise to keep.”

—What might that be?

“Leave behind your Honor Points.”

—Oh.

Master Bang looked as if he was regretting his choices.

For a moment, he’d forgotten.

That he had once traded his past to this demon to secure his future.

—Indeed. I almost forgot.

“Are you already starting to forget the past? And you haven’t even handed it over yet.”

—...Just get on with what needs to be done.

Bang, the Great Ally, began walking toward the Victory Monument visible in the distance, and Yeongwoo, after glancing briefly at the sky where the inspectors might be watching, followed him.

Who knew?

Perhaps even this act of donating Glory Points would reflect well in the evaluation.

‘Just meeting the first-tier score is hard enough... but the points chief Bang is donating this time are far beyond the total needed for the first tier.’

It was only possible because it involved pouring in the entire magnificent history of a race.

This was a huge deal by the standards of a lower-level planet entering the evaluation phase.

Currently, the Glory Points of Metal Seoul, the Special City of Dogo, stood at 1,025, surpassing the 1,000 points required for the first tier.

And the points needed to reach the second tier?

A staggering 3,000.

That meant they were about 2,000 points short.

“How many records of disposals do you have right now, Master Bang?”

—Twelve.

“That’s 1,980 points then.”

—Is that so? How many are needed to fill the second tier?

“With the 1,000 points already secured from passing the first tier, if you donate all twelve records, we’ll be able to go past the second tier.”

—Hm.

Hearing Yeongwoo’s reply, Bantubangtong wore a somber expression.

It was troubling to realize that even pouring in the historic achievements of the Redfoot clan would only barely clear the second tier.

—The universe... is indeed vast.

A way for the Chief Bang to express regret.

In response, Yeongwoo put a comforting hand on Master Bang's shoulder.

"You'll roam that vast universe with me. And with our brothers too."

Just as the Mon'o race warriors had the infamous space pirate Guppy, Jeong Yeongwoo of the remote planet Earth had the Redfoot Orcs.

With fervent hearts and bulging biceps.

Yeongwoo was convinced his Redfoot brothers had all the makings of true space gangsters.

'Although a gangster with "honor." Some might call such people hoodlums.'

In other words, space hoodlums.

"....."

Yeongwoo's chest swelled with pride.

Meanwhile, Bang stood tall in front of the Victory Monument.

—Even if it's not the right thing, a promise must be kept. I know well enough that you're not exactly a righteous person, but still, you'll keep your word.

As Bang spoke to the creature with small feet, Yeongwoo nodded.

"That's also part of 'honor.'"

Yeongwoo gestured toward the Victory Monument with a nod, signaling for Bang to continue.

With a resolute expression, Bang placed his hand on the monument's surface.

Thud.

—Legendary Disposal Records of the Redfoot Orc Lord Bantubangtong have been inscribed: 12 records in total!

‘...At last.’

With the donation of Master Bang’s records, the Glory Points of Metal Seoul in Special City Dogo soared.

From the initial 1,025 points, an astonishing 1,980 were added, surpassing the 3,000 mark.

—Current Glory Points of Metal Seoul, Special City Dogo: 3,005.

—The level of the Victory Monument has increased to ‘3’. Glory Points needed for the next phase: 7,000.

“What, 7,000 points?”

The hurdle grew sharply with each level.

Now, they needed to collect an additional 4,000 points to even think about advancing to the next level.

‘What kind of species are we supposed to plunder next to gather that many points?’

As Yeongwoo gaped in shock, the city system displayed a new message.

—The level of Metal Seoul has increased to ‘3’. As the city’s prestige has risen, ‘defense rights’ have been granted.

“Defense rights? Does that mean we didn’t even have any defense rights until now?”

Barely after Yeongwoo blurted this out, the system displayed a series of highly satisfying messages.

◇ The core power source of this city, the ‘Steel Core’, has enhanced functions, including Guardian Dragon Mode and Annihilation Stance.

“Oh?”

◇ Priority construction options for the city’s defense rights are recommended: *Anti-Aircraft Gun*, Suicide Bomb.

“Wow...!”

Yeongwoo instinctively cheered at the sight of the new construction options but then blinked, tilting his head in confusion.

“Wait, hold on.”

He hadn't seen it wrong.

*Suicide Bomb.

"Suicide bomb? Does that mean it's the 'suicide' I'm thinking of?"

With eyes wide in disbelief, Yeongwoo's gaze fell on the tooltip for 'Suicide Bomb' that appeared before him.

[Suicide Bomb]

|A city that has proven its worth has the right to choose a grand finale.

|Plant a bomb in the designated area, and trigger a powerful explosion at the desired moment. Though you may lose the city, you can also take the invaders with it.

*Once the city's prestige reaches 'Planet Capital', the planet itself can be self-destructed.

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 323: Special Planet (5)

"What... What is this?"

A self-destruct bomb.

This bizarrely named construct was, quite literally, a mechanism that could destroy the entire city.

In fact, if the city's status reached planetary capital, it could even blow up the whole planet...

'Don't aliens only have one life each, too? How could a function like this be embedded in the city's system?'

Yeongwoo, who couldn't believe what he was seeing, soon regained his composure, scratching his chin thoughtfully.

‘No, actually, the fact that aliens only have one life is exactly what makes this function useful.’

Using this as a last resort would mean failing to grasp the true potential of this tool, Yeongwoo thought.

You had to know how to read between the lines.

[Plant a bomb in a designated area, and detonate it at the moment of your choosing. Though the city would be lost, you could take the invading enemy’s life with it.

‘So, in other words, the city’s owner would have a self-destruct switch at least, and the explosion would be tremendously powerful.’

‘Isn’t this... offensive, though?’

Why had this been given along with the "right to defend?"

Now, if he could muster the courage to face death, it was as good as having a way to intimidate anyone who dared approach.

Even if it was...

‘Even guests from across the universe.’

The thought made Yeongwoo shiver.

He might even hold Dogo Chairman, Mara King of the Demons, and those corrupt inspectors hostage for a huge payoff.

‘Of course, that would only work if I truly built an image that would make people believe I’d actually press the self-destruct button....’

Would it work, though?

“ ... ”

After a moment of thought, Yeongwoo realized it was still too early for that.

Even if he could fool others, there was no way he’d deceive the Chairman.

However...

‘If our Metal Seoul becomes the planetary capital, things might be different.’

Planetary self-destruction.

If a person from Earth weren't threatening to press a self-destruct button, but instead an entire planet were scheduled for self-destruction and charging in from outer space, then what?

‘...Incredible. I'd pay just to calm them down if it were me.’

As he imagined Earth burning red in the sky, Jiseon, who had been staring at him, jabbed him with her greatsword.

Poke.

—What crazy thought are you having now?

“I was contemplating our future.”

—Our future? What about it?

“It's going to be explosive.”

Yeongwoo looked at his mother with a bright smile.

His mother, a mere dragon, still wouldn't understand such a grand scheme.

So instead of explaining his plans, Yeongwoo turned his attention to a task at hand.

◇ Enhanced features are inactive. Please complete Guardian Dragon and Annihilation Mode settings.

Notifications from the system had been flashing continuously.

[Guardian Dragon]

|Appoint a Guardian Dragon to protect the city and grant it the ability to return instantly in case of an emergency.

|The Guardian Dragon's combat power is boosted according to city level, and if the Guardian Dragon is already of the dragon lineage, the boost increases by 25%.

‘Unbelievable. So, even a non-dragon could be a Guardian Dragon.’

However, since designating a dragon lineage as Guardian Dragon provided a 25% additional boost, cities with this function essentially had to recruit a dragon.

This meant that dragons were even rarer than he thought.

And, fortunately, Yeongwoo had a very powerful dragon right here.

“Mother.”

—Now what?

“There’s an opportunity to elevate your cosmic status.”

—What? Suddenly?

“Yes. Please become the Guardian Dragon of Metal Seoul, Dogo Special City.”

—What city?

As Jiseon repeated, feeling something sounded strange, she saw her son, eyes alight with excitement, suddenly reaching toward her.

Swoosh!

—What are you doing?

Sensing something ominous, Jiseon tried to step back, but her son’s hand already gripped her arm.

—Ugh!

A mysterious, colorful light radiated from his hand where it held her forearm.

Then, suddenly, texts from the city system began to appear in her field of vision.

「Frost Dragon Song Jiseon has been designated as the Guardian Dragon of Metal Seoul, Dogo Special City.」

Immediately, a lively energy surged through her, and notification texts glowing yellow appeared in succession.

[City-level combat boost is applied.]

[Dragon attribute overlap increases boost effect by 25%.]

[All stats increase by 20% through the ‘Guardian Dragon’ function of the Steel Core.]

—What... what is all this? My body feels...

Before Jiseon could finish saying something felt off, a fierce blue flame erupted from her entire body.

—Arghhhh!

The boosted combat power had transformed Jiseon into an even stronger being than before.

It was as if the overwhelming energy and aggression were boiling inside her veins, unable to be contained, spilling outward—and this force was directed straight at her son, Yeongwoo.

—Damn, why do I suddenly feel like hitting you?

Looking down at him, Jiseon, who now seemed even larger, spoke.

Yeongwoo realized that his mother had changed significantly and cautiously drew his sword.

Whoosh.

“Calm down, Mother. You seem to be experiencing a testosterone surge. Probably a side effect of the Guardian Dragon power-up.”

—What did you do to me?

“I helped you become greater than before. Now you’re truly my mother.”

Before, he’d been confident he could restrain her, but now he was less sure.

Until he clashed blades with her again, he wouldn’t know his mother’s new strength.

‘This is a disaster. So if the city grows, my mother will keep turning into an even stronger monster.’

Of course, having such a monster as Seoul’s Guardian Dragon was reassuring, but it also meant his control over her was weaker.

“Mother, here’s what you should know. You are the Guardian Dragon of Seoul, and I am Seoul’s mayor.”

—And?

“That means we don’t need to fight each other. Also, technically, this could be considered a coup.”

Yeongwoo said this as he quickly tried to install the “self-destruct bomb” right where they stood, hoping to threaten his mother first.

But—

「Self-destruct bomb construction not possible. Annihilation Mode must be activated first.」

“What?”

Activating the self-destruct bomb required Annihilation Mode, and this notification appeared before his empowered mother’s eyes as well.

"You son of a...!"

His mother swung her sword at him.

Reflexively, Yeongwoo raised his sword, Bastard, to guard against her.

Whoosh!

The icy greatsword swung down like a flash, striking Bastard and sending a piercing pain through Yeongwoo's hands.

"...Ah!"

His mother’s strength was so overpowering that Yeongwoo’s grip on Bastard faltered and broke.

And then came the unbelievable message:

「Your sensory stats have temporarily increased from 33,500 to 95,840.」

"What?"

This meant his mother’s base sensory stat exceeded 120,000.

"Mom...!"

Realizing that he was finally at the point where he could actually be beaten by her, Yeongwoo desperately launched into evasive maneuvers.

With no time to pick up Bastard, he threw himself backward.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

A blue trajectory sliced through the space where he had just stood.

"Activate Extermination Mode!"

Yeongwoo shouted in panic, and the construction interface appeared immediately.

[Extermination Mode]

| When the city is in danger, emergency facilities are activated to resolve the issue.

| Can be used only once per day.

◇ Two suitable locations for the emergency facility have been found for Extermination Mode.

<Four Great Gates>

| Exterminator count increases to 4. Improved biological suppression.

