903 Episode 50 The World After The End (6)

Did my question sound strange?

The examiner, whose expression had changed, looked at me carefully.

Did I say something wrong? It doesn’t seem like such a big question to be curious about who the ascendant is today.

"Hmm, now that I think about it, you said you received the blessing of a higher constellation. I guess you’re curious if there’s anyone you know among the ascendants."

I nodded.

If you misunderstand, I’d be grateful.

The examiner, who had been pondering for a moment, answered.

"Ascendants are usually from large corporations. They’re the incarnations who were considered promising talents when they first joined the company. Let’s see. Today’s ascendants are from <Tamra Heavy Industries>, <Heukun Foundation>, and <Olympus Technology>…"

Tamra Heavy Industries. Heukun Foundation. Olympus Technology. They were all company names named after famous nebulae. Tamra would be <Tamra> based on Jeju folktales, and Black Cloud would be <Black Cloud> of the Black Flame Dragon. <Olympus>… there’s no need to mention it.

Why did companies named after nebulae enter 'Murim'?

Was it because of the power struggle related to the destroyed Fear Realm? Or maybe there was a need to supplement the Incarnation resources in the lower scenarios…

In either case, it wasn’t a good scenario flow. Especially if a nebula, who wasn’t particularly interested in expanding their power like <Black Cloud>, had also intervened… something big that I don’t know about could have happened in the upper scenarios.

"…So, today’s list of ascendants… Hmm? Oh, where did I save the list…"

While the examiner was hurriedly searching through the documents, a door leading to the ascension ceremony location appeared in the distance.

This is difficult. If the ascendant over there is related to the 'being' I’m thinking of…

"How strong are the executives?"

"Oh, right. I wonder about that too."

It's a scenario in the 70s.

Considering that even the main story's <Gigantomachia> was a scenario in the 60s, the ascendants in the 70s must be incredibly strong.

"Don't be surprised. The executives have a 'level' that's equivalent to the early stage of narrative grade."

Early stage of narrative grade.

Even the guys like 'Master of Spears' that we fought against at the 'Recycling Center' before were, strictly speaking, early stage of narrative grade.

However, back then, it was a scenario in the 20s, and now it's a scenario in the 70s.

Since the binding force of the probability that can handle the maximum level of the level is different, even the same 'early stage of narrative grade' will exert completely different power here.

"I see."

"Hmm? You're not really surprised."

I answered with a grin and stared ahead.

Now, what kind of guy is beyond here? Is he related to the 'existence' that I thought of?

"Now, this is the Ascension Hall where the Ascension Ceremony is held."

Along with the judge's introduction, a wide, circular platform appeared.

A vast sky reminiscent of a celestial sphere hung on the ceiling, and a translucent passage of light descended from the center of the sky and connected the platform. It was a sight reminiscent of an orbital elevator.

"Ohhh—!"

In addition to us, hundreds of incarnations had gathered in the area.

"Blood Jade Demon! Blood Jade Demon!"

Incarnations whose ranks were comparable to the judge next to me. If they were the incarnations who survived until now, they must be worthy of it.

—The Ascension Ceremony will be held today.

It seems that this 'Ascension Ceremony' is a large-scale event in the 'New Murim District'.

The faces of the ascendants were shown in close-up on the giant screen displayed at the top of the platform.

The judge next to me sighed as if he had just remembered.

"Today is the ascension ceremony of Jo daehyeop."

(TL: daehyeop/daehyup (대협) = 'grand master martial artist', as opposed to sohyeop/sohyup (소협) which means young/little expert martial artist.)

"Jo daehyeop?"

"The incarnation standing on the right side of the altar is none other than Jo Jincheol, the Blood Jade Demon."

Jo Jincheol.

It was a name I knew.

"Jo daehyeop is an ascendant of the <Black Cloud Foundation>. Hehe, how many martial artists have had their spines ripped out by Jo daehyeop in the past few years?"

At that moment, I could hear the mutterings of the onlookers nearby.

"The troublemaker of Murim is finally ascending to the upper town."

"That vicious bastard."

I glared at the face on the screen and frowned.

