38.5. Gilobat Industrial Complex (5)

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My head spun at the sudden display of peak yandere insanity.

I'd long since stopped wondering why something like this was happening.

Slump....

Right now, what'd happened in front of me wasn't even the biggest problem.

I was feeling down because I'd just been seduced by a petite woman who looked much younger than her age.

Have you ever heard of a series called Touhou Project?

It had a little bit of everything, from petite beauties to curvy women and slender girls. There was a time when I'd been completely obsessed with it.

No, actually, I still liked it.

So... what I was trying to say was....

Because of that series, my strike zone had gotten way too damn wide, which made me wonder if that was why Asmodeus, had managed to seduce me.

The body Asmodeus currently used as her incarnation belonged to Han Myungoh's biological daughter.

I had no clue what hole she'd crawled out of.

Anyway, that child's body looked about eight or nine years old, but her actual age was only a few months.

She was literally a baby among babies.

'My chest is shrinking into itself. I'm even starting to hate myself.'

Sure, the mind inside that body—Asmodeus—was hundreds, maybe thousands of years old. Even so, I'd nearly been seduced by someone whose actual age wasn't much different from a fetus.

I could make the excuse that Asmodeus's Fable had affected me.

Still, as a man—or a gentleman—my pride and heart had taken one hell of a scratch.

“Haaaa....”

BOOM! KABOOM! BOOM!

While I desperately craved a cigarette, explosions rang out from somewhere nearby.

Asmodeus, Kim Dokja, and Yoo Joonghyuk had apparently started fighting for real.

“Maybe I should calm this self-loathing by looking at a bunny-girl magazine.”

When your heart was wounded, the best cure was obviously to look at something you loved.

I opened the bunny-girl magazine I hadn't touched in days and calmly studied the older women inside.

A sexy black bunny suit barely covering a generous chest.

A blue bunny suit clinging dangerously close to a slender body.

A red bunny girl wearing a sultry smile as she squeezed her huge breasts together between her elbows.

“*Ahem, ahem*.... Now that's good stuff.”

At some point, I'd become so absorbed in the magazine that I stopped hearing the explosions around me.

I didn't think much of it. Instead, I focused harder and harder on my sanctuary filled with beautiful bunny girls.

“Heheh... Bunny girls are the best. One day, I'll make Dokja wear one too.”

“...Oh? You're going to make me wear one? What color?”

“Huh? Why're you even asking something so obvious? White, of course!”

Kim Dokja's Dimensional Coat was white, so a white bunny suit would obviously suit her too.

Come to think of it, I'd completely forgotten that I'd promised to give Dokja a white qipao dress and garter belt before.

Maybe this was the perfect chance to finally give them to her.

“And Joonghyuk would probably look best in black.”

“...And who said I'd wear one? Keep dreaming.”

“That's exactly why!!! A person's dream!!! Never ends!!!”

Her personality had turned into a complete mess after all those regressions, but Yoo Joonghyuk's face and figure were still second to none.

I was certain black would suit her perfectly, especially with her whole color scheme.

“Uriel would look amazing in pink, red, or white! And Gabriel would probably look best in an aqua-colored one matching her hair!”

[Constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' blushes and twists their body shyly.]

[Constellation, 'Lily Blooming in Aquarius,' stares in disbelief and asks who ever said they would wear one.]

Wasn't there some saying that if a person focused hard enough, they could hear the voice of their own heart?

For some reason, the voices inside my head sounded suspiciously similar to women I knew.

It felt a little unsettling, but I didn't pay it much attention.

If anything, I got even busier using those inner voices to decide what colors would suit my other lovers and the women in our party.

[Oh my... Then what color do you think would suit me?]

“Asmodeus? Hmm... Probably black. Or purple, like that dress she wore before.”

[Hehe... You're truly honest about your desires.]

“That's what makes them great! If you want to reach your dreams, you need desire as fuel!”

Besides, that wasn't even my true dream!

“So what's your dream?”

“I WANT TO PUT ALL MY LOVERS IN BUNNY SUITS AND BURY MYSELF IN THEIR HUGE BREASTS!!!”

It was still a distant utopia.

But just imagining the day I finally achieved it....

My heart was already pounding so hard it felt ready to burst.

“Ghhh... And I'd love to try other cosplay too! Dokja, Sangah-ssi, Heewon-ssi, Jiwon, and Uriel are all insanely beautiful, aren't they? No! Beautiful doesn't even cover it! They're goddesses! Actual goddesses!”

“Ahem... Ahem....”

[Constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' blushes at your praise!]

“You people really are having fun....”

Why the hell were the voices inside my head talking over each other this much?

How was I supposed to focus on my bunny-girl magazine like th—

Wait.

FLIP!

Realizing far too late that something was wrong, I hurriedly lowered the magazine.

“.....”

““.....””

[Two constellations stare fixedly at you.]

[Hehehe. Are you finished enjoying your sweet dream?]

Why had God chosen to put me through such trials?

More importantly, why were the women who should've been fighting like maniacs standing over me instead?

“How long have you been watching?”

With the awkward silence hanging over us, I couldn't stop myself from asking.

Just how long had they stopped fighting so they could secretly watch me tending to my poor, wounded heart?

“Hm? Probably from about the same time you started? Someone was sitting comfortably on the floor reading a magazine, after all.”

“Aha!”

Thank God our kindhearted, big-hearted Dokja answered me with a bright smile.

Although....

For some strange reason, veins were bulging across her forehead.

GRAB!

Before I could leave my final words behind, I desperately grabbed Kim Dokja's leg and rubbed my face against her lovely thigh.

“Dokja... I've got a reason for all this. I couldn't accept that someone with a goddess-tier girlfriend like you could lose to some cheap charm effect from a Fable! I had to make sure my tastes were still normal!”

“.....”

I quietly shifted my gaze toward the corner of Kim Dokja's mouth.

It seemed my flattery—and my sincere love—had reached her.

Otherwise, there was no reason for the corner of her lips to be rising like that.

'I've got a chance. I have to stake everything on this.'

I desperately shot both hands out, grabbed Yoo Joonghyuk's leg, and clung to her beautiful thigh.

Flinch!

"Joonghyuk. I haven't said this before, but you seriously have a goddess-tier face and body. You've got such a big heart too, and you're so kind! You even came all this way with Dokja to help me! I was seriously touched, you know?"

"...I didn't come here to help you."

"I know, I know. How could I not know what our Joonghyuk is thinking? I normally try not to say stuff like this, but you have no idea how happy I am to be your companion!"

"Ahem...."

Apparently, she almost never got compliments like that. Her cheeks had turned the faintest shade of red. After quickly taking note of it, I reached for my next targets.

"Uriel, Gabriel."

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' looks at you with an excited expression!]

[The constellation, 'Lily Blooming in Aquarius,' glances at you with a pout and snorts!]

I carefully picked up Uriel and Gabriel's symbolic bodies from where they hung on Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk's shoulders. Then I rubbed my cheek against their faces and whispered softly.

"Uriel, you know I love you, right? Gabriel, I'm sincerely grateful to you too."

Unfortunately, the two archangels had chosen stuffed dolls as their symbolic bodies, so I couldn't cling to Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk while desperately sweet-talking them.

But that didn't mean I had no way to win them over.

Kiss! Kiss!

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' opens their eyes wide!]

[The constellation, 'Lily Blooming in Aquarius,' opens their eyes wide!]

The moment I kissed each of them on the forehead, their eyes went round.

"My promise from the third floor of the Dark Castle still stands, Uriel. Next time, I'll do it properly in person. And Gabriel, I still haven't taken back what I said to you back then."

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' grins from ear to ear!]

[The constellation, 'Lily Blooming in Aquarius,' blushes and turns their head away!]

Except for Uriel, who hadn't been angry in the first place, the other three women had clearly calmed down somewhat.

'...How the fuck did things twist into this kind of development again?'

It felt like the SAN I'd finally recovered was dropping all over again.

Still, there was one last person left.

"Do I need to do something for you too?"

[Will you?]

"For a woman who isn't even my girlfriend?"

[Wouldn't that problem be solved if we started dating? You already know how I feel.]

"....."

Maybe a Demon King really was a Demon King for a reason.

She sure knew how to talk.

I pretended to sigh, took a deep breath, and slowly opened my mouth.

"I'm... not into physiques that lead me straight to getting canceled."

[Hm? That's a lie, isn't it? After all....]

I'd basically told her in a roundabout way that I wasn't interested in her.

Yet Asmodeus didn't look hurt in the slightest. Instead, she gave me a relaxed smile and placed her palm over the left side of my chest.

[Your heart's pounding even now, isn't it?]

"That's what hearts fucking do, you crazy bitch... Huh?"

Rustle.

I shut my mouth at the unexpected sight before me.

Asmodeus, standing right in front of my face, flushed slightly as she used her left hand to pull down the dress resting over her shoulder.

Skin so flawless it could've been carved from white jade came into view.

The untouched skin of a beautiful young girl, unmarred by the passing years....

[The Fable, 'Devil of Lust and Wrath,' seduces you.]

Heheh... Beautiful girls are great, and beautiful women are grea—!

"No! No! No! Don't fucking seduce me while you're using Han Myungoh's daughter's body! At least bring your real body if you're actually legal!"

[Oh my? If I come to you in my real body, will you date me?]

"...No comment. Wait, before that, does your real body have a legal figure? Or is it more like the older-sister type standing behind me?"

[Hmm? Who knows....]

At my question, Asmodeus gave me a seductive look and brought her index finger to my lips.

[Let's keep that a secret for now.]

Asmodeus's gaze shifted toward Uriel and Gabriel, who were hanging from my shoulders.

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' angrily asks what you're staring at!]

[The constellation, 'Lily Blooming in Aquarius,' glares at the 'Devil of Lust and Wrath'!]

[You'd be better off not reacting so strongly, Uriel, Gabriel.]

Asmodeus took one elegant step back from me, then another. The corners of her mouth stretched upward into a vicious grin.

[I'm only holding myself back because I'm standing in front of him right now. If you provoke me any further... I may lose all desire to talk.]

"Hey. That's enough."

[Hm?]

I'd always known that Demon Kings and constellations—especially archangels—got along fucking terribly.

Still, I hadn't expected them to glare at one another like they wanted each other dead.

I lifted Asmodeus's tiny body and carried her in a princess hold. She gave me a catlike smile, her eyes curving with satisfaction.

I looked her up and down for a moment.

"All right. From this moment on, you're being kidnapped."

[...Excuse me?]

For the first time, Asmodeus looked genuinely flustered.

I casually ignored whatever opinion she might've had on the matter and started carrying her toward the magic locomotive.

[I was planning to leave soon anyway. Won't this make things inconvenient for both of us?]

She looked at me with clear amusement as she spoke. I pressed my lips shut for a moment, then whispered so quietly that only she could hear me.

'Shut the fuck up, woman. Read the damn room.'

[.....Ah.]

As though she'd suddenly understood something, she let out a quiet chuckle.

[Hehe. To think you'd go so far as to set the stage for me. You're quite the considerate man, aren't you? I may have to reevaluate you.]

"I've always been considerate as hell. You're just too dense to notice."

[Ahaha! That sulky face of yours is quite charming too.]

I turned toward Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk, who were standing there staring blankly at us, and shouted.

"Come on, get aboard! We've still got a long way to Gilobat."

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39. Gilobat’s Revolutionary (1)

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To make getting to the Gilobat Industrial Complex nice and easy, we threatened Duke Syswitz and stole a magic-powered locomotive!

Then, while happily chugging along toward Gilobat, Park Jinwoo—me—somehow provoked Asmodeus, ruler of the 32nd Demon Realm, into descending upon the 73rd Demon Realm!

Right after that, a two-way battle over one man broke out!

But when the women spotted Park Jinwoo staring at a bunny-girl magazine with a dopey grin, they immediately stopped fighting and turned their pressure on him instead!

Cornered Park Jinwoo—me—then kidnapped Asmodeus and hauled her onto the magic-powered locomotive bound for the Gilobat Industrial Complex!

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- And that's what happened....

Han Sooyoung, visible on the channel screen, brought an index finger to the side of her head and spun it in circles. She looked so dumbfounded that she'd run out of words.

- You're seriously insane, aren't you? Huh? Why don't you ask Lee Seolhwa to give your head a full examination?

“Isn't that a little harsh? Calling a perfectly normal person crazy like that.”

- You're not even human anymore. Why should I treat you like one?

“Damn! That's Han Sooyoung for you! Nothing but facts!”

The moment I turned on the whatever-the-hell interdimensional video-call device, everyone naturally wanted to know what we'd been up to. So I told them the truth, and now most of them were staring at me like I'd lost my mind.

'Why...?'

Wasn't it common sense in an apocalypse to threaten people and steal their stuff when they owned something you wanted? I remembered Yoo Joonghyuk and Kim Dokja doing similar things.

So why was I the only one getting treated like this?

It was as unfair as a single bunny girl.

- *Sooyoung-ssi, hold on.*

- *Huh?*

Han Sooyoung moved aside with a confused look, and Jung Heewon appeared on the screen right after.

- *Fine, I understand what's going on over there. But....*

Jung Heewon's gaze shifted toward my right shoulder. Her eyes narrowed as she stared at Uriel, who was rubbing her cheek against me with a blissful grin.

- *Could you ask my Sponsor when she plans on coming back?*

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' is startled!]

Uriel finally snapped back to reality at the words of her Incarnation and waved both hands frantically at the channel screen.

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' says their personal scenario here still isn't over!]

“Uriel says she doesn't want to leave me yet.”

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' explains to their Incarnation that they need to stay here for Yoo Joonghyuk's sake as well!]

“Uriel says she wants to use Joonghyuk as an excuse to stay here longer.”

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' asks their Incarnation to please understand them!]

“Uriel says she loves me too much and keeps insisting she wants to stay.”

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' asks you to stop twisting their words and relay them properly!]

“Come on... my interpretation isn't entirely wrong, is it?”

Uriel desperately tried to explain herself under Jung Heewon's icy stare. Unfortunately, there wasn't a channel here, so only those directly connected to Uriel could see her messages.

That was why I'd gone out of my way to relay Uriel's words myself, with only a tiny bit of distortion.

- *Oh...?*

Apparently, the message hadn't gotten through properly. Heh.

[The constellation, 'Demon-like Judge of Fire,' trembles as they cling tightly to you.]

I couldn't stop laughing at how poorly the word 'demon-like' suited Uriel right now. It felt a little strange to admit this, but teasing a woman who was at least several thousand years old was pretty fun.

'Wait. Am I awakening some kind of sadistic streak?'

It felt like I'd discovered something I probably shouldn't have, but I ignored it and patted Uriel's back with one finger.

- *Haa... anyway, Jinwoo-ssi.*

“Yeees~?”

Jung Heewon's target shifted from Uriel to me.

- *So when are the three of you coming back?*

“Dunno?”

- *.....Jinwoo-ssi. I really hate jokes like—*

“This time I'm not joking. I genuinely don't know.”

I cut her off with the truth before the vein bulging on Jung Heewon's forehead could burst. I could tell that she and the others were quietly getting anxious.

They probably had good reason to be.

The people who were supposed to lead them properly through the coming scenarios—their 'leaders'—were all gone.

'I'd go back right now if I could.'

Truthfully, I'd already gotten everything I could from the 73rd Demon Realm.

My damaged Fables had been restored, and my Demon King Status had risen.

I'd collected the Fable fragments Kim Dokja was originally supposed to obtain.

I'd recruited Jang Hayoung and helped awaken her abilities.

I'd bought the revival attribute God Hand, which I'd skipped until now.

And as a side objective, I'd helped Aileen, a member of the Syswitz Citizens' Council.

I'd already completed all five of my goals.

And yet....

'For some reason, my instincts keep whispering to me.'

They were telling me I shouldn't go back yet.

It almost felt as though something deep within my heart—my very soul—was telling me so.

“Sooyoung's acting as deputy leader in our place right now, so you should be fine for a while.”

- *I'm not the deputy leader.*

“Let's ignore our resident Naruto for now. Which scenario did you guys just clear?”

Yoo Sangah stepped forward to answer my question.

- *We just cleared the Eleventh Scenario.*

“.....”

Her answer left me with a lot to think about.

There was the unease of knowing that Earth had finally reached scenarios I knew nothing about. There was also pride in seeing everyone steadily push forward even without me or the other two leaders.

And then there was something else.

Excitement toward the unknown.

“I see....”

- *Hm?*

Yoo Sangah tilted her head adorably on the screen. I lowered mine a little and clasped both hands together.

From here on out, the 'real thing' would begin.

For the first time, I was stepping into a story I didn't know.

I'd always wanted this.

I wanted to experience the 'unknown.'