<Namsan>

| Exterminator count decreases to 1. Enhanced ship interception performance.

"Dammit! Another decision!"

He still had a deadly greatsword swinging at him, but he couldn't pick just anything without careful thought.

So, Yeongwoo...

"Mom!"

...decided to use his ultimate sword technique, Heart Sword.

"Mom, please help...!"

He thought he'd at least try psychologically if he couldn't win physically.

"Mom! Mother!"

Yeongwoo wailed without even holding his sword, but the furious Song Jiseon kept charging at him without slowing down.

Crash!

And so, in the end, Yeongwoo...

"We can turn the Four Great Gates into robots now!"

...shouted a line he thought would stop the fight if he himself had heard it.

If he really had inherited this kind of personality from his mother, he figured she'd be interested in the same kinds of things.

And his guess was...

Crash!

—...What did you say?

...absolutely correct.

The ice dragon Song Jiseon, who had been charging toward him, suddenly halted in place as if she'd hit the brakes.

—What did you say about the Four Great Gates?

"It looks like we can turn either the Four Great Gates or Namsan into a robot. Calm down and take a look."

At Yeongwoo's words, Jiseon finally glanced over the notifications that had been bothering her field of vision.

—This is some crazy nonsense...

"We can only choose one. Which do you think is better?"

Yeongwoo asked as he side-eyed the fallen Bastard in the distance.

He thought if he could just retrieve it remotely, sever an arm, and activate a combined bleeding and limb loss effect, he might stand a chance in a power struggle.

Meanwhile, Jiseon was already captivated by the surprising "Seoul robot" issue.

—Is there even a question? The Four Great Gates rising up would look way cooler.

"But I think Namsan would be bigger. Plus, it has improved ship interception capabilities."

—'Improved' doesn't mean perfect. The Four Great Gates can intercept ships too, just with less powerful units than Namsan.

"Hmm..."

Thinking back to the metal palace, the four turrets all rose simultaneously, firing laser beams.

In this Metal Seoul, everything was upgraded to a much higher level.

So, the power of the Four Great Gates was bound to be overwhelming until they actually saw it in action.

‘Then Namsan must be even stronger... It’s a shame I can’t have both.’

Now was the time to make a decision.

“Since the city has upgraded to level 3 and added anti-aircraft guns, it’s better to focus on defeating the creatures that have already landed on the planet rather than intercepting ships.”

And this 'creature' would include his mother.

While his mother was briefly distracted, he quickly designated the Four Great Gates for Extermination Mode to secure an insurance measure.

“Special Mayor Jeong Yeongwoo07 of Dogo City has designated the ‘Four Great Gates’ as an emergency facility for [Extermination Mode].”

“Looks like Seoul is finally transforming into a real city.”

The only remaining task was to plant the self-destruct bomb under his parents’ wedding hall and wait for the upcoming address reveal of the three main factions.

‘Now that Seoul is relatively safe, bring on the war.’

As Yeongwoo’s eyes glinted and he retrieved Bastard, the clock inside his Vesedel Armor lit up.

Beep!

Finally, it was 4 p.m.

And then, a system-wide announcement began broadcasting across the entire planet.

「In three hours, the locations of the companies participating in the planet's development rights competition will be disclosed.」

「With non-peaceful negotiations expected, residents are advised to seek safety in designated areas.」

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 324: Special Planet (6)

—What's this, are we just supposed to fight every other company?

Jiseon asked, glancing at the warning sign. Yeongwoo scratched his chin.

"If I can settle things with words, I'd rather do that. It'd be easier on both body and mind."

But the adversaries were Mara and Lemu.

Mara had a deep-seated grudge against his brothers, and Lemu was not on good terms with Dogo, their sponsor.

"I don't think we can avoid a war with Mara,"

Yeongwoo said.

—Why?

Jiseon asked.

"It's about avenging my brothers. It's a contract obligation."

—Then I suppose it can't be helped.

Jiseon accepted the answer without further questioning since it was about contract compliance.

No matter how reckless or impossible a task seemed, she had to see it through if she had agreed to it at the time of the contract.

This was one of businesswoman Song Jiseon's iron rules.

—By 'your brothers,' you mean them, right?

Song Jiseon asked, subtly gesturing with her greatsword toward Bantubangtong in front of the war memorial.

Yeongwoo nodded.

"Yes. They're the ones I'll keep going forward with. They even built that bridge..."

—So you've been working them so hard based on your promise to avenge them?

"Yes."

—You've burdened yourself with an enormous weight, kid. Never base a business on 'hatred.' The same goes for revenge.

"Why not? After all, revenge is about exerting power for the victim's sake, isn't it?"

—But isn't hatred the driving force through both the process and outcome? Hatred is unpredictable; it can change form, nature, and direction with the slightest push.

Jiseon wasn't just talking about how revenge breeds more revenge.

She was pointing out the instability it brings to business.

—Do you think anyone can bear the burden of hatred? When hopeful expectations are shattered, they end in disappointment, but when hatred is thwarted, it only breeds more hatred.

"You mean, if I fail in my revenge, my brothers might end up hating me?"

—It could be even worse. Depending on the situation, they might hate you even if you succeed.

With that, Jiseon dispelled her ice greatsword.

Shwiiing!

—What matters is not running a business based on hatred. If you work that way, you won't last long.

As Jiseon gave her advice in a solemn tone, Yeongwoo's expression shifted to one of smug defiance.

"But weren't you just trying to kill me a moment ago, acting like the very embodiment of hatred?"

—You little brat! I'm trying to calm down now, aren't I?!

"Well then, I'd appreciate if your actions matched your words."

Yeongwoo, though wearing a mocking expression, actually took her words to heart because they made sense.

‘So violence is acceptable, I suppose? After all, that’s a business fueled by trust and fear, not hatred.’

As his thoughts reached this point, Yeongwoo instinctively looked eastward.

“Shall we relocate?”

—Where to?

“To Mother’s wedding hall.”

* * *

At 4:14 PM.

Yeongwoo arrived at Gwangjin-gu, a dedicated dueling site proudly located in Metal Seoul, and immediately began the setup for the “Self-Destruction Bomb.”

[Self-Destruction Bomb]

|A city that has proven its value has the right to choose a grand finale.

|Place a bomb in a designated area to cause a powerful explosion at the desired moment. While it will result in the loss of the city, it can also eliminate the invading enemy.

*Once a city’s status reaches that of a ‘Planet Capital,’ planetary self-destruction becomes an option.

A colossal, violent seed, destined to grow into a planetary self-destructer someday. Incredibly, the bomb’s installation range covered the entire district.

In other words.

“Whoa, is this really the size of the bomb?”

Yeongwoo mumbled, staring at the red hologram blanketing the whole of Gwangjin-gu in construction mode, as Jiseon asked.

—How big is it?

“The whole of Gwangjin-gu. If it detonates, we wouldn’t even have time to escape.”

—I can just fly out.

“It won’t be so easy.”

Yeongwoo gazed past Gwangjin-gu, eyeing the other districts.

As he prepared to bury this gigantic bomb beneath Gwangjin-gu's ground, he couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt toward the residents... or rather, the voters.

"But someday, this will be one of our most powerful weapons."

Speaking aloud as if rehearsing a speech for a recording, Yeongwoo's words made Jiseon step back.

—Are you seeing something like a vision?

Then, suddenly—

Fwoosh!

The ground throughout Gwangjin-gu was engulfed in a bright red light as the self-destruct bomb was installed.

「Self-Destruction Bomb has been installed in Gwangjin-gu, Metal Seoul, Dogo Special City.」

「This information has only been conveyed to the mayor.」

"These guys are more sneaky than I thought."

Narrowing his eyes at the notification intended only for the mayor, Yeongwoo watched Jiseon step forward.

—They seriously only told you? About the bomb you just set up?

"Well, now you know too."

Yeongwoo then pointed quietly at his father, standing in a corner.

"And so does Father. This is our first family secret."

The explosive secret of the Yeongwoo family.

Yechan wasn't present, as he was busy distributing wedding invitations on Earth, and Bantubangtong had already returned to Australia before the bomb installation.

"But everyone knows of the self-destruct bomb's existence. They just don't know where it's placed or if it's even been set up for real."

—Are you sure about this?

Even the fearless Jiseon shook her head at this point.

No matter how daring she was, she wasn't bold enough to plant a bomb under her own city.

"Just one more, and we'll be ready for war."

Yeongwoo said as he tapped the ground in Gwangjin-gu with the back of his hand.

—One more? What's that?

"An anti-aircraft cannon. Anything that dares fly over Seoul will be shot down."

* * *

At the same time, in the northern part of Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan...

A woman appeared with three swords but no shield, drawing the attention of the many swordsmen moving northward.

And in an instant, all eyes widened.

"Huh? Is that...?"

"Could it be her?"

Because above the opponent's head.

It was because they held the title of Sword Emperor—Master of Swords.

Not just any Sword Master, but the Miyagi Sword Emperor, Tomiko Fuyama.

Everyone in both eastern and western Japan knew about the time she visited a house in Yamagata and was ambushed by six Sword Masters.

In the end, only the Miyagi Sword Master, Tomiko, walked out alive from that scene.

Because of that, Yamagata Prefecture disbanded and crumbled, having lost all of its Sword Masters.

Thanks to this event becoming so notorious, just a few days later, even high-ranking martial artists from southern Japan were aware that the Miyagi Sword Emperor was a problematic individual.

More precisely, she was known as a pro-Korean Sword Master wielding formidable power.

“Did she really take down all of Yamagata alone?”

“They say she’s worth at least six Sword Masters.”

“Is that even possible? No matter how strong she is, six...?”

“And they say the fight happened indoors.”

The Sword Masters kept a cautious distance from Tomiko, murmuring amongst themselves.

Eventually, they mentioned a stigma—an almost infamous one—that had been attached to her.

“So what? In the end, she’s pro-Korean, right?”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

“Pro-Korean? She refused to cross the sea and ended up killing six people instead.”

“She didn’t just kill six. It’s practically like she set the entire Yamagata region on fire.”

The Miyagi Sword Emperor, Tomiko Fuyama—a fervent pro-Korean.

This was the position that Tomiko held within Japan now.

A crazy woman who, for some reason, killed all of Yamagata’s Sword Masters just because she didn’t want to invade Korea.

In fact, after the Reset, this was an unforgivable act in Japan, which had become much harsher.

Thus, challengers visited Miyagi Province one after another to hold her accountable for the Yamagata incident, yet, to date, no one had walked out alive.

Around the same time, Sword Masters and Sword Emperor from the south had gathered forces, confidently setting off to invade Korea, only to vanish without a trace.

As things unfolded like this, a massive atmosphere of fear began to spread across Japan.

They had previously attacked their rival, with whom they already held hostile sentiments even before the Reset, only to be mysteriously defeated.

So, what was going to happen next?

Of course, it was going to be bloody vengeance.

Invasion from Korea, this time into Japan.

Especially since now, the land was connected.

“Korea will soon covet Japanese territory!”

Though nobody loudly proclaimed this, every Japanese person harbored this fear deep in their hearts.

Then, this morning, people sent from Tokyo arrived in Japan’s major cities.

The Tokyo messengers, arriving on something that was clearly not of this world, handed a short note to each region’s leaders and left.

「Come to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building immediately. The preparations are complete; we will make Japan great once again.」

The message sounded far-fetched, but the signature at the bottom of the note was enough to make every Swordsman and Sword Master willingly take action.

