

Level 4 Human in a Ruined World #Chapter 351 - Read Level 4 Human in a Ruined World Chapter 351

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Chapter 351: Supreme Armament (2)

—Tomiko Hayama? Is she someone you know?

Jiseon, noticing a ridiculous banner in Korean, asked her son.

Yeongwoo nodded.

“Yes, I’ve met her before. If I had to categorize her, she’d be closer to our side.”

Of course, this was purely Yeongwoo’s one-sided assumption.

The only image he had of Tomiko Hayama was from the dungeon Temple of Valor.

However, back then, she seemed far more rational than other participants, even going out of her way to avoid unnecessary conflicts with those from countries with strained relations.

Thus, Yeongwoo thought:

‘Tomiko’s now Japan’s leader? Maybe this can be resolved smoothly.’

Meanwhile, Jiseon had an entirely different thought.

—‘Our side’? There are allies in Japan, and yet we went to war?

“That’s why we fought all the way to Tsushima Island.”

—Then why didn’t she join the war?

“Because she’s smart. You only have one life.”

Judging by the banner hanging there, it seemed Tomiko had been preparing to surrender even before the official notification of the war’s end was issued.

“Let’s go. Over to that tower.”

Yeongwoo pointed toward the lower part of a violet tower.

Jiseon, lowering her voice slightly, asked her son again.

—Still, should we keep acting threatening?

“Of course.”

—Got it.

The moment Jiseon heard this, her entire body began to glow a bright blue, emitting a low, resonant roar.

Then, with her wings spread to their maximum, casting a massive shadow, she descended into the middle of Tokyo, where the mysterious tower stood.

BAM!

Her landing was so forceful that it sent powerful winds surging through the area.

“W-whoa!”

“A d-dragon?!”

“A dragon has come!”

It seemed that there were some Japanese elites near the tower.

Startled, people who had been hiding among the buildings started running away frantically.

Then, above their heads—

WHOOSH!

Jiseon unleashed a burst of blue breath that froze the air as it shot forward.

—I am Song Jiseon, the guardian dragon of Metal Seoul! I have come to claim the rights granted under the war treaty!

Jiseon dramatically delivered the line, unprompted by Yeongwoo.

Yeongwoo, however, played along by holding a treaty scroll high in the air.

Hwoosh!

「Tsushima Pact」 – Epic Certificate

【|||I-Earth】

【This certificate guarantees rights as stipulated in the pact.】

【Enforcement Level: 3】

|This document is certified by the Planetary Court and the Balance Enforcement Office.

A moment later—

Tap, tap!

Swift footsteps approached rapidly from the other side of the violet tower.

The figure that emerged was none other than Tomiko herself.

『Miyagi Sword Emperor』

A title associated with Japan's strongest from Miyagi Prefecture, albeit with the unfortunate nickname Swordslayer.

Despite Yuto's desperate plea at the Tokyo conference—where he even bared himself to rally participants—Tomiko had remained here to the end.

“Hey, don't break things!”

Tomiko's voice carried an edge of frustration as she ran toward them.

Seeing her, Jiseon slowly closed her wide-open mouth.

—That's her? She's got a bit of an attitude, doesn't she?

“You're the one who unleashed the breath first, Mom. I didn't ask for that.”

Yeongwoo commented as he jumped off his mother's back.

Thud!

Seeing him descend, Tomiko, who had been charging forward with determination, hesitated and took an involuntary step back.

“Y-Yeongwoo...?”

It was an unwelcome but familiar face—Jeong Yeongwoo07.

“Yes, Tomiko. I bring bad news today, but I hope you’ve been doing well.”

As Yeongwoo spoke, he stabbed the scroll-shaped spear into the ground.

Seeing this, Tomiko flinched again, her upper lip twitching slightly.

“More importantly, why are you... still naked?”

Tomiko was well aware of the infamous naked war that had occurred on Tsushima.

But why was he still undressed here?

It wasn’t until this moment that Yeongwoo realized he was still naked.

“Oh, my apologies. I was in a hurry.”

With unapologetic nonchalance, he began re-equipping his armor.

Watching this, Tomiko felt a wave of exhaustion wash over her.

‘...Ah.’

It dawned on her that this man had grown even more formidable since the last time she had seen him in the dungeon.

To top it off, a birthright brand now gleamed above Yeongwoo’s head.

It had appeared the moment he severed the head of Tokyo Sword Emperor Yuto on Tsushima Island.

In other words, Tokyo would never have another Sword Emperor as long as Yeongwoo lived.

“Yuto... is dead, isn’t he?”

Considering the slim possibility, Tomiko cautiously asked.

Yeongwoo gestured to the silver-white spear embedded in the ground.

“Yes. He’s gone to hell. But Yuto left behind his final will.”

“His will?”

“We played a card game to decide the future of our nations. I won.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It means Japan now owes the Korean Peninsula 300 million karma per day.”

“.....?”

“And it’s legally binding on a cosmic level.”

Yeongwoo smiled brightly as he spoke, and Tomiko’s legs wavered beneath her.

She instinctively understood that the absurd nonsense this madman was spouting was probably all true.

“W-why should we pay 300 million?”

“You can ask Yuto yourself when you see him. If you had won the war, you wouldn’t have to pay.”

Yeongwoo casually scanned the Tokyo skyline, as if inspecting property he had just won at an auction.

His gaze landed on the violet tower, about 50 meters away.

“That thing—did Lemu build it? Is it the interstellar communicator?”

“...As far as I know.”

“As far as you know? You haven’t used it yet?”

When Yeongwoo asked, confused, Tomiko made an awkward expression.

“I’m not the representative of Japan. I didn’t join the war; I was merely waiting.”

"For the Second Tokyo Conference."

"Second?"

"The first was to select participants, and the second will address follow-up issues. For example, dealing with those who dared not risk their lives for the sake of the nation."

In simpler terms, a purge.

Of course, since Tomiko held the title of Sword Emperor, it was uncertain whether she could be so easily executed.

But one thing was clear: if Japan had won the Tsushima War, the mainland's atmosphere would now be feverishly intense.

"Oh, then if it had been Yuto visiting instead of me, you would have been in quite a predicament, wouldn't you?"

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"Who knows? Both would be problematic, though perhaps to different degrees."

"Even rolling in a pile of manure is better than being dead. In any case, welcome."

"...What?"

"Welcome to my Tokyo. From now on, all of Tokyo's major landmarks are mine."

Ting!

Yeongwoo pulled out a certificate from the ground and pointed with it toward a violet tower. At the same time, beams of light shot down from the sky.

Zeeeeeee-aaaaaat!

"Huh?"

"What?"

One of the beams pierced the top of the violet tower, etching a crest onto it.

Simultaneously, other beams descended throughout Tokyo, creating wedge-shaped sigils.

In other words...

"Even the universe has red tags?"

Red tags.

The official name was Confiscation Marker.

They were essentially a type of branding used by government institutions when seizing a debtor's property for various reasons.

And just now, several of Tokyo's key facilities had been confiscated.

"What is all this?"

Seeing the wedge-shaped symbols suddenly appear throughout the city, Tomiko widened her eyes in shock.

Yeongwoo answered nonchalantly.

"As of now, all cosmic infrastructure in Tokyo is under my ownership."

".....!"

"And from this moment on, Japan's representative is you, Tomiko."

Promoted to Japan's representative in an instant.

But Tomiko's expression was far from bright.

"What if I refuse?"

"Why?"

"It's just a fancy title for someone who has to scrape up money and hand it over, isn't it?"

A perceptive one indeed.

So Yeongwoo nodded without hesitation.

"That's correct."

".....?"

"Japan's primary role right now is to gather 300 million karma daily and send it to us. Naturally, the representative's job is to oversee collections."

"Well, I'm not doing it."

"Then who will? To my knowledge, there's no one better suited to gather money without wielding a sword than you, Tomiko."

"....."

It was only now that Tomiko tightly closed her eyes.

That scoundrel was being polite only because she was a familiar face.

Otherwise, he'd have simply smashed everything alongside his dragon and had the conversation afterward.

"Someone has to take the representative position, anyway. The question is how much blood will be spilled before someone does."

As Yeongwoo said this, he rested his hand on the hilt of his Demonic Cursed Sword.

Seeing this, Tomiko looked as if she were reliving a nightmare.

She knew full well, having seen it herself in the dungeon, that the cursed sword was no ordinary weapon.

"Isn't the lesser evil better than the worst? As long as the reparations are delivered daily, Japan won't face any trouble."

"Demanding 300 million a day is trouble enough."

"Think of it as a fine. After all, you struck first."

"..."

There was no way to argue against that.

"After Pangaea, Japan now shares a border with northern Australia, correct?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"In northern Australia live my brothers, the Redfoot Orcs. Normally, war would have broken out there, too, but I'm currently preventing that from happening."

Bluffing.

In other words, a perfect lie, though not entirely baseless.

If Yeongwoo wanted, he could ask Lord Bang to invade Japan and seize more land.

"If you take on the role of representative, I promise you this: there will be no war with the Orcs."

Conversely, if you refuse the position, the border with Australia will become a new source of headaches...

At least, that's how Tomiko interpreted it.

Though no sword had been drawn, she was essentially being threatened.

"Make the right choice for your people, Tomiko."

As Yeongwoo delivered this nonsensical line with an unchanging expression, Tomiko pressed her hand to her forehead in frustration.

"Collecting 300 million karma daily... Is there anything else I have to do? If there is, just say it all now."

"Of course."

Yeongwoo nodded as if it were obvious.

Then he looked around Tokyo again.

"Empty this city."

"What did you say?"

"Most of the facilities here are ours anyway. My people and I will frequently visit Tokyo to use them. That'll be inconvenient and potentially dangerous for the residents, wouldn't it?"

"..."

At these words, Tomiko reflexively glanced at Jiseon, who was hovering 100 meters above with her dragon's head visible.

"But Tokyo already has so many residents..."

"Then ask them. If they want to keep living in a city visited daily by armed Koreans. And above all—"

Flash!

Yeongwoo subtly changed his title.

『Tokyo Sword Emperor』

"You...!"

"I'm the Sword Emperor of Tokyo now, aren't I? Just tell everyone to leave."

The sorrow of losing the Sword Emperor title.

Tomiko had neither the means nor the ability to stop this lunatic.

By now, it seemed the lesser evil would indeed be for her, as a familiar face, to take on the representative role.

"I'll do my best to empty the city. Is there anything else?"

As Tomiko groaned her reluctant acceptance, Yeongwoo finally tilted his head toward the sky.

"Something else? Let's discuss that later."

"You mean there's more?"

Tomiko gasped in horror, and Yeongwoo drew his Demon Sword, pointing it skyward.

"That depends on Mr. Yuto. I don't know exactly what he was supposed to deliver."

"...?"

Baffled, Tomiko followed Yeongwoo's gaze upward.

There, a massive square-shaped ship silently broke through the clouds and descended.

"Wha—what is that?"

"Lemu. They're in the cultural business."

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Chapter 352: Supreme Armament (3)

"Culture... business?"

Tomiko, still lacking cosmic experience, could only take the words of this eccentric at face value.

And at least outwardly, it seemed believable.

Whirrrr...!

The descending ship indeed looked like it belonged to those involved in cultural endeavors.

Its pristine white, cubic surface gleamed like fine porcelain, descending silently without engine noise.

One could almost say it exuded a certain elegance.

"It does seem to have a noble aura, doesn't it?"

"Exactly, right?"

Tomiko's observation made Yeongwoo smile brightly.

Then, he added a cryptic remark.

"I've always been curious about who they truly are."

"What do you mean? Haven't you met them before?"

"I have, but I've never seen their true form."

Every time Yeongwoo had interacted with the Lemu, their signature cubic entities had represented them.

When they made advertising proposals, they sent intermediaries instead of showing themselves directly to sign the contracts.

But this time was different.

Whooooooooosh...!

The ship descending from the sky was unmistakably a Lemu vessel.

This meant that the true form of the Lemu had to be inside.

"Lemuuuuu...!"

Yeongwoo spread his arms wide, welcoming the enduringly intertwined alien force, and the Lemu seemed to respond in kind by sending a signal.

Baaaaaang!

Like many ships, it emitted a sound similar to a foghorn.

Then, the ship's once-pristine white faces shifted to a pearly hue, radiating a gentle, glowing light.

Fwooooooosh!

Current time: 8:49 PM.

The night was already pitch black, and with no grand events in progress, the Lemu ship was the only source of such dazzling light over Tokyo.

For those unfamiliar with the Lemu, their appearance was captivating beyond measure.

Psssssh!

As the Lemu's ship reached a height of 50 meters above the ground, it released a mist-like substance from its base before coming to a halt.

It appeared they had no intention of descending further.

'These guys are being extremely cautious. Well, considering this city is now practically under Dogo's jurisdiction, it makes sense.'

Perhaps their earlier encounter with the chairman's wrath on Earth made them wary.

'Though if the chairman decided to intervene, their precautions would be meaningless anyway. What's the point of this hesitation?'

While musing over this, Yeongwoo tucked the sword he was holding back into his belt.

At that moment, the base of the Lemu ship began to split into a square opening.

"...Oh."

Yeongwoo widened his eyes.

He had expected them to send a hologram or something similar for their contact, not to physically open the ship.

Click!

With a locking sound, thin white pillars extended from the four corners of the ship's underside.

Hsssssss!

"Huh?"

—...!

Caught off guard by this unexpected development, both Jiseon and Yeongwoo flinched.

The four pillars plunged deeply into the Tokyo ground.

Thud, thud!

Essentially, the massive cube ship had deployed legs to support itself.

“Wouldn’t it be fine just floating? Why bother installing those?”

Yeongwoo murmured to himself.

At that moment, a thin membrane appeared between the four pillars extending from the ship.

Swish!

Completely transparent, the barrier allowed the ship’s underside to be fully visible, but the occasional shimmer of its surface confirmed that something was blocking the way.

In other words, this was likely...

