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I paused for a moment, rereading the nickname over and over again.

Like the constellations, the recorders also had their own modifiers. Just as Asmodeus was called the 'Demon King of the Cinema' and Lycaon the 'Prince of Wolves'.

However, before revealing their modifiers, the recorders sometimes expressed their characteristics with simple rhetoric, as now.

「A recorder who hates regression.」

With such a specific characteristic, the candidates that come to mind are narrowed down.

The first candidate is 'Yoo Joonghyuk' from the main story.

He was the first 'regressor' to escape regression after repeated, distant regressions. Since he, too, acquired the 'writer' trait at the end of the main story, it's possible he'd developed his powers as a 'recorder'.

The second candidate is Han Sooyoung, author of 'Ways of Survival'.

She, too, likely wrote about regression tirelessly, so it wouldn't have been entirely surprising if she had used the rhetoric 'averse to regression'. The third and final candidate was the monarch slayer, Jaehwan.

As far as I know, he had also written his own story, so he could have acquired the trait of a 'recorder' when he moved to the Star Stream.

But the fact that he would make this offer felt strangely unnatural. If it were the Jaehwan I knew, he'd be the first to attack me if he found something he didn't like...

Who could it be?

If this 'recorder who hates regression' is one of the three I predicted, then I wouldn't have much to lose by choosing this option.

The problem is if it's not one of those three.

What if there's a 'recorder' with some nefarious intentions unknown to me, and he's using the rhetoric of 'hating regression' to deceive me...

"I won't choose a recorder."

[The story, 'Heir of the Eternal Name' chuckles, saying he knew you would do something like that.]

Then, the message from the recorders came to mind.

[The recorder who still has no support shakes his head.]

[The recorder who enjoys large-scale fraud is disappointed in you.]

[The recorder who likes squinty characters is intrigued by your choice.]

[The 'Recorder of Fear' who writes about <Veda Biotech> glares at your choice.]

To tell the truth, I had no intention of accepting the offer, no matter who the recorder was.

Because I, too, am qualified to be a 'Recorder of Fear'. I don't need anyone else's help in recounting my tale.

But Namgung Myung, unaware of this, looked startled.

"Benefactor, did you really refuse the recording contract?"

Instead of answering, I smiled. Perhaps sensing the ominousness in my smile, Namgung Myung began to ramble on.

"By signing with the Recorders, you'll receive incredible probabilities. You could win an impossible battle, or even escape the threat of your only life. So, if you're offered a recording contract, you should definitely…"

Every benefit of the <Star Stream> comes with a price. Especially if that benefit involves the most elusive aspect of the <Star Stream>: 'probability'.

Winning an impossible battle... It was a tempting offer, but I couldn't make a rash decision just because of the momentary temptation.

[You declined the 'recording contract'.]

[Some of the 'dreadful Recorders' are shaken by your choice.]

Tsutsutsu!

That's when sparks spread like ripples through the air.

[This guy's still the same. Did he choose no one again?]

A white head floated in the air.

I waved lightly at the dokkaobi.

"It's been a while, Bihyung."

[Your 'Dokkaebi in charge' has been dispatched!]

The time for the 'Solo Meeting' has finally arrived.

\*

'Solo meetings' with Dokkaebis take place in the 'Gamtu' each Dokkaebi possesses.

Is this Bihyung's 'Gamtu'?

A larger and more spacious space than the 'Dokkaebi' described in the main story. It was reminiscent of a hotel suite.

This must mean Bihyung's Dokkaebi rank has risen.

"You live in a nice place."

"Ahem, I'm a high-level Dokkaebi now."

The arrogant Bihyung quickly straightened and cleared his throat.

[Do you know why I called you?]

"More or less."

I was the last survivor of the 'Fear Realm.' During that time, I even traveled to another worldline through the 'Time Fault.'

"Isn't it because of the 'Returner Scenario'?"

Normally, I should have already received the 'Returner Scenario' and begun the process of returning. In the process, there should have been a resolution, either through a 'Return War' or by successfully persuading the group like Kim Dokja and regaining my true self.

[That's right. But there's a problem right now, so I can't activate the 'Returner Scenario'.]

A problem?

[To activate the 'Returner Scenario', I need not only the authority of the Management Bureau, but also the attention of the constellations, and a certain number of 'Returners'.]

"The authority of the Management Bureau shouldn't be a major issue, and there should be a way to secure the attention of the constellations, so the final condition is the issue, I suppose."

Bihyung wiggled his eyebrows, seemingly intrigued by my answer.

[How do you know all that?]

As I shrugged without answering, Bihyung continued.

[You're right. I can manage to secure the authority of the Management Bureau and the attention of the Constellations, but... the problem is the 'Incarnations'. Right now, there are no 'Returners' besides you.]

How could that be possible? In the <Star Stream>, a 'return' occurs on a fictional day.

[Recently, there was an event that summoned a large number of returnees. It was called the 'Return War' special…]

"I understand, Wonjin, but so what?"