—The Tokyo Sword Emperor.

Because the sender was none other than the Tokyo Sword Emperor.

The symbolic name of what had once been the capital of Japan before the Reset, and perhaps still a de facto capital.

Because of this, even masters from the southwest who were preparing for a second invasion, as well as Tomiko, who had not taken a step outside Miyagi for a while, all set out for Tokyo.

“Making Japan great again? Seems like they got the idea from somewhere.”

Having already experienced a similar situation once in Yamagata, Tomiko smirked as she headed toward Shinjuku’s southern side.

That was where the promised meeting place, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, stood.

The landmark in Shinjuku, consisting of two buildings each standing 48 stories high.

The buildings were so tall that before long, the fork-like structure of the Government Building appeared in everyone's sight.

Whooooom...!

However, something about the sight was a little strange.

"...Huh?"

Tomiko instinctively stopped in her tracks.

There, floating atop the Government Building, which stood 243 meters tall, was a massive, white cube.

'Wait, just how big is it?'

If it looked to be as wide as the Government Building from this distance and height, just how gigantic could that object be?

As Tomiko's thoughts reached this point, a loud cheer erupted from the ground level of the Government Building.

No, to be precise, it was the sound of chanting.

"Waaah! Lemu!"

"Lemu!"

"Lemu...!"

Then, a deep, authoritative voice, likely belonging to the Tokyo Sword Emperor, boomed through a loudspeaker.

—Our great Japan is officially set to become one of Earth's three great powers! Lemu!

"Yeahaa!"

"Lemu!"

"Lemu!"

The intensity of the crowd was palpable, even just from the sound.

'Something's wrong here. Maybe I should turn back now.'

Sensing something amiss, Tomiko took a cautious step backward.

But then, the booming voice trapped her in place.

—There are two major conditions! But for greatness, any disgrace must be endured...!

“...Disgrace?”

A word she had never anticipated, making Tomiko involuntarily turn her head toward the lower part of the Government Building.

There, she saw a tall man holding what looked like a microphone on a platform.

‘Are you... the Tokyo Sword Emperor?’

Tomiko’s pupils dilated as she took in the sight of the Sword Master who ruled over this country’s capital.

For some reason, he wasn’t wearing any clothes.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 325: Special Planet (7)

While Tomiko in Japan discovered a bare-bodied Sword Emperor, Yeongwoo's preparations for war were progressing smoothly.

They’d already started test-firing the anti-aircraft cannons.

“Fire!”

At Yeongwoo’s command, a scarlet shell fired from the anti-aircraft guns installed in each of the eight districts of Metal Seoul.

Bang! Bang!

Jiseon, watching alongside, muttered as she stroked her chin.

—How powerful is that?

“Well, you could try getting hit if you really want to know.”

Yeongwoo thought there must be a reason the anti-aircraft cannons fired shells rather than lasers, unlike other large weapons they'd seen before.

'Are shells simply more powerful?'

The tooltip for the anti-aircraft cannon didn't specify what kind of opponent it could bring down.

[Anti-Aircraft Cannon]

| The sky must remain clear.

| Eight anti-aircraft cannons are installed in key areas of the city to eliminate unnecessary flying objects.

In other words, they wouldn't know the cannon's exact power until it was actually used in combat.

"Since we're talking about it, do you actually want to try getting hit? I'm curious."

—You little brat, you really lost it, huh? Wanna go another round?

Whoosh!

As Song Jiseon summoned a massive sword in her grasp again, Yeongwoo waved his hands and took a step back as if joking.

Even he knew that his current strength wouldn't easily overpower his mother.

"Well, anyway... the four gates have anti-aircraft abilities too, so in emergencies, that's a total of twelve cannons."

It wasn't enough to cover the entire sky above Seoul, but it was still more than capable of battering down a giant battleship.

"And there's Mother as well."

The official guardian dragon of Metal Seoul, Song Jiseon.

Thinking about it, Seoul's defense capabilities were quite impressive.

There were eight cannons on standby, twelve in emergencies, plus four annihilation robots that could be activated, not to mention a monstrous guardian dragon who could even pressure Yeongwoo, the master of this world.

Plus, there was the self-destruct bomb that could blow up both the city and the invaders.

‘Now we just need the enemy to show up.’

As Yeongwoo checked his watch anxiously, Jiseon asked,

—So, what’s next on the agenda?

For the first time, Yeongwoo admitted there wasn’t a next step.

“Nothing.”

—What?

“I don’t have anything else to do right now.”

—Really?

Yeongwoo’s face dropped.

He was so used to spending every day at full speed that he couldn’t handle even a little downtime.

—Having nothing to do should be a good thing, shouldn’t it? Why the long face?

“I’m alive right now because I’ve never had nothing to do. Getting too idle isn’t really a good thing.”

The current time was 4:34 PM.

There were about two and a half hours until the address would be revealed.

—How long until the next task?

“About two hours.”

—You’re nuts. That’s what you call free time?

Jiseon finally realized her son’s sanity might not be intact.

How had he been living here if even a two-hour gap felt too long?

—What comes after the war?

“I have to pay taxes at 10 PM.”

—And after that?

“From 11 PM, it’s the real ‘night.’”

—Real night?

“Oh, that’s right. You just got here today.”

Yeongwoo put his hand on his forehead.

He’d momentarily forgotten that his mother was a newcomer in this world.

“After 11 PM, extreme weather starts. Generally, it’s not safe to roam outside.”

Yeongwoo briefly explained the extreme weather conditions, climate-resistant equipment, and dungeons, and Jiseon tilted her head.

—So, you’re saying you wander around outside even at night? Without sleeping?

“Yeah... oh?”

As he nodded to his mother’s words, Yeongwoo suddenly shuddered.

“Right? I do wander around at night.”

—What are you rambling about all of a sudden?

“War. I can fight at night too. And my allies can withstand extreme weather to some extent.”

—...?

Still not understanding the world fully, Jiseon couldn’t quite grasp her son’s excitement.

—So, what does that mean?

“It means we can carry out night air raids. Of course, I’d have to finish the dungeon quickly and return.”

Yeongwoo’s face lit up with excitement.

He stashed away a knife he’d taken out at some point and said,

“I think I know what to do with the remaining time. Before the war starts, I should get some sleep.”

* * *

Yeongwoo07, the Mayor of Metal Seoul, devoted to public service to the point of sacrificing sleep.

When he entered a private suite at the Parnas Hotel with his parents, Seok, sitting with the children in the living room, was taken aback.

“Whoa! Y-Yeongwoo?”

Of course, it wasn’t Yeongwoo that startled her, but the towering white-haired giant with a full set of armor who followed him in.

“A m-monster... behind you...!”

“Oh, the two of you haven’t met, right? This is my mother.”

“.....!”

“And this is Kim Seok, the director of the Moi Cultural Foundation.”

When Yeongwoo forced the two to introduce themselves, Jiseon extended her hand to Seok with a smile.

—I’m Song Jiseon of Jinhyeon. Nice to meet you.

“Jinhyeon... Song Jiseon?”

Seok repeated the name to herself in disbelief, then her eyes widened as she realized who Jiseon was.

“Are you really Song Jiseon?”

—Yes, haha.

Jiseon’s voice held genuine laughter; it was her first time meeting someone who truly recognized her.

—So, what brings the director here...?

Now, it was Jiseon’s turn to ask about the other’s situation.

In response, Seok pointed to Yeongwoo with a forced smile.

“Your son’s holding my husband hostage, so I don’t really have a choice...”

—What?

Jiseon, who had been smiling pleasantly from behind her helmet, instantly froze and glared at Yeongwoo.

—What crazy things have you been up to?

“Well, she didn’t exactly lie, but it’s not entirely the truth either...”

Yeongwoo thought about blowing a whistle to demonstrate, but decided against it.

He still needed to use his "friends" in the upcoming war.

“I’ll show you directly later. It’s a bit of a complicated situation.”

Though he had explained a lot to his mother over time, he didn’t feel confident explaining about the friends locked up and laboring in the returnees’ room.

—All you’ve done so far is kidnap, assault, and extort people. What have you even been doing?

“Oh, come on, stop nagging.”

Yeongwoo moved into the bedroom to escape from his mother.

He was about to turn on the television, but realized it wasn’t the right time for room service and lay down on the bed instead.

“At least the bedding hasn’t turned into stone.”

It might not be a safe zone, but he doubted his mother would try to cut his throat with a greatsword while he was asleep.

That made this place the safest spot in Seoul, didn’t it?

“Please wake me up around 6:30. I still need to be up by 6 at the latest.”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Lying in bed, Yeongwoo said this, and Jiseon, standing by the bedroom door, looked at her son.

—And what am I supposed to do until then?

"....."

But her son didn't answer. Soon, a red eye icon appeared over his left eyelid.

Yeongwoo's mutated cornea, the "One-Eyed Sentinel," had activated.

—This kid sleeps with one eye open, even when he's resting.

Jiseon muttered, feeling pity for her son.

How rough must his life have been if he couldn't let his guard down, even in sleep?

He would have had to exceed his natural limits to survive as a rootless outcast and push aside the top players.

—What is this all about? I come home, and there's a war with aliens waiting.

Click.

Jiseon, feeling mentally exhausted, slumped down, blocking the doorway like a barrier.

Then Jeonggu, who was glancing over from the living room, cautiously spoke.

"Uh... you should get some rest."

—...What?

Unconsciously, Jiseon raised her head.

There stood her fiancé, with a sword at his waist.

—Rest? With a war coming up, someone has to stay awake.

"I can stay awake. I was the one who watched over Yeongwoo before, wasn't I?"

Jiseon snorted instantly.

—You? Don't be ridiculous. You'd probably be blown out of the galaxy by a mere breath.

"I... I'm a Strongest Sword too, you know."

Jeonggu, looking somewhat aggrieved, had a title above his head that indeed read "Strongest Sword."

『Strongest Sword of Dobong』

But it wasn't impressive enough to leave an impact on Jiseon.

Yeongwoo was already the elected Strongest Sword of the Korean Peninsula, and Jiseon herself had returned as a dragon, thanks to her record as a conglomerate head.

She wasn't sure what combination of traits had produced a son like this, but it was clear Jeonggu was the one with the lowest standing among the three.

—Spare me and go to sleep. There isn't much time left anyway.

Jiseon, who usually gave in to the weaker party.

Just then, her son's crazy voice rang out from behind.

"Mother, would you please be quiet and go to sleep as well?"

—...?

When Jiseon turned around, she found Yeongwoo sitting up.

She thought he'd been in a deep sleep, but he had woken up again.

—Why can't you just stay down for once?

"It's too noisy."

—What?

But the "noise" Yeongwoo mentioned wasn't just his parents' conversation.

The real reason he had woken up was due to a system message.

「The addresses of competing companies will soon be disclosed!」

「Register a representative profile, and choose the first company to invite to the negotiation table.」

Since it was nearly time for address disclosure, prompts kept appearing, asking him to register something.

‘What do they keep wanting me to do? Register a representative profile?’

As Yeongwoo struggled to open both eyes fully, he saw a fist-sized round hologram floating in front of him.

Soon, another system message popped up over it.

「Authorize data access. Keywords representing your profile will be automatically input for the competitor.」

‘Authorization?’

When Yeongwoo approved the data access, a long horizontal line stretched from left to right.

It was a loading indicator.