‘A protective shield?’

As Yeongwoo speculated internally, the ship’s underside began lowering a gray, square metal plate.

"Oh..."

Sensing something significant, Tomiko let out a sound.

Yeongwoo, anticipating that the Lemu would be present on the plate, moved closer to the barrier.

And sure enough...

Whirrrr...!

As the square plate descended to roughly 20 meters above the ground, a massive silhouette came into view atop it.

"Wow, it’s huge!"

Tomiko, her pupils dilated, spoke to Yeongwoo.

The descending plate was a perfect square, each side spanning tens of meters.

But the entity standing atop it was so enormous that its silhouette was already visible.

"...Is this okay?"

Feeling a rising sense of danger, Tomiko asked Yeongwoo, but his expression betrayed no tension.

"Lemu used to sponsor Japan. They wouldn't harm you without reason."

With that, Yeongwoo began removing his Vesedel armor.

Clank, clang!

The metallic armor encasing his body hit the ground with a loud clatter, causing Tomiko to scream and step back.

"What are you doing now?!"

"When Lemu promised support to Yuto, they requested the Naked War."

"S-so what?"

"It makes sense to receive the rewards of the war in the same manner."

This implied that the Lemu would expect it.

Tomiko was already exasperated by the reasoning.

"You... You're insane."

"If you're not going to undress, step back. Don't get caught on camera."

"Excuse me?"

"Being clothed here would be disgraceful."

The reward ceremony for the Naked War.

It was undoubtedly being filmed, just like the war itself.

Thus, it was better for only the unclothed to appear on screen for the sake of marketability.

This way, the Lemu would gladly pay a hefty sum.

Having made up his mind to go all the way, Yeongwoo gestured for Tomiko to move aside.

"If you're not going to undress, hurry and leave."

At this point, Jiseon turned to her son.

—What about me?

"Mother, since you're already undressed, come closer."

Yeongwoo proudly invited his mother to the prestigious scene.

As the dragon-shaped Jiseon approached with heavy footsteps toward the direction of Lemu's ship, the gray metal plate finally descended in the heart of Tokyo.

Thoooooom!

"Wow, these guys... they're robots?"

Yeongwoo gaped, his mouth wide open.

The gray metal plate, spanning hundreds of square meters, was intricately etched with what appeared to be countless circuit patterns.

And at its center—

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There sat a figure, unmistakably the master of "Lemu," perched upon a throne forged of mechanical components.

A cape woven from silver-white cables and armor with delicate circuits sprinkled across its surface adorned them.

The mechanical body beneath, however, was composed of gray metal.

Its hands, also gray, bore rings that looked as if bolts had been partially melted and refashioned.

Standing roughly five meters tall, their presence was commanding.

‘...They look ridiculously powerful.’

Beside the throne stood two giant war machines, each at least ten meters tall.

Yet, they didn’t feel like bodyguards.

The figure’s aura was far too overwhelming for that.

‘No wonder they dared to challenge our chairman.’

Yeongwoo, who had envisioned some rich space tycoon, was stunned by the sheer majesty of Lemu, a presence far beyond his imagination.

Then again, isn’t wealth equivalent to power in space?

“.....”

As Yeongwoo, still stark naked, stared at his opponent beyond the transparent protective barrier, the figure on the throne lifted their right hand from the armrest.

□ Jeong Yeongwoo07. Your reputation has reached the very summit of the Machine Tower. It is a pleasure to meet you.

“.....!”

□ I am the Seeker, the Master of the Machine Tower, and the Architect, Lemu.

‘Not the Lustful King Lemu, but Architect Lemu?’

Of course, most prominent figures across the universe loved to use the title of “king.”

Chairman Dogo, the King of Destruction, did so, and Mara referred to himself as the King of Ten Thousand Demons.

But Lemu’s title wasn’t “king”—it was “Architect.”

What exactly did they design, then?

Since they had introduced themselves, Yeongwoo also bent at the waist in a polite bow.

“I am Jeong Yeongwoo07, a human from Earth and the Mayor of Metal Seoul.”

Originally, he would have added “Dogo Special City,” but considering his audience, he tactfully left it out.

“It is an honor to meet you in this manner. May I address you as Chairman Lemu?”

When Yeongwoo cautiously inquired, Lemu moved their mechanical facial muscles to form a smile.

□ Titles are merely formalities. Call me whatever you find comfortable.

At this, Yeongwoo placed a hand on the hilt of his dagger and said abruptly,

“Hey, Lemu!”

□!

“...You’d be shocked if I called you that, wouldn’t you?”

Yeongwoo caught a fleeting moment where Lemu’s expression stiffened, his eyes glinting mischievously.

“In that case, I’ll call you President Lemu.”

As Yeongwoo suddenly shifted from “Chairman” to “President,” it was Lemu who posed a question in turn.

□ May I ask why?

“For me, there’s only one Chairman.”

□ Dogo.

“If it’s all right with you, I’ll reserve the title Chairman for him.”

□ Chairman Dogo may not be a great businessman, but he is an exceptional warrior.

Was this a mechanical diss?

Yeongwoo mulled over the curious remark as he glanced up at the sky.

It seemed the Chairman wasn’t planning to make an appearance today.

Then again, he was probably busy working himself to the bone to prepare tomorrow’s wedding gift.

From what Yeongwoo knew, Dogo had so many business ventures that his company rarely had much liquid cash on hand.

In contrast, from their first meeting, Lemu had tried to win through sheer wealth.

‘Maybe the President is right. The Chairman might be an exceptional warrior but not necessarily a great businessman.’

Everything was relative, after all.

At least compared to Dogo, Lemu was clearly the better businessman.

Even now, Lemu’s attitude showed as much.

Weren’t they addressing someone of significantly lesser stature with the utmost courtesy?

“That aside, President, what brings you to this humble place today...”

As Yeongwoo began to broach the subject of the promised payment, Lemu waved their right hand knowingly.

□ There is no need to embellish your words with me.

At that moment, the circuits embedded in the floor lit up in a radiant blue, and just behind the protective barrier, a white mechanical device emerged.

“Ohhh...”

As expected, the metal plate beneath Lemu’s feet wasn’t ordinary.

Within its domain, Lemu was practically omnipotent.

‘So that’s why the protective barrier is here? In case the Chairman shows up to start a fight?’

A reasonable suspicion.

But business came first. Yeongwoo turned his gaze to the device rising from the ground.

Lemu, gesturing as if to say “go ahead,” tilted their palm upward.

□ Within it are the promised support items and the special privileges of the Machine Tower originally meant for Mr. Yuto.

“The special privileges of the Machine Tower?”

Genuinely curious, Yeongwoo asked, and Lemu leaned forward from the throne to answer.

□ All resources of the Machine Tower are devoted to studying the Akashic Records.

“What... what did you say?”

The Akashic Records.

A kind of record-book revered as godlike among the denizens of the universe.

According to what Yeongwoo had heard, the Akashic Records contained everything that happened in the universe.

“Are you saying the Machine Tower’s special privilege has to do with the Akashic Records?”

□ While no one can access the Akashic Records directly, with sufficient resources, it can be observed. Therefore...

President Lemu made the most significant movement they had since arriving on Earth.

Clap!

Their palms struck together, creating a resounding clap.

The top of the device that had risen before Yeongwoo opened, revealing two massive icons.

The left icon resembled a Karma Coin, likely representing the promised funds.

The right icon was shaped like an eye.

“Wait, don’t tell me...”

□ The Akashic Records holds all of time: the past, the present, and the future.

“.....!”

□ Yuto sought to glimpse the future. Jeong Yeongwoo07, do you wish for it as well?

‘What the... is this guy some kind of universal fortune-teller?’

Caught off guard by the unexpected privilege, Yeongwoo gaped, though his tongue was already forming words.

“The... the future. If I really can see it, I must.”

At his response, the eye icon disappeared, replaced by three words.

□ As a gift for this meeting, I will grant you a glimpse of the future. Choose one of these three fragments.

[Family]

[Infamy]

[Spouse]

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Chapter 353: Supreme Armament (4)

—What... what are you talking about? A spouse? For you?

Jiseon, who had just witnessed a fragment of Yeongwoo's future, was even more shocked than he was.

She had imagined her son's future might involve their family name, and certainly some infamy, but the concept of a "spouse" was so outlandish it had never even crossed her mind.

—You mean I'm going to have a daughter-in-law? What kind of fool would marry someone like you?

Jiseon berated her son mercilessly.

But Yeongwoo was just as flustered.

“...Ah, hold on a second.”

He waved a hand at his frenzied mother, trying to calm her down, and turned to Lemu, who was inside the protective barrier.

“President, what exactly does this mean? The ‘future fragments’ you mentioned earlier... Are these things that will actually happen?”

Lemu propped his right elbow on the armrest of his throne and rested his chin on his hand.

□ According to law of causality, everything in the universe has a rational basis and tends toward inevitability due to karma.

“...?”

□ Therefore, the Akashic Record that governs causality and karma predicts most futures and records them in advance.

“What did you say?”

Yeongwoo’s jaw dropped.

“You’re saying the future is already recorded?”

It wasn’t an entirely unfamiliar concept.

On the first day of the Reset, he had learned about the Chronicle of Destiny and how it had preordained his future.

However, the Reset system had claimed that everyone’s destinies were reset at the point of that catastrophe.

But now...

“So you’re saying my future is still recorded somewhere? But the Chronicle of Destiny doesn’t even exist anymore...”

Yeongwoo trailed off mid-sentence.

Come to think of it, wasn’t the Akashic Record itself the Chronicle of Destiny for the entire universe?

The Akashic Record, which all beings revered almost like a god.

The reason was simple: the Akashic Record determined their futures.

Just as humans on Earth prayed to their ancestors or gods for a good future, beings in the universe venerated the Akashic Record and sought its blessings for their well-being.

In other words, the fact that Yeongwoo’s family name, infamy, and spouse were already inscribed in the Akashic Record meant...

□ The Akashic Record is vast and profound. While we can only observe a tiny portion, one thing is certain...

Lemu gestured toward the fragments of Yeongwoo's future displayed before him.

[Family]

[Infamy]

[Spouse]

□ These are the futures that await you. The Akashic Record has judged and recorded them, and we call this the priority future.

"...Priority future."

Unless some unprecedented variable disrupted the course of events, this was a future that would inevitably come to pass.

And fragments of that future were right in front of Yeongwoo.

"Then... when the original Chronicle of Destiny was revealed on the first day of the Reset, my next future was already recorded in the Akashic Record, wasn't it?"

Yeongwoo posed a sharp question, and Lemu interlocked his fingers, leaning forward slightly.

□ An intriguing question. While it's beyond our capacity to verify, I'd say it's highly probable.

Then, Lemu nodded toward the fragments of Yeongwoo's future once again.

□ Now, choose. You may glimpse only one of them.

"Have you also not seen what's inside these fragments yet?"

□ Observing the Akashic Record consumes significant resources. And since we are already monitoring many things, we cannot squander resources carelessly.

In other words, the opportunity to observe such precious fragments wasn't something they would waste on "Jeong Yeongwoo07."

Just days ago, Yeongwoo was nothing more than an anonymous inhabitant of a remote planet, Earth.

But now, thanks to his promised privileges, he had a chance to glimpse a part of his future.

“You’ve never seen my future before?”

Yeongwoo scratched his chin.

“Then this will be a good opportunity for you, too.”

□ ...?

“You’ll find another person worth monitoring.”

Yeongwoo smirked wickedly, but Lemu, who had glimpsed countless fragments of the universe’s futures, found it laughable.

□ We are awaiting countless moments that have already been set. Events beyond your imagination.

It was a reminder that the vast events unfolding in the universe had already been observed, and they were simply waiting for their time.

But Yeongwoo wasn’t intimidated in the least.

“And yet, you’ve ended up using those precious resources on me. Isn’t that also beyond what you imagined?”

□

Lemu had no retort.

“By the way, it’s unfortunate that the keyword ‘infamy’ is part of my future.”

That essentially meant he would become a villain in the future.

Jiseon immediately chimed in.

—Oh, infamy doesn’t surprise me. You’ve always done nothing but things that would make you notorious.

Then she pointed at the fragment labeled [Spouse].

—But that one’s a real shocker.

[Spouse].

The one keyword that had utterly stunned Jiseon upon its appearance.

—You? Getting married?

“...Why not? I could do it if I needed to.”

Unlike his earlier confidence with Lemu, Yeongwoo spoke with much less conviction.

Even he had to admit his life path seemed far removed from anything resembling marriage.

‘Who on earth would I marry? And why...?’

The idea of having a spouse was shocking enough, but the notion that he would choose marriage was even more baffling.

‘Would I need an absurdly large sum of money someday?’

That was the only plausible reason he could think of at the moment.

If he had to pay an astronomical amount in taxes to avoid prison or death, then marriage might make sense.

“So, Mother, are you most curious about my spouse?”

When Yeongwoo turned to Jiseon, she hesitated.

—And what about you?

Confronted with the possibility of glimpsing her cosmic daughter-in-law in advance, she felt a sudden pang of fear.

Yeongwoo returned his gaze to his future fragments.

Family, Infamy, Spouse.

If he wanted to teach Lemu, the president of the other side, a lesson, choosing infamy or family would probably be the better options.

But realistically, they weren’t likely to be of much help.

‘Family or infamy are somewhat predictable choices since they align with my current direction.’

But the spouse—now that was different.

Yeongwoo, for all his unusually cosmic thinking for an Earthling, couldn't even begin to predict anything about his own marriage.

Why?

With whom?

"Let's take a look at my spouse. I'm more curious about why I'd marry than who I'd marry."

—Why would you even get married?

"Do you think I'd find someone I love and get married in this mess? Even if someone like that existed, they'd be dead by now."

—Fair enough.

Jiseon quickly accepted the logic but then flared up in protest.

—But then why would you get married? Don't tell me you're planning to threaten someone into marriage again, you bastard!

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

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That was, in truth, Jiseon's story.