That 'Jo Jincheol' survived up to scenario number 70?

The head of the Gyeonggi Alliance, the Ten Evils Jo Jincheol.

In the main story, I know he was defeated by Kim Dokja in the Demon King Promotion Match and died, but how on earth did he end up here? Oh, I see, there is no such 'Kim Dokja' in this world...

Judging by the 'Black Cloud Foundation' written on his back, Jo Jincheol seemed to be an ascendant of the <Black Cloud> side.

"Paradise Emperor! Paradise Emperor!"

"Ohhh!"

The next ascendant to be illuminated was a tall, slender figure with small horns on his head.

The moment I heard his nickname, I got goosebumps.

Is this some kind of special on the Ten Evils?

I knew that the 41st round was going to be a terrible round, but I didn't know it would be this bad.

If Yoo Joonghyuk was here, he'd be all beat to death.

The owner of Paradise, Reinheit.

Reinheit, who should have fallen down dead in the 9th scenario, was standing there, looking fine.

How on earth did he bring the guy who was stuck in Paradise?

No... Wait a minute.

「The 'Dark Castle' that was the 8th scenario didn't appear on the Korean Peninsula in this round.」

Originally, 'Reinheit' was the villain who was killed by Yoo Joonghyuk in the Dark Castle.

Since Yoo Joonghyuk, who was going to destroy it, didn't visit the Dark Castle, it was natural development for him to survive in this round.

The intensity felt from Reinheit's entire body was almost on par with that of a lower-level demon lord.

On his back was written <Olympus Technology>.

Kukukuku.

I don't know the details of this round, but the fact that he came here must mean that he had a powerful benefit that was enough to throw away 'paradise'.

The moment I saw the spear held in his right hand, I thought I knew what benefit he had received.

"That's it—!"

The screams of the incarnations in amazement.

Surprisingly, in his hand was Astrape, a sacred relic of Zeus.

"Thunderbolt's Left Thunderbolt!"

"It's as powerful as I've heard!"

If that were real, I would have been surprised and fallen over.

However, I've seen Zeus swing the Thunderbolt himself several times. So I was sure of it.

"It's a well-made fake."

The examiner flinched and turned to me.

"You have a keen eye. That's right."

"It seems to be equivalent to a holy relic."

"It's proof that the Paradise Emperor is recognized by <Olympus> to that extent. Even if it's a mass-produced version, not just anyone can have that spear."

"I see."

I don't know the specific method, but it was clear that Reinheit escaped the Dark Castle with the support of <Olympus>.

Yoo Joonghyuk had also accepted Reinheit as a colleague, so <Olympus>'s decision was understandable.

Anyway, the fact that they've made it to the 70th main scenario means that the lower scenario regions that I knew of were already...

「As we enter the latter half of the scenarios, some continents on Earth have disappeared from the map forever.」

A sinister thought came to mind along with the phrase from 'Ways of Survival' that came to mind.

Will the Korean Peninsula be safe?

What happened to the incarnations at Geumho Station and Gwanghwamun?

"I thought there was one more ascendant, but it seems he hasn't arrived yet. That's for the best. Follow me. The full-fledged ascension ceremony is not over yet, so I have some time to spare."

The examiner said that and moved through the crowd toward the altar.

I thought about sneaking out at this point, but since I had come this far, there was one thing I wanted to try.

"Jo daehyeop!"

Jo Jincheol turned to look at the examiner's call. It seemed that Jo Jincheol knew the examiner.

"Oh, Jeon Daein."

"Congratulations. You are finally leaving this damn 'New Murim'."

"Thank you. I guess we are meant to be. It's because we met again on the last day."

Jo Jincheol, who had no influence in the main story, became a being on par with 'narrative-grade'.

Based on the sense of stories, it seemed that he had reached the early narrative-grade by increasing the average synchronization rate with his sponsor, but even that wasn't easy.

"Haha, that's right. I heard that you secured quite a lot of D Coins in the recent 'Foreign Press Suppression War'."

"Hmm, nothing much. Just took care of a few remnants of the disaster level."

"As expected, you're the great Jo daehyeop."