「Extracting keywords from user Jeong Yeongwoo07’s data.」

Two large rectangles then appeared below.

Pop!

「While the extraction is ongoing, review the profile of the competing representative.」

‘So now I can see the competitor’s profile?’

Blinking, Yeongwoo waited for the next steps, and soon, a string of text began to fill the large rectangle.

『Mara』

| Representative Type: Human

| Mara’s representative is of the [Predator] type, highly [rational], with a strong [armed] presence and a [challenging] demeanor, making them an extremely [dangerous] competitor.

‘Ah, so this is what they mean by keywords.’

Yeongwoo nodded.

It was a method where a few attributes were extracted from each representative’s data, creating an introductory profile based on that.

‘So next is the Lemu profile?’

When Yeongwoo’s gaze moved to the final profile, he saw a rather odd phrase.

『Lemu』

| Representative Type: Human

| Lemu's representative is a [blindly devoted] follower. Driven by immense [greed] and a clear [sense of purpose], with a strong [sacrificial spirit], they await their competitor [in the nude].

With clear purpose and strong sacrificial spirit, they await their competitor in the nude...

Yeongwoo was left with only one comment.

"What the hell... what exactly is waiting for me?"

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 326: Negotiation (1)

—What's going on? Why are you so surprised?

Song Jiseon, seeing her son's expression, was surprised herself.

What on earth could startle this monster of a kid so much?

It seemed that something only the mayor could see had appeared again, so Jiseon asked again.

—Don't keep it to yourself; discuss it with your parents. Do you think you're fighting this war alone?

Yeongwoo couldn't take his eyes off the representative profile of the naked agent, and finally turned to look at his mother.

"They're completely naked."

—What?"\

Jiseon's voice instantly twisted in shock.

"I don't know why, but apparently the agent from the Lemu side is naked. Maybe because they're in the adult industry?"

It seemed almost too straightforward for a company that deals with intergalactic adult content.

Yeongwoo found it hard to believe.

—Naked? Does that mean they're not even wearing any gear? Are they really going into battle like that?

Jiseon found it just as difficult to understand, and Yeongwoo could only scratch his chin.

"I mean, I wouldn't know. Still, as a representative, they probably have no choice but to do what their sponsor tells them to do..."

—What? So if these Dogo guys told you to strip down right now, would you actually consider it? Or do even worse things?

"..."

Faced with such a loaded question, Yeongwoo looked at his mother with a mix of disgust and bewilderment.

But it was a sharp question.

In fact, he hadn't thought about it in those terms before.

The humiliations he'd endured while working with Dogo so far were limited to announcing his sponsorship to his opponents.

Even that had become so routine that he no longer found it humiliating.

"Stripping... Once you get used to it, after being financially compensated enough times, it might not be such a big deal."

—Crazy kid.

"Of course, I don't know what I'd actually do if it came down to it. But one thing's for sure—I'd consider it very seriously."

Yeongwoo thought that the Lemu representative might have chosen "stripping" for a similar reason.

Just as Dogo operated with a rather ruthless business philosophy, Lemu must have its own unique way of doing things.

'Well... the fastest way would be to just summon them and ask directly.'

Yeongwoo recalled the notification he saw at the start.

「Register your representative profile and choose the first organization to invite to the negotiation table.」

‘So, after registering my profile, I can summon an organization? I’ll just pick Lemu then.’

It didn’t matter who he met first since he planned to crush both Mara and Lemu eventually, but after learning that the Lemu representative was completely naked, he couldn’t resist the urge to meet them.

Why were they waiting for battle in the nude, and what kind of compensation did they receive for it?

‘Hmm. I’m curious to see where this weirdo lives.’

As Yeongwoo pondered his curiosity, a short alert sounded, indicating that his keyword extraction was complete.

「Extraction complete. Please review the representative profile below and choose the first organization to invite to the negotiation table.」

‘Oh...’

Finally, his profile was complete.

Yeongwoo, curious about how the system would evaluate him, quickly looked over at his profile.

The first thing that caught his eye was the name of his affiliated agency, "Dogo."

『Dogo』

| Representative Type: Demon |

| The representative of Dogo is insane! They don’t even possess a [heart] of humanity. They are [unpredictable] and a [cosmic] presence. They covet all the [money] you have. Avoid encounters if possible. |

"...What."

Yeongwoo felt momentarily taken aback when he saw his profile.

He wasn’t sure if this was an insult or a compliment.

Of course, the purpose of this profile was to help competitors decide on their first negotiation target.

‘Not that it really matters whether it’s a compliment...’

But it was impossible not to feel a slight sting seeing the system label him as “insane.”

‘Am I that crazy even by cosmic standards?’

As Yeongwoo pondered this, a real-time notification popped up in front of his eyes.

Pop!

「Representative Mara has reviewed your profile.」

「Representative Lemu has reviewed your profile.」

"Oh."

Both the heavily armed representative of Mara and the naked representative of Lemu were now awake.

‘Well, with the address reveal approaching, it would be strange if they were sleeping.’

Once his thoughts reached this point, Yeongwoo finally got out of bed.

Then, at last, the options related to the “negotiation table” appeared.

「Please select one representative to meet at the negotiation table.」

「If both representatives select each other, a portal to the negotiation table will open. At the table, relatively safe conversations can take place, and official agreements may be made.」

It was literally an opportunity for actual negotiations.

Moreover, it wasn’t just a simple conversation; if they reached some sort of agreement, they could make it official.

‘But if neither side picks the other, there won’t be any negotiations.’

For instance, if Dogo chose Lemu, Lemu chose Mara, and Mara chose Dogo, then no one would have picked each other.

‘Well, let’s go with... Lemu?’

Based on the descriptions, the Mara side seemed stronger, but he was tired of meeting strong opponents.

He'd met enough powerful entities on and off Earth to be sick of them.

Now, he was more interested in the "weird ones."

'Lemu... I'll go with Lemu.'

As Yeongwoo muttered this to himself, the system immediately responded.

「Representative Jung Yeongwoo07 of Dogo has invited Lemu to the negotiation table.」

Then, the representatives who had invited Yeongwoo to the table were revealed.

「Representative Lemu has invited you.」

「Representative Mara has invited you.」

"Huh? An unanimous vote?"

Both Lemu and Mara had chosen Dogo's representative.

Since the negotiation table offered a "relatively" safe space for conversation, it seemed that the others felt drawn to the most dangerous-looking profile.

「You may now initiate negotiations with the Lemu representative. Would you like to open the portal?」

"Right now? Immediately?"

Yeongwoo, surprised, muttered aloud, and Jiseon beside him tilted her head.

—What's happening now?"

"I can initiate preliminary negotiations right now."

—Negotiate what? Aren't you all just going to end up fighting anyway?"

"Right? I'll find out once I sit down."

Yeongwoo, like his mother, wasn't exactly sure what they'd be negotiating.

It wasn't as if they'd propose going to war without killing each other, was it?

Once he gave his approval to open the negotiation table, a large portal opened on one side of his room.

Shwaaaaa!

This portal was different from the ones he'd seen before, appearing as a large, dark blue ring of light.

—Is that the entrance to the negotiation hall?"

"Yes."

—This is still our domain, and yet they can just open a passageway without any restrictions?"

A true leader's perspective.

It was a perspective fitting for the head of a global corporation.

In the midst of it all, Jiseon felt a kind of threat and discomfort.

"They did ask for my consent before opening it."

However, depending on the situation, they could probably open a portal without permission if they wanted to.

Hadn't foreign powers, as well as other entities, been recklessly invading this planet?

And perhaps that was because the rightful owner of this planet had yet to be determined.

"Take care. Please look after Father and Madam."

Yeongwoo asked his mother to watch over them as he stepped into the portal leading to the negotiation table.

* * *

Cold.

The first thing Yeongwoo felt upon passing through the portal was the chill.

It wasn't an intense cold that stung his skin, but it was enough to feel uncomfortably chilly.

"Seriously, calling someone here and this is what we get? At the very least, they could have adjusted the temperature."

The space beyond the navy-blue portal was a small room, about 8 meters in diameter.

In the center of the room was a table, roughly 2 meters wide, and chairs were arranged around it so that people could face each other.

In other words:

'If someone starts a fight here, there's no way to avoid it.'

The room was too cramped for two of the strongest representatives of each nation on the brink of war.

And, as expected...

The room was far too cramped for the two champions from opposing nations, poised for war.

And, as expected...

<<This space is a public resource managed by the Planetary Court. Acts of property damage, assault, and murder are strictly prohibited.>>

A warning message appeared, almost as if it had been waiting for this very moment.

Then another message followed.

<<If you experience any inconvenience while using this space, please press the button on the side to open an exit.>>

"An exit?"

It was only now that Yeongwoo noticed there wasn't a separate exit in the room.

And that there was a small button on either side of the room.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

'So if I stop my opponent from pressing it, I can prevent them from escaping, too.'

But with violence strictly prohibited—let alone killing—he'd have to subdue his opponent without striking.

'In this space, what exactly constitutes an act of violence...?'

While Yeongwoo was mulling this over, a navy-blue portal finally appeared on the opposite side.

Swoosh!

“.....!”

The representative of Lemu was entering.

Thud.

Yeongwoo instinctively reached to draw his weapon but barely stopped himself in time.

And then...

Whoosh.

A figure finally emerged from the portal.

‘No way.’

Yeongwoo’s pupils widened in shock as he caught sight of the pale figure.

The man representing Lemu stood completely naked.

A towering figure of about two meters, appearing to be in his early 40s, but with such well-developed muscles that it was clear he had enhanced his physique.

Yet, his unblemished, pale skin, hollow eyes, and wild beard gave him a deeply unsettling appearance.

It was as if his face and body didn’t belong to the same person.

Not that Yeongwoo was much different, but at least he had clothes on.

“Ah, you’re an East Asian, I see.”

The man who came to the negotiation table on behalf of Lemu spoke, observing Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo tried to check the title above the man’s head but quickly realized there was nothing there.

“You don’t have a title.”

When Yeongwoo pointed to the man’s head with his armored finger, the man nodded, intrigued.

“Indeed. Nor do you, sir.”

“.....”

He called him "sir."

It was rare to hear someone address another with such formality.

“It seems that titles from our homelands hold no power here.”

The man extended an arm horizontally, then brought it to his chest, bowing his head.

It was an overly dramatic gesture.

“I am Yuto Kawachiya03, Sword Emperor of Tokyo, representing Lemu.”

“.....”

Upon closer inspection, the man’s fingers were exceptionally long.

Watching this giant naked man bowing oddly just seven meters in front of him gave Yeongwoo chills.

‘I... I want to kill him right now.’

Just as one instinctively wants to rid themselves of a giant insect when they feel disgust or fear, Yeongwoo couldn’t help but want to get this man named Yuto out of his sight.

But this was the domain of the Planetary Court.

Killing his opponent would land him in prison.

“I’m Jeong Yeongwoo07 from Korea. As you’re probably aware, I’m the representative of Dogo.”

Yeongwoo introduced himself simply and gestured to the negotiation table.

“Let’s sit down, for whatever it’s worth.”

At least by sitting down, he could hide half of this guy’s bare flesh behind the table.

Creak.

Yeongwoo pulled out a chair and sat down at the table first.

After some thought, Yuto followed suit and grabbed his chair.

“Why?”

“.....?”

“Why is your type listed as ‘Demon’?”

|Representative Type: Demon

Yuto was referring to Yeongwoo’s profile.