Wasn't she the first victim of a forced marriage thanks to Yeongwoo?

"Well, who knows? I'd have to see it to find out."

Yeongwoo couldn't entirely deny the possibility, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

After all, who could say what kind of person he'd become in the future?

"Alright then, let's see for ourselves."

When Yeongwoo turned toward Lemu, the mechanical emperor who sold pornography to fund its foresight ventures wore an odd expression.

□ Have you made your decision?

“Yes. If my future spouse exists, I’d like to know who it is and how we ended up married.”

At that, Lemu closed its eyes as if in contemplation.

□ What you see will be known only to the printing press.

And then it added,

□ Select a shard.

The future shards.

The three choices given to Yeongwoo were positioned inside Lemu’s protective barrier.

They rested on a gray metal plate with intricate electronic circuits etched into its surface.

‘So, I have to step inside to pick one myself?’

Lemu still showed no reaction, and the three future shards, displayed on a mechanical device, were about 10 meters away beyond the protective barrier.

It was impossible to touch the shards without stepping inside.

“Wait here for a moment.”

In the end, Yeongwoo entrusted the situation to his mother and boldly stepped into Lemu’s barrier.

Swish.

Immediately, a system message appeared in his vision.

「All equipment effects below the Epic grade have been deactivated.」

‘What?’

But that wasn’t all.

「You are now under the ‘Contempt for Life’ effect. All stats are reduced by 25%.」

As expected, within Lemu’s barrier, he couldn’t use his powers properly.

And that wasn’t the only concern.

“.....”

The electronic circuits on the floor were essentially extensions of Lemu's body.

He would be exposed to unpredictable attacks if he had to fight inside this space.

This was Lemu's home turf, after all.

'As much of a mess as our planet is, it's impressive how Lemu can casually set up its domain here.'

It seemed there wasn't a single pushover among the galaxy's big names.

Quietly marveling, Yeongwoo carefully advanced toward the shards.

Clink, clink.

Finally, he reached out to the shard on the far right labeled "Spouse."

'Who could it possibly be? My future spouse...!'

As the future shard began to flicker, Yeongwoo stepped back cautiously.

Meanwhile, Lemu, seated on its throne, adjusted its posture and tilted its head toward the air.

Soon,

Flash!

A vibrant glow surged from the shard Yeongwoo had selected, forming a hazy halo in the sky.

It resembled a massive screen.

'Why is the screen so big?'

Feeling an ominous presence within the glow, Yeongwoo instinctively stepped back again.

Roar!

The presence was far larger than he'd expected.

'Something's coming out?'

While Yeongwoo's hand moved to his weapon out of reflex, his mother, Jiseon, who had a much better vantage point, widened her eyes.

She had already seen the inside of the glowing halo.

—Is... Is that my daughter-in-law?

Iron Empress Song Jiseon's voice was thick with fear and disbelief.

"What is it? What did you see?"

Yeongwoo urgently asked.

At that moment, the previously white halo flared a vivid red.

Whoosh!

".....!"

Then, a colossal dragon with crimson scales, resembling dried blood, crawled out and let out a piercing yellow breath.

Rooooaaarrr!

Beneath its blood-colored scales, fiery sparks crackled, turning its skin an even more intense red.

The creature's monstrous wings entered Yeongwoo's vision next.

No fewer than four wings—two pairs—stretched out menacingly.

"...Oh, shit."

Yeongwoo muttered under his breath as he involuntarily covered his mouth.

That's when he noticed Lemu, now standing from its seat.

"President! What the hell is that? Are you saying that's my spouse?"

Lemu looked at Yeongwoo with a complicated expression.

□ That is Princess Parina of the Sun.

"What...?"

□ If she does not suit your tastes, it's likely a political marriage.

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 354: Supreme Armament (5)

"Uh, strategic...?"

Yeongwoo felt a sudden dizziness as Lemu's words about cosmic fate echoed in his mind:

「According to law of causality, everything in the universe has a rational basis and tends toward inevitability due to karma.」

In other words, the prioritized future inscribed in the Chronicle of Destiny was a result of causality and karma.

Put differently:

‘...It happened because it was bound to.’

Although the exact timing of his supposed marriage to that monster was unknown, it implied that all his past and future actions had inevitably led to this outcome.

Craaaaack!

Princess Parina let out a guttural sound, reminiscent of a chest full of phlegm, and spewed a yellowish breath.

Though it was merely a vision, with no tangible heat, her fiery temperament was apparent to all present.

— What the hell, kid?! What did you do to end up marrying someone like her?

A startled Song Jiseon gaped at her son, her jaw dropping as she interrogated him.

Yeongwoo, looking both aggrieved and confused, replied:

"I don't know! And I'm not even married yet!"

— Did you miss it? If it's written in the Chronicle of Destiny, it's practically set in stone!

"..."

There was no refuting that.

But still...

'What kind of situation leads me to marry someone like that? What on earth did you do, future Yeongwoo?'

Yeongwoo threw the question into the void, seeking answers from his future self.

Unsurprisingly, no response came.

Meanwhile, the crimson visions that filled the air dissipated without a trace.

Swish!

"Huh."

— Whoa!

As the images of future wife and daughter-in-law vanished, the stunned mother and son widened their eyes.

Lemu, sitting once more on his throne, feigned composure.

□ Intriguing, isn't it?

Yeongwoo, undeterred, took a few steps closer to Lemu and asked:

"President, can't I see a bit more? Shouldn't I at least know why this marriage happens and what I gain from it?"

□ The Chronicle of Destiny reveals only what it allows. We cannot see beyond this.

Though far more must have been etched into the scroll, Lemu asserted that the Machine Tower's observation capabilities were limited to this glimpse.

Even if Lemu was deliberately withholding information, Yeongwoo had no way of proving it.

'This is why it sucks to have no power.'

Yeongwoo surveyed Lemu's dominion with envy.

His gaze shifted to the coin-like icon still resting atop a mechanical platform.

"Then, can I at least claim my reward now?"

□ Of course. You've earned it.

With a casual gesture, Lemu motioned toward the coin icon as though offering a meal.

Yeongwoo wasted no time and grabbed the last remaining reward.

Click.

In an instant, 800 million karma was transferred into his balance.

Whooooosh!

"Whoa...!"

Available Karma: 932,779,605

Available Defense Funds: 0

Yeongwoo's wealth surged past 930 million, and the electronic flooring gave way as a massive steel vault, the size of a wardrobe, emerged.

Clang!

"What's this?"

□ An armory.

"An armory?"

When Yeongwoo touched the surface of the mysterious vault, a large gap appeared in the center, and the doors slid apart, revealing the contents inside.

"Wow..."

As expected, it was indeed an armory.

Inside, a gear rack held a sword, a shield, and a small object resembling a key.

"Why do they look like that?"

Yeongwoo pointed to the sword and shield, questioning their holographic appearance.

Lemu, seemingly brimming with pride, answered:

□ These are customizable rewards.

"Customizable rewards?"

□ Input your desired effect, and the Machine Tower will locate and summon equipment matching those specifications.

"Ridiculous."

Essentially, a blank check for equipment—no wonder Lemu seemed so confident.

"What's the maximum grade?"

□ Both are of legendary grade.

"Wow."

Two pieces of legendary equipment tailored to his needs—a value that couldn't be measured in money.

On Earth, no matter how wealthy you were, obtaining the desired gear was often a matter of sheer luck.

'So the President doesn't just read the Chronicle of Destiny; he uses other forms of detection as well.'

Though Yeongwoo knew Chairman Dogo despised Lemu, he felt it wise to maintain at least a working relationship.

After all, Lemu's ability to glimpse even fragments of the Records set him apart from all other factions.

"Um... Should I place an order now?"

As Yeongwoo cautiously reached into the armory, Lemu nodded.

□ May you find equipment that suits you.

"Phew."

Exhaling deeply, Yeongwoo touched the holographic sword.

Buzz.

Immediately, a search interface appeared.

[Please input your desired equipment effects.]

"Perfect."

Yeongwoo already knew what to ask for.

Just as he had requested from Yechan, he needed gear specialized in special abilities.

Currently, his build maximized the benefits of the Osmosis effect by optimizing base resistance values.

「Osmosis」 - Epic Ring

【The lowest basic resistance value is equal to the highest resistance value.】

|Fire Resistance: 15% (Osmosis: 50%)

|Cold Resistance: 15% (Osmosis: 50%)

|Lightning Resistance: 15% (Osmosis: 50%)

|Poison Resistance: 15% (Osmosis: 50%)

|Special Ability Resistance: 50%

|Dragon Resistance: 10%

His fire, cold, lightning, and poison resistances were balanced, while his special ability resistance was pushed to its maximum.

If he could keep stacking special ability resistance, he wouldn't need separate gear for base resistances.

His offensive gear followed a similar logic: Yeongwoo was transitioning to a special ability-focused setup.

「Heresy」 - Unique Gauntlets

【15% of attack power is converted into mental damage.】

「Judgement」 - Unique Gloves

【Increases power by 20% against enemies with #abilities.】

「Dark Slash」 - Transformed Crescent Moon Blade

【While using this weapon, you will continuously take psychic damage.】

【Adds 25% of the psychic damage taken in the last 2 seconds to your attack power.】

【Increases psychic attribute damage by 10%.】

Additionally, his epic bow White Fire had a default special ability damage attribute.

'I have to find weapons and shields related to abilities.'

Abilities not only weaken an opponent's equipment but are also a trait widely used by cosmic entities.

In other words, to compete in the cosmos, one cannot rely solely on the common attributes found on Earth.

'Search for equipment with the highest single stat related to resistance against or damage from abilities.'

As Yeongwoo made this request, the search interface began working immediately.

[Searching for the requested equipment.]

Soon after, the holographic sword began to change shape.

Shuaaaah!

It was no longer a sword—it had transformed into something akin to a long spear.

“Already found one, huh?”

As Yeongwoo muttered to himself, the length of the first reward weapon, now a spear, suddenly extended to around four meters.

“Whoa?”

And then, its full appearance and tooltip were revealed.

「Horn of Kelpite」 – Legendary Spear

【20% of attack power converted to ability damage.】

【40% increase in ability damage.】

“Wow...”

Truly, a legendary item lived up to its name.

Yeongwoo was left speechless at the absurdly powerful effects.

‘Unbelievable. Sniping specific options during crafting can produce gear like this?’

With this, Yeongwoo’s ability damage ratio had now reached 35%.

At this rate, it would be nearly impossible to find an equal rival on this planet.

‘Heh heh, conquering Earth is just a matter of time now.’

As Yeongwoo gave a wicked grin, the search interface displayed a new prompt.

[Please input the desired equipment effects.]

One more.

Now it was the shield’s turn.

Just as with the weapon, Yeongwoo was about to search for shields with the highest stats related to abilities, but then he paused.

‘Wait.’

The grade of the next obtainable item was legendary.

‘If that’s the case, what if I look for an item with no numerical stats in its options instead?’

The moment this thought occurred to him, he immediately requested the search.

[Searching for the requested equipment.]

A legendary shield related to abilities but without numerical values in its options.

It didn’t take long for the search to yield results.

Shuaaaah!

The hologram, which had taken the shape of a shield, suddenly shifted into a rectangular form and revealed a metallic structure with a brass hue.

「Fully Armored」 – Legendary Shield

【When taking ability damage, all equipment becomes indestructible.】

“What...?”

Indestructible.

From the description, it seemed to counteract the primary trait of ability damage: equipment weakening.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

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Normally, exposure to ability damage over time would cause equipment to crack and eventually break, but this shield prevented that entirely.

‘But I’m constantly exposed to ability damage because of the ‘Dark Slash.’

If Yeongwoo were to acquire this item, it would effectively render all his equipment permanently indestructible.

‘Well, since both will go into the collection, I’ll just hold Aratubank in my hands.’

This was already a satisfying haul, wasn’t it?

Moreover, there was still...

“President, what’s that?”

At the very bottom of the armory lay an item resembling a key.

“It looks like a key at first glance.”

Unlike the previous two pieces of equipment, the “key” was not rendered as a hologram.

This meant it wasn’t crafted as a customizable item but had been included as a fixed reward.

“Could it be a surprise bonus? Like a key to a treasure chest?”

Yeongwoo jokingly remarked as he reached out to pick up the mysterious object.

But just then, a warning hologram from the First Sword Art appeared.

“Uh-oh.”

It was already too late.

Yeongwoo’s fingers had just touched the key.

Tap.

「Villain Suppressor」 – Legendary Tool

【Applies a suppression effect based on the target’s level of malice.】

“Huh?”

The moment Yeongwoo read the tooltip, a massive vibration began to emanate from his fingertips.

The suppressor activated.

“Urghhh!”

Yeongwoo’s entire body was paralyzed as if struck by a taser.

Meanwhile, Lemu muttered an ominous line.

□ The decree has already written your future. At the very least, it confirms that you’ll marry the Princess of the Sun, so no matter what I do here, I won’t kill you.

“Of course not, you bastard! If you try to kill me, the chairman will come flying!”

Yeongwoo gritted his teeth and shouted.

And he was probably right.

The planetary evaluation fee that had already been paid meant a significant investment had been made into Yeongwoo and Earth.

If anyone, especially Lemu, attempted to take his life, the outcome would be painfully obvious.

Boom!

Meanwhile, Jiseon unleashed her breath on Lemu’s barrier, but it didn’t leave a single scratch.

□ But is it really because of Chairman Dogo?

“...What?”

□ Perhaps it's simply because our story is progressing well, and that's why you can't die.

With these words, Lemu gazed at the sky.

□ The chairman is quite preoccupied at the moment. He doesn't have the bandwidth to care about the safety of a mere advertising agent.

“...!”

Realizing this, Yeongwoo also turned his gaze upward.

Now that he thought about it, despite the increasingly dire situation, neither the chairman nor anyone from headquarters had intervened.

Why was that?

‘Could it be...’

Lemu's earlier remarks about observing fragments of the future flashed through his mind.