I wanted to enjoy an 'adventure.'

I wanted to fight beside 'companions I could trust.'

Just like the protagonists of hot-blooded action stories.

I'd always wanted to live a life where I could truly burn myself out.

'I really am nowhere near becoming an "adult" yet.'

The word adult had always felt distant to me.

I'd wanted to coast through life. I hated hard work, and I hated studying.

But if I wanted life to become easier, I had to work hard. I had to cling to the very studies I hated.

Everything had felt pointless.

I'd had no dream.

“A dream, huh....”

But now....

For the first time, I had something that felt like a real dream.

I wanted to reach the end with the people standing before me—the end of this world itself.

“Seriously....”

- *Jinwoo-ssi?*

I handed Uriel and Gabriel, who'd been hanging from my shoulders, over to Yoo Joonghyuk and Kim Dokja. Then I quietly walked past Asmodeus, who'd claimed the seat beside me.

I playfully ruffled Jang Hayoung's hair as she glanced my way. Then I passed Han Myungoh, who was secretly stealing glances at the Demon King using her own daughter's body as an Incarnation Body, and gave him a couple of pats on the shoulder.

“Park Jinwoo?”

“Jinwoo? Where're you suddenly going?”

I ignored the voices calling after me and headed toward the locomotive's driver's cab.

The three demon nobles working hard to operate the engine turned around when I entered.

“Hm? Constellation-nim?”

“How long until we reach the Gilobat Industrial Complex?”

“At our current speed, we should arrive in less than ten minutes.”

“That so?”

At the demon noble's answer, I slowly began loosening up my body.

Excluding the exceptional Ninth Main Scenario, I hadn't fought with everything I had since the Sixth Main Scenario.

I'd pretended it was for my companions' growth, but the truth was that I'd kept tightening a leash around my own power and hadn't truly given anything my all.

'How stupid.'

I'd gotten lucky.

I'd stolen other people's skills and climbed into the ranks of the strong far too easily.

Through everything I'd done, I'd also built up quite a large collection of Fables.

I'd become strong far too quickly.

At some point, boredom had started creeping in, just like when you used cheat codes in a game.

I'd reached the upper ranks of power in Seoul Dome. I'd even defeated the shadow of Yamata no Orochi, a Narrative-grade Constellation.

And those achievements had slowly filled me with the ink called 'arrogance.'

But that ended now.

The Ninth Main Scenario had taught me something.

I was still weak.

There were still countless beings above me who were far stronger.

And after seeing Asmodeus gather her power here in the 73rd Demon Realm, that thought had become absolute certainty.

'I really am still weak.'

And just like that, I finally cast off the shackles of my arrogance.

“Fuck it. If a man's gonna run around swinging a sword anyway, it's only right that he aims for the title of ‘strongest,’ isn't it?”

[Personal Skill, ‘Clairvoyance Lv.10,’ has been activated!]

I could see it.

Beyond the front of the magic locomotive racing forward at a ridiculous speed, the Gilobat Industrial Complex began to come into view. The same thrill I'd felt when I first arrived here settled into my chest again.

At some point, my mind had stopped racing to figure out how to use my skills better and how to combine them. I'd grown strong, started treating everything too simply, and let arrogance weigh me down like a bout of boredom.

That shackle was gone now.

I'd prove it here.

FWOOSH——!!

Blue flames erupted, and with them came the first Star Relic I'd ever obtained in this place.

“Come, Der Freischütz.”

My beloved gun, once an anti-materiel sniper rifle, settled perfectly into my hands. It easily weighed more than ten kilograms, giving me that familiar heavy grip.

My own Ego, one that responded to my mana.

CLICK!

Blue flames curled around the muzzle of the Star Relic I hadn't properly drawn in ages.

“Feels like it's been forever since I've seriously used you.”

HMMMM!

Blue flames began gathering around the muzzle of Der Freischütz, and I carved a mark into them as well.

‘In... out...’

I steadied my heartbeat with a slow breath, sank into complete silence, and focused.

FWOOSH——!!

A dragon's heart was a reactor that could produce mana without end. I poured every last bit of mana I could bring forth in my current state into Der Freischütz, concentrating it again and again.

“C-Constellation?! W-We don't know what we did wrong, but please forgive us! We deserve death!”

“Please, just spare our lives...!!”

I let the beast bastards beside me, who looked like they'd walked straight out of Momotaro, go in one ear and out the other. Right now, what I needed was focus.

And overwhelming firepower.

Last of all, a flashy performance.

“I become Elation.”

With Clairvoyance, I swept my gaze over everything ahead and waited for the perfect moment. Under my absolute focus, the whole world faded to gray and everything began moving in slow motion.

There were the tightly shut gates of the Gilobat Industrial Complex and the citizens trudging along beside the rails with gaunt faces. There were demon nobles beating and robbing those same citizens, rampaging around like spoiled colts that'd never learned restraint.

‘Everything's lined up perfectly.’

The blue sun I'd compressed again and again until it was barely larger than a spark was drawn deep into the barrel.

「Der Freischütz - Second Bullet」

『The Inevitable Bullet』

The blue sun, compressed until it'd become a tiny bullet, silently tore through space.

It passed through the front window of the magic locomotive's driver's cabin, pierced past the massive gates of the Gilobat Industrial Complex, and barely missed the countless citizens walking beside the tracks. It flew past demon nobles and countless buildings before shooting straight up into the sky.

Through Clairvoyance, I watched the citizens and demon nobles stare in confusion at the blue meteor soaring higher and higher.

Once I'd confirmed their reactions, I activated my skill.

[Personal Skill, 'Flying Thunder God Technique Lv.10,' has been activated!]

ZZZT...!!

Every spatial restriction vanished at once, and the scenery before me changed completely.

The magic locomotive was suddenly high in the sky. The demon nobles' faces had gone white as they stared at the sight before them.

Then gravity tried to drag us down.

"Water-Calming Pearl! Do it."

[Star Relic, Water-Calming Pearl, uses its divine power to alter the gravity inside the magic locomotive!]

Our bodies, which had been about to slam into the front window of the driver's cabin, froze in place under the dragon's divine power channeled through the Water-Calming Pearl.

I watched the magic locomotive plummet toward the roof of Gilobat's factory at terrifying speed, then pressed the button marked 'PA Announcement' inside the driver's cabin.

"Ah, ahem! We'd like to offer our heartfelt thanks to all passengers who've chosen our magic locomotive service to Gilobat until today."

"Aaaaaagh!!! S-Save me——!!!"

- *Y-You completely insane bastard!!!*

I ignored the noisy local broadcast happening right beside me and continued with my final announcement.

"As of today, our magic locomotive service to the Gilobat Industrial Complex will be permanently discontinued."

- *Jinwoo-ssi?! Have you seriously lost your mind?!*

- I knew this lunatic would cause another disaster!

- I know this one! It's a Gyro Drop, right?!

- Jinwoo-hyung! Let me ride it next time too!

The companions who'd been quietly watching me through the channel erupted into chaos, and I couldn't stop myself from grinning.

What was Elation?

It meant joy. Delight.

Playing around with a heart full of excitement was what we called Elation.

Until now, I hadn't been very elated at all.

How tragic.

So—

“Our train will soon be arriving at Gilobat Factory's Rooftop Station. Unfortunately, there'll be no doors opening on arrival.”

I'd scatter the seeds of Elation right here.

““PARK JINWOO———!!!!!!!””

“Whoa! What powerful voices you've got!”

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk's screams reached me from a carriage farther back.

Just before the locomotive smashed into the roof of Gilobat's factory, I threw the pale-faced demon nobles—who were hugging each other and bawling their eyes out—into My Room. Then I flung open the driver's cabin door and fled into the next carriage.

KABOOOOOM———!!!!!

“AAAAAAAAGH———!!!!!”

The driver's cabin struck the factory roof first and crumpled apart with a deafening crash. Leaving the screams of the demon nobles inside the factory behind me, I ran at full speed.

CRRRAAAAAACK———!!!!

God, this was thrilling.

Train cars kept breaking apart behind me with one deafening crash after another, while I sprinted toward the carriage holding my people to escape the destruction.

“Hah... Now this is living.”

How long had I held myself back?

How long had I suppressed the urge to raise absolute hell because of the Tenth Scenario?!

How long had I forced down this desperate need to cause a fucking disaster?!

- *You crazy bastard...!!!*

Han Sooyoung and the other adults sounded utterly dumbfounded by what I was doing.

- *Oppa! Let me do that next time too!*

- *Hyung! Me too!*

And then came the voices of our kids, happily watching something they definitely shouldn't be enjoying.

- *...Th-That's awesome.*

- *Don't even think about learning from him, Jihye-unnie.*

Leaving Lee Jihye, who still wasn't an adult, and the adult Shin Yoosung's voices behind me, I kept going.

A thrilling, razor-thin, life-or-death game of tag!

Not that my life was actually in danger.

I jumped across the collapsing sections one after another, threw open the next door, and finally reached—

“Park Jinwoo!! You couldn't even hold yourself back for five minutes before causing another disaster?!”

“I swear, you're going to be the death of me!!”

The sight of my two moms—not actually my moms—furiously yelling at me.

I beamed and opened the entrance to My Room.

“HAHAHAHAHA!”

Anyone who came toward me to lecture me or demand an explanation got thrown into My Room one after another.

Kim Dokja. Yoo Joonghyuk. Uriel. Gabriel. Jang Hayoung. Han Myungoh.

And finally—

[Ahahaha—! You truly are a master of madness!]

Asmodeus was laughing from the bottom of her heart with a crazed smile on her face.

I grabbed both her hands.

“So, you hate it?”

Grin.

A smile appeared on the lips of Asmodeus, who almost never showed any change in expression.

[No. It's absolutely wonderful. I really do have a good eye for——]

Asmodeus never got to finish.

The instant she tried to say the rest—

KABOOOOOOOOOM———!!!!!!

Every remaining carriage of the magic locomotive slammed into the factory floor and crumpled apart.

In an instant, everything around us fell into darkness.

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39. Gilobat’s Revolutionary (2)

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‘Fun’ is like a fleeting dream.

People feel dopamine from an emotion they can only experience for a brief moment. And from that feeling, they gain the energy to keep living.

“WRYYYYYY!!! THIS is what you call a TRAIN!!!”

[What’s with that strange battle cry now?]

I’d gotten so excited after shamelessly copying Lord DIO’s finishing move from Part 3 of JoJo that I even imitated his battle cry. Asmodeus, who’d been standing beside me with a blank look, tilted her head.

“It’s the battle cry of a man who abandoned humanity and chose the path of a vampire.”

[Hmm...? He sounds like quite the strange person too.]

“People are weird by nature. You’re weird too, aren’t you?”

[Ufufu! I really do enjoy how you say whatever comes to mind without filtering yourself.]

As expected, Asmodeus was a difficult woman to deal with.

There was clear ‘enjoyment’ inside those dark eyes steeped in madness. It was a little unsettling to entrust my back to a crazy woman who might turn into an enemy if I made even one wrong move, but...

“Activate Combination.”

[Personal Skill, ‘Combination Lv.10,’ has been activated!]

That very danger made everything far more thrilling, so I decided not to worry about it.

[Purchasing seven ‘Ice Essences’ from the Dokkaebi Bag.]

[700,000 Coins have been consumed.]

[Seven ‘Ice Essences’ have been selected as the first combination material.]

Back during the Fifth Main Scenario, I’d obtained a skill after hunting down the ice disaster.

Glacier Creation.

It was an S-grade skill, and I’d gotten plenty of mileage out of it over the years. Still, it was starting to show its limits.

‘I need something stronger.’

My skill list was packed to the brim anyway. So, to clear some space and get my hands on an upgraded version of Glacier Creation, I decided to sacrifice the skill that had served me so well.

[All skills related to the ‘Ice’ attribute have been selected as the second combination materials.]

[‘Glacier Creation,’ ‘Ghostly Cold Ice Flame,’ ‘Snow Dragon Formation,’ and ‘Freezing Flower’ will be consumed as materials.]

Seven Ice Essences, the kind of ice-element elixir you’d often see in martial arts stories. Along with them, I threw in every ice-related skill I currently possessed.

[Combination materials of the same attribute have created synergy! A higher-grade skill is being formed!]

There was one thing I'd learned after using Combination so many times.

The result always came out at least 'one grade' higher than the skills used as materials.

Crack—!

A system message slowly began to form before my eyes. At the same time, bitter cold gathered beside it.

[Congratulations! You have acquired the SSS-grade ice-type skill 'Heavenly Glacier Convergence'!]

A grin spread across my face when I saw I'd obtained an SSS-grade ice skill.

But I hadn't activated Combination just to get myself a stronger skill.

[Purchasing 1,000 'Red Flags' from the General Store!]

[5,000 Coins have been consumed.]

The smile vanished from my face as I stared at the massive heap of red flags that dropped beside me.

Now was the time to get serious and prepare the stage.

Bzzzt—!!!

I connected several spaces inside My Room in succession, then linked their exits to different points in the sky outside Gilobat's factory. I didn't forget to open as many random portals as I possibly could.

"Asmodeus."

[Yes?]

"From now on, I'm going to show you what a real 'revolution' looks like."

Flutter!

I immediately hurled five hundred red flags through the spatial rifts scattered across the Gilobat Industrial Complex.

[Personal Skill, 'Incitement Lv.5,' has been activated!]

[Personal Skill, 'Nagak Breathing Lv.10,' has been activated!]

I drew in a deep breath while focusing on my abdomen.

[Personal Skill, 'Lion's Roar Lv.4,' has been activated!]

Once I'd drawn in as much air as I possibly could, I focused on the muscles in my abdomen and throat and roared at the top of my lungs.

『All comrades of the revolution who've been trampled beneath the feet of the 'oppressors' known as Dukes—LISTEN TO ME——!!!!』

My voice, amplified through Lion's Roar, spread across the entire Gilobat Industrial Complex.

I could tell it had worked.

The citizens who'd been wandering the streets like puppets, their gaunt faces carrying dead, lifeless eyes, all looked up toward the sky.

『My name is 'Kim Dokja'!!! Just like all of you, I too am one who was 'oppressed' by the 'oppressors'!!! 』

From inside the open space leading into My Room, I heard Kim Dokja shouting something as she struggled to force her way out.

But that wasn't important right now.

『My fellow comrades who've suffered beneath oppression! How long will you keep your heads bowed?! How long will you live meaningless lives with your freedom stolen from you?!』

Just then, the red flags drifting through the sky began landing one after another right at the feet of the industrial complex's citizens.

I raised my voice again.

『From this moment onward, I shall cut down the oppressor of this industrial complex, 'Duke Gilobat'!! Since the Revolutionary who should've risen for us refuses to act, I—'KIM DOKJA'—shall become the Revolutionary of this land myself—!!』

Life began returning to the eyes that had once looked dead.

『Those who share my cause—raise your weapons——!!!!』

[Personal Skill, 'Heavenly Glacier Convergence Lv.1,' has been activated!]

Crystals of ice compressed to their limit began forming across the skies of the Gilobat Industrial Complex, each one taking the shape of a different weapon.

Pickaxes. Axes. Shovels. Hammers.

They were all tools an ordinary worker might wield.

I poured all 150 points of my Magic Power into creating weapons. In an instant, hundreds—then thousands—of weapons meant for laborers stabbed into the ground before the citizens.

『I shall personally ignite the spark of 'revolution' against these vile oppressors—!!! All revolutionaries who'll stand with me, come to Gilobat's factory!!!』

The citizens stared at the weapons before them with trembling, hesitant eyes.

Then one person reached out.

Then another.

Then dozens.

One after another, their eyes hardened with resolve. They became the eyes of revolutionaries who yearned for freedom.

『I am the revolutionary 'Kim Dokja'!!! I shall stand at your front and reclaim the 'Freedom' you've longed for with these very hands!!! Raise your flags!!! Starting today, we'll execute the 'dictator' who oppressed us and reclaim our freedom with our own hands—!!!!』

「WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH———!!!!!!」

Was this what it looked like when tens of thousands of ants marched toward the same place?

Each citizen wielded a translucent worker's weapon as they charged toward the factory in one great wave. My shoulders began to tremble.

"Ahahahahahahahaha——!!!!"

I burst into genuine laughter.

Then I turned toward the silent Asmodeus.

She was staring at me blankly, utterly dumbfounded.

"What're you looking at? Is this the first time you've seen me do something like this?"

[……..]

Her lips opened and closed as though she wanted to say something, but I walked right past her.

I didn't want to waste my attention on her right now.

“Hmm~ Hmm-hmm♪”

At this moment, the only thing that interested me was our proud revolutionary comrades—ha!—marching blindly toward this place!

And if I wanted this stage to reach a perfect ending...

Not a single one of them could die.