Both Mara and Lemu were marked as “Human,” but Yeongwoo, the representative of Dogo, was listed as “Demon.”

“You look human enough to me.”

Yuto’s gaze landed on Yeongwoo’s chest, specifically near his heart.

He seemed to be recalling the profile note: Does not possess a human heart.

Yeongwoo shrugged and placed his hand on the negotiation table.

Thud.

“Well, you’ll find out soon enough. But more importantly, why are you naked?”

As Yeongwoo asked this, Yuto finally pulled his chair in and started to speak.

“The reason for my current state is actually...”

But before he could finish his sentence—

Beep!

A sharp signal blared as the table that both Yeongwoo and Yuto had their hands and elbows on lit up.

Whoosh!

“Huh?”

“What’s going on?”

<<Welcome to the negotiation table.>>

A holographic message appeared in front of both representatives.

And then the true nature of the “negotiation” was revealed.

Fwoosh!

Beams of light shot down from somewhere above them, creating five face-down cards in front of each person.

“What is this?”

Yeongwoo, who had seen all kinds of strange things, had never encountered anything like this, and it seemed that Yuto, the embodiment of “strange” himself, felt the same.

“Could it be a card game?”

He muttered in his peculiar tone, and soon an instruction appeared.

«The negotiation will proceed with up to five proposals.»

«Each representative is given five cards reflecting their actual power. For each proposal, one card will be revealed to compete on a ‘power’ score.»

‘No way.’

Yeongwoo looked down at the cards on the table in front of him.

So, in essence, they were going to play five rounds of card flipping.

The winner of each round, based on the ‘power’ of their card, could make a demand of the loser...

‘Is that it? Did I understand this correctly?’

As Yeongwoo silently questioned himself, the next message appeared right on cue.

«Now, let the first negotiation begin.»

«Each representative, please pick a card to reveal for this round. If you win the power duel, you may state your negotiation demand.»

‘Looks like we’ll have to pick a card before deciding on a demand.’

Following the instructions, Yeongwoo picked up the card at the center of his hand.

A help message appeared as he did so.

「You have selected your first card. Until the final negotiation decision, neither party will be able to see each other’s cards.」

In other words, they would only reveal their cards after deciding on their demands and seeing who won.

‘So if I’m confident in winning, I could set any outrageous condition I want, right?’

As he held his first card, Yeongwoo asked himself this question, and the help message responded promptly.

「The loser of each round not only has to accept the winner’s demand but also forfeits their own demand to the winner.」

‘Ah.’

Put simply, if he set a condition like "surrender at the start of the war" and lost the round, then he would have to fulfill that absurd condition himself.

‘So, in the end, we’re forced to gauge the strength of each other’s cards.’

Since he didn’t fully understand the rules of this game yet, Yeongwoo decided to be a bit cautious.

‘Let’s see what my first card is. I still don’t know what’s on it.’

Muttering to himself, Yeongwoo flipped the card he was holding.

Tiny, hail-like particles rained down onto the card as icy blue text appeared.

—[Mother, Who Returned from the Heavens] card has been drawn!

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 327: Negotiation (2)

‘Uh... Mother?’

Yeongwoo was stunned when he drew his first card.

It wasn’t just the name on the card that left him speechless.

[Mother Who Returned from the Heavens]

"Mother breathed her blue breath."

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 1,200

Strongest Mother

If the opponent's card is a dragon type or mother type, power increases by 600.

'Damn it, this is basically a card duel.'

The composition of the cards looked just like the ones in competitive card games.

'We're deciding the outcome of a war with this? Are they insane?'

As Yeongwoo wiped the cold sweat off his forehead, still unable to grasp the reality of the situation, Yuto across the table flashed a wicked smile.

"So? It seems you've drawn quite an impressive hand."

"...!"

When Yeongwoo looked up, he saw that his opponent, the duelist standing across from him, was completely naked.

He even held the elongated card between his fingers as though he were used to games like these.

'Who the hell is this guy? Even the way he's holding his cards is different.'

Swallowing hard, Yeongwoo caught sight of the card Yuto held between his fingers.

It reflected a faint, bluish light.

As explained earlier, until the terms of negotiation were confirmed, they couldn't see each other's cards.

"Have you played a lot of... games like this?"

Yeongwoo asked carefully.

Yuto, placing his massive, pale pecs on the table, clasped his hands together with a confident smirk.

"Games like this'... If you were an experienced player, you wouldn't use that phrase. It's clear that you're a novice, Mr. Yeongwoo."

Yuto chuckled unpleasantly before switching to a cold tone.

"I won't lie. To put it mildly, I'm a veteran duelist."

"...!"

"The fact that we're each using a different deck version would disqualify this from official matches, but we have no choice. The whims of the universe are far beyond our control."

Listening to Yuto, Yeongwoo realized something.

This guy was just as insane as he was.

'Judging by his attitude, he was probably a game nerd in his youth. And this lunatic is supposed to be Tokyo's Sword Emperor? Japan's in real trouble.'

Yeongwoo had momentarily forgotten that he himself had once been a gaming streamer.

"So, now that we've both drawn our cards... does this mean we should propose our negotiation terms?"

Yeongwoo looked back at the card he'd drawn for this round.

A legendary card with 1,200 power.

From the looks of it, 1,200 seemed to be on the high end of the power spectrum.

But this was only a guess.

Without more cards to compare, he couldn't be sure.

'Given that only monsters powerful enough to be called to the negotiating table are here, the average deck composition could be legendary.'

Yeongwoo reminded himself that this was a power struggle backed by extraterrestrial sponsors.

'I have Bastard and Aratubank among my forces. With equipment at a mythic level, their card grades should be mythic too.'

On the other hand, "Mother Returned from the Heavens" was at the legendary level.

It was a powerful conditional card, but it might be relatively average if the condition didn't match.

Yeongwoo hadn't played a lot of card games, but he knew that conditional power boosts typically worked that way.

'My mother's power increases by 600—or 50%—when facing another mother or dragon.'

It was effectively a counter card.

Which meant its base power might have been intentionally set lower, assuming it would occasionally encounter matches in which it would receive a power boost.

'So if I face the right opponent, I could potentially take down a mythic card. But since it's only a counter for two types, its base power might be lower than average for a legendary.'

This was the best deduction Yeongwoo could make.

Now, he needed to figure out the strength of his opponent's card.

But he had no prior knowledge about this naked man, making any guess difficult.

'Besides, in a world where even orphans can get mother cards... anything is possible from his side.'

Would he get a feel for things after the first round?

'Let's dive in.'

Resolving himself, Yeongwoo tightened his jaw, and Yuto squinted, noticing the change in his expression.

"Seems like your card is a bit underwhelming, huh?"

"...!"

Realizing his expression had been read, Yeongwoo widened his eyes.

'Right. I should've kept a neutral face, even if I wasn't bluffing.'

But it was too late to hide what had already been revealed.

So Yeongwoo turned the question back.

"What about you? Did you draw a decent card?"

Yuto, self-assured as a veteran, answered without batting an eye.

"Hmm... Legendary?"

"..."

Yeongwoo tried to stay calm, controlling his breathing, but his pupils betrayed him by widening slightly.

"Yeongwoo, that card's legendary, right? Or maybe it's epic, but you're intimidated by legendaries."

Yuto skillfully probed, observing Yeongwoo's reaction.

'This guy's not just a duelist; he's a gambler. He's way too good at mind games.'

Yeongwoo's impulse was to skip the cards and snap Yuto's neck, but he had no choice.

"Let's get this over with. Propose your terms."

Refusing further mind games, Yeongwoo insisted on moving to the next step, and the system displayed a new message.

《Both parties have confirmed their cards, and negotiations will now commence.》

Then, three yellow coin icons appeared above each of their heads.

Flash!

《Each agent has three negotiation points per round.》

《Negotiation points can be used to propose or reject terms.》

'This... feels like karma points.'

The rule felt familiar.

Just as karma points could be used offensively or defensively, negotiation points were resources for attack and defense at this table.

'Making the first proposal will cost one point... so in practice, we can each use only two negotiation points.'

Realizing this, Yeongwoo quickly deduced one key rule about the game.

That rule was simple.

'If you're the first to refuse, you're at a disadvantage.'

In this game, rejecting an opponent's proposal immediately deducts a negotiation point.

If one side keeps rejecting while the other continues proposing new terms, the side that started rejecting will eventually run out of points and lose.

'It's all about order. If you refuse twice in a row, you'll have no points left, while the other side, after two refusals, can still propose a final term. Since we each start by proposing a term, the side doing the rejecting will be cornered.'

Though the proposed term stays in effect for both sides, this isn't the same as winning.

The side that has been rejected twice can propose a final term that the opponent can't refuse.

In other words, as soon as you begin rejecting and implying your hand is weak, you fall into your opponent's pace.

To avoid this, one could either charge forward blindly, confident in the strength of their hand, or set a deliberately absurd condition to provoke the opponent's refusal.

'But if they accept your absurd term and win the round, that would be suicidal.'

Yeongwoo realized this game was more complicated than it appeared.

But at the same time, he thought:

'If the card is strong enough, that solves everything, right? If I knew I'd win 100%, it wouldn't matter what terms I propose.'

Of course, that's easier said than done.

People aren't robots, after all; psychology plays a huge role.

«Please propose your terms now. After voicing the desired conditions, touch the negotiation points above your head to submit your proposal.»

'The game has begun.'

What should he propose in this first round?

Without absolute certainty of victory, he had to prepare for the worst.

He had to assume his conditions could backfire on him.

‘Suicidal terms or offering equipment... those are out.’

He wasn’t here to gamble away his life or legendary equipment.

Even if he was in a card battle, his life wasn’t a game with extra lives.

"...."

As Yeongwoo deliberated over his first proposal, Yuto broke the silence.

"Let’s start with something peaceful. How about it? Something low-stakes for both sides."

"What do you mean by ‘peaceful’?"

"There are still four rounds left to determine the outcome of the war. Shouldn’t we make choices for the people we are responsible for?"

"Hah..."

For the first time, Yeongwoo saw the person before him as a ‘human being.’

Perhaps he wasn’t as indifferent to life as he initially thought.

"Are you talking about something like prohibiting attacks on civilians?"

"Something similar. We could also prohibit large-scale weaponry to preserve residential areas."

"..."

Large-scale weaponry.

He was probably referring to something like laser cannons.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

"You want us to fight with only melee weapons?"

"Victory will ultimately depend on which side’s main forces are annihilated first, won’t it? There’s no need to cause unnecessary civilian casualties."

“Yes, that’s true, but…”

It made sense, yet Yeongwoo’s side had Toma’s laser cannons, eight anti-aircraft guns from Metal Soul, and four decimators disguised as the city’s four gates.

‘No large-scale weapons? That’s nonsense.’

Besides, it wasn’t like he didn’t have alternatives.

“How about this?”

“Hmm?”

“Let’s designate a battlefield. Somewhere between Korea and Japan.”

As Yeongwoo suggested this, a map showing Korea and Japan in their current ‘Pangea’ state popped up.

Pop!

“If we evacuate civilians in advance and restrict the fight to that area, there won’t be any unnecessary civilian casualties.”

“That makes sense.”

Yuto nodded.

But Yeongwoo could tell he wasn’t entirely on board with the idea.

‘This guy… he only made that suggestion to gauge whether I have large-scale weapons or not.’