Perhaps this moment was one of the many instances Lemu had been waiting for.

A moment when the chairman and the entirety of Dogo would be tied up.

Maybe all of this was...

‘The architect, Lemu.’

Whether it was because of the suppressor or his own horrifying thoughts, Yeongwoo's entire body trembled.

At that moment, Lemu casually snapped his fingers.

□ All promised rewards will be delivered. However...

Boom!

Lemu's two bodyguards began to approach Yeongwoo.

□ You'll also need to sign a contract with me. Think of it as receiving an investment for the distant future.

“What nonsense is this? If I did that...”

The chairman’s wrath would be unimaginable.

It would also cause irreparable harm to his relationship with Dogo in the future.

□ It’s a dual contract. Legally, there’s no issue.

For the first time, Lemu smiled.

And seeing that smile sent shivers down Yeongwoo’s spine.

This guy must have already reviewed fragments of this future before arriving or had quickly set up the suppressor upon the Princess of the Sun’s appearance.

Either way, his cunning was undeniable.

“Fuck, the whole universe is full of villains.”

□ The contract terms are highly favorable to you.

“Shut up! As long as the chairman has my back, there’s no way I’m making a deal with you!”

As Yeongwoo shouted while restrained by the suppression device, Lemu's bodyguards, who had approached right in front of him, glanced back, awaiting their employer's signal.

In response, Lemu interlaced his fingers again and spoke softly.

□ I cannot go against the directives, so I won't be able to kill you immediately, Yeongwoo.

"Then isn't all this pointless? Why go out of your way to provoke me and ruin our relationship?"

□ If I restrain you, at least I can threaten you in other ways, can't I?

"What?"

Yeongwoo instinctively retorted, and then quickly thought like a villain.

Forcing his paralyzed neck to twist, he shouted toward his mother outside the protective barrier.

"Mother! Prepare to fight!"

—...What?

"They're coming for you next!"

The moment Yeongwoo yelled, Lemu's bodyguards suddenly changed direction, rushing out of the protective barrier.

BAM! BAM!

Since killing Yeongwoo on the spot wasn't an option, they intended to use Song Jiseon's life to threaten him.

—Damn it, telling me to prepare to fight, not even to run? What kind of nonsense is this?

Jiseon shouted indignantly, just as two of Lemu's bodyguards unsheathed blades from their fingertips.

SHIIING!

—Hey, these bastards have swords!

Sensing their menacing aura, Jiseon flinched and prepared to unleash a breath attack, but Lemu addressed Yeongwoo.

□ Your mother won't be able to defeat my subordinates. I guarantee she'll lose her life in 16 seconds.

Since it was none other than the Lemu making the claim, Yeongwoo believed it to be true.

This only made him more confident in his response.

"Then let's see what happens in 16 seconds."

As Yeongwoo looked to the sky, as if waiting for something, Lemu followed suit, glancing up.

And indeed, something appeared in the sky.

WHIIIIIIINE!

□?

It was none other than the signature oversized anchor of Chairman Dogo.

"If my future fragment has a family, shouldn't that be a clue? If my mother dies here today, my future family wouldn't exist. So something else is bound to happen!"

Excited, Yeongwoo explained as he confirmed the anchor in the sky.

But contrary to Yeongwoo's expectations, Lemu wore a baffled expression.

□ Families... can be established in various ways.

"What?"

□ Even if your mother were to die, it's still possible to—

Lemu was about to continue when he couldn't.

The massive anchor descending from the sky crashed onto Lemu's ship.

BOOOOOOM!

With a deafening roar, the four pillars projecting the protective barrier shook violently, and the bodyguards poised to attack Jiseon also turned their gaze skyward.

And then—

KA-BOOOOOOM!

Countless swords rained down from the heavens, overwhelming the bodyguards. A thunderous voice resounded from somewhere.

—I am the one born of the battlefield, master of the Hundred-Thousand Sword Mountain, and the Destroyer King, Dogo!

□

As soon as Lemu heard Dogo's voice, he quietly pressed his forehead in exasperation.

Then, carefully addressing the void, he asked,

□ Aren't you supposed to be under containment? What brings you here?

In response, a massive tombstone-shaped warship emerged, connected to the anchor by chains, as the voice boomed again.

—That matter has been resolved.

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 355: Supreme Armament (6)

Resolved.

There was no need to ask what the chairman meant by "resolved."

It was obvious.

'In the middle of being arrested? That means the police or someone else must have been trying to apprehend him. And yet, here he is?'

What on earth was the chairman's daily routine like?

Yeongwoo was at a loss for words.

'Does he commit crimes during the day and kill public officials who come for him at night?'

While Yeongwoo was muttering to himself, the gravestone-like bottom of the ship opened up, and the problematic businessman, Chairman Dogo, appeared.

—Lemu...!

As always, Dogo appeared clad in full-body Vesedel armor, wielding a massive sword.

From over 200 meters in the air, he dropped straight down.

Screeeeeeech!

He landed noisily right next to the iron anchor hooked onto Lemu's ship.

Boom!

The four pillars supporting the shield shook even more violently than before, prompting Lemu, seated on his throne, to speak in an annoyed tone.

□ Chairman, this is still a commercial zone.

In response, Dogo tapped the tip of his sword against Lemu's ship beneath his feet.

Thunk, thunk.

—I'm here for business, too.

□ ...!

Having dealt with Dogo many times before, Lemu's face stiffened instantly.

And just as expected—

CRASH!

With a deafening tearing sound, the ship Lemu had brought began splitting apart on both sides.

"What the hell...?"

Yeongwoo stared blankly into the air in disbelief.

The chairman was tearing apart a spaceship with nothing but a sword.

'Is that even possible?'

It was the sheer majesty of a Level 3 being under space law.

Or perhaps it was simply because he was Dogo.

Zap!

The shield that had surrounded the area instantly disappeared, and the suppressor that had paralyzed Yeongwoo also deactivated immediately.

Swish!

However, this wasn't because Lemu's ship was destroyed—it was simply because Lemu, who controlled the suppressor, could no longer pay attention to Yeongwoo.

Crash!

Having split the enormous ship from the ceiling to the bottom, Dogo was now charging toward Lemu.

—Your corpse won't even make good fertilizer!

Dogo, making a somewhat mechaphobic remark, swung his sword as Lemu sprang up from his throne, snapping his fingers.

Ping!

A massive mechanical hand emerged from the circuit-covered floor, attempting to grab Dogo.

□ Let's calm down, shall we?

Using the mechanical hand as a shield, Lemu quickly retreated.

However, Dogo sliced the hand apart with a single blow, and before its wreckage could even hit the ground, he had closed the distance to Lemu.

□ ...!

—Do you not see the royal insignia? Truly a lowly creature.

The Vesedel armor that Yeongwoo wore bore the royal insignia itself, so how dare Lemu issue threats?

But Lemu had a response.

□ Isn't it said that Vesedel acts faster with a sword than with words? I simply prevented you from using the sword to facilitate conversation.

In some ways, this wasn't entirely wrong.

Dogo proved Lemu's point by thrusting his sword forward instead of replying.

Screeeech!

As the chairman thrust the massive sword in his right hand forward, a large barrier rose from the floor to intercept the sword's trajectory.

Boom!

Of course, this barrier, too, was instantly shattered, but it seemed to be part of a premeditated plan.

Clang!

Only after raising the barrier did Lemu finally manage to block Dogo's sword, which he did while trembling violently, clutching a mechanical sword with both hands.

In contrast, the chairman still held his massive sword with one hand.

Watching this unfold, Yeongwoo realized something.

'Lemu can't withstand even a single direct strike from the chairman.'

Without the preemptive defense of the barriers, Lemu's body would have been torn to shreds.

In other words, without the circuits Lemu had prepared in advance, the battle wouldn't have even been possible.

'This... this is insane. Is this the difference between Level 3 and Level 4? Or is the chairman just that exceptional?'

Yeongwoo blinked in astonishment.

Meanwhile, Dogo glanced at Lemu's cape, which was visible beyond the trembling mechanical sword, and let out a laugh.

—Have you developed a new material? That cape looks impressive.

The silver-white cape made of cables caught his attention.

Seeing this, Lemu looked troubled.

Then Dogo swung his idle left hand, launching a hook punch.

Swish!

The chairman's body hook flew straight for Lemu's right flank.

□ ...!

Sensing the impending fatal blow, Lemu hurriedly summoned an iron barrier from the ground to defend himself, but it was insufficient to block the chairman's punch.

Crunch!

The thick barrier crumpled like tin foil, pushing into Lemu's right side.

Thud!

In the end, the chairman's body hook struck Lemu's right flank squarely.

As Lemu bent forward in pain, the chairman's sword swung in a sharp, violent arc.

"...Ah!"

Before Yeongwoo could finish his exclamation, Lemu's head was severed.

Slice!

"What the...?"

Yeongwoo gaped in disbelief at the spectacle before him, while the chairman casually kicked Lemu's decapitated head aside.

Then, without a word, Dogo pulled the cape from Lemu's limp body.

Swish!

—You've made something interesting in the meantime.

"C-Chairman?"

—Speak.

"Is this really okay? No matter what, Lemu is..."

The president of an interstellar mega-corporation.

The fact that such a man could be beaten to a pulp and killed was simply incomprehensible.

—Are you worried about the machine?

"Excuse me?"

—Lemu is a machine. That's why it doesn't wager its life in even a sacred duel. From the start, it has no life to lose.

"What do you mean?"

—Its consciousness is scattered within the Machine Tower, and its lowly body can be reproduced there as many times as necessary.

"Ah."

Yeongwoo finally understood.

This visit to Earth was, in short, merely Lemu's shell.

No matter what happened to it here, Lemu's existence itself wouldn't disappear.

'So it was a safe outing from the start.'

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

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However, the body itself must be quite costly, so there would still be some losses.

Sure enough, Chairman Dogo kicked Lemu's corpse around, inspecting it with admiration.

—Impressive. To think it dared withstand my blade.

That meant it had been impossible during their previous encounter.

—Military Chief.

At Dogo's call to the air, Desirak, the Military Affairs Chief, suddenly appeared from the halved remnants of Lemu's ship, sweeping aside his cloak.

He had been lying in wait nearby, concealed.

—Yes, Chairman.

When Desirak descended from above, Dogo handed him Lemu's cloak.

—Deliver this to Development, and confiscate all the junk.

The 'junk' the Chairman referred to included everything in the vicinity, from Lemu's body to the cubic ship and the electronic circuits scattered on the ground.

—Understood.

Upon receiving the order, Desirak scattered small metallic spheres onto the ground.

Flash!

The spheres emitted a blue light, scanning the surroundings and beginning to hologram Lemu's body.

Sssshh...

Everything in the area was being transferred somewhere.

'So when he said he was here for business, he wasn't lying.'

The ship alone and Lemu's body must hold tremendous value.

Yeongwoo finally began to understand how Dogo generated his revenue.

'...Honestly, this is just extortion.'

The fortunate part was that Lemu's bounty wasn't included in the company's seized goods.

'No way he'd take my meal ticket, right?'

While Yeongwoo mulled this over, Chairman Dogo approached him, his shadow towering ominously in the dark.

Thud, thud!

Yeongwoo made the first move.

"Chairman, are you all right? Of course, he's no match for you, but Lemu wasn't an ordinary opponent."

—The essence of all duels is facing death. But that machine doesn't confront death. That's why it belongs beneath my blade.

The Chairman then looked at the sword in his right hand.

—Cutting something filthy has left a stench.

Whoosh!

He flung his sword to the ground behind him.

Desirak glanced at the discarded blade and sent one of the spheres rolling toward it.

The sphere scanned the sword, beginning to hologram it.

"...!"

At that moment, Yeongwoo clearly saw it.

The blade of the Chairman's sword was partially damaged.

'Huh?'

Although it had seemed like he overwhelmed Lemu, something had clearly caused damage to his weapon during the process.

'So he was bluffing?'

Yeongwoo finally understood why the Chairman's card had the special effect "Saving Face."

Style over substance.

The Chairman was someone who would rather die than have his dignity compromised.

'Is this what it takes to sit at the pinnacle of the violence business?'

As Yeongwoo marveled at the Chairman's bravado, Jiseon, who had been standing imposingly, lowered her head as much as possible to bow.

—Chairman, I'm Yeongwoo's mother, Song Jiseon. It's an honor to meet someone of your stature.

Creak.

She pressed her ice scales tightly to her skin to reduce her bulk as much as possible. Dogo looked up at her and remained silent for a moment.

—...

Yeongwoo tilted his head before realizing.

'Is he deciding whether to use honorifics?'

While Desirak had addressed Jiseon as "Madam" earlier, Chairman Dogo was different.

Given the vast gap in status between him and Yeongwoo, using honorifics for Jiseon just because she was Yeongwoo's mother might seem ridiculous.

'But the Chairman is an illegitimate child. So maybe he has particular feelings about parents?'

Of course, those particular feelings could be an overwhelming rage.

At any rate, it was clear that the Chairman was unusually hesitant, and the result of his deliberation was...

—...It's a pleasure. Yeongwoo is doing well.

A ridiculously awkward piece of feedback.

Nodding his helmet once, the Chairman turned to Yeongwoo and hastily bid farewell.

—Lemu has lost its body on this planet today, and it will be reflected in the evaluation.

“Excuse me? Planet evaluation?”

Yeongwoo asked, but instead of answering, Dogo soared toward the Iron Anchor, leaving only a final piece of advice.

—Make sure you attend the dungeon tonight.

“The dungeon, sir?”

While Yeongwoo repeated the Chairman's words, his wrist suddenly emitted a brief alarm.

Beep!

Checking the time on his wrist, Yeongwoo saw it was already 9 p.m.

「The lodging service has begun.」

「From now on, all buildings classified as ‘residences’ are under the influence of the lodging system and are rendered inviolable.」

In two hours, the night dungeon would open.

The dungeon the Chairman mentioned must undoubtedly refer to this night dungeon.