[Personal Skill, ‘Clairvoyance Lv.10,’ has been activated!]

I pushed myself a little and brought every direction of the Gilobat Industrial Complex into my field of view, observing everything happening across the battlefield.

[Personal Skill, ‘Authority of the Puppeteer Lv.3,’ has been activated!]

Whenever citizens looked like they were about to fall to the counterattack of the demon nobles under the factory’s command, I connected Mana Threads to them and pulled them out of danger.

[Fable, ‘Maestro of the Puppet Show,’ has become deeply immersed in the stage before you!]

Using the frozen crystals of Heavenly Glacier Convergence, I formed a conductor’s baton.

Then I gently closed my eyes and began to move it.

At this very moment, the stage known as the Gilobat Industrial Complex was one great orchestra.

And for this single moment, I was its maestro.

I immersed myself in the hearts of the citizens who were giving everything they had in pursuit of freedom, and I conducted my comrades so that not a single one would be hurt.

My eyes watched every corner of the stage.

My ears listened to everything happening around me.

My right hand, holding the baton, breathed life into the new music—this revolution—that was being born here.

And with my empty left hand, I ceaselessly manipulated the Mana Threads, tuning every note of the performance.

My focus deepened until I couldn’t hear anything else.

Sweat beaded across my forehead—no, my entire body—before dripping to the ground. I savored the refreshing sensation and kept swinging the baton.

[…Haaah. This is truly beautiful.]

A smile rose to my lips at the honest praise of the spectator watching me.

I couldn’t sing.

I knew nothing about music.

Even so, I was a man who loved it.

For one fleeting dream, I’d stepped proudly onto a stage and become the conductor guiding its performance.

But every moment has a beginning.

And after every beginning comes an end.

‘I don’t want to let go of this genuine joy. It’s been too long.’

But...

You have to know when to let something go before you can understand what made it beautiful.

I melted my heart into the bittersweet feeling of regret.

Everything fun happening in this moment...

I’d make it into a memory—a Fable.

And I’d never forget it.

I’d never forget any of the joy I felt here.

BANG!!

「WAAAAAAAAAAAH———!!!!」

“……”

At last, I heard the cries of countless citizens as they smashed their way through the factory gates.

Their voices were filled with years of resentment, rage, and hatred.

But there was also hope in them, shining toward the future as they swung their weapons.

The baton in my right hand had already melted away. I crossed that hand over the left hand that had controlled the Mana Threads and brought my movements to a halt.

Then I turned around.

Gracefully.

Naturally.

My clothes were stuck tightly to my body from all the sweat, so I hardly looked dignified.

Still, I gave it everything I had.

To the one and only spectator—the Demon King—who'd quietly watched my stage until the end.

I placed my right hand over the left side of my chest and bowed at a perfect forty-five-degree angle.

"Did you enjoy my performance?"

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap!

There was no answer.

Only applause.

Life had entered those eyes that could normally be described as hollow, filled with nothing but madness.

That expression would surely vanish as quickly as a fleeting dream.

But even so...

I could tell that Asmodeus had truly enjoyed everything that had happened here.

My first modifier was 'Apostle of Elation.'

One who'd throw everything away for the emotion of joy and the dopamine it brought.

That was why I called myself a 'clown.'

If even one person found joy in what I did...

"Yeah? Then I'm satisfied again today."

Then surely, everything I'd done had meaning.

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39. Gilobat's Revolutionary (3)

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We receive an education when we're young. We're taught that if we do something wrong or cause trouble, we'll get scolded or punished for it.

Then, sometime between middle school and high school, we learn that most of what we're forced to study is useless garbage that never comes up in real life. Seriously, how often do people use math formulas outside of basic arithmetic in their daily lives?

'Well... I never do. Maybe it's different for people with other jobs?'

Anyway, that's beside the point. The conclusion here is simple: when you screw up, you get scolded.

And right now, I was experiencing that lesson firsthand.

- I've seen people throw trains around in comics and movies before, but in all my life, you're the first bastard I've ever seen actually do it for real! The first!

Han Sooyoung's nagging.

"How the hell do you manage to cause trouble every single time?!"

Yoo Joonghyuk's nagging.

"Forget all that. Why exactly did you use my name, huh?"

Kim Dokja's nagging.

Back in the day, I would've trembled in fear and at least pretended to reflect on my crimes.

'Hmm... What should I have for dinner tonight?'

Now I'd gotten used to it, so I just let their words go in one ear and out the other. Wasn't this what you'd call adapting to life and learning how to survive?

'You've grown, Park Jinwoo.'

You're the best! Number one!

"I'm truly being falsely accused here, everyone."

Of course, if I kept obviously tuning them out, they'd catch on sooner or later. I needed to shift their attention somewhere else right now.

Point!

I raised a finger and pointed at Asmodeus, who was watching us with an oddly seductive smile that didn't suit her childlike appearance.

[Hm?]

She tilted her head in confusion when she realized my finger was aimed at her. I immediately put on a teary face.

"That Demon King threatened me! She said she'd make me regret it if I didn't show her something entertaining right this instant!"

[...Did I say something like that?]

"Shut up. Read the room, you bitch."

How could a Demon King be this bad at reading the room?

Asmodeus was normally sharp enough to catch onto things like this, so my plan to use her name as a scapegoat seemed destined to fail.

[Haaaah...]

A sweet, sultry sigh suddenly came from behind me, making my eye twitch. Something about that sound felt very wrong, so I turned around.

Asmodeus stood there trembling faintly, an ecstatic look spread across her face.

[...Ah! Could you say what you just said one more time?]

"...You crazy bitch. Why the hell are you making a face like that with a kid's body?!"

Our innocent children were watching through the channel!

[Mmm... I feel like it's been quite a while since anyone insulted me like this. It's rather thrilling.]

"I'm seriously gonna lose my mind. Yoosung, Jihye, Gilyoung. Cover your ears for a bit."

This crazy woman looked like she'd become a terrible influence on the mental development of our underage kids, so I ordered all three of them to cover their ears.

But—

- *Why is that Demon King making that face?*

- What's an insult kink?

- Ohooo... Hmmm...?

Shin Yoosung, Lee Gilyoung, and Lee Jihye answered in turn, already showing interest in things they absolutely shouldn't be interested in yet. I covered my face with both hands in despair.

Wasn't there some saying about kids these days learning bad things way too fast?

It was exactly right.

Our innocent babies! They were already showing interest in things like "Mmm~"!

"What do we do, Dokja?! Should we give everyone over there a sex-ed book and ask them to teach the kids for us?!"

"...Don't ask me."

Flinch!

At the words "sex-ed book," several members of the group gave awkward smiles and slowly began backing away from the channel screen.

"Sangah-ssi?"

- Y-Yes, yes?! I-I can't do it!

Yoo Sangah flushed red and waved both her head and hands in frantic refusal.

"Heewon-ssi?"

- No... I can't do it either...

Jung Heewon firmly refused as well, her cheeks turning pink just like Yoo Sangah's.

"Jiwon?"

- I was an actress... not a teacher...

Min Jiwon blurted out a ridiculous excuse and hurried toward the back.

"What a shame..."

I'd picked them because I thought they'd be good teachers for the kids.

Of course, another part of me just wanted an excuse to take photos and videos of their embarrassed faces for the first time in ages.

I shifted my gaze toward one woman standing with her arms crossed and her head deliberately turned away.

"Then... Sooyoung, wanna do it?"

- *H-Huh?!*

Han Sooyoung had been pretending not to notice us, but the instant I called her name, she jumped like a startled cat.

Watching her react like that never got old.

'If she were right next to me, I'd love to poke her in the side once.'

Of course, if I actually tried that, the vicious black cat would probably claw my face off.

"No, seriously. I think you'd be good at teaching them. I'll give you coins. Wanna try?"

- *Get lost! I'm not doing something that annoying.*

Han Sooyoung glared at me through the channel for a moment, breathing hard with irritation. Then she suddenly fell into thought before a sly grin spread across her face.

- *Why don't you do it yourself?*

"Me?"

- *Yeah. You adore these kids, so you'd probably teach them properly, right?*

Han Sooyoung grabbed Shin Yoosung and Lee Gilyoung by the shoulders, then dragged Lee Jihye in with them and lined all three up right in front of the channel.

- *Wanna try?*

"Hmmmm..."

There was a saying that the guy who suggested a game of chance usually ended up being the one who got screwed by it. Now that the target had suddenly swung back around to me, my feelings became complicated.

"Well... why not?"

- *Huh? S-Seriously?*

"Of course! If there's one thing I'm good at, it's cramming a ton of information into someone in a short time!"

- *...Tch.*

I answered with total confidence, but Han Sooyoung looked me up and down with naked suspicion.

I ignored her and turned my attention to the kids staring at me.

- *But...*

Lee Jihye, standing between Shin Yoosung and Lee Gilyoung, raised her hand with a reluctant look.

- *I already had mandatory sex education at school. Do I really have to learn it again?*

"Of course! There's no end to the path of learning!"

That was bullshit.

I just wanted to see the self-loathing on our Jihye's face after sitting through sex ed, along with the cute sight of her blushing in embarrassment.

I pulled a pair of black sunglasses from the storage inside My Room and put them on.

"All right! First question! Kids, do you know how babies are born?"

- *Babies?*

- *Hmm... I don't really remember.*

- *I mean... I know how babies are born...?*

Our adorable youngest daughter and son tilted their heads with puzzled expressions. Meanwhile, our second daughter, Lee Jihye, scratched her cheek with a slightly embarrassed look.

A proud smile spread across my face.

"Well, well! Looks like Teacher Jinwoo has no choice but to teach you!"

I was filled with confidence that I could give the best sex education lesson anyone had ever seen.

Just as I opened my mouth—

Grab.

Two hands landed on my shoulders.

"Dokja? Joonghyuk?"

I slowly turned my head.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk stood there, looking down at me with rigid expressions.

The two women stared at me in silence for a moment before slowly speaking.

"Cut out every unnecessary detail. Got it?"

"Refrain from teaching the children anything unnecessary, Park Jinwoo."

Kim Dokja had always cared deeply for those kids, but Yoo Joonghyuk was different.

Or maybe she only looked cold on the outside while secretly caring about them all along?

She suddenly looked different to me.

I shrugged at the two women.

"Leave it to me. I know how to hold back when kids are involved."

I tapped their hands lightly with my index fingers, telling them not to worry, then shoved my face closer to the channel screen.

"All right. Before we get into the real lesson, let's start with some basic terms."

"Huh...?"

"What...?"

I had no idea what they found so shocking, but I ignored both women's reactions and continued.

"First, forget all that stuff about babies being found in cabbage patches or carried in by birds. It's all a scam."

- *Huh? Really?*

- *Then how are they made?*

- *...Why do I have to listen to this again, Oppa?*

"You only need to learn one word first."

The kids were watching me with sparkling eyes despite pretending otherwise, while every adult looked increasingly nervous.

I put on a serious expression.

"Adults usually use this word when talking about how babies are made. In English, it's called sex. In Korean, it's also called intercourse or sexual relations. And if you want to say it crudely, you could call it fu—"

- *You crazy bastard!!!*

"Park Jinwoo!!!"

"You insane bastard?!"

"...Why're you all suddenly freaking out?"

I was only trying to explain a few basic terms before getting into the actual lesson.

Han Sooyoung, Kim Dokja, and Yoo Joonghyuk suddenly interrupted me so violently that I flinched.

- *I'm the idiot for trusting you even a little just because you care about those kids, aren't I?! Huh?!*

"Is there seriously nothing you won't say in front of children?!"

"Didn't I clearly tell you to refrain from saying anything unnecessary?"

The sight of the three women grilling me like parents nitpicking a teacher during an open-class observation made me raise both hands in surrender. Then I shouted with a genuinely aggrieved look on my face.

“No, seriously... Sure, Yoosung and Gilyoung are definitely young compared to Jihye, but they’re upper-grade elementary schoolers, you know? Kids that age learn what words like this mean these days!”

- *Really...?*

“Did we...?”

“……”

We were already in our mid-to-late twenties, so none of us could remember it that well. But if I remembered right, the internet said kids learned this stuff around that age!

To be exact, it said they learned about secondary sexual characteristics, proper sexual knowledge, and sexual assault prevention. Which meant the proper sexual knowledge part obviously had to cover things like sex, and how men’s and women’s *ahem!* parts differed!

I’d been wronged! This was a gross miscarriage of justice!

I'd sincerely planned to teach the kids what the words meant first and then give them proper sex education for their own good. But after the objections from these hardcore-not-really parents-not-really, my mood completely soured.

"Fine! You teach them yourselves!"

But you know...

A question suddenly popped into my head.

'...I started spouting random bullshit because I didn't want to get yelled at for smashing through the factory roof with a magic locomotive.'

How the hell did things end up like this?

I guess the flow of human consciousness really is impossible to predict.

Huh? Who am I suddenly talking to?

Fuck if I know.

Maybe I'm addressing some constellation living inside the stream of my thoughts.

Anyway!

The adults had somehow started having a debate among themselves, while the kids looked crushed after having the most interesting part cut short. I had plenty I wanted to say about that, but...

'Managed to bullshit my way out of getting scolded again.'

I really am a genius when it comes to scheming.

「**Waaaaaah!!**」

「**There are still remnants of the demon nobles over there!**」

「**Follow Revolutionary Comrade 'Kim Dokja' and fight for freedom!**」

「**Comrade revolutionaries! Hurry up and follow us!**」

Just then, the voices of the citizens who'd stormed into the factory reached my ears. They were swinging their weapons at every demon noble they came across.

I smiled as I watched them freely wave the red flags and weapons made of ice crystals I'd given them. Then I turned my gaze elsewhere.

Through the still-active Clairvoyance, I spotted the demon nobles desperately fleeing deeper into the factory, along with Duke Gilobat.

‘Does he have some way to activate the factory as a bootleg Gundam too, like Duke Syswitz did?’

If he really did have something like that, things would get pretty annoying.

The others were still talking among themselves after somehow forming what looked like a sudden debate club. While they were distracted, I quietly slipped away.

I grabbed Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus, both of whom were staring blankly with their mouths hanging open, and dragged them along with me.

“W-Wait? Where are we suddenly going?”

[‘Apostle of Elation’? Where are we going all of a sudden?]

I answered the two women as they followed along with their wrists caught in my hands.

“Obviously, we’re going to catch the duke. I get coins for killing him.”

If I remembered correctly, each Demon Realm duke was worth 200,000 coins.

Sure, compared to the tens of millions I already had, that reward was basically pocket change. Still, it wasn’t small enough to completely ignore.

“But why’re you suddenly taking me with you? And...”

Jang Hayoung's gaze shifted toward Asmodeus, who was walking right beside her.

“Why’re you bringing the Demon King too?”

Asmodeus smiled at Jang Hayoung's wary expression.

[My... you're afraid of me, aren't you, adorable child?]

“Urk...!”

Demonic energy began leaking from the body of the Demon King who looked like a little girl, and Jang Hayoung's face went deathly pale.

[‘Apostle of Elation.’ Your urge to collect things really is impressive, isn't it? You only ever keep such pretty faces around you... I'm honestly amazed.]

“……”

[Which makes it such a shame. If I'd found her first, I certainly wouldn't have left her alone.]

“Asmodeus.”

I stopped walking and quietly turned around.

The Demon King still wore the same smile. I watched her for a moment before speaking.

“If you insult Hayoung with that mouth of yours again, I’ll take it to mean you’ve chosen to make an enemy of ‘me.’”

[Hmm...?]

She let out an intrigued hum. I released the wrist I'd been holding and pulled Jang Hayoung behind me.

There were two reasons I'd brought Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus here.

The first was to use the power of the Wall that Jang Hayoung had awakened to awaken her as a ‘Fighter.’

The second was to stop Asmodeus from interfering with what we were doing. She kept sneaking glances at Uriel and Gabriel's symbolic bodies while wearing that mischievous smile, after all.

‘Nothing can happen to Uriel and Gabriel's symbolic bodies.’

The only reason Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk could currently set foot in the 73rd Demon Realm was because the two archangels had given them personal scenarios.

If the anchors known as Uriel and Gabriel were damaged, Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk would be judged to have left their scenarios and would receive the exile penalty.

I quietly informed Asmodeus, who was staring at me as though deep in thought.

“Choose.”

[Choose what?]

“Whether you’re going to make an enemy of me or not. Pick one.”

[…….]

As Asmodeus fell silent, I quietly circulated the magic power inside my body.

My physical condition was perfect.

Unfortunately, only one stock of my resurrection Attribute, ‘God Hand,’ had recovered.

My original life, plus the extra life given to me by the ‘Immortal Dragon Constellation.’

That left me with only three lives in total, which made me a little uneasy...