Watching Jo Jincheol converse so normally, I felt a sense of wonder inside.

Perhaps this was an extremely rare scene in the entire 'Ways of Survival'.

「I want to record it.」

[The 'Recorder of Fear', whose identity has not been revealed, looks around in surprise.]

Did he sense my gaze?

Jo Jincheol glanced back at me. When the examiner pointed to me and explained the situation, Jo Jincheol's eyes flashed with interest.

"A subject for irregular examination?"

"Yes. He's the incarnation that entered the 'New Murim District' today."

"Hmm... Aren't you a friendly soldier who's reluctant to reveal your face?"

At that tone of voice asking how I could be so arrogant as to wear my hood upside down in front of the victor, I took off my hood with a bitter smile.

[The effect of the item, 'Unidentified Hood' disappears.]

"Hoo..."

Jo Jincheol's eyes flashed. An unpleasant gaze scanned my face. What he used wasn't a search or insight skill.

I knew the skill Jo Jincheol used.

「Those who have reached the early stages of the narrative-grade acquire their own 'story interpretation method'.」

'Narrative' is both the status of a constellation and the way constellations view the world.

Every constellation emits light based on the stories it has accumulated, and understands the world by projecting that light onto other stories.

That's why the 'birth story' is important to all constellations.

This was the same for not only constellations, but also for transcendents. For example, those who have reached the third stage of the transcendents could understand others' stories and even infer their hidden realm.

Jo Jincheol, who was in front of me now, also seemed to have manifested the same power as he entered the early stages of narrative-grade.

I had a conversation with Han Sooyoung about this once.

「"You mean the hood won't work from the early stages of the narrative-grade?"」

「"They have excellent story detection."」

「"Then how can I hide my identity in front of the narrative-grade?"」

Han Sooyoung smiled and answered my question.

「"Don't do anything."」

「"Yes?"」

「"Now the average constellation won't be able to guess your realm?"」

Jo Jincheol's expression was changing in real time before my eyes.

"This is?"

"Jo daehyeop. Do you see something?"

"Hmm."

「"Why?"」

「"I don't know if you don't realize it or if you want to show off. Think about the stories you've built up so far."」

I thought about the stories I had 'built' myself.

Recorder of Things that Will Disappear (사라질 것들의 기록자).

The One Who Rewrote Fate (운명을 다시 쓰는 자).

Heir of the Eternal Name (영원한 이름의 계승자).

The Line Between Truth and Lies (진실과 거짓의 행간).

Up until this point, three were legendary, and one was mythical.

And on top of that, there was the 'giant story' that had no name yet.

「"Huh?"」

「"Do you understand now?"」

I have built more than five 'stories' so far.

And the <Star Stream> describes the existence that has built five stories as follows.

Constellation.

Originally, I should have already achieved the status of a constellation.

But the <Star Stream> and the Management Bureau did not give me the modifier of a constellation.

Why on earth?

「"It must be because of the 'rank' of the stories you have built."」

Come to think of it, even 'Kim Dokja' did not build stories of this level when he became a constellation.

King of a Kingless World (왕이 없는 세계의 왕).

One Who Fights Against Fate (이적에 맞서는 자).

One Who Hunted the King of Disasters (재앙의 왕을 사냥한 자).

One Who Killed an Outer God (이계의 신격을 살해한 자).

Demon King of Salvation (구원의 마왕).

Four legendary-level stories and one semi-myth-grade stories.

「"That 'Kim Dokja' also received a 'narrative-grade constellation' as his first rank. But if you were to receive a rank, what would you become?"」

I couldn't answer.

「"The Management Bureau judged after seeing the stories you've accumulated. 'That can't possibly be possible. That kind of being is definitely an 'error.'"」

An 'error' that is not given a rank.

「"The constellations just use a handful of light to read whatever they want to read."」

Han Sooyoung's smiling expression slowly overlapped with Jo Jincheol's in front of her.

The narrative-grade constellation was looking at me through Jo Jincheol's swirling eyes.

「"I'm curious too. In those guys' eyes, what will you 'look like' now?"」

Jo Jincheol's lips opened.