“Chairman! What's going to happen in the dungeon tonight?”

Yeongwoo shouted, chasing after the Chairman, who was already atop the Iron Anchor. Finally, he received an answer.

—You'll meet your evaluation peers.

“...What?”

—Act in a way that doesn't disgrace the Vesedel insignia. If there's a problem, resolve it immediately.

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 356: Supreme Armament (7)

"You're talking about evaluation peers... Basically, aliens, aren't you, Chairman?"

Yeongwoo asked, but Dogo soared into the air with the steel anchor without another word.

Charrurururut!

His ship was preparing to leave Earth.

Yeongwoo skipped many steps and got straight to the point.

"Chairman! Won't there be problems later if I harm my peers?"

However, the anchor carrying the chairman had already disappeared into the ship.

Clang!

The bottom of the ship sealed, and the hull turned a brilliant white.

Paaaaaat!

Moments later—

Pit!

In the blink of an eye, Chairman Dogo's tombstone ship disappeared from Earth's orbit.

Staring blankly at the sky, Jiseon said to her son:

—Hey, what kind of technology is that? Don't you have something like that?

"How could a planet still struggling to develop have that kind of technology?"

A spaceship was in a completely different category of power—far beyond mythic swords or anything else.

Although Yeongwoo didn't even own a small space vessel yet, he instinctively understood.

To own a ship, you needed a proper family or a business enterprise.

"If you want technology like that, focus on getting married tomorrow without a hitch."

—What does marriage have to do with technology?

"It matters in space."

To avoid being dominated by other planets, you needed not only defensive power but also offensive capability.

In other words, a spaceship was essential.

'Is this why I end up marrying the Princess of the Sun? Just for a good spaceship...?'

He knew parts of the future, but ironically, those glimpses made his path feel even more uncertain.

What on earth was going to happen?

—So, what's left now? Shouldn't we head back?

Jiseon looked around as she spoke, and Yeongwoo replied while picking up the rewards left by Lemu.

"Yes, let's go back and prepare to pay taxes. But before that..."

As Yeongwoo registered the equipment Lemu had left into his catalog, he shifted his gaze to the violet tower in front of him.

A tooltip for this cosmic device appeared in his view—just like in Metal Seoul.

[Space Communicator]

| Connects to a space communications network within a specific range, allowing external communication.

| Communication range depends on the planet's grade. A fee must be paid to a relay station when activated.

"Wow, what? There's a space communications network?"

A system message appeared as he checked the tooltip and touched the communicator's surface.

「Change of authority detected.」

「Would you like to issue a new access card for the communicator?」

「If a new card is issued, the existing one will be destroyed.」

The previous card seemed to have been with the prior owner, Yuto, who was now presumably dead.

‘Well, obviously.’

Yeongwoo immediately issued a new card.

A palm-sized rectangular object materialized before him.

Swaaaat!

[Space Communicator Access Card] - General Tool

| Instantly activates the connected communicator's functions.

"Ohhh."

It felt like the communicator was an important piece of equipment.

Even the dimensional gate in Darwin, northern Australia, didn't have such remote controls.

However, as soon as Yeongwoo tried to activate the communicator, a restriction message popped up.

「The planet is under review, so connection to the communications network is blocked.」

"Wait, these bastards cut off the internet?"

He now had another reason to finish the planetary review quickly.

‘Why did Lemu set this up then? Was he just investing for a distant future?’

It was also possible that the communicator had functioned properly before Yeongwoo initiated the planetary review.

While the communication range was tied to the planet’s grade, even a low-grade planet should have some access to the network.

‘What about the rest?’

Yeongwoo noticed icons with unique tooltips scattered throughout Tokyo.

These were infrastructures Lemu had installed while sponsoring Yuto.

[City Shuttle Bike]

| Deploys bikes that allow fast travel between designated cities.

‘Oh, this feels like a downgraded version of the high-speed transit routes.’

[Mechanical Forge]

| Mass-produces basic equipment in a short time.

‘Huh.’

This was clearly the weaponry Lemu’s faction had used during the Tsushima War.

It turned out that those weapons had been produced here.

‘This could be useful for maintaining a standing army. I should invest in this once the treasury is filled up.’

With everything checked, Yeongwoo turned his attention to the high-speed transit station installed in Tokyo.

It was time to return to Seoul to prepare for taxes and dungeon challenges.

"It's time to head home."

—Is it really over now?

"Yes. Today's daytime work is all done."

—What do you mean daytime? It's 9 PM, you lunatic.

Yeongwoo glanced at his wristwatch and replied:

"My night starts at 10 PM."

With that, he walked toward the station.

* * *

10 PM.

The time when taxes—feared by every entrepreneur in the universe—were collected.

11 PM.

The start of extreme weather and nighttime dungeons, marking the real night.

As a result, Yeongwoo had almost no time to rest.

The best he could manage was a brief break between 9 PM and 11 PM after finishing most of his afternoon tasks.

—Wow, you live like this every day? You don't even need to go to hell for this kind of life.

The current time was 9:21 PM.

Finally returning to their hotel suite in Samseong-dong, Jiseon tossed a greatsword onto the living room floor.

Jeonggu and Yechan, who were already there, wore uncomfortable expressions.

—Ah, there were people here.

Seeing Yechan, who had arrived earlier, Yeongwoo brightened up.

"Oh, Yechan! How did it go?"

To Yeongwoo, Yechan was the most anticipated person.

After all, it was Yechan who traveled the entire planet, delivering wedding invitations, risking his life to collect debts, and purchasing ability-related equipment from various merchants.

"Yes... This time, the amount collected is 240 million Karma."

Yechan, whose face looked somewhat gaunt, kicked the iron box at his feet.

The box opened its mouth wide and started spitting out coins.

"I thought I might need something to carry things, so I bought a storage container from a merchant."

It wasn't on the level of a Golden Goblin, but it was still a storage container capable of subspace inventory.

"Wait, 240 million? That means you didn't just travel through China, right?"

Yeongwoo, who had been silently listening to Yechan's story, asked.

Yechan nodded in response.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

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"Yes. Since delivering the wedding invitations was the main mission, I went to almost every region I could immediately access."

Then, with a horrified expression, he stared at his spear.

"But in Mongolia... the disputes were so intense I had no choice but to duel."

"....."

Having gone through something similar in China, Yeongwoo could vividly picture the situation.

"...Well done. You're a true Golden Goblin."

Yeongwoo said this while instructing the actual Golden Goblin sitting next to the sofa to collect the funds.

— Keeet!

Shortly after, Yeongwoo's account balance reflected not 240 million but roughly 170 million.

Yechan had already taken out his 30% commission before handing over the money.

"...What about the equipment?"

Yeongwoo glanced at Yechan's hands, just in case.

He knew Yechan had worked hard, but with such a hefty commission paid, surely something more should come out of this.

As expected.

"I thought you'd say that."

Yechan let out a small sigh and pulled out a glove from the storage container.

"Like you mentioned, it's true that ability equipment isn't easy to come by."

"Just one?"

"...Luckily, there are two."

Yechan pulled out a pair of pants from the container as well.

"Oh."

For the first time, Yeongwoo's expression brightened.

「Mist's Touch」 – Unique Glove

【Increases sensory perception by 15% when visibility is obstructed.】

【10% Resistance to special Abilities.】

"What... 10% special resistance? Are you kidding me?"

Yeongwoo's jaw dropped.

Given his current equipment setup, the special ability resistance stat directly applied to all basic resistances.

As a result, Yeongwoo's current resistances looked like this:

|Fire Resistance: 15% 【60% Osmosis】

|Cold Resistance: 15% 【60% Osmosis】

|Lightning Resistance: 15% 【60% Osmosis】

|Poison Resistance: 15% 【60% Osmosis】

|Special Ability Resistance: 60%

|Dragon Resistance: 10%

The effects were overwhelmingly powerful.

On top of that, the armor catalog's progress was steadily building, and the third effect would soon be unlocked.

"What about the other one?"

Yeongwoo stretched out his hand, prompting Yechan to hand over the last piece of equipment.

「Unstoppable Stride」 – Relic Pants

【Increases physical damage by 15% while in motion.】

【Increases special ability damage by 15% while in motion.】

"While in motion? So it doesn't apply when stationary."

Of course, if he extended his blade for mid-range combat, the bonus would likely apply constantly.

The same went for archers firing while moving.

'If only there was one more special ability resistance stat, it'd be perfect.'

Still, if Yechan kept working hard every day, completing the special ability equipment set wouldn't be much of an issue.

"Tomorrow is the day to collect congratulatory gifts, so you don't need to handle any collection tasks. It's a tax-exemption day. However..."

"However what?"

"You need to gather equipment. Meet with some merchants before the ceremony starts tomorrow."

The wedding was scheduled for 3:23 PM.

Assuming the various awakened individuals from each country were sorted out by 2:00 PM, that left about an hour to spare.

— Are you really going to manage time down to the second?

Jiseon, who had been quietly listening, commented.

Yeongwoo turned toward his mother.

“We don’t know what might happen after tomorrow’s ceremony. So we have to do our best to prepare in advance.”

But the truth was, anything could happen at this very moment, too.

Because—

Tat-tat!

There was a small noise from inside the room, and soon, Kim Seok ran into the living room.

“Y-Yeongwoo...?”

“Yes, Madam. Is something wrong?”

Seok was the wife of Kim Taejoon, who was trapped in the Returnee’s Room.

She was one of the few people Yeongwoo treated with utmost respect.

Yet, Seok now wore a very complicated expression.

“You need to come see this. Right now...”

She gestured toward the bedroom where the television was set up, prompting Yeongwoo to ask urgently.

“Why? Did something happen?”

He was already rushing toward the bedroom.

Fwaaah!

As he crossed the living room and central corridor into the bedroom, the large television was already on.

On the screen was the pure white Returnee’s Room.

“Representative! Are you okay?”

Yeongwoo asked urgently, but Kim Taejoon’s voice from the television didn’t sound strained at all.

— Ah, Yeongwoo. The figurehead has finally been assembled.

Contrary to Yeongwoo's expectations, Kim's tone didn't suggest any danger. Instead—

— But... there's a problem.

“Yes, Representative. What is it?”

— The figurehead won't activate.

“What? Even though you've finished assembling it?”

— It requires a name. A family name.

“...!”

A family name.

As soon as Yeongwoo heard this, he felt it in his gut.

“Don't tell me... The purpose of that figurehead...”

Yeongwoo's eyes widened as he spoke.

Kim Taejoon then read the tooltip hovering above the completed figurehead.

— This figurehead is a fusion device capable of merging with ships. It can attach to specific objects, other ships, or, in rare cases, even planets.

“What did you say?”

— To enable interstellar travel, proof of ownership from a family or business is required. Please input the owner's seal or family name below.

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Chapter 357: Astronaut (1)

To acquire a ship for space traversal, proof of ownership by a family or business entity is essential...

Upon reading this formal statement, Yeongwoo's heart began to race.

‘A ship for space traversal.’

Finally, he was at the threshold of owning his own ship.

Of course, to construct the ship using that forward deposit, he either had to marry off his parents to establish a family or create a business entity himself.

‘Since I don’t yet know how to officially start a business, turning to the family route will be quicker.’

Currently, Yeongwoo was progressing through achievements related to founding a family.

Once his parents’ marriage was complete, the path to establishing a family would surely open up in some way.

And then, at that point, the ship could be officially commissioned.

—A family name? How can you put down a name when you don’t even have a family yet?

Jiseon, who had been watching TV with her son, asked this.

Yeongwoo scratched his chin.

“As you said, we can’t put it down just yet, but we should still think about it.”

—Think about what?

“A family name.”

The minimal background required to become a major figure in space.

In the chairman's case, he hailed from the royal family of Vesedel, though he hadn't been the one to choose the family name.

After all, being an illegitimate child of the royal family, there must have been a founder of the family and many kings before him.

However, Yeongwoo was lucky to have the chance to name his own family.

In effect, he held the qualifications of a family's founder.

"What would be good for our family name?"

Yeongwoo asked his mother.

Jiseon shrugged her shoulders.

—How should I know? It's your family in the end, isn't it?

"It's our family, Mother."

Yeongwoo emphasized once more.

[Noble Family: Restoration of Roots]

[Complete the following three missions. (1/3)]

-Obtain a mother and father.

-Reconcile your parents.

-Receive a blessing of existence from your complete parents.

Because the final step of the achievement 'Restoration of Roots' was to receive a blessing of existence from his complete parents, Yeongwoo was mentally preparing them in advance.

In Yeongwoo's mind, "complete parents" meant a physical family consisting of a wife, husband, and their only child, who also recognized this family bond emotionally.

"So, can I name the family whatever I want?"

As Yeongwoo said this, Jeonggu quietly appeared in the background.

He had been bothered by all this talk about families and had crept closer to listen.

"...What? What's going on?"

Jeonggu asked nervously, standing in the doorway.

Yeongwoo pointed at the ceremonial figure on the TV screen.

“After your wedding tomorrow, I’ll move forward with founding the family and building the ship. But we need a name for the family to use at that time.”

“A family name...?”

Jeonggu had a blank expression.

Then, glancing briefly at his wife, he muttered softly.

“Well, technically, we already have a name, don’t we?”

He was referring to Jinhyeon, Jiseon’s family of origin.

But Yeongwoo shook his head.

“This is our family. So, we need a new name. And besides, Father, you’re not even from the Jinhyeon family.”

Strictly speaking, Yeongwoo wasn’t part of the Jinhyeon family either.

Though some of that family’s blood ran through his veins, it was the Jinhyeon family that had decided to abandon him when he first appeared in this world.

“I want a name that relates to all three of us. One that also carries a bit of Earth’s uniqueness...”

Muttering to himself as he pondered, Yeongwoo suddenly widened his eyes.

Then, he pronounced a word that neither Jiseon nor Jeonggu could have ever expected.

“Renaissance.”

“...Huh?”

—What?

“How about Renaissance?”

