

Turning 36

Chapter 36

The party members were perplexed, unable to see Yuder's protective barrier, but only Kishiar widened his eyes slightly and smiled.

"Interesting... Marvelous, indeed. In that brief moment, it wasn't just self-preservation but the will to exercise your power for everyone else."

"No, it wasn't like that."

Yuder lowered his head, but Kishiar's gaze lingered on his face for a while.

"Just by touching the stone, such an event unfolds. Moving it might not be as easy as we thought."

"..."

Everyone's expression darkened. Yuder was equally perturbed.

'Has this happened before? How did they transport it then?'

Before, Kishiar had retrieved the Red Stone and returned to the Cavalry with it in his hand. Since he had taken it directly to the palace, it wasn't that he couldn't move it. What had changed between then and now?

While Yuder pondered, Kishiar issued a new command to the Eldore siblings.

"Is it possible to move it by placing the stone between you? Even a short distance would do. It would be great if you could try."

"Um... We'll try."

However, the attempt was doomed before it even began in earnest. As soon as the siblings, who had struggled to position themselves on either side of the red stone, reached out to touch it, energy surged from the stone once again.

"It's clear that it reacts to something, even without direct contact."

In the end, Kishiar decided it was unnecessary to attempt any further and suggested they head back.

The group retraced their steps. Throughout the journey, the party members were silent, their expressions grave.

"You've worked hard today. I didn't expect everything to go smoothly from the start. Let's rest for now and regroup tomorrow. If anyone has something to say about what we've seen today, feel free to find me, no matter how late."

As he spoke, Kishiar's gaze subtly shifted towards Yuder. Yuder, feeling the weight of that look, pretended not to notice.

'I can't possibly know all the answers.'

Although he had memories of the future, he couldn't know now what he didn't know then.

Back in his quarters, Yuder lay on his bed, quietly pondering the day's events.

The strange power emitted by the Red Stone, the reason only the Cavalry members could approach it, the reasons for its explosive behavior, the differences between the past and the present...

Numerous memories swirled in his head, rapidly comparing and analyzing.

'The biggest problem at the moment is that we can't move the stone.'

In the past, Kishiar had quickly retrieved the stone and returned. There was a minor incident that revealed him as the owner of the divine sword, but that happened after the stone was retrieved.

In other words, it was correct to think that the retrieval operation itself had been completed quickly without major delay.

Then and now. What has changed?

Of course, the party members chosen by Kishiar were all different. But that alone shouldn't have made a big difference...

Deep in thought, Yuder's expression suddenly changed.

'Come to think of it, when Kishiar brought the Red Stone in the past, he wasn't holding it directly in his hand.'

The first time he saw Kishiar with the Red Stone, it had been tightly wrapped in a thick cloth to prevent it from being seen. The second and final time he saw it, it was encased in a box carved out of a transparent magic stone.

He had never touched it directly.

Could it have been the answer? It was an unknown, but it seemed worth trying.

Yuder pondered for a moment before rising from his seat.

"Where are you going?"

Gakane, who had been lying on the adjacent bed immersed in thought like Yuder, looked up in surprise.

"Just need to clear my head a bit."

Yuder quickly left the lodging, fearing Gakane might offer to accompany him. After sunset, the surroundings were dark and quiet.

Once he confirmed that no one was around, Yuder looked at a stone near him. Although it was small, he decided to consider it a substitute for the red stone.

'And... wrap it.'

The force extending from Yuder's fingertips moved the earth beneath the stone. Sand slithered up, wrapping around the stone and starting to form a round sphere.

When he felt it was the right size, Yuder wrapped the stone in soil, then called forth water by waving his hand in the air. The water flew towards the lump of earth, wrapping it before freezing into a shiny white shell.

Yuder's ability allowed him to freely manipulate the elements of nature. Not only could he change the forms, but he could also control temperature. He picked up the large ice sphere, feeling its weight.

'So easy with a regular stone.'

Would the same method work with the Red Stone? It might be prudent to bring along a thick cloth as well. Yuder decided to pack one in his bag tomorrow.

He dropped the ice sphere, and with another wave of his hand, the solid ice and earth broke and melted, seeping back into nature until they disappeared. All that was left was the original pebble.

As he looked at it, Yuder wondered why Kishiar had needed to wrap the red stone so tightly.

'The most likely reason is to shield even the slightest bit of the energy it emits.'

The energy emanating from the stone was powerful. Just looking at the shattered shadow of Gakane, who had been hit directly by it, made it clear. Even with a protective barrier, the invisible force tried to penetrate into his body, making him feel breathless to this day.

'And all that power came from a single small stone.'

Yuder slowly looked down at his palm. He hadn't noticed until he came down the mountain, but after returning to the lodge and taking a closer look, there was a bruise on the back of his hand, as if something had pierced it.

He couldn't tell when he got the bruise that looked as if something had exploded from within, but as he looked at it, he remembered.

'Just before I put up the barrier, some of the force from the stone passed through my hand.'

Something invisible had brushed through his body. It was a subtle but strange sensation. If this mark was indeed caused by that force, then putting up the barrier at that moment seemed to have been the right decision.

'If that power had pierced my head, heart, or mana hole... I don't even want to think about it.'

The damage was fortunately limited to his palm. The body of an Awakener was much more resilient than that of a normal person, but it wasn't invincible.

In particular, the mana hole, located below the navel, was an extremely important organ. Although it didn't make its presence known regularly, if it were to be destroyed, one would neither be able to use abilities nor detect energy. As Yuder looked down at the area around his lower abdomen, he thought about this organ that was to be revealed to the world in about a year's time.

At a glance, the bodies of the Awakener didn't seem to have changed much since their awakening. However, in reality, their bodies underwent many transformations. Were these changes really the natural ones prepared by God, as announced by the Pope and the Emperor?

He had known well before his death that their words were not all trustworthy, but since he didn't consider this to be of significant importance, he had never thought deeply about it.

However, having seen the original form of the Red Stone up close and personal, it seemed extraordinarily strange that the energy emitted by this tiny stone changed the bodies of countless people, including himself, and gave them new abilities.

Yuder kicked the stone he had been looking at with the tip of his foot. The rolling stone came to a halt against someone's foot. Surprisingly, Kishiar La Orr was standing there.

"What brings you here?"

"I was just taking a night stroll. What about you?"

"Me too...the same."

He actually had come out to sort out his thoughts on the Red Stone, but he fumbled a vague response. It was quite something to run into Kishiar in such a place again.

Yuder intended to return to his quarters immediately, but Kishiar was a step quicker in striking up a conversation.

"Since we've met, shall we walk together for a bit?"

How could a mere member refuse the commander's request? Yuder sighed softly and nodded his head.

Though Kishiar had invited him for a stroll, he remained silent for a while. Because of this, Yuder felt a strange pressure to start the conversation.

"...Sir..."

"You are..."

In a coincidence, the words they had decided to speak overlapped. Yuder widened his eyes slightly, looking up at Kishiar who was gazing down at him, and lightly bit his lip.

"Please, you first."

"No, it wasn't important. You first."

"No, I was not going to say anything important either."

There was nothing particularly friendly to be shared between him and Kishiar. His plan was to bring up today's events first and if there was nothing more to say, throw out a topic related to the second gender. As Yuder shook his head, Kishiar narrowed his eyes.

"Is that so? If it's not important, there's no harm in you going first. Even if I order you to speak first as your leader, you wouldn't like it?"

'This crafty...'

Yuder's eyebrows twitched.

His past of using the invincible excuse of 'orders from the leader' to make his subordinates do similar tasks momentarily disappeared from his mind.