885 Episode 48 Avatar (8)

In 'Ways of Survival', Lee Hyunsung and Yoo Joonghyuk fight frequently. Of course, most of them were mock battles ordered by Yoo Joonghyuk ("We will conduct a combat stamina test in preparation for the next scenario"), and they were part of a special training plan to strengthen Lee Hyunsung's tanking ability.

「"Get up, Lee Hyunsung."」

Yoo Joonghyuk only repeats that phrase throughout the mock battle. That's because in his sparring with Yoo Joonghyuk, Lee Hyunsung is constantly getting beaten up and falling down.

Falling down, getting up, falling down, getting up.

An incarnation body that has been forged hundreds and thousands of times, just like refining steel. That was Lee Hyunsung, the Steel Sword Emperor of 'Ways of Survival'.

However, the 1,863rd round’s battle unfolding before my eyes was strangely different from the 'Ways of Survival' that I knew.

"Oh! He hit him with one shot!"

Unlike Lee Hyunsung of 'Ways of Survival' who felt goosebumps and trauma just by looking at Yoo Joonghyuk, Lee Hyunsung of the 1,863rd round was calm.

Lee Hyunsung, who fought by turning the entire desert upside down, a wave of extraordinary magical power rose from his fist.

Kim Namwoon, who was watching from the side, muttered in admiration.

"Wow, he's mastered that technique too?"

With a loud noise like a mountain collapsing, a magical light exploded from his fist.

[Byeokryeokilkwon].

The martial art of 'Kwon-wang', a transcendental left-hander from Murim. In addition, his technique to avoid Yoo Joonghyuk's [Breaking the Sky Swordsmanship] was Lee Jihye's specialty, [Ghost Walk].

"No, I told you several times that you shouldn't walk like that!"

Lee Jihye, who was watching, pursed her lips and said. Even though it wasn't perfect, the fact that Lee Hyunsung could freely use the skills of other incarnations shocked me greatly.

「It's different from 'Ways of Survival'.」

Come to think of it, Han Sooyoung in the 1,863rd round used [Black Flame] even though she didn't make a contract with the Black Flame Dragon.

Perhaps they were constantly developing the combat abilities they didn't have by repeating the simulation.

"That's right! Push!"

Lee Hyunsung fought desperately. He calmly deflected Yoo Joonghyuk's attacks, countered the attacks he couldn't deflect, and punched him without hesitation whenever he saw an opening.

Since his opponent was Yoo Joonghyuk, he ended up losing the overall fight, but his improvisation and situational management skills were astonishing.

If Yoo Joonghyuk of 'Ways of Survival' had been by his side, Lee Hyunsung would have definitely received a 'Battle Physical Test S-Rank'.

Kim Namwoon asked.

"Isn't our ahjussi great?"

I nodded and kept my eyes on Lee Hyunsung's battle.

Beyond mere desperation, it was a battle that felt like a desperate battle. That was the only way I could describe it.

The story contained in each punch and kick was telling the story of Lee Hyunsung.

I didn't know why he kept fighting with that face. I just vaguely guessed that there must be something he wanted to protect just as much.

Kwaaaaah!

The suffocating close combat finally ended.

[The story simulation '1,863–004' ends.]

The smoky dust on the screen disappeared, and the door to the training capsule that Lee Hyunsung had entered opened.

"You did well, ahjussi."

Lee Jihye handed a towel to Lee Hyunsung, who was drenched in sweat.

"Thank you."

"It was too bad. I thought we would win this time."

Lee Hyunsung shook his head with a bitter smile. But the next moment, he turned his head towards me. We stared at each other for about three seconds. When I bowed first, Lee Hyunsung also responded.

"You're the person the captain brought."

In some rounds, Lee Hyunsung was always a kind person. To Kim Dokja and to his colleagues.

But why?

Strangely, there was a faint sense of wariness in the way Lee Hyunsung spoke to me.

[The character, 'Lee Hyunsung', is suspicious of you.]

What?

"Nice to meet you. Please take care of me."

This man, who seemed to be reaching out to me on the outside, seemed suspicious of me on the inside.

Why?

If I had to pick a reason, it wasn't that hard to guess. He might not like me, who suddenly fell from the sky like a parachute (I really did fall from the sky), and appeared at Han Sooyoung's introduction.

Lee Hyunsung looked at me for a moment, then turned around and walked out of the training grounds.

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One day, two days, three days passed again.

During that time, Kim Namwoon dragged me to training grounds and PC rooms, and whenever he had the chance, he would harass me by saying things like, "Let’s have a go."

What was Han Sooyoung thinking when she told me to meet people?

「There are 27 days left.」

I checked the scenario again anxiously. In the next 27 days, I had to solve the problem of this worldline and find a way to return to my worldline.

However, I had no idea what the problem of this worldline was.

So I tried to sneak a hint to Kim Namwoon once.

"Problem? Well, Jihye doesn’t really react when I talk to her."

Surely that wasn’t the 'worldline problem'.

I asked Lee Jihye as well.

"You mean my swordsmanship hasn’t improved much lately?"

"It can’t be the only thing you’ve got to worry about?"

"Kim Namwoon keeps on hanging around? Why?"

This didn't seem like a grand enough problem to be called a 'worldline problem'.