Yeongwoo looked back and forth between his parents with an innocent expression.

Neither of them could say anything.

Renaissance of Bulgwang-dong.

The truth was, Yeongwoo didn’t yet fully understand what “Renaissance” meant.

Whether it was the name of the nightclub where his parents had first met, or the name of the motel where his conception had likely occurred due to “implied intent,” he didn’t know.

But his curiosity didn’t last long.

—You son of a bitch!

The moment Jiseon heard the name “Renaissance,” she pulled out a knife and tried to slash her husband.

Swoosh!

“Ah, wait, Jiseon! I didn’t do anything...!”

Jeonggu fell backward in shock at the sight of the knife, and in the chaos, Yeongwoo stepped in to block his mother’s blade.

Clang!

“Wait, seriously?! Were you actually trying to kill him?”

Yeongwoo, stunned by the sharpness of her strike, asked incredulously.

Jiseon exhaled a blue breath.

—Stop saying that cursed word.

“Is ‘Renaissance’ the name of a motel or something?”

—Kaaargh!

Jiseon, having completely lost her composure, no longer sounded human.

And this was Seoul, the very heart of the Korean Peninsula.

With the “guardian dragon” buff in effect, Jiseon’s power was immense.

—I swear, I’ll kill everyone!

Kwaaak!

[Translator - Night]

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As Jiseon screamed something close to a battle cry and swung her greatsword, Yeongwoo, who had been holding his mother's blade at bay until then, was flung across the room, landing on the opposite side of the bed.

"Ugh!"

The "friends" who had been watching the bedroom scene through the television reacted with shock.

—What's going on over there?

—Yeongwoo? Are you okay?

The friends outside the returnee's room were startled to realize there was another "monster" inside capable of overpowering Yeongwoo.

—...!

It was only then that Jiseon noticed the presence of an "outsider" in the room and withdrew her sword.

"---nyway, no. Use another name.

"Repeated exposure is one way to overcome trauma, you know."

Yeongwoo sat up and stared at the ceiling—dark and dim.

Perhaps the ceiling of the Renaissance that his parents had once looked up at, on that fateful day of their youth, had been just as black.

"I'm not saying we should decide right now. I'm just saying we should consider it."

For some reason, Yeongwoo liked the name Renaissance.

It was a name tied deeply to him, Jiseon, and Jeonggu, the three people who would form the first members of this family.

To Yeongwoo, it also felt like something close to a hometown.

Moreover—

'Renaissance. It's got a good meaning. And it's a word born on Earth, so it would even have uniqueness out there in space.'

Renaissance.

Originally referring to a cultural and artistic revival, in modern times, the word is also used when something experiences a resurgence or a second golden age.

In other words, it could symbolize Earth's revival—a hope for rebirth after reaching the brink of destruction through the “reset.”

‘The era of violent Renaissance. Earth and humanity will be reborn through fists.’

While silently reciting his own slogan, Yeongwoo suddenly had a thought and asked the TV screen:

“CEO, what did that tooltip for the bow figure say earlier? Something about planetary fusion?”

—Uh, yes. Hold on a moment.

CEO Kim Taejoon walked back over to the bow figure and reread the tooltip.

—It can attach to certain objects or other ships under specific conditions, and in rare cases, it can even fuse with planets.

“That’s it! Planetary fusion!”

Tat!

Yeongwoo dashed toward the TV, prompting the camera broadcasting the returnee’s room to elevate its angle and zoom in on the bow figure.

“If this thing can turn into a ship and it says it can fuse with a planet, what does that mean?”

—Well, that... uh...

CEO Kim Taejoon, being a rational person, could only stammer in confusion.

Yeongwoo supplied the answer himself.

“It means Earth can become a ship. I don’t know what the specific conditions are, but that’s what it’s saying.”

—What are you talking about? Earth turning into a ship?

This time, Jiseon interrupted.

She was terrified to think about what kind of insane scheme her son was concocting this time.

“I’ve been wondering why I’m supposed to marry the Princess of the Sun, and I think it’s because of that.”

—The ship...?

“Yes. To be precise, it’s because we need Earth to turn into a ship.”

—And why would marrying the Princess of the Sun have anything to do with that?

Jiseon asked, bewildered.

Yeongwoo walked over to the bedroom wall and turned on the room light.

Click.

“Because Earth needs a sun. But since we can’t afford to buy one, it seems like they sold me off instead.”

—What?

Jiseon no longer had the energy to argue at this point.

Yeongwoo added another comment.

“The fact that I’m going to marry the Princess of the Sun means that Earth’s ship transformation—which requires the sun—must be part of my future.”

—What crazy thing are you saying now?

“And for Earth to transform into a ship, a family is essential. But since your wedding is tomorrow, that means I won’t have a family until at least then, right?”

—...That’s true?

“So that means, at the very least, until today and tomorrow—until the ceremony ends—I’m hard to kill.”

—...Is that how that works?

“Yes. The records show that the moment when I marry the Princess of the Sun is inevitable.”

Strictly speaking, it was “an extremely high probability.”

Therefore, as long as Yeongwoo advanced toward the future laid out by fate, the statement that he “wouldn’t die” could also hold true—“at an extremely high probability.”

“Mother, all the forces of the universe are aligning in my favor. Today, the chairman also said I could do whatever I wanted, and fate says I’m hard to kill until tomorrow.”

—I was there, and the chairman never said that.

“Tonight and at the wedding tomorrow, nothing I do will matter. In any case, all of this is to gather as much money as possible to upgrade Earth into a ship and marry the Princess of the Sun.”

As if to declare his plans to fate itself, Yeongwoo gazed up toward the ceiling.

Jiseon shook her head.

—This bastard has truly lost his mind.

Her crazy son was now negotiating with fate itself—fate that may not even have a consciousness.

—You’re going to end up dead, you know. I’m worried about you, Yeongwoo.

As Jiseon voiced her genuine concern, a system notification suddenly appeared in everyone’s view.

Flash!

—Taxes will be collected starting at 10:00 PM.

—Anyone with unpaid taxes will be immediately terminated at the time of collection.

[Translator - Night]

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Chapter 358: Astronaut (2)

In the universe, there's a tagline that goes, "Interest rates cheaper than death."

The idea is that if you fail to pay your taxes, you'll be annihilated instantly, so loan companies urge you to borrow money from them to pay your taxes.

That's how absolute taxes are in space, and Yeongwoo had never seen anyone who failed to pay them.

Even someone as rebellious as the so-called "shadow of the universe's law" would probably pay their taxes.

That's how strict it was.

'But seriously, who's even using all this tax money?'

As one of Earth's top taxpayers, Yeongwoo couldn't help but wonder.

Who was using all this collected tax money, for what purpose, and how?

Generally, taxes are public funds, so they are used for the public good—maintaining roads and streetlights, covering public employees' salaries and operating expenses, and so on.

'Ah, probably to hire replacements for all the public officials who keep dying.'

Yeongwoo answered his own question.

Considering how many villains like the Chairman existed in the universe, a significant portion of the funds likely went into handling the disasters they caused.

Now, one question remained.

'So... who's spending it?'

While institutions like the National Tax Office existed, it was unclear if there was something akin to a Ministry of Finance in the universe.

What Yeongwoo was really curious about was whether there was some entity that oversaw it all—something like a president of the universe.

'Doesn't seem like it's typesetting, though...'

From what he'd seen, even the Chairman—who casually killed public officials over inheritance tax disputes—never ignored taxes.

This meant even lawless figures had a line they wouldn't cross: taxes.

‘Nobody dares defy taxes. That means there’s an overwhelming force behind it.’

But what was the source of that force?

Why could someone beat up a tax collector but not refuse to pay taxes outright?

What sat at the top of this universal governance?

—Tax collection will now commence.

The tax notice cut off Yeongwoo’s train of thought.

Moments later, his tax statement appeared before his eyes.

| Calculated Tax: 138,290,000

Acquisition Tax: 11,530,000

| Deductibles: Dependents

| Final Tax: 117,540,000

Acquisition Tax: 9,800,000

Acquisition tax due in 23 hours, 59 minutes

The total amount, including acquisition tax, was just shy of 130 million Karma.

‘I’ve officially reached the point where I’m paying taxes in the hundreds of millions.’

Even though he was about to lose an enormous amount of money, Yeongwoo didn’t feel bad at all.

His bank account was in good shape, and the more taxes he paid, the better his chances of becoming a planetary stakeholder someday.

Available Karma: 1,104,309,405

Defense Funds Available: 0

Yeongwoo’s total wealth amounted to roughly 1.1 billion Karma.

However, as promised to the Strongest Swords, half of the money earned during the Naked War had to be used for public purposes.

This meant 400 million was essentially public funds, leaving his effective wealth at 700 million.

'I'll have to invest some of the public funds into upgrading Metal Seoul... that should work.'

It might also be worth considering using the forge Lemu left behind to supply Seoul with equipment.

After calculating his finances, Yeongwoo paid the full tax amount without hesitation.

Flash!

In an instant, 127,340,000 Karma was deducted, reducing his balance to the 9 billion range.

* Available Karma: 976,969,405

* Defense Funds Available: 0

"Everyone else is good, right?"

Yeongwoo asked, just to be sure, and everyone nodded in agreement.

After all, anyone with issues had likely already been annihilated and wasn't present in the room.

"Alright, then..."

Yeongwoo scanned the room, checking on everyone, which included a more diverse group than before.

Jiseon, Jeonggu, Yechan, and Seok, along with Kim Taejoon's family.

"Everyone seems to be doing well. I'm going to catch a bit of sleep now."

He had less than an hour for some shut-eye.

Glancing at his wristwatch, Yeongwoo lay down on the bed.

Jiseon, who had been staring at him, stepped back, and as always, Jeonggu cautiously approached and asked:

"When should I wake you? Are you heading to the dungeon again today?"

"Yes, of course. I absolutely need to go today."

According to the Chairman, today's dungeon was different.

It would be the first nighttime dungeon Yeongwoo entered since starting the planetary evaluation.

With his curiosity as a universal ranker, Yeongwoo wouldn't miss it, even if someone tried to stop him.

"Apparently, there'll be other evaluation candidates. The Chairman said so, so it must be true."

"Evaluation candidates? You mean for planetary evaluation?"

"Yes. There must be other planets undergoing evaluation. Their representatives are coming too."

"So, aliens?"

"Exactly."

"What are you supposed to do with those... aliens in the dungeon?"

Jeonggu, having some experience accompanying Yeongwoo to dungeons, couldn't help but wonder.

"No idea. Maybe we'll have a battle for additional promotions or something."

A frightening thought, but one entirely plausible in this universe.

"We'll find out soon enough. If I don't wake up even after the extreme weather alarm, wake me by force."

"...Got it."

As Jeonggu responded, Yeongwoo had already closed his eyes and begun to sleep.

* * *

At exactly 11:00 PM, the time Yeongwoo had been waiting for arrived, accompanied by an extreme weather alert.

「Extreme Weather Alert: Lightning Storm Detected」

"!"

As soon as the alarm sounded, Yeongwoo bolted upright.

He immediately began scanning his equipment catalog for gear to withstand the storm.

「Eye of the Typhoon」 - Epic Necklace

【Ignores extreme weather of the wind type.】

It was a necklace he'd earned as a reward for a nocturnal achievement.

Since it negated all wind-based weather effects, it would likely work against the lightning storm as well.

‘None of these rewards go to waste.’

Having prepared for the weather, Yeongwoo got up.

At that moment, he encountered his father walking toward the room.

"Oh, you're already awake."

"And you're walking over in this storm? What if I'd overslept?"

"...What?"

"I'm heading out. If I'm meeting fellow candidates, I can't be late."

With Bastard at his hip, clad in full Vesedel Armor, and accompanied by Golden Goblin and shadowy Pofu Tenta, Yeongwoo checked his equipment one last time and stepped out of his room.

Click.

The moment he entered the hotel corridor, ominous noises greeted him.

Crackle! Zap!

The lightning storm outside was affecting even the hotel's interior.

‘Crazy. Anyone who went outside for even a second must've been killed.’

The corridor floor seemed to warp underfoot as if a lens distorted it.

The entire exterior space was saturated with immense energy.

Yet the hotel elevator was still operational, and Yeongwoo risked riding it down to the lobby despite the storm raging outside.

‘Times like this really feel like the apocalypse.’

Lightning arced above the elevator call button.

Though it felt more like a lightning attribute than a wind one, Yeongwoo wasn't harmed at all—thanks to the storm being classified as "wind."

Ding!

The elevator doors slid open, and at the far end of the lobby, Negwig was waiting.

‘This really feels like going to work.’

Especially since today's mission involved the planetary evaluation, it could be considered an external duty.

"Let's go. Whatever it is, today won't be ordinary."

Yeongwoo mounted Negwig, and Golden Goblin and Pofu Tenta climbed onto its back.

"Take me to Gwangjin-gu. It's dungeon time again."

-Screech!

As soon as Yeongwoo patted Negwig's neck, the creature dashed out of the hotel like a bolt of lightning.

Boom!

Just like always, Yeongwoo was engulfed by the immense speed, but this time, a raging thunderstorm greeted him outside.

CRASH!

‘What the...’

Yeongwoo's pupils dilated as he stared at the sky.

Massive lightning whirlwinds, each hundreds of meters in diameter, writhed over various parts of the city.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

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‘And they don’t even graze the residential areas?’

For the first time in a while, Yeongwoo felt a sense of awe.

Until now, he'd been too preoccupied figuring out how to navigate the extreme weather to notice.

But now, his perspective had broadened enough to take in the phenomenon itself.

‘How is that even possible? I’d bet my company’s entire resources couldn’t develop this kind of technology.’

It was a wide-scale assault that affected every nook and cranny of the building corridors, yet, beyond the thin line of a single door labeled "residential area," there wasn’t a hint of damage.

And every day, such attacks came in different forms in this world.

Which meant that someone out there in the universe had designed and implemented all of this.