And further, if needed, he intended to ban large-scale weapons to secure an advantage.

‘So, does that mean Japan doesn’t have artillery weapons? Even if that’s the case, with Lemu backing them, they’re bound to have something.’

Their military strength was still shrouded in mystery.

“…”

Yeongwoo studied the map provided by the system and pointed to a region between Geoje Island and Yamaguchi Prefecture, specifically an area that used to be an island.

“How about here? It wasn’t heavily populated to begin with, and there aren’t many buildings left for habitation.”

Yuto's eyes widened as he confirmed the spot Yeongwoo indicated.

"That place..."

"It's Tsushima."

"...!"

Yuto's poker face slipped for an instant.

Seeing this, Yeongwoo immediately touched the coin by his bedside and shouted.

"The Korea-Japan war will be fought solely on Tsushima!"

A negotiation draft instantly appeared between the two of them.

Ping!

[The battle between the Dogo and Lemu factions shall be conducted solely within Tsushima.]

"This...!"

Yuto looked slightly flustered at the sudden negotiation draft, and Yeongwoo added a few more words.

"If you don't like it, you can exercise your veto."

"..."

But Yuto knew well enough that the first side to use their veto usually ended up at a disadvantage.

Furthermore, he hadn't even proposed his own negotiation terms yet.

<<The representative of Lemu, please present your negotiation terms.>>

The system prompted Yuto, who finally slammed the table with his right hand and grasped the coin with his left.

Thud!

"Like me, strip off all your clothes. Let's both fight in the nude."

"...What?"

Yeongwoo's eyebrow twitched as Yuto's proposal appeared below his own on the screen.

Ping!

[The representatives of Dogo and Lemu shall engage in combat in a completely naked state.]

"You... you bastard..."

First, he was all about making choices for the people, and now he was demanding a nude fight?

What was this nonsense?

"You said you don't lie! Don't you want to make choices for the people?"

Yeongwoo pointed accusingly, but Yuto closed his eyes quietly.

"You asked me why I was naked."

"I... I did."

"This is the reason."

Clunk.

Suddenly, Yuto stood up, revealing his entire body.

"Ah, damn it."

Yeongwoo cursed, squinting in disgust, while Yuto slowly opened his previously closed eyes.

"Everything I do is recorded by Lemu's cameras."

"...What?"

"What I gave to Lemu in exchange for immense power was humiliation."

"...?"

"The more humiliation captured on camera, the greater the national benefit. So if I can strip the representative of Dogo as well... it will benefit my country immensely."

"What, what the hell are you talking about?"

As Yeongwoo instinctively reached toward his sword, Yuto stretched out his right hand in a gesture to stop him.

“Representative of Dogo, Jeong Yeongwoo! Please strip. We have already prepared 200 naked warriors!”

“...!”

Yuto’s pale flesh reflected in Yeongwoo’s wide eyes.

Yuto then approved Yeongwoo’s negotiation terms.

Ping!

Now, if Yeongwoo accepted Yuto’s proposal, the real battle would begin.

‘Damn... if I lose here, I’ll have to fight naked? And for free?’

Could this all have been part of Lemu’s grand plan?

Was this some roundabout way of taking revenge after losing the Dogo publicity model?

“You, do you have any idea how crazy this is? Dogo and Lemu...”

Yeongwoo was about to explain the interstellar power dynamics when Yuto interrupted.

“Then just decline it.”

“What?”

“Exercise your veto. Isn’t that all you have to do?”

“You bastard.”

It wasn’t exactly wrong, but it wasn’t entirely right, either.

He’d likely fall into the opponent’s pace when he exercised his veto.

And after two vetoes, he could be met with an even more humiliating proposal.

Maybe it would be better to gamble everything on winning here.

‘If I can overpower his hand with my card, then I just need to win... but is this the right move?’

Lowering his gaze, Yeongwoo looked at the card he held firmly in his hand.

[Mother Who Returned from the Heavens]

“Mother breathed her blue breath.”

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 1,200

Strongest Mother

If the opponent's card is a dragon type or mother type, power increases by 600.

Could this card possibly defeat the crazy hand that man would reveal?

‘Mother, you’re strong, right? I’ll trust you this time.’

There was no choice but to go all in.

Yeongwoo opened his eyes wide, then slammed the table as he accepted Yuto’s nudity proposal.

Bang!

“Fine, reveal your card! If I lose, I’ll strip as much as you want! But if I win...”

A glimmer of madness flickered in Yeongwoo’s eyes.

“I’ll make you realize why I’m known for going after all my opponents’ money.”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 328: Negotiation (3)

[Dogo’s Rules]

The battle between the Dogo and Lemu factions can only take place within Daema Island.

[Lemu’s Rules]

The representatives of Dogo and Lemu must fight unclothed.

As the terms of the negotiation were finalized, Yuto toyed with the card in his hand.

“This is a reasonable proposal for the first round, wouldn’t you say? The outcome isn’t of great importance, regardless of who wins.”

Yeongwoo, baring his teeth in response, shot back,

“Who cares? You psycho. I have no intention of fighting naked.”

Of course, even in the worst-case scenario, Yeongwoo wasn’t entirely without a foothold.

Even if all his gear was removed, he would still benefit from the effects of his catalog collection.

This was one reason why Yeongwoo quickly accepted the proposal.

‘He’s not completely wrong. For the first round, it’s sensible for both sides to set manageable terms.’

Neither side knew the true power of the other’s cards or how each round would unfold.

‘And if necessary, we can just cancel the last round’s agreement in the next negotiation. That should be doable, right?’

Naturally, taking such a step would waste an entire round, so caution was essential.

‘Besides, it’s just clothes. I can manage if I can rake in a ton of money in the later rounds.’

As a glint of enthusiasm appeared in Yeongwoo’s eyes at the thought of money, Yuto, who had been watching him closely, settled back into his chair.

“Shall we proceed?”

For some reason, he was brimming with confidence.

With that, Yeongwoo turned his gaze to the space above the table, awaiting the system message.

Shhh..

Immediately, padlock icons appeared on both negotiation terms, and a new notification was displayed:

《The terms for Round 1 have been finalized.》

《Now the power of each side's cards will be compared to determine the winner, and the representative who wins the battle will secure both sets of terms.》

Losing meant giving up his terms, while winning allowed him to take everything.

It was...

‘Just like a gamble.’

As Yeongwoo surveyed the gambling table where the fates of both nations were staked, the time finally came for the cards to be revealed.

《Dogo's representative, please reveal your card.》

Yeongwoo glanced at Yuto's expression briefly before placing his card on the table.

Thud.

“...Let me introduce my mother.”

The blue glow covering the card vanished in an instant, and a dragon's roar—likely from an ice dragon—reverberated throughout the negotiation chamber.

KUA-AAAAAAH...!

At that moment, a frigid stream of icy energy flowed along the ceiling, chilling the room further.

‘Was that really necessary?’

While Yeongwoo remained unfazed, Yuto looked up at the ceiling with an expression of awe.

“Did you say... your mother? Just who are you...?”

Then, immediately—

Shwaaaah!

A silver-white dragon emerged from the icy current on the ceiling and leaped into Yeongwoo's card.

CRASH!

“Mo... mother?”

Seeing the dragon, Yuto reflexively jumped up from his seat.

Meanwhile, the image on Yeongwoo’s card changed to depict a massive ice dragon roaring over a city.

[Mother Who Returned from the Heavens]

“Mother breathed her blue breath.”

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 1,200

Strongest Mother

If the opponent’s card is a dragon type or mother type, power increases by 600.

“A legendary card, as expected.”

Admiring Yeongwoo’s card, Yuto smiled appreciatively.

“And what about yours?”

When Yeongwoo gestured with his chin toward the card in Yuto’s hand, he raised it with a serious expression and threw it toward the table like a whip.

Snap!*

The card glowed a bright white as soon as it touched the table.

“...!”

“Observe closely! This is my declaration!”

Yuto’s sharp voice echoed as a shout of determination resounded from somewhere.

WAAAAH!

“...What the hell?”

Startled, Yeongwoo looked around to locate the source of the noise, only to see naked Japanese warriors pouring down like a waterfall from above Yuto.

[200 Naked Warriors]

“Success always requires adversity.”

Card Grade: Epic

Power: 800

Effect: Comradeship

If the next round's card is human, it increases that card's power by 300.

“What....”

Watching the naked warriors being absorbed into the card, Yeongwoo grimaced.

‘Damn it... he got me.’

He realized that Yuto, a self-proclaimed veteran duelist, had bluffed.

This guy knew from the beginning he had a high chance of losing.

‘So that's why he was going on about patriotism and whatnot.’

Of course, since he was willing to fight naked for his country, there was likely some truth to his sense of duty.

‘Anyway, a win is a win.’

The only issue was...

If the next round's card is human, it increases that card's power by 300.

Yeongwoo had realized that the card effect of “Comradeship” could influence the next round, not just the current one.

‘If the next card is human...? Unlike “mother” or “father,” humans are pretty common, aren't they?’

Currently, the power of the Epic-grade Naked Warriors card was 800, while the Legendary Mother card had a power of 1,200.

So if there was an Epic card with a base power of around 900 or a Legendary card with a power of around 1,100, then this “Comradeship” effect could actually enable the Epic card to surpass the Legendary card.

‘Better to assume the opponent will have an additional 300 power in the next round.’

As Yeongwoo considered this, the cards lying on the floor rose into the air and collided.

PAH!

In the next instant, Yuto's "200 Naked Warriors" card shattered into pieces.

CRACK!

《Dogo's card "Mother Returned from the Heavens" has destroyed Lemu's card "200 Naked Warriors."》

《Dogo's representative has secured full control over the terms of the negotiation!》

At last, the first-round victory.

In front of Yeongwoo, the terms of both sides and a new option appeared.

《Dogo's representative, please select the final terms.》

A help message popped up for Yeongwoo.

「You have won the power battle! The opponent's terms are now yours.」

「You may nullify or partially modify the opponent's terms, but at least one term must remain active.」

"Partial modification?"

As Yeongwoo muttered, the help message elaborated.

「If the opponent's terms have the potential to be disadvantageous, partial adjustments are possible.」

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

With a flash, a modified term appeared:

Lemu's representative must fight unclothed.

"Oh."

The original condition was for both sides to fight unclothed, but it could be modified so that only the opponent would have to comply.

However...

'The guy is already unclothed. In fact, he seems to prefer it.'

Yeongwoo's gaze shifted to Yuto across the table.

Already prepared for the next round, Yuto watched him, hands clasped and chin resting atop them, exuding an eerie intensity.

'What a lunatic.'

Yeongwoo muttered to himself, then had an idea and asked the helper for clarification.

'Is it possible to change the suggestion to, like, a rule about keeping clothes on, instead of taking them off?'

The response came back immediately:

「You cannot alter the basic format of a suggestion.」

'Damn. So all I can decide is whether I join him in taking them off or not.'

In that case, there was no question: reject the opponent's proposal.

'For that guy, making me undress might be crucial. So, let's leave it open enough that he keeps debating over it through the remaining rounds.'

Fighting while undressed wasn't itself a major ordeal for Yeongwoo.

But doing so without any advantage...that felt utterly unfair.

'If I could at least gain something for going naked for a round, I could accept it. But just taking it off? No way.'

With that thought, Yeongwoo immediately rejected Yuto's proposal.