To the same question, Lee Seolhwa answered as follows.

"Loneliness, isn't it?"

"Loneliness?"

This time, I was a little surprised by the somewhat abstract answer.

Loneliness. An emotion that everyone experiences, to varying degrees, as a human being.

But is there a reason why that would be a 'problem' in particular?

Ah.

Now that I think about it, 'Yoo Joonghyuk' is no longer in this round. I wondered if the loneliness Lee Seolhwa felt was related to that, but Lee Seolhwa smiled and added.

"It's a story about the captain."

"Han Sooyoung is lonely?"

I opened my mouth as if to protest without realizing it.

"How could she be lonely when she has such great colleagues?"

Han Sooyoung's 1,863rd round was close to perfect.

She reached the final scenario without Yoo Joonghyuk. Even in the final scenario, the fact that so many incarnations survived was something that even Yoo Joonghyuk of 'Ways of Survival' couldn't do.

"That's not the problem."

"Is that so?"

Lee Seolhwa didn't answer. For a moment, she made a strange expression like a broken doll, and then suddenly acted out.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine."

"That's fortunate."

"But what you just said—"

"I have something to do, so I'll go first."

It was a conversation that left only a sense of uneasiness.

After work, I returned to my assigned dorm. I had many worries about the scenario, but it was hard to remember the last time a day passed by so peacefully like today.

As I sat on the soft chair and looked at my face in the mirror, I remembered something I had heard in passing.

Did you say I looked depressed?

That thought suddenly occurred to me. If I am influenced by them every time I get a fragment of Kim Dokja, then my current 'depression' may also be related to Kim Dokja.

So…

"Kim Dokja, are you watching?"

I tried speaking to him while looking in the mirror, but there was no answer.

Well, if they were the kind of people who would respond when I spoke to them like this, they would have contacted me already.

I thought for a moment, then turned on my smartphone and opened the web novel app. It was to check the comments on the platform for the first time in a while. In times like now when there is insufficient information, it was best to use a platform that allows short-term future vision.

[Current connection is not smooth.]

However, the site connection was not smooth.

Why is that? Is it because this is a different worldline?

Wiiing.

I was startled by the vibration sound that rang for a moment and looked at the screen.

[A new message has arrived.]

There are already people who will send messages to this smartphone.

To be exact, there are only two.

As expected, the sender was my hyung.

—Round 896 of Ways of Survival

That was the end of the message. It was a rare contact, but I was disappointed.

The content of the message he sent was also 'Round 896 of Ways of Survival'.

But thinking about it again, I was grateful that he sent me even a short message.

Seven characters that were sent at the risk of probability in a situation where even the platform connection was not smooth.

If this was Kim Dokja's message, there must be a reason.

I immediately opened the text file of 'Round 896 of Ways of Survival'.

I scrolled down, and down again.

Soon after, I found the 'Round 896' of Ways of Survival that Kim Dokja had mentioned.

「And Yoo Joonghyuk opened his eyes.」

Yoo Joonghyuk in the 896th round was the same as Yoo Joonghyuk any other time.

The first scenario started on the subway.

Yoo Joonghyuk calmly obtained the necessary items and then proceeded with the scenario. As I followed the smooth progression without any unnecessary details, I realized once again what kind of life Yoo Joonghyuk had lived.

Life was a habit to him.

The sincerity of repeating the same thing over and over again without getting tired of it. That sincerity is what ultimately made Yoo Joonghyuk.

「"You die."」

Of course, his personality became a bit twisted in return.

「"You die too."」

He became a strange person who only repeated the word "die" whenever he got the chance.

「"You survive."」

In the midst of all this, Yoo Joonghyuk faithfully saved those who needed to live, and took them as his comrades. Yoo Joonghyuk continued to advance while carrying out the 'Absolute Throne' scenario with them and fighting against various nebulae.

After going through the 'Demon King Selection Tournament', 'Gigantomachia', 'Ragnarok', and 'The Holy Demon War'—he encountered several crises and cleared scenarios that seemed impossible to solve. I also followed Yoo Joonghyuk’s journey.

Did I acquire too many Kim Dokja fragments?

It had been a long time since I felt reading—and especially 'Ways of Survival'—interesting.

I didn’t want to miss this flow, so I forgot about my problems for a moment and immersed myself in Yoo Joonhyuk’s story.

How much did I read like that?

「And Yoo Joonghyuk reached the final scenario.」

I finally reached that sentence. And only then did I realize the strange sense of discomfort I had felt throughout reading the 896th round.

"Huh?"

Something felt strange.

The 'final scenario'?

That couldn’t be.

As far as I know, except for the 1,863rd round, the only time he got close to the 'final scenario' was in the 999th round.

But in the 896th round, which was 100 rounds earlier, he reached the 'final scenario'?

Did the content of Ways of Survival change?

Or am I remembering something wrong?

But regardless of my memory, Yoo Joonghyuk continued with the scenario, and even.

「That's how he cleared the last scenario.」

He even cleared the 'last scenario'.

「At the end of every scenario, he slowly looked back at the world. His colleagues laughing unrealistically, the ending he had so desperately wanted.」

But Yoo Joonghyuk, who was quietly staring at that scenery, let out a bitter laugh.

「"I see."」

And he muttered.

「"This world is fake."」