‘Is there really an all-powerful god in the universe?’

Standing in awe of a deity whose existence he couldn't confirm, matters like his parents' wedding scheduled for 3:23 PM the next day or the venue's 1.22 billion Karma balance seemed utterly trivial.

‘If I had power like that... I wouldn’t have to deal with all these money leeches!’

Boom, boom!

The steel horse carrying Yeongwoo kicked its legs with even more vigor.

Soon, Gwangjin-gu appeared ahead, shrouded in the lightning storm.

“I’ll open the dungeon right away. As usual, you probably won’t be able to enter this time either.”

When Yeongwoo said this and gestured for the goblin to take out the orb, the goblin, squinting against the lightning storm, fumbled nervously in its dimensional pouch.

-Squeak!

The goblin handed over an orb that started turning pitch black the moment it was drawn from the pouch.

Taking the orb, Yeongwoo leaped off Negwig.

Thud!

Surprisingly, before his feet even touched the ground, a dark field began to unfold from the orb.

Whoosh!

“Huh?”

An all-too-familiar sensation.

It was the void.

‘What... what’s going on?’

「At the request of planetary inspectors, this dungeon is now linked to the waiting room of the Planetary Administration Bureau’s Inspection Division.」

A warp utilizing the void had opened.

“Wait, what? How can it just connect like that? Shouldn’t you get my permission first?”

Yeongwoo shouted angrily, but his voice was drowned out by the roaring lightning storm.

Instead, a short notification followed:

「Commencing transport.」

Before Yeongwoo could protest further, his body was sucked into the dark void.

“Ugh...!”

This was nothing like the portals typically used to enter dungeons.

Though time seemed frozen, the suffocating sensation of holding one’s breath pressed down on his entire body.

When the unpleasant feeling finally subsided, his vision was filled with polished stone tiles.

Thud!

Yeongwoo let out a pained yell as his forehead smacked against the floor.

“...Ugh!”

Caught mid-air during transport, Yeongwoo had fallen flat as soon as the warp ended.

But where was this?

According to the chairman, this was where he'd meet his inspection peers.

“...!”

Sensing movement ahead, Yeongwoo quickly regained his composure and shot to his feet.

Shing!

Drawing his mythical sword, Bastard, he shouted:

“Come at me! I'm the one and only...!”

But the only figure in the stark white waiting room was a single individual.

-Please, calm down...!

A hulking knight with shoulders spanning at least two meters.

The figure stood around five meters tall but appeared shorter since they were crouched awkwardly on a small bench.

Even seated, they were taller than Yeongwoo.

“What... Just you?”

Yeongwoo eyed the figure suspiciously.

Now that he looked closer, something was off about them.

They wore a thick suit of armor that completely covered their body, but the headpiece wasn't solid.

Instead, it was filled with something that looked like a semi-melted caramel—a blend of liquid and jelly-like texture.

In other words, a caramel-coated knight was sitting in front of him.

“What the...”

An alien.

No doubt about it.

Plop.

The caramel knight kept dripping some kind of sweat or liquid from its armor.

-Ah, apologies.

As the yellowish liquid seeped through the armor's waist, the alien used a handkerchief in its left hand to wipe it away.

"...Are you sick or something? Should you even be here right now?"

Yeongwoo asked, half-seriously, prompting the caramel-like head to twist into a spiral.

-I-I'm sorry. I tend to sweat a lot when I'm nervous.

"Oh, I see."

Realizing it was just sweat, Yeongwoo nodded.

He also learned something else.

While the alien had no eyes, nose, or mouth to express emotions, its entire head reacted to its feelings instead.

'So this guy can't play mind games, huh?'

Reassured by the surprisingly novice-like demeanor of his first opponent, Yeongwoo relaxed slightly.

"Am I the second to arrive?"

-Oh, y-yes.

The caramel knight wiped its sweat again before turning its caramel head toward Yeongwoo.

'Wait, so this guy wasn't even looking at me while talking?'

-I came early, just in case I was late.

"Yeah, but where are the others?"

-They should be here soon.

Plop.

The early bird dripped more of its bodily substance.

Yeongwoo decided it was time to exchange names.

“Well, since we’re stuck here, why don’t we introduce ourselves...”

Just then, the system sent a message.

Beep!

「This is the waiting room. To prevent any mishaps, all participants are requested to remain seated.」

‘Remain seated?’

Come to think of it, the caramel knight had been sitting on a bench the whole time.

It must have received this instruction upon arrival and followed it dutifully.

“Remain seated, huh...”

Yeongwoo looked around.

The spacious room was lined with long benches and wide chairs along the walls.

The system sent another message:

「Royalty, please take a bench. All other participants, please use the chairs.」

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 359: Astronaut (3)

"What the hell?"

Yeongwoo frowned deeply.

But no other response came from the empty space he glared at.

Only this:

「Royalty, please take a bench. All other participants, please use the chairs.」

The same message as before appeared once again.

‘Is it telling me to shut up and just follow orders?’

Irritated by the blatant discrimination, Yeongwoo turned to the caramel knight.

"Excuse me."

-Yes?

"Forgive me for asking, but are you royalty?"

-Huh...?

The caramel knight's yellowish head morphed into a wide circular shape.

He then alternated his gaze between the bench he sat on and Yeongwoo's feet, as if to say, 'Can't you tell by the fact I'm on the bench?'

-I am Aldo, the second prince of the Shelbir Royal Family from the planet Doatel.

A second prince, hailing from a place called the planet Doatel.

He remained seated on the bench, bowing politely with folded arms and only inclining his waist.

“.....”

Yeongwoo quietly observed the prince's greeting before stepping toward him with purposeful strides.

Clank, clank.

At that moment, the system issued a warning.

「Combat in the waiting room is strictly prohibited.」

"Oh no, nothing like that."

Yeongwoo grinned widely.

He sheathed his sword back at his waist and extended a hand to Aldo, the prince from Doatel.

"I'm Jeong Yeongwoo07 from Earth."

-Earth...?

Hearing a planetary name for the first time, Aldo's head quivered like jelly.

"Yes, it's an obscure planet you wouldn't have heard of yet."

Yeongwoo gave a bitter smile and approached Aldo again.

-Wha... What?

Startled, Aldo twisted his head into a spiral shape and leaned as far back as he could.

But Yeongwoo simply matched the distance with another step forward, rendering the effort useless.

"I'm not going to hit you. It's our first meeting, so I just wanted to shake hands."

---Shake hands?

As Aldo echoed his words, Yeongwoo extended his right hand.

"Just take my hand with your right one. On Earth, this gesture means 'Let's not fight and get along.'"

-Ah.

Although Aldo's head was still tightly twisted, it seemed he wasn't so alarmed as to refuse a handshake.

-That's... a good gesture.

Eventually, Aldo extended his massive, armored hand and completely enveloped Yeongwoo's hand, much like grabbing a handle.

Grip.

The size difference between their hands—easily more than double—made this inevitable.

"Pleasure to meet you, Prince Aldo."

As Yeongwoo gently shook their clasped hands, Aldo's twisted head started to unwind slightly.

-Then... may I call you Mr. Yeongwoo?

"Of course."

Yeongwoo replied cheerfully, then withdrew his hand from Aldo's grip.

And then—

'Why are there so many benches? Are there really that many royals in the universe?'

Truthfully, Yeongwoo wanted to sit on a bench too.

Though he didn't have royal blood in his veins, the Authenticity he was wearing carried the insignia of the Vesedel royal family.

【Vesedel Royal Family's Protection】

This armor substitutes for a royal insignia.

'Damn it, if I have a royal insignia, I'm basically royalty.'

Even so, Yeongwoo opted for a chair instead of the bench.

He figured it was wiser to observe how things unfolded before making a move.

'I still don't fully understand why I'm here. Let's hear the rules before deciding anything.'

It was around then that the third participant finally appeared.

Whoosh!

Emerging from the same dark void as Yeongwoo was a golem with a body made entirely of rock.

-Oh.

With a voice as heavy as his appearance, the third participant alternated his gaze between Yeongwoo and Aldo.

Then he cautiously stepped back, surveying his surroundings.

'Looks like he's a cautious one too.'

As Yeongwoo studied the third participant with interest, the system displayed the same instructions as before.

「This is the waiting room. To prevent any incidents, all participants are asked to take a seat.」

Incidents—probably referring to fights between participants.

"Royals sit on benches, everyone else on chairs,"

Yeongwoo helpfully relayed the rules, prompting the golem to silently plant himself on a nearby chair.

-Why bother distinguishing seats for royalty?

The golem glanced back and forth between his chair and the benches, visibly displeased.

Representing his planet here, he felt slighted by the preferential treatment.

And then—

Whoosh!

The void opened once more, ejecting the fourth participant.

Boom!

With a heavy thud, the new arrival landed.

‘...Huh?’

It was an owlbear, straight out of a game—a massive bear with the head of an owl.

What stood out were the numerous tattoos covering its entire body.

Yeongwoo speculated they were likely substitutes for equipment.

‘There’s no way they’d walk around without even pants unless there’s a reason for it.’

The only items the newcomer carried were several bracelets on their wrists and a large hammer in one hand.

The two long, colorful feathers extending from where ears would typically be likely indicated...

-Greetings, everyone. I am Amana, guardian of the sacred planet Sutral.

‘...That’s a gender marker.’

The moment Amana spoke, Yeongwoo realized she was female.

Her voice wasn’t necessarily higher-pitched like a human’s, but something animalistic about it made her gender unmistakable.

Those vibrant feathers were the equivalent of sexual dimorphism in Earth’s animals.

Once again, the seating instructions were broadcast.

「This is the waiting room. To prevent any incidents, all participants are asked to take a seat.」

-Seat?

With movements exuding dignity, Amana surveyed her surroundings.

Upon hearing the instructions, she furrowed her brows—well, the space between her beak.

「Royalty, please sit on the bench. Other participants, please use the chairs.」

-Ridiculous.

Amana was clearly not royalty either.

-Why create seating disparities? Isn’t this the real cause of conflict?

She directed her sharp words at the empty air, then cast her large shadow over a chair in the corner.

Whatever the system’s logic, she saw no point in defying it, especially since others were already complying.

Boom!

Amana sat down with her head and beak held high, when suddenly a white sphere descended from somewhere high above, beyond sight.

Swoosh...

Approximately five meters in diameter, the sphere descended to a level where everyone in the room could see it clearly before speaking.

—Greetings, planetary examination candidates!

"Huh? It talks?"

-What?

-...?

-Was that... the sphere?

Yeongwoo and the others in the room looked on in astonishment. And then—

—I am the administrator of this space, Waiting Room 023. You can call me ‘Vito.’

When the mysterious sphere introduced itself as ‘Vito,’ the other waiting participants surprisingly all greeted it in unison.

-Ah, Mr. Vito.

-Pleased to meet you, Vito.

-Nice to meet you. So you’re our administrator.

The only one who felt a tinge of unease in the situation was Yeongwoo.

‘What the... are these guys idiots?’

Sure, being polite is fine and all, but this seemed a bit over the top.

Meanwhile, Vito continued speaking.

—Those of you gathered in Waiting Room 023 will now form a team and be deployed to the Promotion Hall.

-The Promotion Hall...?

-What’s that?

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

As expected, the term Promotion Hall sparked reactions from the participants, and Vito was quick to provide an explanation.

—An important factor in planetary promotion is the abilities of the representative who applies for the promotion.

—Thus, representatives from planets that have passed the first screening undergo further evaluation in the Promotion Hall. Planets that pass this second screening earn additional opportunities for promotion.

Additional opportunities for promotion.

In other words, the planet's rank could increase further.

'Crazy. So that means Earth passed the first screening.'

And the same applied to the other planets represented here.

"What exactly will be evaluated in the Promotion Hall?"

Yeongwoo asked, raising his hand.

Everyone else in the room turned to look at him, and Vito answered.

—The Promotion Hall assess a representative's judgment, combat skills, diplomacy, and other abilities essential for planetary management.

At that moment, Vito extended a large map from the lower part of its sphere-like body.

Fwoosh!

—A total of 50 teams will compete in the Promotion Hall, showcasing their skills as planetary representatives. Only the top five teams in terms of score will qualify for additional promotion opportunities.

'Oh, my god.'

Fifty teams.

Since there were four people in Waiting Room 023, this meant a total of 200 participants, many of them likely aliens, would be thrown into some chaotic situation.

'Five out of 50 teams... They're saying we have to make it into the top 10%.'

How would they determine these scores, though?

Vito displayed a guide to clarify.

—The second screening will last six hours. During this time, your goal is to earn as many points as possible through activities within the Promotion Hall.

Activities within the Promotion Hall.

Yeongwoo was starting to piece it together.

The “world map” now floating in mid-air was dotted with icons resembling monsters, along with shields and shop symbols.

‘Basically, they’re saying all 50 teams will drop into this place and have a battle royale.’

Most likely, points could be earned by taking down other participants, monsters, or completing certain objectives.

‘This is going to be a mess.’

Even with 200 humans, such a setting would be chaotic, let alone representatives from various planets.

The scenario was hard for him to imagine.

—This is Waiting Room 023, so your team will also be designated as ‘Team 023.’

Vito calmly explained the team name.

Then it revealed a peculiar detail about this team.

—For this screening, teams have been assigned based on their Karma Scores.

-What?

-Karma Scores?

-What exactly does that mean?

—The average Karma Score of all teams entering the Promotion Hall is set to zero.

“What?”

Yeongwoo blurted out in shock, immediately understanding what this meant.

The strange behavior of the other members when Vito first appeared.

The overly passive and virtuous impression of the caramel-colored knight, Aldo, who seemed almost unnaturally kind.

‘No way. Don’t tell me...’

Yeongwoo glanced at his three teammates one by one.

Their faces revealed no trace of malice, inner darkness, or inferiority.

‘Don’t tell me... am I the only piece of trash here?’

Yeongwoo frantically searched his belongings for a Karma Meter, but it was nowhere to be found.