《Lemu's negotiation offer has been rejected. As a result, only the conditions set by Dogo's agent are now active.》

'Good. At least we've secured the battleground.'

This meant that, in the battle against Lemu's side, the likelihood of civilian casualties had been drastically reduced.

[Dogo]

[The battle between Dogo and Lemu's forces can only take place within Tsushima Island.]

In a few hours, he would be facing 200 naked Japanese warriors on Tsushima Island.

'Is this a dream or reality?'

When Yeongwoo looked up at his opponent again, pale flesh once again filled his view.

"Alright, now that we've got the basic rules down, let's move quickly. The war's about to start."

As Yeongwoo said this, Yuto nodded, and soon a system message appeared.

《Negotiation round two will now begin.》

《From this round onward, each round will allow one 'shuffle'.》

"Shuffle?"

"Oh."

Yuto's face lit up with interest, while Yeongwoo immediately asked the system for clarification.

"Shuffle, as in, mixing up cards?"

《From now on, at the beginning of each round, you can view the number and grade of the cards in the deck, and use 'shuffle' to randomly mix the cards on the table with those remaining in the deck.》

Yuto summed up the explanation in one word:

"...A reset."

Exactly.

Simply put, it was a way to reset the cards on the table.

The key here, though, was that each round allowed for inspection of the deck's remaining card count and grade.

'So, does that mean I can get an idea of whether any mythic cards have been drawn from my deck yet?'

For instance, Yeongwoo had two cards in his deck that could definitely be classified as mythic: the mythic items "Bastard" and "Aratubank."

If he counted resources broadly, there was even the possibility of a mythic-grade Chairman card.

'In other words, there's a good chance I have three mythic cards in the deck.'

So, if the deck showed three mythic cards left after the shuffle, that would mean...

'It would mean no mythic cards are on the table right now, so legendary would be the highest I can expect.'

As Yeongwoo grasped this part of the rule, he saw Yuto nodding on the other side, clearly having caught on to the significance of the "shuffle" as well.

《Before drawing the second card, each representative, please confirm your deck.》

Following this prompt, a hexagonal hologram appeared in Yeongwoo's view.

It was his deck.

[Total Cards: 25]

|Mythic: 3

|Legendary: 5

|Epic: 10

|Unique: 7

'What... I have 25 cards in my deck?'

Which meant that, including the five cards already on the table, there were 30 cards total.

And one of his legendary cards was already in play.

'Damn, getting Mom on the first turn was actually incredibly lucky?'

The price of not trusting the strongest mom card.

Yeongwoo belatedly regretted his unfilial behavior.

'So, what are the remaining four cards on the table? All epic or unique?'

That's what it looked like based on the deck's configuration.

Lower-ranked cards were usually more common in this type of battle game.

'Then, should I go for a shuffle...?'

As Yeongwoo pondered this, a curved arrow icon appeared to his left.

That must be the shuffle icon.

"....."

Without a second thought, Yeongwoo activated the shuffle.

Whip!

The five cards on the table were sucked into the air.

Then—

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Five blue lights shot down onto the table in their place.

The shuffle was done.

Cards reshuffled, and the ones for the second round were laid out anew.

'So, what about my deck? Since I can't shuffle again in the same round, I guess they'll at least show me the deck's status?'

As Yeongwoo asked this with a hopeful look, the system quickly responded.

《The shuffle for round two has been completed, and the deck's composition has been updated.》

And now, Yeongwoo's updated deck status showed:

[Total Cards: 25]

|Mythic: 6

|Legendary: 4

|Epic: 7

|Unique: 8

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 329: Negotiation (4)

‘What the... why do I have six Mythic cards now?’

Cognitive dissonance.

Seeing that the number of Mythic cards had actually increased after shuffling, Yeongwoo could only blink in disbelief.

[Total cards: 25]

| Mythic: 6

| Legendary: 4

| Epic: 7

| Unique: 8

Before the shuffle, there were only three Mythic cards, but now there were six.

The Epic cards had decreased from ten to seven, and the Unique cards had increased from seven to eight.

So, to sum it up:

‘Could it be that my initial hand had three Mythic, one Legendary, and one Unique card?’

Looking at the increased number of Mythic cards post-shuffle, it seemed likely.

He had just discarded the ultimate hand that could have secured victory in every round except one, with a very high probability.

‘No way, damn it.’

Yeongwoo realized instantly that he was, in colloquial terms, screwed.

‘Why are there six Mythic cards here?’

Yeongwoo was stunned at the sheer quality of his deck, now returned to the deck pile after shuffling.

‘Wait, then what’s on the table now?’

He looked at the five cards still face down on the table.

He could deduce their identity by reverse-calculating from his previous hand and the current deck.

‘Two Legendary and three Epic.’

Considering that the lowest grade in his deck was Unique, he had at least avoided the worst-case scenario.

But knowing there were no Mythic cards in this hand made the situation even more grim.

‘And one card can’t even be used because one round has already passed.’

This meant that only four cards would be used.

‘So, realistically, the remaining hand could be either two Legendary and two Epic, or one Legendary and three Epic.’

Adding to this, if the opponent drew a card of the “Human” type in this round, its power would be increased by 300.

‘This round won’t be easy.’

As confirmed in the first round, Yuto had Epic-level cards.

The first card he had drawn in a random hand was Epic, so he likely had several Legendary cards as well.

‘In that case, I have to hope his hand has a lot of Unique cards.’

Yeongwoo thought this, but then quickly changed his mind.

‘No, relying on luck alone would just be gambling.’

He couldn't leave the future of the Korean Peninsula—or this entire planet—to mere chance.

'If the hand isn't good, what's the way to win? It comes down to momentum.'

Yeongwoo resolved himself.

This second round would be won through a bluff, using sheer force of will.

《All Representatives, please pick up your card for this round.》

It was time to choose his second-round card. Yeongwoo hesitated for a moment and then picked the card in the center, as he had in the first round.

Swipe.

Immediately, the silhouettes of his 'friends' rained down from the ceiling.

[Workers]

[The Workers]

"Yeongtae, Taejoon, Younghyeom, Geumhwa."

| Card Grade: Epic

| Power: 1,000

Performance-based

If this card is drawn again, its power doubles.

'Damn it...'

Yeongwoo almost rubbed his forehead but managed to stop himself.

Even though it was a high base power for an Epic card, the timing was not favorable.

《Both sides have confirmed their cards, so negotiations will begin.》

A flash of light followed, and three negotiation rights appeared above each player's head.

《Please state your negotiation proposal and touch one of the rights above your head to make the proposal official.》

Yeongwoo locked eyes with Yuto.

“.....”

Yuto’s eyes showed no signs of wavering, so Yeongwoo spoke while maintaining eye contact.

“Let’s start by cutting off one arm each.”

Yuto, who had been interlacing his fingers, twitched them.

“...What did you say?”

“Let’s keep this round light. Let’s fight with one arm each cut off.”

“What on earth are you saying?”

Yuto’s face hardened, and he frowned in genuine displeasure.

“Stop joking and make a serious propo—”

Beeep!

“Huh?”

The familiar alert sound made Yuto unclasp his fingers and look at the space between them.

[Both the Representatives of Dogo and Lemu must cut off one arm before proceeding with the battle.]

Yeongwoo had really locked in the proposal to fight with an arm cut off.

“Hurry up and accept it. I’m really curious about what’s going to happen.”

Yeongwoo gestured as if choosing which arm to cut, and Yuto shook his head.

“Is this some kind of bluff? Your hand must be pretty bad to pull such a desperate move....”

“If it looks like I’m desperate, then make a bold move too. If you win the card duel, I’ll be the only one who loses an arm, right?”

“.....”

This time, Yeongwoo didn’t even tell Yuto to refuse.

Even if he lost and ended up cutting his arm alone, it wouldn't be a huge disadvantage.

In fact, he might need to cut it to gain the effect of a physical impairment and blood loss.

"Hurry up! We don't have all night. Don't forget we also have to fight Mara."

As Yeongwoo urged him, Yuto bit his lip.

"Fine... I'll make another counterproposal."

[Both the Representatives of Dogo and Lemu must fight in the nude.]

Beeep!

Yuto finally started to get pulled into Yeongwoo's pace.

While he had no issue fighting nude, the idea of cutting an arm off was frightening.

"You were eager to strip and fight at the start, but now you're scared to lose an arm? I could cut off both of mine."

"...There's a difference between noble sacrifice for one's country and just being a lunatic with no arms."

Then Yeongwoo pulled out Bastard from his belt.

Swaaash!

He extended his left hand and placed it on the table.

Thump!

"W-what are you doing now?"

Yuto's pale face turned even whiter, and Yeongwoo looked at him with a predator's glare.

"If you're not crazy, you can't achieve anything in this universe!"

"What?"

"So, I can't hand over this planet to someone who's not fully committed."

".....!"

With that, Yeongwoo positioned Bastard vertically over his left hand and drove it down.

Slam!

“Ahh, you maniac!”

Yuto jumped up from his seat, losing his composure for the first time, while Yeongwoo shouted fiercely.

“Sit down, you bastard! The game isn’t over yet.”

“Y-you...!”

“Sit tight and accept the negotiation. Let’s see what the cards reveal.”

Even as Yeongwoo spoke, Yuto was already activating his veto.

Flaaash!

《The Representative of Lemu has rejected the proposal from Dogo.》

Now, Yuto had only one veto left.

Seeing this, Yeongwoo immediately proposed the same negotiation again.

[Both the Representatives of Dogo and Lemu must cut off one arm before proceeding with the battle.]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

“It’s no use. I’ll keep proposing the same thing.”

“What’s wrong with you?”

“It’s easier now that we’re on informal terms. Stay sharp; this is just the beginning.”

Yeongwoo smirked, blood trickling from his left hand, while Yuto wiped the sweat from his temples and activated his last veto.

Flaaash!

《The Representative of Lemu has rejected the proposal from Dogo.》

Yuto now had no more vetoes left.

He could no longer refuse the opponent's proposal, which meant that for Yeongwoo, this was finally the chance to put forth an advantageous offer.

Since the odds of winning this battle were not high after drawing an epic card, wouldn't it be enough to propose an offer that was nearly null?

However, Yeongwoo, now caught in the momentum, proposed the same limb-severing clause again.

[Both the delegates of Dogo and Lemu shall fight after amputating one of their arms.]

"You can't run away,"

Yeongwoo declared.

"Wha...!"

Fear flickered in Yuto's eyes as he realized that the opponent who suggested cutting an arm was genuinely serious.

"Th-the Representative of Dogo is insane. Unpredictable and... cosmic..."

Yuto recalled the description he had once read about Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo then finished the line for him, "So avoid encounters whenever possible...!"

BANG!

Yeongwoo slammed the table hard with his remaining right arm, confirming the proposal.

Immediately, both negotiation clauses were adopted, and the card in front of Yeongwoo began to glow.

《Round 2 negotiation terms have been confirmed.》

《Representative of Dogo, please reveal your card.》

Yeongwoo swiftly flipped his card, revealing an illustration of four friends assembling a player statue, and its power was disclosed.

Flash!

[The Workers]

"Yeongtae, Taejoon, Younghyeom, Geumhwa."

| Card Grade: Epic

| Power: 1,000

Performance-based

If this card is drawn again, its power doubles.

“What... what? An epic?”

Yuto's eyes widened, even more so than when he had witnessed Yeongwoo self-harming.

He had expected an overwhelmingly strong card, so he was shocked to see only an epic card.