‘At the very least, if we fight, I’ll cripple her.’

Even so, I was confident that if I threw everything I had at her, I could at least tear off a few arms and legs.

There was one thing I couldn't get wrong here.

Yes, I was currently the strongest person in our group.

But the Demon King standing before me was a mid-to-upper-tier powerhouse of the Demon Realm who'd maintained her position as a Demon King for at least several hundred years, possibly several thousand.

Meanwhile, I'd only been a constellation for a few months.

Our Status as constellations might've been comparable, but I believed there was still a clear gap between us in combat experience, number of skills, and number of Fables.

In other words, I couldn't ignore her age—

No.

Her experience.

‘Actually, I’m probably just this worried because I’ve never fought a constellation seriously before.’

I'd only fought three beings on that level so far.

The Fable-grade constellation ‘Yamata no Orochi,’ whom I'd fought while it was using Shadow Descent.

The Fable-grade constellation ‘Founder's Mother,’ whom I'd also fought briefly through Shadow Descent, just like that damn snake.

And finally, while it wasn't a constellation, there was the Outer God ‘Eater of Dreams,’ a being who easily surpassed Fable-grade constellations.

I could've started celebrating and claiming I'd already beaten constellations.

But not one of those constellations had ever fought me using their full strength.

I'd only won against enemies who weren't going all out.

So whether it was a Historical Figure-grade constellation or a Fable-grade constellation, I'd never once truly witnessed the full strength of a constellation.

‘So I won’t let my guard down, Asmodeus.’

Just as I was about to awaken my Status as a constellation in response to the still-silent Demon King—

[...You really are cruel.]

“Huh?”

Asmodeus puffed out her cheeks and slowly walked toward me.

Then she suddenly hugged me.

[You know how I feel, yet you still say something like that. That's why I called you cruel.]

“……”

Fuck.

Was this the gap moe of a Demon King?

Or was this some scheme to make me lower my guard?

My brain practically froze at her sudden behavior.

She rubbed her face against my chest for a moment before finally pulling away with a satisfied expression.

[Hehe. Regrettable as it is, I’ll admit defeat this time. In exchange...]

She slipped out of my arms in an instant and held her right hand toward me.

[If you don't mind, would you escort me to wherever the duke of this industrial complex is hiding?]

“Haaaa...”

A sigh escaped me as I stared at our elementary-school-looking Demon King, whose thoughts were harder to read than anyone else's.

“Fine.”

I reached out with my left hand and took hers.

“Hayoung.”

“Y-Yeah?”

I called to Jang Hayoung, who'd been trembling behind me while clutching the hem of my clothes.

I immediately reached out with my right hand, grabbed Jang Hayoung's left hand, and started personally leading both of them forward.

“Don't fight each other. Just behave and follow me.”

[Very well.]

“...Okay.”

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39. Gilobat's Revolutionary (4)

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I stopped while chasing Duke Gilobat with Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus.

“Why’d you suddenly stop? Weren’t we in a hurry?”

[‘Apostle of Elation’?]

I was an idiot. I couldn’t believe a brief rush of dopamine had made my brain freeze up this badly.

Duke Gilobat and the demon nobles had taken a shortcut only they knew to reach the underground levels, yet I’d actually been stupid enough to try chasing that bastard on foot….

Fury welled up inside me at my own pathetic stupidity, and I slowly clenched my fist.

[You’ve purchased the skill books ‘Robust Body,’ ‘Robust Legs,’ and ‘Body Enhancement’ from the Dokkaebi Bag.]

[You’ve purchased the skill books ‘White Wild Beast’ and ‘Mark of the Moon’ from the ‘Solo Max-Level Newbie’ category of the Story Shop.]

[A total of 415,000 Coins have been consumed.]

Jotaro Kujo, the protagonist of JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure: Stardust Crusaders, once left behind a famous quote.

「***You make your own path.***」

Those words suddenly struck deep into my heart.

“Yeah. A path is something you make yourself.”

Which meant….

“I’ll make one right now.”

[Your Personal Skill, ‘Combination Lv.10,’ has been activated!]

[You’re combining ‘Giant’s Strike,’ ‘Incarnation of Herculean Strength,’ ‘Hardened Claws,’ ‘Robust Body,’ ‘Robust Legs,’ ‘Body Enhancement,’ ‘Form of Resentment,’ ‘White Wild Beast,’ and ‘Mark of the Moon’!]

I’d never tried combining nine skills at once before. The balance began falling apart from the very start, something obvious even at a glance.

If I had to give an example, it was like trying to forcibly mix oil and water. In a sense, this was nothing short of gambling.

“Haaa….”

But who was I?

I was the man who’d broken through countless impossible odds to reach this point.

I was Park Jinwoo.

I awakened the mana racing through the vessel known as my body and focused my mind.

[The Star Relic, ‘Water-Calming Pearl,’ awakens the divine power of the dragon!]

[The Fable, ‘One Who Twists Fate,’ begins its story!]

[The Fable, ‘Paradoxical Disaster,’ begins its story!]

[The Fable, ‘Master of Alchemy,’ begins its story!]

[The Fable, ‘Beloved by the Goddess of Luck,’ begins its story!]

Ingredients that didn’t belong together would never mix on their own. Fortunately, I had more than enough materials that could force the impossible into harmony.

Other worlds had fixed recipes, but this world didn’t. I pictured a recipe that had never existed here before, carefully maintaining the balance between each ingredient as I forced them toward a single whole.

[Your Star Relic and Fables are observing your Personal Skill, ‘Combination’!]

Before me was a blank recipe, a pure white sheet with no predetermined result. What I was doing was forcibly ‘injecting,’ ‘fixing,’ and ‘anchoring’ a recipe from another world into that empty page until the result could take root here.

Two worldviews that should’ve been incapable of interfering with each other were colliding.

I could still feel tiny points where they refused to align, so I spoke the mysterious language of dragons.

「**Compression.**」

「**Fixation.**」

「**Anchoring.**」

「**Fusion.**」

Deep inside me, it felt as though two walls had pressed together—thin yet thick, present yet absent.

[Your understanding and mastery of your Personal Skill have fulfilled its evolution conditions.]

[Your Personal Skill, ‘Combination,’ has evolved into ‘Fusion’!]

At some point, I opened my eyes and stared at what floated before me.

It was a single sphere.

A sphere made from skills that should’ve belonged to an entirely different world hovered there, shining with a brilliant glow. I looked at it and spoke one final word of Dragon Tongue.

「**A Paradoxical Fable.**」

The nine materials, each with different effects and different forms, finally reached completion.

At that moment, I was a ‘chef’ completing a blank recipe, a ‘craftsman’ refining raw material, and a ‘blacksmith’ forging something that had never existed before.

[You’ve acquired a new Stigma.]

[You’ve acquired the Stigma, ‘Tombgrave’s Body.’]

[‘Tombgrave’s Right Arm’ is being reproduced.]

I stared at my right arm, which had turned a deep blue.

It was the completed form of the ‘Tombgrave’ series used by the protagonist of Solo Max-Level Newbie.

The body of the giant race warrior, Tombgrave.

Among the countless giants living on the upper floors of the Tower, Tombgrave had been praised as a ‘Great Hero.’ Now, his body had broken through the wall between worlds that should’ve never connected and taken root here.

Everything had gone according to plan.

It was a perfect success.

Except….

‘This hurts like hell….’

I frowned as a savage pain tore through the muscles and nerves of my right arm.

It’d been days since I’d died as a Demon King, and this was the first time since then that I’d felt pain this intense. I couldn’t stop the smile spreading across my face.

“That intro went on way too long, huh?”

I lowered my upper body and raised the joint of my right arm toward the ceiling.

Crackle——!!!!

Golden waves spread across the arm that had only been blue a moment ago, and a mark was engraved into its flesh.

“Jinhyuk, I’m borrowing your skill for a bit, okay?”

[Through the reproduction of ‘Tombgrave’s Right Arm,’ the Strength stat and destructive power of your right arm have increased!]

[Due to insufficient Strength and Constitution, only 20% of the original ability can currently be reproduced.]

Just clenching my fist was enough to make the air ripple.

“Hssss….”

Clairvoyance was still active, so I watched the route Duke Gilobat and the demon nobles were taking. I carefully adjusted my strength so I wouldn’t kill them, then gently tapped the corridor floor with my fist.

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“Hm?”

[Hmm?]

Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus, who'd frozen at the violent wave of power that seemed capable of crushing everything around them, tilted their heads.

They'd clearly seen me holding back.

"Nothing happened, though?"

Just as Jang Hayoung said, absolutely nothing happened.

The two women exchanged glances, silently checking each other's reactions, then approached Park Jinwoo at the same time.

"Heyyy, Park Jinwoo? Why'd you suddenly lose your mind?"

[That power was intense enough to rival a giant. Did you fail because it was your first time handling that kind of strength?]

Park Jinwoo didn't react to either of them.

Puzzled, Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus moved a little closer.

"We're so fucking screwed——!!"

"Huh?"

[What?]

Park Jinwoo suddenly snapped back to reality and roared like an enraged bear. He immediately tucked both women under his arms and bolted.

Jang Hayoung stared at the cold sweat pouring from his body and the extreme panic on his face.

"Why're you freaking out all of a sudden? Did something go wrong?"

"Yeah, something just went wrong! This whole place is about to collapse!!"

"Whaaaaaat——?!"

Park Jinwoo casually hurled Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus into the My Room space, then shouted toward Jang Hayoung.

"Hayoung! Use that wall of yours and message the Demon King of Salvation right now! Tell her to get out of the factory! As fast as she can!!"

“O-Okay! Got it!”

With the burdens under his arms gone, Park Jinwoo was finally free. Still dripping with sweat, he sprinted toward the underground area where Duke Gilobat was headed.

Storm-like winds wrapped around his whole body as he ran at full speed, and the scenery around him changed by the second.

It took Jang Hayoung only twenty seconds to send Kim Dokja a chat message through the ‘Unidentifiable Wall.’

In those mere twenty seconds, Park Jinwoo caught sight of Duke Gilobat and the nobles following him, all of them panting as they raced somewhere ahead.

“Hssss….”

Asmodeus quietly observed the serious look on his face, something rarely seen from him.

‘You really are fast, ‘Apostle of Elation.’’

For a moment, she remembered the first time she’d discovered him and quietly smiled.

At first, she’d thought he was merely a mortal who didn’t know his place and ran wild without restraint. Yet he’d turned out to be a reckless madman whose antics were so far beyond those boring Incarnations that there was never a dull moment around him.

He seemed to possess an inborn obsession with women and bunny girls, and she’d once assumed he’d eventually be struck down for his shameless behavior and die somewhere without anyone even noticing.

Instead, he’d casually surpassed Historical-grade Constellations and proudly hung his own star in the night sky as a Fable-grade Constellation.

At some point, Asmodeus realized that most of her attention had begun falling on Park Jinwoo.

The mortal Yoo Joonghyuk and the newly ascended Constellation Kim Dokja were entertaining too.

But even together, the two of them couldn’t compare to Park Jinwoo.

‘You really are fascinating. I truly want to know how you manage to commit one insane act after another.’

Asmodeus kept her eyes fixed on Park Jinwoo, watching everything he did.

Then, in the next instant, the startled Duke Gilobat and his demon nobles were already dangling from his hands.

Park Jinwoo instantly threw them into My Room, snatched the turquoise sphere glowing where Duke Gilobat had arrived, and bent both knees.

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[The 'Factory' has ceased operation.]

"Ah, shit! Why the hell did this ancient factory suddenly shut all the lights off?!"

The moment I snatched the turquoise Fable sphere—or whatever it was—the surroundings went dark. I cursed up a storm and bent my knees.

The situation had officially gone from worst to somehow even worse.

I'd tried to hold back and make a straight passage to where that duke bastard was.

But since this was my first time controlling the Stigma, I'd completely screwed it up.

I'd tried to follow Jotaro Kujo's wisdom by smashing through the wall—or rather, the floor—to make my own path. Unfortunately, I'd gotten distracted for a second while throwing the punch, and the resulting shockwave had gone straight through the deepest parts of the underground structure.

And with Clairvoyance, I'd seen it.

Countless cracks rapidly spreading across the steel pillars supporting the entire factory.

Those bastard cracks reached through every floor, wall, and ceiling that made up the building.

'At best, we've got thirty seconds before this whole place comes down.'

I'd secured the scarecrows for Jang Hayoung—the duke and his nobles—and even picked up a Fable Core as a bonus.

Now all I had to do was escape.

"Damn it… Dokja's factory's going bankrupt before she can even become its duke—factory manager…."

You bastard! You wicked Duke Gilobat!!

Did you hate the idea of handing your factory over to our Dokja that much?!

Sure, technically it was collapsing because of me…but as long as I kept Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus quiet, this could still become the perfect crime.

"Ah, shit…."

Whatever. Escaping was the priority.

I probably wouldn't get badly injured or die even if the factory rubble buried me, but I'd already been crushed under debris once before.

It had been absolutely awful, and I had no desire to repeat the experience.

'Using Tombgrave again seems like a bad idea, and it'll take too long to run or fly all the way back up….'

I ran through my current skills and Stigmas, wondering how I could escape in a way that looked at least a little cool while still conveying a sense of urgency.

'Guess I've got no choice….'

One Stigma flashed through my mind.

[The Stigma, 'Black Dragon Transformation Lv.1,' has been activated!]

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"Run! This whole place is about to collapse!"

"Was this Park Jinwoo's doing again?"

"Can't you tell just by looking?! Of course Jinwoo did it!"

The moment Kim Dokja received Jang Hayoung's message, she ran and kept running, trying to escape the factory as fast as possible.

- Wow… I just realized something. You guys are incredibly lucky Park Jinwoo's on your side. Otherwise, wouldn't we be the ones dealing with all this right now?

Han Sooyoung had her chin propped on one hand as she casually watched the scene, and Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk's faces twitched in irritation.

Their expressions crumpled in frustration, but neither woman could bring herself to argue.

Eventually, Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk leaped over the demon noble corpses scattered across the floor and escaped the factory.

Rrrrrrrrumble——!!!

The factory collapsed behind them, sinking into the ground while blasting clouds of dust in every direction. Both women let out small sighs of relief.

"Uh…?"

“Kim Dokja….”

Their gazes dropped toward the collapsing factory.

Something immense was rising from beneath it—an aura that felt strangely familiar yet entirely new at the same time.

Yoo Joonghyuk silently stared underground for a few seconds before her expression hardened.

“Get ready. It’s coming.”

BOOOOOOM!!!

Something smashed through the collapsing factory’s ceiling and shot high into the sky, scattering dense clouds of dirt and dust.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk immediately drew their swords, watching the long, black, unknown creature with tense expressions.

Before they knew it, an enormous black dragon had lowered its face toward them.

For an instant, both women froze beneath its quiet yet tyrannical pressure.

[Yo.]

The sheer anticlimax of that greeting drained every ounce of tension from their bodies.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk’s swords slipped from their hands and clattered to the ground.

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39. Gilobat's Revolutionary (5)

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When people think of Eastern dragons, they usually picture sacred beasts. Water gods, sea gods, guardian deities—there are many different ways they're viewed, and most of them are positive.

But unlike most dragons in legends and folktales, which are usually portrayed in a favorable light, the black dragon alone tends to symbolize death, disaster, and destruction. The same is true of Western dragons. Whether East or West, black dragons are the ones most strongly tied to ominous meanings.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk were now getting a firsthand lesson in exactly why.

The two women slowly raised their heads and stared at the black dragon looking down at them. Its long, enormous black body had to stretch for several kilometers, and each individual scale was as large as a grown man's torso. Four massive legs ended in the sharp claws of a predator.

Deer-like horns rose toward the sky, while its eyes had razor-thin vertical pupils. A thick mane covered parts of its head and jaw. It was, without question, the very image of an Eastern black dragon, and Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk could only stare in awe.

However, the reason they'd gone speechless had nothing to do with its majestic appearance.

[Ah, shit. This is my first time fully turning into a dragon, and my senses feel weird as hell. I think I'm getting motion sick. I might puke.]

"Urgh...!"

The sight of the dragon's long cheeks puffing out as it desperately fought back nausea sent chills through both women's bodies.

"K-Kyaaaaaaah!!"

"Park Jinwoo!! T-Turn your head away right now!!"

"If you puke on us, I'll seriously kill you!"

The overwhelming pressure the black dragon had radiated moments ago vanished without a trace. In its place came a much more primal terror.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk had gone through every kind of hardship imaginable and overcome countless brutal scenarios. But they were still human. They had absolutely no desire to get swept away by someone else's vomit, much less drown in it.

There was only one option left.

"Yoo Joonghyuk!"

"I know!"