Of course, it was likely still back in Gwangjin-gu, braving lightning storms in the hands of the Golden Goblin.

‘What’s my Karma Score right now?’

Just as he was asking himself that, Vito spoke again.

—However... there is something noteworthy about Team 023 that I must inform you of in advance.”

-What is it?

-Is it something problematic?

-As long as it doesn’t put us at a disadvantage during the screening, it doesn’t matter.

The other three members, excluding Yeongwoo, were curious about what this “noteworthy” aspect was, and Vito cautiously continued.

—While all teams have been assigned randomly to ensure an average Karma Score of zero...

‘Ah.’

Yeongwoo shut his eyes tightly, already guessing what would come next.

And then.

—Team 023 has an unusually high variance in Karma Scores due to one participant with an exceptionally high negative score.

—We’re notifying you in advance so you can coordinate and avoid issues in the Promotion Hall.

Coordinate and avoid issues... It was likely advice on how to adapt to the differing methods needed to solve problems when dealing with someone with such a high negative Karma Score.

-How big is the variance?

-The average is still zero, right?

-Who's the one with such a high negative score? How high is it?

All three, confident it wasn't them, bombarded Vito with questions.

In response, Vito silently turned to face Yeongwoo.

—.....

“...?”

Or at least, Yeongwoo felt as though the featureless sphere, Vito, was staring right at him.

Finally, Vito announced its decision.

—I will disclose the details.”

—The highest negative Karma Score in Team 023 is...

Gulp.

Yeongwoo audibly swallowed.

And then, Vito revealed the astronomical figure.

—One hundred million.

-One hundred million?

-Are you saying 100 million?

—Seventy six million.

-What?

-...Huh?

—Among Team 023, one participant possesses a Karma Score of approximately negative 176 million. As a result, the other three members were automatically assigned due to their overwhelmingly high positive Karma Scores.

At this, the three alien teammates gasped, covering their mouths in disbelief.

Even Aldo, the second prince of the Shelbir royal family, began sweating profusely.

-Th-that's almost 200 million.

-That's insane. How does someone even get a negative score in the hundreds of millions?

-176 million is practically 200 million...

Unable to take it anymore, Yeongwoo shot to his feet and screamed.

Fweeeeeeeek!

“You idiots! Since when is 176 million the same as 200 million?!”

[TL/N: Knew this guy would fuck up somewhere. 🤡]

[PR/N: Backbencher class clown with teacher's pets.]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

Chapter 360: Between Good Karma and Bad Karma (1)

-Huff.

-Huh...?

The sudden action by Yeongwoo made the members of Squad 023 flinch in unison.

Then, one of them cautiously spoke.

-Yeongwoo...?

Aldo, the second son of the Shelbir royal family, hesitantly called Yeongwoo's name.

-Could it be... Yeongwoo?

It finally dawned on him.

The only person in their squad with an overwhelming amount of negative karma, rumored to have come from Earth, was none other than Jeong Yeongwoo.

“Yeah, damn it! I’m the most evil person in this room!”

As Yeongwoo introduced himself, he brandished his demonic sword Bastard at everyone in the room.

The other three squad members pressed themselves against the walls, their eyes wide with shock.

-Yo... Yeongwoo, was it? Let’s calm down for now.

Amana, the Guardian of Sacred Planet Patrol, spoke in a trembling voice, her beak slightly quivering.

Yeongwoo’s face, already brimming with anger, twisted further, now fully resembling a villain.

“Do I look like I can calm down right now? All three squadmates I’m about to head into battle with are saints! This is ridiculous!”

It was a problematic situation no matter how you looked at it.

Judging by the attitudes of the other three squad members and their “overwhelming” positive karma levels, it was clear they had no aptitude for the battlefield.

Sure, on their home planets, being virtuous might have earned them the status of sages, but on a battlefield, they were utterly useless.

‘These guys must have been the biggest rejects out of the 200 squads. Normally, they would’ve been scattered among teams as deadweight. But because of my insane negative karma, they’re all lumped together with me.’

Still, wasn’t this his own karma coming back to bite him?

If he hadn’t accumulated so much negative karma, he wouldn’t have been assigned to a squad like this in the first place.

“Ha...”

And it wasn’t like he could beat them up just because they were too virtuous.

Yeongwoo felt an overwhelming sense of despair.

“I have to fight with these people in the promotion grounds?”

Yeongwoo muttered in frustration, prompting Amana to speak up in a slightly irritated tone.

-You're being exceedingly rude.

“What did you just say?”

Already enraged, Yeongwoo pointed Bastard at Amana, but she swung the hammer in her hand to deflect the blade.

Clang!

-Do you even understand why we're here? Everyone in this room is a planetary guardian. We're more than capable of protecting ourselves.

Amana's brilliant plumage shook violently as she spoke, causing Aldo to nervously coil himself even tighter.

At that moment, Yeongwoo's expression changed.

“Exactly, Amana! This is it!”

He suddenly approached Amana with a strange glint in his eye, excitement bubbling over.

-W-What?

“Just do what you did just now in the promotion grounds! As soon as you see an enemy, bash their heads in with your hammer!”

Amana's expression twisted in alarm, and she frantically waved her hands.

-W-What are you talking about? Our patrols...

Amana's stiff plumage suddenly drooped.

-We follow a non-lethal doctrine.

Non-lethal.

A principle of refraining from taking lives.

To someone like Yeongwoo, preparing for the chaos of the promotion grounds, there was no scarier phrase.

“What the hell?! Then why are you even here?!”

Outraged, Yeongwoo tried to grab Amana by the collar, but a nearby golem, panicking, intervened and stood between them.

-P-Please, calm down!

Even in this chaos, the golem’s voice was filled with such kindness that it only made Yeongwoo even more furious.

“Don’t tell me you’re all non-lethal too, huh?”

Eyes blazing, Yeongwoo shot a glare at the other two squadmates.

The golem hesitated, glancing at Aldo as if to defer the question.

Aldo, too, stammered.

-We... We are advocates of peace...

“Oh, for crying out loud!”

Yeongwoo nearly threw his demonic sword Bastard to the ground in frustration but barely stopped himself in time.

He couldn’t risk damaging the national treasure bestowed upon him by the chairman.

Instead, he considered throwing the item in his left hand—a sacred artifact of the Red Foot Brothers—but hesitated again.

“What are you going to do in the promotion grounds, huh? Wave your hands at enemies swinging swords and tell them to stop?”

Yeongwoo’s exasperation prompted Amana to rise to her feet.

-It’s possible to subdue an opponent without taking their life.

“No, that depends on the opponent!”

Yeongwoo clutched his forehead in frustration.

Still, there was some credibility to Amana’s words.

Her earlier swing with the hammer had been impressively strong.

But the other two...

“Seriously, Prince Aldo. If you’re not willing to kill or even beat someone up, how did you manage to obtain planetary guardian status?”

Reaching this stage of planetary evaluation meant that, at some point, internal conflict or even war had occurred on their planet.

Yet...

-Um...

There were exceptions.

-Our planet applied for the promotion evaluation to secure additional development areas for producing more relief supplies.

“...What?”

Yeongwoo couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“What do you mean, relief supplies?”

-Doatel is one of the interstellar relief centers. The more we help neighboring planets, the higher our planet’s rank rises.

“You’re kidding, right?”

As someone who thrived in the business of violence, Yeongwoo couldn’t even fathom such a concept.

A part of the universe was apparently dedicated to good deeds and altruism.

“Listen, sir... If you keep living like that, one day you’re going to run into someone like me, and they’ll clean you out completely.”

Yeongwoo’s voice carried genuine concern, prompting Aldo to smile for the first time since arriving.

His face formed a perfect oval as he replied.

-But you haven’t cleaned me out yet, Yeongwoo.

“You...!”

Yeongwoo swallowed the curse that instinctively rose to his lips.

Even a villain with a towering 170 million negative karma couldn't bring himself to insult someone radiating such pure-hearted goodness.

"Anyway... Since we're already here, we need to pass the second promotion evaluation, right? More importantly, we need to survive."

He stopped short of adding, so you can continue your relief work, finding the words too cringeworthy.

-Yes. For the sake of Doatel, we must survive. My older brother is unwell, so I'm the most likely successor.

"Unbelievable..."

A life story more absurd than anything he'd imagined.

'But does caramel's poor health mean it's so runny it just drips everywhere?'

Yeongwoo scanned the waiting room again, wondering if this might all be some elaborate prank.

Meanwhile, Aldo, the second son of the Shelbir royal family from the planet Doatel, spoke in a tone befitting a solemn sage.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]

-It's true that I was a bit surprised by your karmic debt of 200 million, Yeongwoo. But didn't you ultimately manage to restore balance?

According to the earlier briefing, the karmic debt of the current 023 Group had almost reached zero.

In other words, it was thanks to Yeongwoo, burdened with an enormous karmic debt, that people with immense karmic merits were all gathered in this group.

Chances were that the highest karmic debtor and the greatest karmic benefactors among the promotion candidates were all in this group.

-I see this as another of the system's preparations. It's an inevitability dictated by karma. And perhaps, it's also a chance for you, Yeongwoo, to earn some karmic merit.

Swoosh.

Aldo spread his arms as if to warmly welcome Yeongwooo.

Now that he thought about it, Aldo hadn't carried any weapons from the beginning.

'This guy came here planning to freeload from the start.'

Though Yeongwooo was deeply cynical, he couldn't entirely dismiss part of what Aldo had said.

Hadn't Lemu once said this?

「According to the law of causality, all events in the universe possess inherent rationality and tend to form patterns based on karma.」

All things are governed by cause and effect, so the deeds of the past inevitably influence the present, creating tendencies over time...

Put simply, the reason why a group with near-zero karmic debt had both Yeongwooo, with his massive karmic debt, and three extraterrestrials with immense karmic merit in the same room was that it was an inevitable consequence of these laws.

The problem was—

'Other groups probably have a reasonable mix of villains and virtuous individuals, so they won't have much trouble reaching a consensus. But this group? It's made up of the absolute extremes.'

How could pacifists and executionists possibly agree on anything?

This was a disaster of a group, born from the very workings of the universe.

"So, what now? Are we all going to the promotion hall for a group suicide?"

Yeongwooo gripped the hilt of Bastard tightly as he spoke.

"No way! I can't do that. I'm going to survive, go back, get my parents married, extort some wedding gifts, and take ownership of a ship!"

Yeongwooo's every word dripped with greed.

At this, the golem, who had earlier stood to separate Yeongwooo from Amana, cautiously spoke up.

-Well... technically, we only need to make it into the top five somehow, right?

Yeongwooo pointed his weapon at the golem and roared like fire erupting.

“Hey, Golem! What’s your name?”

-Ta... T-Taru, from Pigot...

“Okay, Taru. As the villain here, it’ll only make me look worse if I lose my temper with you, so I’d rather not. But!”

Whoosh!

Unable to hold back, Yeongwooo thrust Bastard in Taru’s face.

“How the hell are three of you—Caramel the Giver, Owl the Pacifist, and Taru the Polite Golem—going to make it into the top 10%, huh?”

-.....

-.....

-Umm...

As the three extraterrestrials failed to give any response, Yeongwooo let out a deep sigh.

“Don’t you people believe in having a plan?”

Of course, they weren’t people.

“Sigh.”

Yeongwooo gazed at the three dejected extraterrestrials as if they were utterly pathetic.

“I don’t know about you, but my planet is under constant invasion from powerful forces. And tomorrow, I need to pay off a debt of 1.2 billion. So forgive me if I’m a bit short on patience.”

Click!

Yeongwooo sheathed Bastard at his waist, and Amana looked at him in shock.

-What are you plotting this time?

It seemed that Amana’s distrust of Earthlings was already starting to take root.

“What do you mean? It’s obvious we won’t get much out of this team, so we’ll just have to loot the others.”

As Yeongwooo said this, he turned his gaze upward to the hovering Vito.

“How long until we’re deployed to the promotion hall?”

Immediately, the floor of the waiting room turned transparent, revealing a distant island far below.

“Are you kidding me?”

They had been floating above some planet this whole time.

—Deployment to the promotion hall will occur in 12 seconds.

“What?”

—In approximately 11 seconds, the waiting room will be dropped as a whole, and you can adjust your drop zone using the displayed device.

At that moment, a holographic map appeared in the center of the group of four.

It was identical to the promotion hall map they had seen earlier, with one difference:

Beep, beep, beep, beep!

Numbers from 1 to 50 began to light up sequentially on the map.

“This...”

The format and interface were all too familiar.

Yeongwooo instantly realized what this was.

The drop zones of the 50 groups were being marked in real time.

‘Damn it, this is just like that game.’

The moment Yeongwooo thought he understood the test’s format, he drew his sword again.

Shwing!

“Top 10%? No. I have to be first. There must be special rewards for being at the top.”

Yeongwooo licked his lips greedily, and Amana recoiled in horror.

Meanwhile, Vito announced the test’s imminent start.

—Five seconds until the waiting room is dropped.

Click!

Outside the walls of the waiting room, the sound of locks disengaging echoed.

Aldo grabbed onto the bench tightly, and Taru hurriedly returned to his seat and sat down.

As for Yeongwooo—

“Everyone, there’s a reason villains exist in this universe.”

With a maniacal grin, he pointed to the zone with the most numbers on the map.

Tap!

[023]

The number 023 was added to the densely packed central-west region of the promotion hall.

“If it weren’t for me, you wouldn’t have made this choice.”

-Are you insane? That area’s swarming with other groups!

Seeing the drop zone selected for Team 023, Amana’s face twisted with fear, and Yeongwooo delivered his line as if he had been waiting for this moment.

“Pacifism? Sure, I respect it. But shouldn’t you respect me as well?”

-...?

“I’m a performance-based guy. If necessary, I’ll take care of three times the work.”

-...No, that’s not—

As Amana groaned in near despair, the waiting room of the doomed Team 023 began its descent.

[Translator - Night]

[Proofreader - Gun]