“A bluff? No, this is just...”

Madness.

—The Representative of Dogo is insane!

While the profile description echoed in his mind, Yeongwoo pointed at Yuto's card and spoke.

“Now we shall fight on Tsushima, stripped and with one arm cut off.”

Of course, Yeongwoo knew he was going to lose.

Yuto, trembling with horror, roughly flipped his card.

“Stop with the nonsense, you madman! You cut your own arm off!”

BANG!

The card of Lemu's delegate, Kawachiya Yuto03, was revealed.

[The Giant Slayer]

“The bigger the opponent, the easier it is to attack.”

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 1,100

Climber

When faced with a higher-ranked card, power increases by 700.

“So it was a legendary card after all,”

Yeongwoo commented calmly, prompting Yuto to shoot him a bewildered look.

“You’re not surprised at all? Did you just want to cut your arm off for fun?”

Having regained some composure after winning this round, Yuto resumed speaking formally.

“Either way, you’ll end up stripped and missing an arm.”

“But I gained a round,”

Yeongwoo replied.

“...?”

“How could a crow understand the phoenix's intentions?”

Yeongwoo said as he pulled out Bastard embedded in his left hand.

Swish!

The wound on his hand healed rapidly, but Yeongwoo quickly hid his arm to avoid revealing this fact.

There was no need for Yuto to know that he could reattach limbs.

And so, the shuffling phase began again.

《Round 3 will begin soon. Shuffle counts have been recharged.》

Seeing this, Yeongwoo activated the shuffle without hesitation.

He had nowhere left to fall.

‘Shuffle, start!’

Flash!

As Yeongwoo approved the shuffle, the cards on the table were shuffled, altering the deck composition.

《Round 3 shuffle complete. Deck composition updated.》

[Total Cards: 25]

| Mythical: 3

| Legendary: 5

| Epic: 9

| Unique: 8

‘Ah...!’

Yeongwoo gasped inwardly as he observed the remaining cards.

‘They’re back! My mythicals!’

Three mythical cards had returned to the table.

“ ... ”

As Yeongwoo's eyes gleamed wildly post-shuffle, Yuto cautiously asked while watching him.

“What now? You're not going to propose something absurd again, are you?”

With fierce eyes, Yeongwoo stared back at him.

“We’re going to strip.”

“Pardon...?”

“How much is Lemu paying you for that?”

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 330: Negotiation (5)

“Wh-why...?”

Yuto pressed his lips tightly as if reluctant to speak.

In response, Yeongwoo looked down at himself and spoke.

“You said the national interest grows the more humiliation captured by Lemu’ cameras, so if I appear naked, wouldn’t the pay you and Japan receive increase as well?”

“...That’s correct.”

“Then why don’t I get a share?”

“...?”

“Dogo is Lemu’ biggest competitor. If a representative from such a company were to be humiliated, Japan would surely gain enormous benefits.”

“But in the end, Lemu’ representative is on this side, so why should you...?”

“Exactly, you bastard.”

“What?”

“That’s why I’m angry. Why should you guys take the money I earned by undressing?”

Yeongwoo slammed the table in frustration, just as the system message announced the start of the third round.

《Please pick up and check the card you will use in this round.》

“Hurry and check your card! I will reclaim my rightful share in this round.”

With this, Yeongwoo exclaimed while already grabbing the card on the table.

Snap!

The card he picked in the third round was the one furthest to the left.

‘Please, please, a myth!’

Yeongwoo’s current hand, verified through the shuffled deck, was three Myth cards, one Legendary, and one Epic.

Out of the five cards on the table, only three would be used in the future, so his actual hand could consist of three Myth cards, or one Legendary, one Epic, and one Myth.

‘It could also be two Myths and one Epic. With such a high ratio of Myths, the odds are significantly in my favor no matter how this plays out!’

This too could be considered karma.

Because he had accumulated so much mythical “karma,” he was now reaping great “rewards” in this card battle where the stakes were the dynamics of war.

“Gahhhh!”

Yeongwoo let out an unusual cry as he checked the fate held in his hand.

Flash!

The identity of the card Yeongwoo flipped in his hand was revealed.

Screech!

[Bastard]

“The world was especially harsh to me.”

|Card Rank: Myth

|Power: 2,200

Despise the Weak

<Defeats any card below Myth rank.>

Challenger

<Power increases by 1,000 when facing cards higher than Myth rank.>

‘...Damn. The boss has arrived.’

Bastard.

Seeing the majesty of the first Myth card he had ever drawn, Yeongwoo couldn’t even blink.

The card, just like the original, exuded red demonic energy like a torrent.

There was no way Yuto, who had hesitated at the mere suggestion of an arm being cut off, could have a card to defeat this beast.

‘Its performance is absolutely insane. Even a Myth-hunting Legendary card can’t beat Bastard, and on the contrary, this card....’

Challenger

<Power increases by 1,000 when facing cards higher than Myth rank.>

A monster designed to counter cards stronger than Myth.

Yeongwoo couldn't help but be pleased with its performance, perfectly mirroring that of the original Bastard.

Now, what card did Yuto have?

Shff.

When Yeongwoo lifted his gaze, he saw a naked man with a solemn expression examining his own card.

"How is it? This card."

At Yeongwoo's question, Yuto asked instead.

"What are you planning to propose this time?"

Yeongwoo nonchalantly responded.

"My money."

"What?"

"Hand over the money."

And soon the negotiation phase began.

《Both sides have confirmed their cards, starting the negotiation phase.》

Pop-pop-pop!

Three negotiation tokens appeared above both men's heads, and Yuto's body trembled slightly.

《Please state your proposal. Once spoken, touch the negotiation token above your head to formalize the proposal.》

"....."

Yuto, having learned from the previous rounds that predicting the opponent was futile, looked nervously between Yeongwoo and his three negotiation tokens.

“Am I going first?”

Yeongwoo asked politely, then shouted out his proposal before Yuto could respond.

“Hand over all the money Japan is supposed to receive from Lemu!”

The system immediately acknowledged Yeongwoo’s words and formalized them.

Whirr!

[The representative of Lemu transfers the war profits gained from the contract with Lemu to the representative of Dogo.]

“What? This lunatic!”

Rustle!

Yuto jumped up in disbelief, only for Yeongwoo to gesture with the Bastard card for him to sit back down.

“Calm down. I wanted all your profits, but it’s limited to the war profits. It’s the lesser evil.”

This seemed to be because the negotiation table was related to the upcoming three-nation war.

Proposals could be made freely, but their scope had to be limited to this war.

“No matter what, asking for all profits is absurd!”

When Yuto protested, Yeongwoo stood up as if ready to throw down the Bastard.

Wham!

“Hey, bastard! Then does stripping down and fighting in Tsushima make sense?”

“.....”

“If you don’t want to lose your money, win the match. Then you won’t have to worry about me taking it.”

This was undeniably true.

And this was the negotiation table.

If one could make unreasonable demands of the opponent, then one should also be prepared to receive unreasonable demands.

“...Damn it.”

Yuto’s spirit, so confident when he first appeared naked in this room, had notably changed.

After staring at the card in his hand for a while, he looked determinedly at Yeongwoo.

“...Fine. I’ll counter with something big too.”

He pointed at the proposal already floating in midair and shouted.

"Have the proxy of Dogo also transfer all the profits generated after this negotiation to me!"

[The proxy of Dogo transfers all war profits gained through their contract with Dogo to the proxy of Lemu.]

"You idiot. We're strictly performance-based; we need to win the war first to get anything."

After glancing at the proposal, Yeongwoo made a brief comment before finalizing the negotiation terms.

Flash!

《Round 3 negotiation terms have been finalized.》

The third round unfolded swiftly, showcasing a genuine battle of wits.

For the first time, both sides had proposed the same terms.

The losing side in this battle would have to hand over all war-related profits from their sponsor to the opponent.

"Show me your card. What do you have?"

Yeongwoo extended his index finger to point at Yuuto’s card, and Yuuto's face turned even paler as he flipped it over.

"Behold the new landmark of Greater Japan!"

"What?"

Flash!

[Space Communicator]

"Space is vast; you never know what you might encounter."

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 800 + 1,140

Encounter with the Unknown

<When this card is activated, its power increases by 1 to 3,000.>

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

"Oh...!"

Yuuto, though the one who revealed the card, looked astonished as if he were seeing it for the first time, and Yeongwoo understood his reaction only after taking in the bizarre card's effect.

Encounter with the Unknown

<When this card is activated, its power increases by 1 to 3,000.>

'A gamble within a gamble. This card sure has a strong theme.'

The Space Communicator card started with a base power of 800, but its power could randomly spike from 1 to as much as 3,000 the moment it was flipped, making it a risky bet.

'If it reached its maximum, it could have contended with even higher-tier cards than mythic.'

Despite its incredible potential, the problem was that this time, the opponent was holding a "Bastard" card.

"Impressive. But I believe Japan's fate is sealed."

"What?"

Yuuto's face contorted, but Yeongwoo didn't respond verbally, choosing instead to flip over his card.

Flash!

[Bastard]

"The world was especially harsh to me."

|Card Rank: Myth

|Power: 2,200

Despise the Weak

<Defeats any card below Myth rank.>

Challenger

<Power increases by 1,000 when facing cards higher than Myth rank.>

"...Huh?"

Yuuto, who had been meticulously reading through the Bastard's tooltip, suddenly widened his eyes and mouth in shock.

Seizing the moment, Yeongwoo slammed his hand down on the table with force.

Bang!

"The power of the universe stands with me...!"

At that moment, a crimson sword shot out from the Bastard card, shattering Yuuto's 'Space Communicator.'

Crack!

"No... This can't be. How does a card like that even exist?"

"Does it make sense for a legendary card to reach a max power of 3,800? You wouldn't have said a word if you'd won."

Having won Round 3, Yeongwoo easily nullified Yuuto's proposal.

As a result, the current negotiation conditions set between both sides numbered four in total.

[The battle between the proxies of Dogo and Lemu can only take place on Tsushima Island.]

[The proxies of Dogo and Lemu must fight in a naked state.]

[The proxy of Dogo must fight with one arm amputated.]

[The proxy of Lemu transfers all war profits gained through their contract to the proxy of Dogo.]

‘Two rounds left. What should I propose to avoid regrets?’

Yeongwoo had two mythic cards left with a legendary and epic card each as well, meaning the odds of drawing a mythic card in the remaining two rounds were quite high.

‘Let’s go strong both times. If I face a critical proposal and lose, I’ll have to void it in the next round.’

《Round 4 is about to begin. The shuffle counter has been recharged.》

A chance to shuffle for Round 4 was given, but Yeongwoo opted not to and picked up a card right away.

Tap!

Yuuto’s eyebrows twitched upon seeing this.

Not shuffling meant Yeongwoo was satisfied with the current hand.

Moreover, this was Round 4.

So that meant he intended to use the current cards for both remaining rounds.

“What on earth... What are you holding?”

Yuuto asked with irritation, to which Yeongwoo responded while calmly drawing the next card.

“Heh... my card is... huh.”

Yeongwoo, after drawing the card, checked it again in disbelief.

‘What kind of nonsense is this?’

[Jeonggu Before the Storm]

"Jeonggu is still alive, wrapped in the mysteries of the universe."

| Card Grade: Legendary

| Power: 1,000

Suspicious Straw

<This card always defeats cards of the same grade. However, it loses to any other grade.>

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]