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk spun around and fled without looking back. They pushed their speed past their normal limits as they raced away from the industrial complex.

Park Jinwoo, still in the form of a black dragon, watched them leave with his arms somehow folded and bared his teeth in a grin. Then his expression abruptly darkened.

[Ah, shit. Wait. I actually think I'm gonna puke.]

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Using Black Dragon Transformation for the first time came as a huge shock.

My body felt unbelievably light, as though I'd shed some suffocating shell. I'd never felt anything like this before. A sense of omnipotence far beyond what I'd experienced with Dragonkin Transformation filled my entire body.

It felt as though I'd transcended the limits of a physical vessel. The overwhelming sense of superiority, freedom, and sheer power was impossible to put into words.

I felt like I could flatten the ground with a flick of my hand. I could swim freely through the sky and rule over everything around me.

It was incredible.

Unfortunately, that feeling soon fell straight into the abyss.

[Ah, fuck. I'm motion sick.]

I'd always been naturally prone to motion sickness.

Cars, buses, trains, ships, planes. I'd ridden all five before, and when the motion sickness got bad, my stomach would churn so hard that cold sweat poured down my body. If it was mild, I'd often end up falling asleep before I even realized it.

Apparently, that problem still applied after using Black Dragon Transformation.

It was my first time transforming my body and species so completely. My senses were basically the same as when I was human, but subtle differences had warped everything just enough for my mind to reject it.

And the source of that disconnect was my own body.

Flying through the sky without wings felt like swimming through water, and it was deeply unnatural. Having my arms and legs replaced by a dragon's limbs felt strange too. Every one of my five senses had grown sharper than when I was human, making everything around me feel uncomfortable.

[...This is driving me insane.]

What was the point of becoming a full dragon and gaining access to a dragon's true power if I got so motion sick from the transformation that I couldn't even use it?

[Stigma, 'Black Dragon Transformation,' has been deactivated.]

If I stayed transformed any longer, I was seriously going to humiliate myself by vomiting all over the Gilobat Industrial Complex. So I canceled Black Dragon Transformation.

My body compressed with a sickening series of cracks as it twisted back from a dragon into a human. The scales covering my skin sank away, while my muscles and bones returned to human shape.

Next came the stretched nerves, blood vessels, and organs shifting back into place. I landed on the ground and immediately lay flat.

"Ah... I'm dying."

My five senses had returned to normal, but the motion sickness that'd already started wasn't going away anytime soon.

[The Star Relic, 'Water-Calming Pearl,' looks pathetically at its master.]

"Shut the hell up. I already know! Urgh...!!"

Another wave of nausea surged up. I covered my mouth with both hands and slowly controlled my breathing until it settled down.

I'd gotten motion sick countless times over my twenty-six years of life, but there'd only been one time bad enough to actually make me throw up.

That was when I'd ridden a boat for the first time as a kid.

And unfortunately, the sensation of swimming through the sky as a dragon felt disturbingly similar to being on a boat.

'This is seriously driving me nuts.'

Fuck. The whole world was screwing me over.

What was even the point of going through hell to unlock something as badass as Black Dragon Transformation if I couldn't use it properly?

'Was there an item that helped with motion sickness...?'

Or maybe this was only happening because it was my first time becoming a full dragon. Maybe my body just needed time to adjust.

Slap! Slap!

My head was getting hazy from the nausea, so I smacked both cheeks hard with my palms.

"Phew... That's a little better."

After lying against the cold ground for a while, the motion sickness finally began to fade. My stomach settled, and the heat clouding my mind gradually cooled as well.

'This is actually a pretty serious problem.'

Who the fuck would've guessed I'd get motion sick from turning into a dragon?

It was so damn lame that I could practically feel my dignity shriveling up.

I immediately ran through every fictional universe I could remember and searched my memory for anything that might help with motion sickness.

'Was there even an item with such a stupidly specific effect?'

There wasn't.

No matter how much I searched my memory, I couldn't think of a single item in the Story Shop that was good for motion sickness.

'Games are completely out, then.'

The only manga that came to mind when I thought of motion sickness was Fairy Tail. But as far as I remembered, even that series never really offered a proper solution for it.

"Ah, screw it, screw it!"

For now, I'd just use Black Dragon Transformation a few more times and try to get used to the motion sickness. If that didn't work, I'd search the Dokkaebi Bag for something useful.

Rip!

I opened the space leading to My Room and pulled Duke Gilobat and the demon nobles out. Then I let Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus out too.

"Pfft!"

[Pfft!]

"Fuck."

The second Jang Hayoung and Asmodeus saw my face after coming out of My Room, both of them burst into laughter. I covered my face with both hands in sheer humiliation.

"Ah, ahahahaha! A-Are you okay? Hahahahaha!"

[Ahem... ‘Apostle of Elation’? Sometimes, motion sickness can happen when your body transforms into another species. Don't take it too hard.]

"....."

A lot of things seemed to be breaking inside me today.

I wanted nothing more than to smack both Jang Hayoung, who was openly laughing her ass off, and Asmodeus, who was covering her mouth with one hand while smiling with her eyes.

...Of course, if I actually did that, only Jang Hayoung's life would be in danger, so I didn't.

"Hayoung."

"Ah, my stomach hurts from laughing so much.... Why're you calling me all of a sudden?"

Jang Hayoung wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes and rubbed her stomach with one hand.

"Have you inherited your Incarnation yet?"

"Huh? No, not yet."

"Really...?"

A grin spread across my face.

What was the fastest way to raise someone's level of mastery?

The answer was simple.

Real combat.

In the Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint webtoon, the male Kim Dokja had called Jang Hayoung by two titles.

The master of the 'Unidentifiable Wall.'

And the 'King of Transcendents.'

She was said to be the most perfect Incarnation among countless Incarnations.

Jang Hayoung started trembling as she watched my smile. I lightly placed both hands on her shoulders.

"Okay, listen carefully. From now on, use the Wall to send this to the guy with the modifier 'Abyssal Black Flame Dragon.'"

「***Fifteen-year-old middle school girl looking for an online pen pal~***」

「***That Elation bastard is alive.***」

"Got it?"

Jang Hayoung immediately began typing through the Wall's ability, though she still looked at me uneasily.

"Do you know this Constellation? Is it really okay to send something like this?"

"Of course! I know him pretty well. His personality's... hmm. Probably better than Sooyoung's, at least."

"I'm sending it, then?"

Jang Hayoung pressed the send button, and the message flew toward our dear Flame Dragon.

We waited for several seconds.

[A reply has arrived!]

[Sender - Abyssal Black Flame Dragon]

I knew our simple little chuuni dragon would answer.

Then again, his Incarnation, Han Sooyoung, might've already told him I was alive.

- [The Constellation, 'Abyssal Black Flame Dragon,' doesn't wish for your death.]

"....."

A bitter taste filled my mouth.

He'd been one of the Constellations who'd hoped I wouldn't die on the third floor of the Dark Castle. And now I needed to borrow his power.

"Hey, hey! Park Jinwoo!"

"Hm?"

Someone tugged on my arm. I turned and saw Jang Hayoung gripping it with a confused look.

"He replied. What do I send next?"

"What'd he say?"

"He said he'd welcome a fifteen-year-old pen pal, but he called you a bastard."

"Has this overgrown lizard finally lost his damn mind?"

Here I was, actually feeling a little moved and apologetic while trying to borrow the power of that Western lizard.

And he decided to start by insulting me?

"Tell him to explain why I'm a bastard."

"Uh, okay!"

Clack-clack-clack.

Jang Hayoung rapidly typed another message and sent it toward the Flame Dragon.

Ding!

"Uh... He's angry because you died without his permission."

"This bastard?"

Of course, I knew he didn't literally mean it that way.

That was probably just his own awkward way of saying he'd been worried about me.

"Sigh."

This was why dealing with chuunis and teenagers going through puberty was such a pain.

What was the point of getting angry at a bratty dragon who couldn't just admit how he felt?

"Tell Flame Dragon I'm sorry for dying without permission. Then ask if he missed his hyung that much."

A smile slowly crept across my lips as I watched Jang Hayoung type.

Knowing there was someone besides my companions who'd worried about me felt surprisingly nice.

'I guess I've lived a pretty decent life.'

The memory of getting motion sick during Black Dragon Transformation had already vanished from my mind thanks to Abyssal Black Flame Dragon's message.

"Talk with him for a bit, then tell him you want to borrow the Incarnationization skill. As for the other Constellations...."

For a moment, several modifiers flashed through my mind.

The Great Sage, Heaven's Equal. Secretive Plotter. Admiral Yi Sun-sin. The Constellations who'd sent messages telling me not to die, or who'd watched my final moments to the very end.

I wanted to tell all of them that I was still alive.

'...I can do that later.'

I was worried about leaking information, so I decided to contact them another time. Then I turned toward the demon nobles who were quietly trying to sneak away.

"Are you guys seriously going to run? Really?"

Flinch!

Every one of the demon nobles instantly froze.

They slowly turned their heads toward me, and I smiled at them.

"I'll give you a chance. In a little while, you'll fight her. If you win, I'll let you live. Deal?"

"W-Wait?! Hey! How am I supposed to beat those guys?!"

Without a word, I threw an arm around Jang Hayoung's shoulders.

"Hayoung. You're an incredibly lucky person."

"Where's this coming from all of a sudden...?"

[You have sponsored Incarnation 'Jang Hayoung' with 200,000 Coins.]

Jang Hayoung, who'd probably never held anywhere close to 200,000 Coins in her dirt-poor life, opened her eyes wide.

"You're one of the Incarnations I've sponsored this many Coins to on one hand... Actually, no. Not quite."

Still, she was probably within the top fifteen.

That counted as pretty lucky, right?

"Hayoung, remember what I told you before? I said I'd make you stronger."

[You have purchased 4 Oak Logs from the 'Minecraft' category in the Story Shop.]

[A total of 4 Coins has been consumed.]

Four blocky logs appeared in my hands, and a Minecraft-style UI popped into my vision. It wasn't exactly the same as the original game's interface, but I placed the logs into the inventory icon in the upper-left corner, then stacked all four inside the crafting grid.

[You have acquired 16 Oak Planks.]

I took the sixteen wooden planks and placed four of them into the crafting grid.

[You have acquired a Crafting Table.]

"Hayoung."

"Y-Yeah?"

"You're ready to get stronger now, right?"

If we're going to power you up properly, then let's go all the way.

Time to turn you into a player decked out from head to toe in a full set of diamond gear.

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39. Gilobat's Revolutionary (6)

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Minecraft.

One of the most popular games in the world. It's an open-world sandbox game where you survive in a world made entirely of square blocks.

Players can do all kinds of things while surviving in that blocky world—building, hunting, farming, gathering, PvP, exploration, redstone circuitry, and more. It's the kind of god-tier game that lets you experience countless genres in a single title.

And now, it had crossed the walls between worlds and dropped anchor in the world of Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint.

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"Uh... was this how you crafted a full set of armor?"

It'd already been years since I'd stopped playing Minecraft. I'd forgotten most of the crafting recipes ages ago, so I dug through my memories as best I could while staring at the wooden crafting table.

Holding the diamonds I'd bought from the Story Shop, I slowly crafted a full set of diamond armor. I started with the most important parts, the helmet and chestplate, then made the leggings and boots.

But then...

"....."

As you'd expect from something straight out of Minecraft, the finished armor was extremely square and blocky. It looked exactly like the armor sets I'd made countless times while playing the game years ago.

Still, the sight of it reminded me of that infamous version worn by Jack-hyungnim in the live-action Minecraft movie, and my mood instantly soured.

'Fuck. No way, right?'

I suddenly felt uneasy. The memory of that live-action diamond armor doubled my anxiety.

"Hmm... should I use my Stigma and turn it into a bikini?"

Activating my Stigma, Time of Elation, required me to consume probability. But if it meant seeing Jang Hayoung in a bikini, that wouldn't exactly be a waste.

My debate ended almost instantly.

"Okay. Hayoung! You're ready to put on a bikini, right?"

Just as I stretched out my right hand to activate my Stigma, the blonde, short-haired beauty hurriedly wrapped both arms around it.

"Don't screw with me! What the hell are you talking about, suddenly bringing up a bikini?!"

The feel of her small but soft breasts against my right arm was extremely pleasant. Hayoung, meanwhile, seemed to stand on the exact opposite end of that emotional spectrum as she glared at me with flushed cheeks and eyes full of panic.

The sight stirred something sadistic inside me.

'Hmm... at this point, I've got no choice but to admit it.'

Apparently, I was a soft sadist!

Discovering a sexual preference I hadn't known about for twenty-six years threw my mind into brief chaos. Naturally, I crushed that confusion beneath my budding sadism without a second thought.

"Wouldn't it look good on you, Hayoung?"

"Uh, huh...?!"

"I mean, I definitely prefer bunny girls to bikinis, but with your face and figure, I'm sure you'd look great in one."

"A-Ahh... wh-what...?!"

Her entire face turned scarlet, followed by her neck and ears. She lowered her head in embarrassment, and rather than feeling excited, I started getting worried.

What the hell was this girl going to do when she grew up?

I'd said it with ninety-nine percent sincerity, but if she didn't want to do it, all she had to do was tell me no. Then I'd have stopped. Instead, Hayoung's reaction just kept feeding my sadistic streak, and now it felt awkward to back out midway.

If I was being completely truthful with myself...

I did want to see Jang Hayoung in a bikini.

I was a man.

And not merely a healthy one. Between my race changing into a dragon and my skill Virility Enhancement, I'd become an explosively healthy man from morning to night.

Damn it! Seeing a beautiful Western blonde in a bikini was every man's dream!

Sure, her breasts weren't as big as my girlfriend Kim Dokja's! But wasn't seeing a cute blonde with short hair in a bikini still every man's dream?!

Shiver—!

'Ah. Thinking about Dokja suddenly calmed me right down.'

For a split second, an image flashed through my mind of Kim Dokja holding a blade against my throat. Goosebumps spread across my whole body, and a chill ran down my spine.

'Yeah. Let's stop.'

If I actually went through with this, there was no doubt that imaginary scene would become reality. I decided this was far enough.

The survival instinct of a man already taken instantly crushed the excitement that'd been shooting through the roof.

"Here... just put this on for now."

"Huh? O-Okay."

When I suddenly handed her the diamond armor with a dejected look, Jang Hayoung accepted it with a bewildered expression. She kept glancing at me as she struggled into the angular armor piece by piece.

Thankfully, once she'd put on the full diamond set, it looked exactly like the armor from the game. I felt genuine relief that it didn't have the bizarre proportions of the live-action version.

'Still, this is pretty interesting.'

I studied the diamond armor covering Jang Hayoung's body. There was no way armor shaped like that should've fit her perfectly, yet I'd watched its size adjust on its own, much like the Dimensional Coats that Kim Dokja, Yoo Joonghyuk, and I owned.

Feeling a wave of nostalgia from the blocky armor, I handed Hayoung the diamond sword and shield I'd made on the crafting table.

"Did you learn Fighter Transformation from Flame Dragon?"

"Yeah. In exchange, I gave him a verbal promise that you'd give him some Jewel Meat or whatever later."

"...Why are you spending my coins however you want?"

"Trades through the Wall need payment. I didn't have anything I could give him right away, so I had no choice but to offer that."

Jang Hayoung narrowed her eyes before continuing.

"And who was the one who practically shoved me into learning Fighter Transformation in the first place? You should at least let this much slide."

"Sheesh... Fine. Good job. You did well."

Her words reminded me of something I'd almost forgotten. She really could learn skills possessed by constellations and transcendents through the Unidentified Wall, but she still needed to pay a price for them.

'Originally, the payment was asking for advice about Han Sooyoung being in danger because of some wyvern or whatever, wasn't it?'

I moved the interdimensional video-call channel I'd fixed beside Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk over to myself.

- So anyway, that bastard Park Jinwoo seriously... Huh?

"Talking about me again?"

I folded my arms as I caught Han Sooyoung blatantly badmouthing me. Her eyes went wide like a startled cat, and she stammered for a moment before clearing her throat and looking at me.

- *Hey.*

"Yeah?"

- *Just how strong have you gotten?*

"Huh?"

I was caught off guard. This was the first time I'd ever seen Han Sooyoung ask about my strength like this.

I looked at her through the interdimensional channel and noticed that all the other party members who'd been beside her were gone. After thinking about it for a moment, I opened my mouth to answer her question.

"I don't know either."

- *Park Jinwoo. I'm asking seriously.*

"....."

The strangely bittersweet look on Han Sooyoung's face left me speechless for a moment.

I wondered why she'd asked me something like that.

It didn't take long to figure it out.

"Are you getting impatient?"

- .....

I could understand how Han Sooyoung felt, at least a little.