[There was a crazy guy among the participants back then. He killed all the other participants. That's why the precious war and the scenario itself disappeared. Since that incident, the 'Returner Scenario' has been temporarily suspended.]

Is there anyone among the precious ones who can wipe out all the returnees before me?

Who is it? Jang Hayoung?

[Anyway, that's why the 'Returner Scenario' won't appear this time.]

I was grateful.

If a 'Returner Scenario' were added to the current situation, it would be a hassle in many ways.

But Bihyung didn't stop there.

[Your next scenario will be a bit more difficult, though. Be prepared.]

"The reward will be that much better, right?"

"Well... but are you okay?"

"I can tolerate difficulty adjustments as long as the rewards are good. But more importantly, could you please give me the scenario reward? I finished the Fear Realm and didn't get it."

"Oh, right. I should."

Seeing Bihyung sweating profusely and looking into his pockets, I quickly added,

"Don't try to make up for it with some half-assed story. It's called the 'Fear Realm'."

Bihyung hesitated.

"You know what happened to me in the Fear Realm, right? I joined the 'Transcendent Alliance'. I defeated a natural disaster-level fear, unleashed an end-level fear... and at the end, you know that the myth-level constellations swarmed me, threatening to kill me, right?"

Bihyung hesitated for a moment before starting to search through his slightly larger pockets.

"If you think that's all there is, you're mistaken. You might not know, but I fought the Apocalypse Dragon in another worldline. If you know what happened there..."

I briefly absorbed the Apocalypse Dragon's shockwave, but the whole fighting the Apocalypse Dragon thing was a lie. If I had done something like that, I wouldn't be here now.

[This should do, right?]

I looked at the box Bihyung had pulled out.

—An SSS-grade skill selection box.

It wasn't S-grade, or SS-grade, but an 'SSS-grade skill' selection box.

"Hmm."

I put on a disapproving expression, but honestly, I was astonished.

Even within the same 'SSS-grade' category, 'skills' and 'items' are on different levels. For example, items have a higher category called 'Relics' above 'SSS-grade', but skills end at 'SSS-grade'.

Even Yoo Joonghyuk's [Sage's Eye] was only an SS-grade skill.

And yet, an SSS-grade skill? And a 'selection box', at that. This wasn't a losing proposition.

"SSS-level skills? Are you really going to rule with something like this?"

But who am I?

"This isn't even worth exterminating a single natural disaster-level fear?"

As a member of Kim Dokja, known as the 'Spout of Hell', I couldn't be satisfied with this small reward.

I had to get even a little more reward...

"Okay, okay. I'll give you that too."

I honestly didn't expect another reward to drop. Considering Bihyung's aggressive nature, I thought even a SSS-level skill selection box was excessive.

"Another box?"

"I'll tell you after seeing the original."

I checked the name of the box Bihyung had handed me.

—Limited Edition Random Relic Box.

The random part was familiar, but the name after it was surprising.

Relic? The relic I know?

—It was recently made into a hack-only item, but was scrapped.

I nodded at the price written on the side of the box. Even if it contained a relic-level item, I wonder who would buy it for 5 million coins per item.

And if the relic level is even random...

"What kind of idiot would release something like this..."

Bihyung's expression darkened suddenly.

[Ahem, anyway. Is this reward enough?]

"It'll probably just contain a bunch of great-grade constellation relics."

[...I'll give you two.]

I knew it, you punk.

[You've acquired two 'Limited Edition Random Relic Boxes'.]

Yeah, this really wasn't bad.

Even if they're great-grade constellation relics, getting two at once isn't common.

After all, relics are strengthened by the user's story, so there's no need to worry about their level.

[So now...]

"Wait a minute, what about the coins? They were on the reward list, weren't they?"

Bihyung sighed lightly and shook his finger.

[You've earned a total of 2,000,000 coins as a scenario reward!]

I doubted my eyes for a moment.

Two million coins in one go?

It was even more than the reward amount.

"I guess the Administration Bureau's finances are ample these days?"

[No, that's not true. I calculated it based on your achievements. You even defeated a natural disaster-level fear, and you even had a showdown with the Apocalypse Dragon, right?]

"You didn't see me have a showdown with the Apocalypse Dragon, did you?"

[You said so. I believe you.]

"Isn't there some other motive?"

Bihyung's eyes rolled at my words. He really is an easy-to-understand dokkaebi.

"If you're honest now, I'll let you off."

Bihyung looked at me and sighed, his heart sinking.

"Did you make another mistake? Or will a disaster descend upon Murim from now on?"

I began to float a scenario I could only imagine.

If a dokkaebi like Bihyung were to unleash such a barrage of gifts, there would naturally be a plausible scenario.

In short, a great catastrophe, like a natural disaster slumbering in Murim, would awaken, or Yoo Joonghyuk, suddenly transformed into a beautiful girl, would awaken as the Demon King and wreak havoc...

But the words that came out of Bihyung's mouth were completely unexpected.

[Good job refusing.]

For a moment, I fell silent, unable to grasp the implications of those words. Then Bihyung sighed again and added,

[Refusing the record contract.]