What would you normally think if a companion who'd once walked right beside you suddenly became so strong they'd vanished into the distance, far beyond your reach?

Pride? Happiness? Dependence?

Any of those could've been the right answer.

But for the Han Sooyoung in front of me, every single one was wrong.

"Saying you guys are still doing great would probably just sound hypocritical, wouldn't it?"

- *...You know me well.*

Compared to their webtoon counterparts, they'd become stronger at least one full stage earlier.

But next to a cheat-like existence like me, even their rate of growth probably looked meaningless.

That wasn't anyone else's judgment. It was likely how they saw themselves.

I closed my eyes for a moment and began comparing everyone in the group, measuring each person's growth one by one.

Aside from Kim Dokja, Yoo Joonghyuk, Han Sooyoung, Gong Pildu, and Lee Seolhwa, the others seemed to have grown at least one stage beyond where they'd been in the webtoon, with some nearing three stages ahead.

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk already knew how they needed to grow, so I could set them aside. Gong Pildu was steadily getting stronger through the crises he faced on his own, so I could exclude that old man too.

And compared to a game, Lee Seolhwa filled the healer and support role, so she could be excluded as well.

That left Han Sooyoung alone, and her growth was a little harder to judge.

Back on the second floor of the Dark Castle, my intervention under the name of "training" had caused everyone who participated to grow at a fairly rapid pace. Han Sooyoung, however, had left with Kim Dokja, and she hadn't shown any major leap since then.

Seeing the complete dragon form I'd become must've made the others impatient too. Some of them might've felt competitive, but impatience was probably the stronger emotion.

Even so, no matter how impatient the rest of them felt...

'You're probably feeling it more than anyone.'

I couldn't shake the feeling that none of them felt it as strongly as Han Sooyoung did.

"Sooyoung."

- .....

She didn't answer when I called her name.

But her eyes stayed fixed on me.

"I understand why you're impatient."

I never really said it out loud, but ever since the first scenario, I'd always been thinking about how to get stronger as fast as possible. Again and again.

Why did everyone think I'd acted like a lunatic during the Green Zone scenario and charged straight into a monster wave? I'd done that insane shit because I needed to get used to real combat as quickly as possible. Did they think I'd risked my life like that because I didn't have a brain?

The world of Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint was an apocalypse slowly marching toward destruction. I knew that if I couldn't gain enough power to protect myself in a hell like this, the only thing waiting for me was a dog's death. That was why I'd done so many crazy things while pretending not to care that I couldn't count them on both hands anymore.

Of course, some of them had just been spur-of-the-moment impulses. And now that I'd gained enough strength, I was far more relaxed than I'd been back then.

That was also why I understood Han Sooyoung's impatience better than anyone.

"But didn't I give you an SS-grade dagger and an SSS-grade dagger? The ones I made for you from that ice turtle and those Underworld minerals."

- You mean the ones you gave me on the third floor of the Dark Castle? Yeah, I've been using them just fine. But you know as well as I do that from here on, skills and Stigmas matter more than weapons.

"More precisely, raising your own 'Status' should be your top priority, but you're not wrong."

During the first through tenth Main Scenarios on Earth, Overall Stats had been far more useful. Well, Overall Stats and skills, to be exact.

'From now on, the number and Status of your Fables, along with your Stigmas and skill grades, are going to matter a lot more.'

Actually, after spending the night with Kim Dokja, I'd tried raising my Overall Stats past the base level of 100, excluding bonus stats. Did they know what kind of system message I'd gotten?

[Once an Overall Stat exceeds Level 100, the number of coins required to raise it will increase exponentially with each level bracket.]

[Constitution Lv.100 → Constitution Lv.101 requires 1,500 Coins.]

[Would you really like to raise your Constitution stat level?]

Did they notice what was wrong?

Raising an Overall Stat from 90 to 91 cost 1,200 Coins. Until now, each new bracket—from 1 to 10, 10 to 20, and so on—had only increased the cost by 100 Coins.

But once I hit the Level 100 bracket, the price jumped by a full 300 Coins.

How the fuck did that make any sense?

I genuinely went speechless when I saw that raising a single level would cost me 1,500 Coins!

Anyway.

At this point, trying to bulldoze through scenarios with absurd stats by constantly raising my Overall Stats had become a massive waste of money.

If the 100-to-110 bracket already cost 1,500 Coins per level, then the 110-to-120 bracket would obviously cost even more. At that point, I'd usually get more value out of buying skills with the same money.

"By the way, are you guys actually collecting Fables properly?"

- *Who do you think I am, you?! If Fables were that fucking easy to get, do you think the rest of us would be struggling this much?!*

"Oh, come on. I already told you all the tricks for getting Fables! Just shut your eyes and try something crazy for once!"

- *Such as?*

I thought for a moment at Han Sooyoung's question, then remembered that nameless pterosaur she'd struggled with before.

"Ride on the back of some flying pterosaur bastard and control it. Or tame one. Wouldn't you get a Fable like Wyvern Rider or something?"

- *...You lunatic! You think some monster bastard's just going to let me ride it?!*

"What are your Avatars for, decoration? Make a shitload of clones, have them all cling to the thing until it's too heavy to fly, beat its health down to nothing, then tame it!"

- *You're calling me a pig in a roundabout way, aren't you?!*

"What the hell are you talking about now? Why would you be a pig? Where else am I supposed to find a slender beauty like you?"

- *...Ahem. As long as you know.*

Wasn't there a saying that a woman's heart was as fickle as a reed?

I hadn't even been insulting her, yet she'd misunderstood on her own and started yelling at me. Then the moment I gave her my honest opinion, Han Sooyoung blushed and turned her head away.

I sighed inwardly.

"Anyway, let's get back to the point. So what's the deal? You want to get stronger and need advice? Or do you want me to find you some good skills?"

- *...Honestly, both.*

For a second, I almost snapped, 'What, did you deposit some Coins with me or something?'

But when I saw Han Sooyoung biting her lip and avoiding my gaze like she felt guilty, I shut my mouth.

The Han Sooyoung I'd seen until now was a proud woman. She had a lot of pride as a writer, too, and although she pretended otherwise, she cared deeply about the people she considered her own.

Just how desperate did she have to be to ask me something like this?

The thought made me frown.

"Haah... I'll be straight with you."

- .....

"I can help you. But skills are out."

Han Sooyoung opened her mouth to say something, but I spoke first.

"It's not because you used to be an Apostle or because I still don't trust you or anything like that. Just hear me out first."

- *...Then why?*

"My shop does have plenty of skill books and items that'd help you. The problem is..."

- *The problem?*

"There's nothing that feels like it fits you perfectly."

If I had to describe Han Sooyoung as a game character, she had one hell of an awkward build.

She was basically a ninja without stealth or assassination skills crossed with a mage—no, more like a black flame sorcerer.

Didn't that sound weird just hearing it?

Everyone else in the party had a fairly clear direction, but Han Sooyoung's build was oddly vague.

If I gave her support skills to reinforce her black flames, it'd feel like a waste of all the daggers she normally used. But if I gave her skills focused on stealth, assassination, or supporting that style, then her black flames would end up getting pushed into the background.

Giving her both sets of skills was awkward too. What if stuffing both into her build ended up hurting her growth instead?

'A skill that fits her without erasing what makes her unique...'

Hmm.

Nothing immediately came to mind.

There was, however, one Star Relic I'd once considered giving Han Sooyoung.

"Hey, Han Sooyoung."

- *Yeah?*

"If I gave you a Star Relic, would you happily take it?"

- *A Star Relic? Of course I'd be happy if you gave me one.*

"Really?"

I immediately opened the Story Shop and searched for the Star Relic I'd been debating whether to give her.

[Searching the 'Jujutsu Kaisen' category in the Story Shop.]

[Purchasing the Star Relic, 'Inverted Spear of Heaven'.]

[Using a 70% Discount Ticket.]

[900,000 Coins have been consumed.]

Through the channel connected to Han Sooyoung, I sponsored the Inverted Spear of Heaven to her.

- *...Oh. But—*

Han Sooyoung lifted the Inverted Spear of Heaven for a moment, then looked at me.

- *Does this thing have some kind of special effect?*

"Obviously. But what kind of person asks that without reading the item description first?"

- *I'll read it later. Come on, give me the cool explanation yourself.*

There was a reason people said predicting a cat's behavior was damn near impossible.

"Starting today, your new title is Sorcerer and Mage Killer."

- *Huh?*

"That Inverted Spear of Heaven has the ability to forcibly cancel any technique that's currently active."

- *Wh-What...?!*

Han Sooyoung's eyes went round. She hurriedly cupped the Inverted Spear of Heaven in both hands as if it had suddenly become infinitely more precious.

"Originally, it only worked on a sorcerer's cursed techniques, so its effects were limited to jujutsu. But there's a pretty high chance it'll work on magic-type skills and Stigmas too."

- *H-Hey...! I know I'm the one who asked you for help, but isn't this way too ridiculous?!*

"I'm already so fucking strong that shit like that doesn't even work on me anymore, so I don't need it."

Han Sooyoung's words did make my stomach hurt a little.

It was still a Star Relic that would've been more than useful if I'd kept it for myself.

Still.

"It's a gift for a woman who was sulking because she was the only one who didn't get anything. Just shut up and accept it."

- .....

Like hell there was anything I couldn't spare for a beautiful woman who'd swallowed her pride enough to ask me for help.

"It's definitely effective against jujutsu traditions from East Asia. But honestly, I've got no idea whether it'll work on Western magic too. Keep that in mind when you use it."

- *Thanks...*

"If you're grateful, wear a bunny suit for me sometime."

I deliberately brought up the bunny suit as payment so the mood wouldn't get awkward.

But then—

- *Sure, why not...*

"...Huh?"

My eyes widened at Han Sooyoung's voice from the other side of the channel.

Her face was bright red as she stared straight into my eyes.

- *I'll wear it. Your bunny suit.*

"...Seriously?"

- *Wearing a bunny suit once in exchange for a Star Relic is basically getting it for free.*

"....."

No, to be fair, she wasn't wrong.

- *Anyway, we've reached our next scenario too, so I've gotta go.*

"H-Huh? Uh..."

- *This noona will put your Star Relic to good use, so don't go getting your ass kicked somewhere. And seriously, what kind of fucking dragon gets motion sickness?*

[Click.]

The channel screen abruptly disappeared.

I stared at the empty space and let out a dry laugh. After covering my eyes with both palms and rubbing them for a moment, I slowly opened them again.

Jang Hayoung was watching me with a crumpled, nervous expression.

I looked straight up at the sky.

"Fuck... Is this actually real?"

Winter had passed.

Spring had finally come for me.

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39. Gilobat's Revolutionary (7)

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“Ah, I can’t focus.”

This was the chance of a lifetime. The thought that an opportunity I’d probably never get again had fallen right into my hands left my mind blank and my heart pounding.

It was a first.

A woman had actually offered to wear a bunny-girl outfit for me of her own free will.

‘God, I want to go back to Earth right now.’

And with that, my hatred for the great nebulae that had dumped me in this place began to swell from the bottom of my heart. I needed to spend my time helping Jang Hayoung grow right now, but Han Sooyoung had made it impossible to focus.

I’d always known that cat was cute, seductive, and wickedly teasing.

I’d just never imagined she’d flirt with me like this.

Slap! Slap!

Han Sooyoung’s image kept popping into my head like I was trapped in an endless loop, so I smacked both my cheeks to snap myself out of it. The burning sting helped clear my head, if only a little.

“Huuu…”

Focus.

Right now, I was in the middle of something important. I needed to focus on helping Jang Hayoung, who could practically be called the second protagonist of Ways of Survival, grow stronger.

I turned toward Jang Hayoung, who was watching me with a nervous, crumpled expression.

“Sorry. I lost my mind for a second. Anyway, you’re about to fight. You’re confident, right?”

“H-Hey… I’ve never fought nobles before. It’s only been a few minutes since I learned these skills!”

Jang Hayoung had never gotten the chance to show off her talent because of the Unidentified Wall, so she looked at me with obvious unease. I gently placed my hands on both her shoulders.

“Hayoung.”

“Yeah…”

“Leave everything that comes after to me. Just go wild and do whatever you want.”

Jang Hayoung was overflowing with talent. The only reason she reacted like this was because that immense talent had been sealed behind her wall and had never gotten the chance to bloom.

“I believe in you.”

“Believe in what…?”

In the second half of Ways of Survival, Jang Hayoung would be known as the ‘Most Perfect Incarnation’ and the ‘King of Transcendents.’

“I believe you can do this.”

I’d already become strong enough.

I knew I still had much further to go, but the time had come to stop looking only at my own growth. Now I needed to look around me and move forward together with the people at my side.

And for the first step, I chose Jang Hayoung.

“I get why you’re scared. I used to feel the same way.”

“……”

“This road is hard. It’s painful, and it hurts like hell. But…”

“But?”

I looked straight into Jang Hayoung’s glowing blue eyes and grinned. Images of the companions I’d traveled with over the past few months flashed through my mind.

“If you’re walking that road with me and the rest of our party, then I don’t think it’s something you need to be that afraid of.”

Just being in a party full of protagonists gave me peace of mind. There wasn’t a single bad person among them, and the simple fact that I belonged to such an ideal group gave me strength.

That was why I was sure.

If I stayed with them, we’d definitely reach the ‘end’ of this world.

With that certainty in my heart, I looked at Jang Hayoung.

“Go wild. Release all that heart—no, all that talent—you’ve kept helplessly locked away until now.”

Jang Hayoung stood there in thought for a moment before slowly closing her eyes.

Fwoosh.

Small flames flickered to life across her entire body. In the next instant, they surged with terrifying force, making their presence known beneath the dark night sky.

For a moment, the flames burned in the shape of a cross before collapsing inward around Jang Hayoung.

It lasted only an instant.

Then Jang Hayoung slowly emerged from the flames that had lit up the night.

Her golden hair, like molten gold, had taken on a reddish tint, while flames danced all across her body. She looked almost like a spirit that commanded fire itself.

I quietly marveled as I stared at Jang Hayoung after her awakening as a Fighter.

‘So this is Fighter Transformation?’

The 73rd Demon Realm was currently hosting the ‘Revolutionary’ Scenario, which felt like a modified version of Mafia.

There were ‘Executioners,’ who could kill someone every night, and ‘Spies,’ who could identify the Executioners hiding their identities. There were also ‘Guardians,’ who could protect a target marked by an Executioner, though they could only do it five times.

And finally, there was the ‘Fighter,’ the only role capable of opposing the Executioners at night.

Just as ‘Guard’ was the core skill of the Guard, the Fighter also had a core skill.

Its name was Fighter Transformation.

It melted down the user’s fear and terror and converted them into raw combat power. The longer someone had lived among the exploited class, the more power the skill could draw out.

In that sense, Jang Hayoung was perfectly suited to become a Fighter even without the Unidentified Wall.

Jang Hayoung raised her head after activating Fighter Transformation and stared straight at the demon nobles, who were looking this way in shock.

Several demon nobles near Duke Gilobat hurriedly took on the form of Executioners.

I grinned.

“Yeah. I figured you’d have at least one or two Executioner bastards hanging around you.”

And knowing that very fact would soon tighten the noose around Gilobat’s neck, I gave Jang Hayoung’s shoulder a light pat.

“Go on. This is your big debut, made just for you.”

Jang Hayoung took a small breath, tightened her grip on the diamond sword and shield in her hands, and put strength into her legs.

Boom!

She kicked off the ground hard enough to make the earth explode beneath her feet, and in an instant, she was already right in front of the demon nobles.

“Haaaaaaaaah!”

BOOOOM—!

A warm sense of satisfaction filled me as I watched Jang Hayoung beat the living hell out of the Executioners with the power she’d gained by trading away her fear and terror.

“Okay! Hit ’em harder! Smash their crotches too!”

Crack!

Jang Hayoung actually followed my order and slammed the hilt of her diamond sword straight into an Executioner’s crotch, permanently destroying his ability to function as a man.

I clapped for her.

Watching her move in that boxy square armor was a little awkward, but the sheer force and speed behind her attacks made me forget about it almost at once.

“Damn it! Kill her right now! What the hell are you all doing?!”

Duke Gilobat watched the number of Executioners and demon nobles slowly dwindle, then barked orders with growing panic.

The way he casually sacrificed nobles beneath him for his own safety was about as stereotypically villainous as it got.

[She’s quite talented, isn’t she?]

“Yeah, she is.”

I nodded at Asmodeus, who’d been quietly watching the battle from behind us.

Like I’d said earlier, Jang Hayoung had talent.

No, saying she merely ‘had talent’ was a massive understatement.

Even Kim Dokja in the webtoon had named Jang Hayoung, aside from Yoo Joonghyuk, as the only true all-rounder in Ways of Survival.

‘What the hell is that damn “wall,” anyway…?’

Just like Kim Dokja, Jang Hayoung possessed a strange skill called the Unidentifiable Wall. Through trades made using that ‘wall,’ she was guaranteed terrifying growth with any skill transferred to her through it.

Of course, even that talent supposedly couldn’t let her instantly break into the profound realms of a Transcendent.

Still, it was talent that could let her surpass years of another person’s effort in just a few hours.

And talent like that inevitably put its owner in danger.

[The universe truly is vast. To think a child with such talent could be born.]

“That’s what makes it fun.”

[Pardon?]

Asmodeus looked up at me in surprise, and I continued.

“Every Constellation I’ve met so far acts like they’re starving for entertaining stories that fit their tastes. Am I wrong?”

[No, you aren’t, but…]

“Then from your perspective, shouldn’t the appearance of Incarnations like her be something worth celebrating?”

Stagnation puts the brakes on growth.

Just look at those Constellations and great nebulae strutting around like they were the greatest beings in existence.

They'd spent ages moving forward, only to eventually choose stagnation.

They claimed to want entertaining stories—Fables—yet the moment someone talented began to grow, they felt threatened and tried to interfere.

And when those people still managed to rise despite that, they started worrying about their own safety before anything had even happened, resorting to threats and attempts at persuasion.

It was so pathetic that there was no better word for it.

They wanted entertainment, yet they threatened and bribed people into submission?

And if those people still refused to listen, they'd try every possible method to erase them?

What kind of contradictory bullshit was that?

The question of why they'd chosen to stagnate if they were so afraid of someone overtaking them had vanished from my mind long ago.

I'd been genuinely disappointed by just how broken they'd become.

"When I was a kid, I used to love reading books, comics, and collections that summarized Greek and Roman mythology, as well as the myths and legends of India, China, Korea, Japan, and all sorts of other countries."

I could feel Asmodeus quietly watching me as I continued.

"When I finally got to meet the beings from those myths and legends—and realized they were actually real—I was honestly thrilled at first."

But now, all I felt was disappointment.

"The versions of them that once lived inside me are basically dead now."

Aside from a handful of Constellations, the figures I'd once respected, revered, and admired had died long ago, along with what little childhood wonder I'd still carried inside me.

I watched Jang Hayoung pretend to fight the Executioners while beating the hell out of the demon nobles instead, then glanced at Asmodeus, who'd remained silent.

"In that sense, I haven't been disappointed in you yet."

[Oh my… Are you confessing to me right now?]

"Interpret it however you want."

I placed my palm against Asmodeus's cheek and stared into her black eyes.

"I'm a little curious whether you'll disappoint me someday… or whether you won't."

[I'm curious about that myself.]

Lick.

A bright-red tongue slipped between her tiny lips and dragged across my palm.

Even with the slick warmth of her tongue against my skin, I kept staring into Asmodeus's eyes.

Then her expression changed.

She looked excited.

Happy, even.

Like a Demon King who'd just found something irresistible.

Crackle—!!

A terrifying surge of bloodlust and compressed demonic energy burst from her, forcing my gaze away from her eyes.

The condensed demonic energy gathered around Asmodeus's head and back before taking shape as violet-black demonic horns and wings.

But what caught my attention most was her face.

Her cheeks flushed as she bit down on my hand with her neat rows of white teeth.

Asmodeus gazed up at me with eyes overflowing with madness, obsession, and affection while coating my hand in saliva.

[I'm the one who's curious. I wonder how long this affection I feel for you will last.]

Like a pet begging for attention, she kissed my palm, nibbled on my hand, and toyed with it.

A laugh escaped me.

"Don't fall too hard for me, you crazy bitch."

The Demon King kept shamelessly chomping away at someone else's hand and soaking it with drool, so I shoved my thumb into her mouth.

[Mm?]

Asmodeus seemed slightly startled by the sudden intrusion, and I moved my thumb around to tease her tongue.

Her warm, wet tongue slid against my finger with slick sounds, moving however I pushed it. Then I shifted my thumb toward the side of her cheek.

Her lips were forced apart by my finger.

I looked directly at her from inches away.

“And you seem to be misunderstanding one thing.”

I released the Status of a Constellation that had been boiling deep within my soul.

[The Status of a ‘Constellation’ is being released.]

This wasn’t like before, when I’d released it while placing limits on myself.

After accumulating Fables of many different grades, I could finally unleash the Status of a Fable-grade Constellation properly.

That Status wrapped itself around Asmodeus.

[…….]

Aside from Persephone, Asmodeus was probably only the second person I’d ever unleashed this much Status against.

Her eyes widened as I truly revealed my Status as a Constellation, and I leaned close to her ear.

“Don’t assume I’ll accept you just because you show me affection. I’m surprisingly picky about women.”

The corners of Asmodeus’s mouth twisted violently.

As her expression transformed once again, I reached out with the hand still slick with her saliva and grabbed her by the collar.

“You’re not the one who gets to choose.”

I tightened my grip.

“I am.”

The moment I finished speaking, I released her collar and shoved her backward.

Asmodeus lowered her head and stared at the floor.

I was just about to turn my attention back toward Jang Hayoung when—

[Demon King 'Asmodeus' is showing you tremendous affection!]

[Demon King 'Asmodeus' is showing you tremendous affection!]

[Demon King 'Asmodeus' is showing you tremendous affection!]

Three system messages appeared one after another.

I frowned and glanced toward the culprit who'd sent them.

But Asmodeus was no longer standing where she'd been a moment ago.

Then—

[Haaaah…….]

I had no idea when she'd gotten there.

Asmodeus wrapped both arms tightly around my waist, buried her face against my stomach, and took a sensual breath inward.

A chill ran through me.

*[You really do keep tempting me. I absolutely **love it**.]*

Asmodeus lifted her head.

My body flinched on instinct.

Her cheeks were bright red, and saliva had poured from the corners of her mouth like a flood, leaving my stomach soaked.

'…Should I punch her?'

I felt a vein throb as I looked at the Demon King who'd drenched my clothes in drool.

Completely unaware of what I was thinking, Asmodeus gazed up at me with eyes thick with madness, obsession, and affection.

[I truly adore those who refuse to compromise. The more stubborn someone is, the more I want to break them.]

"……."

[You said you're the one who chooses, didn't you? I'll take that as a challenge.]

Demonic energy rippled from Asmodeus's entire body and wrapped around me like chains.

[No matter what it takes, I'll seduce you and make you mine.]

The demonic energy squeezed my upper body, forcing me to bend forward.

Asmodeus opened her tiny mouth toward my neck.

Crunch!

Then she bit down hard.

She wasn't trying to rip out a chunk of flesh, so I stayed still.

I felt blood trickle down my neck as she bit into me and sucked hard against the wound.

[Haa… You have rather delicious blood, 'Apostle of Elation'.]

"Hey."

[Mm?]

Asmodeus wore a blissful expression as she licked the blood running from the wound on my neck like she was drinking sweet juice.

"I've been meaning to tell you this for a while, but I kept forgetting. Just call me by my name."

[…….]

"I don't like being called by my Constellation modifier. Got it?"

[Hehe… *Haaah*, honestly…….]

Asmodeus suddenly grabbed me by the collar and pulled hard, forcing me to bend even lower.

Our eyes met perfectly.

Desire boiled in her voice.

[You've been tempting me nonstop. Are you doing this on purpose?]

"What kind of bullshit is that? Just hurry up and go back to your Demon Realm already. Okay?"

[I suppose I should. If I stay here much longer, I don't think my self-control will hold.]

Asmodeus gave me a seductive smile.

[I'll be leaving for today. I originally came here because there was some trash I intended to clean up, but….]

"Hey. I joke about angels being feathered pigeons all the time, but calling my girlfriend and her friend trash is crossing the line."

[Oh my? I'm a Demon King. Under normal circumstances, I'd never tolerate things like that wandering around right in front of me.]

Asmodeus gently stroked my cheek.

[Park Jinwoo. I'm only overlooking them this once because of you.]

The incarnation body of Asmodeus slowly began to scatter.

[Until our next meeting, then.]

"Yeah, yeah. Now hurry up and leave."

[Hehe. What a cruel man.]

With that, Asmodeus's incarnation body vanished from sight, leaving behind only probability sparks and traces of demonic energy.

For a moment, I stared at the spot where she'd disappeared.

Then I pulled a hand mirror from My Room and examined the side of my neck where she'd bitten me.

"Fuck."

Naturally, the crazy Demon King had left a hickey.

A hickey smeared with blood, at that.

I stared blankly at it for a while before slowly turning toward Jang Hayoung, who'd already finished cleaning everything up.

Somehow, despite having her body frozen stiff by the Status that Asmodeus and I had unleashed, she'd still managed to beat the demon nobles and that damn duke senseless.

I watched her for a moment, sighed, and looked up at the night sky.

"Ah… Dokja's gonna give me shit when she sees this, isn't she?"

Just thinking about the ordeal waiting for me was already exhausting.

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Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk were rushing toward the place where the red flames had surged into the sky.

Crackle!

Suddenly, small violet-black sparks gathered in front of the two women.

From within those sparks emerged the Demon King of the 32nd Demon Realm.

[There you are, 'Demon King of Salvation' and Incarnation 'Yoo Joonghyuk'.]

"Asmodeus?"

[I have a proposal for you two, so I came here without letting him know.]

"A proposal?"

Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk looked at her with mild surprise.

Asmodeus smiled and raised her right palm toward them.

[Would either of you happen to be interested in becoming a new Demon King?]

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39.5. Gilobat Factory (1)

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Jang Hayoung, clad in a full set of diamond armor (Minecraft ver.), had a surprisingly easy time beating down the demon nobles.

"Our Hayoung worked hard."

"Haa… haa…."

Seeing Jang Hayoung struggle to nod while gasping for breath, I poured her a cup of cold water from My Room and handed it over. “Catch your breath first. At this rate, you’re gonna pass out.”

“Th-thanks….”

She gulped the whole thing down in one go, making me chuckle. “I couldn’t watch the whole fight since I was talking with Asmodeus, but you did pretty well.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Still, Fighter Transformation only works inside the Revolutionary Scenario, so don’t mistake what you just showed for your normal level of strength.”

“I know that….”

Her lips jutted out after the criticism that followed my praise, and I snickered. Part of me wanted to let Jang Hayoung enjoy the high from her first real debut battle, but I remembered how she'd gotten carried away after using Fighter Transformation for the first time during the Unidentifiable Wall arc in Ways of Survival.

Bad habits were best crushed before they had time to settle in. It'd be better for her future that way.

“Anyway, you killed everyone except the Duke, right?”

“Yeah. You told me to leave the Duke alive.”

Just as she said, I'd asked her for one thing right before she jumped into the fight.

'It'd probably be better if Dokja killed the Duke.'

It was a shame I'd miss out on 200,000 coins, but with the coming struggle over the Demon King position, it'd be better for Kim Dokja if she killed a Duke herself.

The only problem was that I'd accidentally reduced the factory to something close to a complete ruin.

'Hmm… Should I buy some blueprints from the Dokkaebi Bag or the Story Shop and build a fortress here while I'm at it?'

I could summon some demon minions and dump the work on Maggdra, or I could test the new skill that'd evolved through Fusion. Materials wouldn't be an issue either. I could just source them from survival crafting games like Minecraft.

And come on, building a secret base was one of every man's dreams.

As I stared at the empty ghost lot where the factory had once stood, looking as though it'd taken a direct missile strike, I happily let my imagination run wild. Then, in the distance, I spotted Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk walking toward us with clearly irritated expressions.

“Dokja? Joonghyuk?”

“……”

“……”

My instincts whispered to me.

Those weren't the faces of people who were annoyed because I'd been vomiting earlier.

'Then I guess I don't really have to worry about it.'

One was basically a walking encyclopedia of Ways of Survival, while the other was one of the protagonists of this world. They weren't the young Shin Yoosung, Lee Gilyoung, or Lee Jihye, who still needed looking after.

If it was Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk, I trusted them to overcome pretty much any crisis thrown right in their faces. So I didn't bother asking why they looked so pissed.

“Oh, Dokja. Catch.”

“……?”

I tossed her the Fable Core I'd taken from beneath the factory.

Kim Dokja caught it out of the air with a dazed expression, stared at it for a few seconds, then slowly turned her head toward me with an almost mechanical creak.

“Where did you get this?”

Her eyes and voice trembled as she asked. I scratched my cheek.

“Duke Gilobat was about to grab that thing and run off with it, so I figured it must be important and held onto it.”

“What…?!”

That was technically a lie.

Or maybe it wasn't?

After all, I'd actually found Duke Gilobat and the demon nobles in the same underground area where the Fable Core had been stored.

Well, whatever.

Kim Dokja's eyes widened in shock at my answer. Before she could open her mouth to say whatever she was clearly about to say, I beat her to it.

“By the way, Hayoung beat Duke Gilobat half to death. He's still alive, though. So if you want that Duke position, you might wanna hurry up and finish him off.”

“…You.”

She clearly had something to say. Her eyes drilled into me with open irritation, and I quietly avoided her gaze.

Kim Dokja glared at me for a long moment before letting out a small sigh. Then she immediately ran toward Duke Gilobat, who was lying collapsed beside Jang Hayoung.

“So.”

I glanced at Yoo Joonghyuk, who was just staring straight at me with her usual blank expression.

“What're you sulking about this time…?”

“What are you talking about?”

She obviously knew exactly what I meant, yet she still refused to say anything.

“You know what I'm asking.”

“I don't.”

“No, you do….”

“I said I don't.”

Watching Yoo Joonghyuk turn stubborn only at times like this made my chest feel tight.

“If you've got something to say, just say it. Why're you acting so unlike yourself?”

“……”

Yoo Joonghyuk pressed her lips shut like she'd decided she wouldn't utter another word.

For a second, I wondered if it was because of the kiss mark Asmodeus had left when she'd bitten my neck.

But it didn't seem like that was the reason.

'…Don't tell me that crazy bitch pretended to leave, went over to Dokja and Joonghyuk, and talked to them about something.'

That wasn't just possible. It was extremely likely.

Asmodeus often kept her eyes on me, but I wasn't the only person she watched. Other than me, the two people she paid the most attention to were obviously Kim Dokja and Yoo Joonghyuk.

I frowned and tried to guess what kind of conversation had passed between the three of them.

Then I shook my head and gave up.

'I'm giving up on thinking for a while.'

I'd spent months wringing my brain dry by using everything I knew about Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint. I didn't want to think anymore for at least a little while.

'I'll dump all the brain-melting stuff on Dokja and Joonghyuk for a few days.'

And I shouldn't forget the whole reason I'd originally come to the 73rd Demon Realm.

This was supposed to be my recuperation trip and vacation.

My vacation schedule was already wrecked badly enough to give me a headache. I had no desire to pile even more problems on top of it.

“You don't have to tell me right now. But if you need help, say something. I'll help.”

“……”

Yoo Joonghyuk frowned again as if even that bothered her, but eventually nodded. I did my best to pretend I hadn't noticed and walked over to Kim Dokja.

By the time I reached her, she'd already driven her sword into the area around Duke Gilobat's heart.

“Dokja. I've got a present for you.”

“A present? What is it?”

The word 'present' made her whip her head around to stare at me. I handed over the Fable Fragments from the 'Something-Something Gold Dragon's Heart' and the 'Something-Something Swordmaster's Arm.'

“What're these?”

“Have Aileen combine them later. They'll definitely help you.”

Kim Dokja immediately understood what I meant and nodded.

“I'll gladly take them. Thanks. But Jinwoo.”

“Yeah?”

“What happened to your neck? There's a mark there, and you're even bleeding.”

The cold wind blew for the Nth time.

But fear not.

I'd already dug myself another escape tunnel.

I stared into Kim Dokja's eyes as the life rapidly drained from them and began my defense.

“That bitch Asmodeus suddenly tried to jump me and started kissing my neck, you know? I fought back and told her I was already taken, so she bit me really damn hard.”

I skillfully mixed truth and lies together, then plastered a miserable expression across my eyes, mouth, and every other part of my face. Walking closer to Kim Dokja, I openly showed her the wound on my neck.

“……”

Kim Dokja carefully inspected the wound for a while before turning her gaze back to me. Her eyes were still cold enough to say she didn't believe me, so I made my expression even more pitiful.

“Dokja.”

I slowly reached out and wrapped an arm around her waist.

“I'm seriously innocent here.”

“…Innocent of what?”

I barely held back the urge to complain that it was unfair I even had to explain myself in the first place.

Seriously, what had I done this time to seduce Asmodeus?

That crazy bitch was the one who restrained me first, forced a kiss onto my neck, then bit down hard enough to leave a mark. I could confidently swear that I hadn't begged her to do it or provoked her first.

“You know that Demon King is a crazy bitch too, right? Hm?”

“Well… that's true….”

Apparently she couldn't argue with that much. A faint spark of life returned to her eyes.

I saw hope.

“You seriously think I'd ignore a girlfriend as adorable as you and fall for some girl with a petite, childlike figure?”

“W-why're you suddenly being so gross?”

Her words rejected me, but the corners of her mouth had quietly lifted, making it clear she didn't hate the cheesy line all that much.

I saw Gabriel, who was perched on Kim Dokja's shoulder, twist her face in disgust.

But this was a necessary sacrifice for my survival.

'Good. She's calmed down a bit.'

If I'd had my way, I would've kept pampering Dokja until every trace of her anger vanished. Unfortunately, we had more urgent matters to clean up first.

“Dokja. So are you a Duke now?”

“Huh? Yeah. I just got the system message.”

Kim Dokja looked disappointed that the mood I'd been setting had vanished so quickly.

I was pretty disappointed too, but cleanup came first.

“We can get back to the mood later. We've got work to do right now.”

“You mean killing Duke Syswitz?”

“That too, but there's something more important.”

I jerked my thumb behind me, and Kim Dokja followed the gesture.

Only then did she look as if she'd suddenly remembered something.

The factory had completely collapsed.

A Duke of the Demon Realm was required to possess a 'factory.' In other words, a Duke without a factory couldn't exist.

That meant the factory had to be repaired no matter what.

And right now, there was basically no one here besides me who could handle that job.

“Before we left the Syswitz Industrial Complex, I left a Flying Thunder God marking there.”

I looked at Kim Dokja.

“Help Joonghyuk and cut off Duke Syswitz's head for me. In exchange, I'll restore the factory until it's good as new.”

“…So you're just repairing the thing you destroyed.”

“Ahem! Anyway, I'll make it look damn good! Can I leave the rest to you?”

“Seriously….”

Kim Dokja gave me a helpless look as she slipped out of my arms, then spoke with a sulky expression.

“But how're you planning to restore the factory?”

“Oh, that's easy.”

I confidently smiled and tapped the fresh blueprint I'd just bought from the Story Shop.

“Since I'm rebuilding the factory anyway, I figured I'd recreate a slightly modified version of our country's most famous folk game.”

“…F-folk game?”

Kim Dokja blinked, looking like she couldn't believe what she'd just heard.

I gave her my brightest smile.

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After using the Flying Thunder God Technique to send Jang Hayoung, Han Myungoh, Kim Dokja, Yoo Joonghyuk, Uriel, and Gabriel to the Syswitz Industrial Complex—

[Personal Skill, 'Minion Summoning Lv.10', has been activated!]

I recruited slaves.

I poured almost all of my absurd 150 Magic Power into summoning as many minions as I could—imps, ice golems, minotaurs, and creatures that resembled lamias. Then I used my leftover magic to make ice-crystal pickaxes and handed them out.

“Kururuk?”

The slaves raised the pickaxes in both hands and alternated between staring at me and the tools with confused expressions.

“Turn around and take a look behind you.”

“Kuruk?”

At my command, the minions all turned around at once.

Behind them lay a hideously cratered wasteland, with wreckage from the factory scattered in every direction.

“Your company commander is deeply disappointed in you.”

“…Kkik?”

“That empty lot back there is really getting on my nerves.”

Seriously, I was so glad I'd gotten this skill.

A skill that gave me free labor like this…?

Wasn't it basically an essential skill for construction sites and the military?

“Flatten every crater in the ground. Clean up every scrap of building debris scattered around the area. And drag everything out of that giant hole filled with factory wreckage.”

The slave bastards just stood there, watching me and waiting to see what I'd do.

I roared at them.

“You lazy bastards are already slacking off?! I'm gonna work too, so get your asses over there and start working!”

Only then did the slaves—or rather, the minions—finally understand what was happening.

They all charged toward the empty lot at once.

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39.5. Gilobat Factory (2)

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I finally understood why officers in the military made the enlisted guys do all the work.

“Haah… Now this is the life.”

I stretched my tired body out on a sunbed I’d kept in the My Room storage and stared ahead through a pair of black sunglasses. My minions were sweating buckets as they hauled away debris from the collapsed factory, crawled into the blocked-off holes to drag more rubble back out, and filled in the gouged-up ground until it looked normal again.

Watching my slaves faithfully follow every order I gave them, I smiled and sipped a drink made from a Honey Water Pear I’d bought from the Toriko section of the Story Shop. It was pure, one-hundred-percent fresh juice squeezed straight from the fruit.

“Hehe. Master, is this much breeze enough?”

“Yeah, that’s plenty. Thanks, Maggdra.”

And right beside me, Maggdra was fanning me with a folding fan, sending a cool, refreshing breeze over my body.

Wasn’t this the true meaning of a vacation? Of recuperation?

It was such a comfortable break that I could almost feel myself becoming corrupted by it. Ever since Han Sooyoung cut the interdimensional channel, I’d been enjoying this freedom with all my heart, without having to care about anyone watching me.

‘Still… is this really gonna work?’

Every now and then, I glanced at something I’d bought from the Story Shop: StarCraft, one of Korea’s so-called traditional folk games. More specifically, I was looking over blueprints for the Terran Command Center, belonging to one of StarCraft’s three iconic races.

The Command Center drawn on the plans looked insanely complicated. Since it was a building from some distant future, I’d expected that much, but—

‘What the hell does any of this even say?’

There were all sorts of bizarrely named minerals and technical resources listed in the plans, so I quickly concluded that making a perfect replica was impossible. That was why I planned to patch things together with some improvised engineering, though I had no clue whether the damned thing would actually work.

“Hmm… whatever. I’ll just work the kids to the bone and tell them to figure it out.”

[Grrrk…?!]

At that moment, an imp minion passing by stared at me with empty, miserable eyes.

“What’re you looking at me like some kicked puppy for? Get back to work.”

[Grrrk…!]

The moment I raised my fist, the imp hurried back to its station. I took another deep gulp of Honey Water Pear juice.

“Khaaah! Maggdra, want some?”

The clean sweetness was completely different from ordinary juice, so I offered Maggdra a taste, but she gently shook her head.

“No, I’m fine, but… um, Master…”

“Hm?”

Maggdra fidgeted in place, twisting her body as she watched my expression.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“May I ask… when you intend to share your power with me?”

“Ah, that.”

So that was what this was about. She must’ve been worried because I still hadn’t fulfilled the agreement we’d made earlier.

“Things kept coming up one after another, so I got delayed. Sorry.”

I crooked a finger at Maggdra, motioning for her to lower her head. She tilted her head in confusion for a moment, then gave a small nod and bent her upper body toward me.

Tap.

I gently placed my palm on the crown of Maggdra's head and awakened the demonic energy sleeping inside my body.

[Demon King Transformation has been activated!]

[The Fable, 'Demon King of Twilight and Dawn,' begins its story!]

Originally, Demon King Transformation was an authority only Demon Kings could use. But I'd stolen it through a little trickery of my own.

The demonic energy I'd usurped flowed through Maggdra's crown and entered her body. Her face twisted in pain as that pure demonic energy tore through her insides without restraint.

"Endure it. If you can't, you'll die right here."

Grind.

Maggdra bit her lip hard enough to draw blood. She lowered her head slightly and stayed silent.

I studied her condition for a moment, then began moving the demonic energy in earnest, driving it deeper through her body. My demonic energy as a Demon King was fundamentally different from the 73rd Demon King I'd encountered on the third floor of the Dark Castle.

After all, I'd gained it by consuming a heart strengthened by the hearts of four Demon King blood relatives and the heart of the 73rd Demon King itself. In terms of raw quality, it was at least two stages stronger.

"If you wanna get stronger, keep your head together. The instant you lose focus, your body's gonna go boom and explode."

"……."

Once the demonic energy had penetrated far enough, I slowed its circulation to give her time to adapt. I could feel Maggdra's own demonic energy and mana instinctively joining forces, trying to survive, trying to make this new power hers as they began guiding my energy themselves.

'Going smoothly.'

The moment I'd slept with Dokja several times in a row, I'd absorbed most of the elixir energy that had been sitting inside me, nearly overflowing. There was still some left, of course, but only a tiny trace.

At least, it was tiny to me. To anyone else, that tiny trace would've been considered an enormous amount of energy.

What I was doing now was transferring that leftover elixir energy into Maggdra, mixed with a portion of my Demon King's demonic energy. It was fairly dangerous, but there weren't any hostile forces left nearby that could threaten us, and if I waited any longer, I'd probably absorb even this remaining bit myself.

So now was my only chance.

I watched Maggdra sweat from head to toe as she desperately made the elixir energy her own, then pushed the last of it into her body. Once I'd transferred everything, I removed my hand from her crown.

[Personal Skill, 'Sound Isolation Lv.4,' has been activated.]

As one last bit of help, I blocked out the surrounding noise so Maggdra wouldn't be distracted. Then I turned my attention away from her.

Right on time, those slave bastards had finally cleared the factory debris scattered everywhere and filled in the torn-up ground. They'd also recovered most of the wreckage from the giant pit.

A satisfied smile spread across my face.

"You bastards could do it just fine, yet you sat there whining?"

I bought a huge quantity of iron blocks from the Minecraft section of the Story Shop. Then, from the regular shop, I bought enough concrete mixers, rebar, formwork, scaffolding, and every other construction material we'd need.

[175,700 Coins have been consumed.]

I stepped out of the sound-isolated area and dropped the freshly purchased materials in front of the panting slave bastards.

[Kyeng?]

"Why're you sitting there resting? We've gotta build the building now, Mr. Kim."

[Kyeng?!]

These bastards were physically stronger than humans by a mile, yet they still had the nerve to cry.

"Hey! I'm gonna work too now, assholes. When I tell you to jump, you jump!"

The slaves trudged away with sorrowful eyes, carrying the supplies and stacking them neatly. I tossed aside my subspace coat and T-shirt.

Normally, the golden rule of construction work was to wear proper work clothes and a safety helmet. But with my current body, there wasn't much point in wearing either.

"Ah, of course. All you good grown-ups watching this should absolutely wear proper work clothes and a helmet at a construction site, okay?"

After breaking the fourth wall to give every responsible adult a warning, I jumped straight into the work myself.

First, I dragged every remaining chunk of factory debris out of the pit. Then I adjusted the concrete mixer's angle, poured in cement, sand, gravel, and water at roughly the right proportions, and switched it on.

The minions stood around blankly, staring at the concrete mixer as though it were some fascinating alien artifact.

"Hey, you assholes! Quit gawking and move your asses!"

[Kik!]

After some time, the ingredients blended into proper wet concrete. I nodded in satisfaction, then used a pickaxe made from an Ice Crystal to break apart the Minecraft iron blocks.

Thankfully, even when I destroyed the iron blocks with my handmade pickaxe, they still broke down into iron ingots. Relieved, I started swinging at the rest.

"Haah, fuck… I can't believe I came all the way here just to do construction work."

A sudden wave of existential despair hit me, and for a moment, I wanted to throw everything away.

But what else could I do?

I'd made a promise with Dokja, and I couldn't abandon every man's dream of building a secret base halfway through. So I pulled out the Command Center blueprints again and went back to studying every detail.

"Just you wait. With enough manpower and resources, I'll brute-force this thing into existence no matter what."

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Three days passed.

Long story short, I finished building the Command Center—improvised, modified version.

“…You all worked hard.”

[…Kehk!]

It’d been worth giving up sleep and building the factory day and night.

Sure, the minions I’d summoned all looked half-dead and were practically on death’s door, but what mattered was that we’d finished.

My head almost exploded over those three days. Trying to wire the complicated interior systems without turning every cable into a tangled mess nearly killed me for real.

Thankfully, I’d been able to buy the operating program from the Story Shop in the form of a simple USB drive.

If I couldn’t have done that, I would’ve smashed this whole damned building to pieces ages ago.

“Anyway, seriously, you all did great. I won’t summon you for a while, so get some rest.”

[Whine!]

The minions cried bloody tears as they were reverse-summoned, their faces full of the joy of finally escaping hell. I scratched my cheek.

‘Maybe next time I’ll summon them by saying we’re building a Gundam. Suddenly, I kinda wanna piss them off.’

If the minions had heard that, they probably would’ve fallen into despair. But they weren’t here anymore, so who cared?

StarCraft, the real-time strategy game Koreans jokingly called a traditional folk game.

Anyone born in the eighties, nineties, or two-thousands probably knew how big the game had once been. It’d lost some of that status by now, but back in its prime, it’d truly been one hell of a legendary game.

Anyway.

The game had three playable races: Protoss, the aliens; Zerg, the monstrous aliens; and Terran, the humans.

You picked one of the three, built up your base, produced an army, then used that army to wipe out the enemy faction.

Back when I played StarCraft, I'd mostly been a Protoss player, so naturally I'd wanted to build Protoss structures. But that shit cost way too damned much, so I gave up and switched to Terran.

From the outside, the building definitely looked like a standard Terran Command Center. But instead of all those weird futuristic minerals and ores, I'd built it from concrete, Minecraft iron, and other materials, which meant its durability was probably two or three tiers below the original.

However—

I'd made a few modifications to compensate.

"I'm never getting personally involved in this kind of shit again."

I finally understood why skilled technicians got paid more.

I could brute-force physical labor with my body, but technical problems weren't something an amateur had any business touching.

"…I wonder how Dokja handled things on her end."

For the first time in three days, I pulled out the Interdimensional Video Communication Device and immediately tried connecting to Kim Dokja.

BOOOOM!

"What the fuck?!"

The moment the connection went through, an explosion thundered from the other side. Startled, I stared silently into the channel.

Through the screen, I saw Jang Hayoung using Fighter Transformation while beating the hell out of Executioners.

"……?"

I hadn't contacted them for three whole days, so I didn't have enough context to figure out what the hell was happening.

- *Park Jinwoo?*

Kim Dokja's voice came from the other side.

"Yeah, Dokja. What the hell's going on over there?"

- *I spent the last few days training Jang Hayoung so she could grow stronger, but then the nobles from the Syswitz Industrial Complex suddenly attacked us.*

Dokja said it like it was nothing, and the corner of my eye twitched.

“What…?”

- *That’s how things are over here. What about you? Did you finish the factory?*

Dokja definitely knew that what she’d just told me had instantly put me in a terrible mood. But when she deliberately changed the subject and asked about my situation, I cooled down the anger boiling inside me before answering.

“It doesn’t look like the original Gilobat Factory anymore, but… yeah, it’s finished. I put the Fable Core in the center too.”

- *Good work.*

“Do you need help?”

If Dokja said yes, then as of today, the Syswitz Industrial Complex would officially become the Yoo Joonghyuk Industrial Complex.

But—

- *No, we’re fine. We’ll handle this ourselves this time.*

Kim Dokja firmly rejected my offer.

- *We need to create opportunities for our own growth too, don’t you think? I appreciate the thought, but for Hayoung’s sake, calm down for now, okay?*

“……Tch.”

As expected, the wife had already noticed my mood heading straight for rock bottom.

“Think you’ll finish today?”

- *Today’s impossible. We’ll probably be done by tomorrow.*

“Really?”

- *Ah, hold on.*

Kim Dokja turned her gaze somewhere else, then shouted at Jang Hayoung, who was currently grabbing an Executioner by the neck and snapping it.

- *Jang Hayoung! Don’t get too carried away!*

- *She's gone berserk from using unfamiliar power.*

I could see it too.

Jang Hayoung was tearing through the battlefield with Fighter Transformation active, an extremely excited look on her face.

"For now, if Hayoung screws anything up, have Joonghyuk cover for her."

- *Hm? You're not coming straight here?*

"I haven't slept for three days because I've done nothing but build this factory. The world's spinning in front of me, so I can't. I'll rest today and head over tomorrow."

- *All right. Don't push yourself this hard next time.*

"Yeah. Thanks for worrying about me. I'm hanging up now, okay?"

Click.

I cut the interdimensional channel.

"Hmm…"

For a moment, several thoughts ran through my head.

I was furious that Duke Syswitz had ignored my warning without knowing his place.

The original scenario's events seemed to have finally begun, only later than expected.

And Biyoo still hadn't been born yet.

'…Did things just start following the original course a little late? No, was the timing actually supposed to be around now?'

Even the Omniscient Reader webtoon rarely gave exact dates, so all I could do now was make educated guesses.

Well, whatever.

"Ah, screw it. I'm going to sleep."

The situation in Syswitz was far better than it had been in the original Omniscient Reader webtoon, so without worrying much, I opened the entrance to My Room.

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