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I paused for a moment.

Is this kid praising me for turning down a recording contract?

"What do you mean by that?"

Of course, Bihyung was also a 'dokkaebi' in the <Star Stream>. A dokkaebi who wouldn't hesitate to throw in a bunch of incarnations for an interesting 'scenarios'.

He once sacrificed his life for Kim Dokja in the main story, but that was only a part of the main story.

In other words, Bihyung couldn't have said that out of concern for my safety.

"I wanted you to refuse."

"Didn't you grumble earlier about not choosing?"

"We dokkaebis don't like 'recorders of fear'."

I hadn't heard a detailed explanation, but I felt like I understood Bihyung's feelings.

Basically, it was the dokkaebis' role to preside over the narrative in the <Star Stream>. They exist to open channels, manage scenarios, and produce high-quality stories.

But when these idiots, devoid of any foundation, show up out of nowhere and start arguing, saying they'll 'record the stories', it's understandable they're not happy.

[Until now, the recorders have been prohibited from directly interfering with the scenarios. Because if they interfere and start abusing narratives, the plausibility of the story becomes a mess.]

That's right. Every single 'recorder of fear' I've encountered so far possessed immense power.

Asmodeus, Bicheonhori, Cheon Inho... If even one of them set their mind to it, even a 'giant story'-level scenario could be distorted.

And indeed, they have.

[But recently, they've broken the taboo and begun to come to the forefront of the scenarios.]

"Recording contracts."

[That's right. The Administration is deeply troubled by that. This is the first time they've interfered with a scenario in this way.]

Even in Ways of Survival, there's no mention of 'recording contracts'. In short, what's happening in this city right now is unprecedented across all of the Star Stream's worldlines.

"So? What are you trying to say? Are you telling me not to sign any more recording contracts?"

"That's not all."

Bihyung hesitated, his face uncertain whether to reveal this, then added:

"Do you... by any chance know how a Recorder of Fear is created?"

I recalled a conversation I had with Bicheonhori.

「【I don't know exactly how a Recorder of Terror is born. Each Recorder has a different trigger.】」

Bicheonhori said.

「【Every Recorder becomes a Recorder for a different reason.】」

At the same time, Bicheonhori expressed all of those 'triggers' in a single sentence:

「Those who harbor the potential for a record worthy of the Oldest Dream.」

Of course, I had no intention of relaying that interpretation to Bihyung, so I shamelessly feigned indifference.

"I don't know."

The stupid dokkaebi chuckled, as if he'd expected that.

[Then I'll tell you specifically. Most of the 'Recorders of Fear' are created by those lumpy guys.]

It was an unexpected answer, so I hesitated for a moment before asking.

"Can I use [Lie Detection]?"

[I swear on the Management Bureau.]

If that idiot dokkaebi swears on the Management Bureau, it must be real.

[Some are born naturally, but most Recorders are mass-produced by those lumpy guys. They're often born when powerful people from worldlines that failed their scenarios communicate with the 'Devil of the Horizon'.]

"Why do those lumpy guys mass-produce 'Recorders'?"

[I can't tell you that.]

I thought for a moment and then answered.

"Are all the Recorders in this city mass-produced in the same way?"

[Anyway, you're a quick-witted brat.]

"I thought something was off."

Even in that 'Fear Realm', I only encountered four 'Recorders of Fear', but in the 'New Murim District', there were far more Recorders than the Fear Realm.

But if they were all mass-produced by the Recorderd, then that would make sense.

"What do you want?"

As if he'd been waiting for me to say that, Bihyung added with a feigned solemnity.

[The Management Bureau wants you to deal with the Recorders of the 'New Murim District'.]

"Are you asking me to kill them?"

[You arrogant brat, do you think you can kill the Recorders so easily? Just preventing them from advancing to higher scenarios is enough.]

"What should I do?"

[We just need to deal with the incarnations who signed the 'Record Contract' with them.]

I see. So that was the true purpose of the 'Exclusive Meeting'.

I grinned and asked back.

"With my bare face?"

[This city's final scenario will begin soon. Whatever story you obtain here, I'll raise its rank by one level.]

It was a radical offer.

In other words, if I obtain a Legendary Tale here, its rank will be raised to Semi-Mythical, and if I obtain a Semi-Mythical Tale, its rank will be raised to Mythical.

For someone like me, who still lacks the rank to face Mythical constellations, the increased rank of the story I'm about to obtain was a huge boon.

"Still, the risk is too great. Is there any other support?"

[I already gave you a generous reward. Full-scale support is out of the question. Even for the Administration Bureau, it's difficult to intervene in this scenario area. The likelihood is too complex due to the intervention of the Recorders here.]

"If that's the case, I can't help you. If I fail, won't it make things even more difficult for the Administration Bureau?"

[...I'll tell my superiors. You can receive light support if you want. If the likelihood of fallout is somewhat mitigated...]

"A tip, like how to deal with them? Like, if there's a place they only hang out in."

[You'd know better than me. You've probably seen other recorders, haven't you?]

I said, recalling the high-ranking recorders I'd met in the 'Fear Realm'.

"At least their faces."

"Hmm. I heard there's a subspace only recorders can access... Well, I'm not a recorder myself, so I don't know for sure."

A subspace only recorders can access?

It was quite useful information, so I decided to memorize it.

"Okay, I understand."

[So, you'll accept the request? I'll give you a sub-scenario?]

"Honestly, the reward is a bit disappointing."

[This guy really is...]

The reward was adequate, but since I was the one in control in this situation anyway, I decided to push it a little harder.

"No, think about it. In this scenario, if I obtain a quasi-mythical or mythical tale, it's a gain, but if I obtain a historical tale, wouldn't it be a loss? Even if I raise the story level by one, it's only a legendary one."

[No, there's no way the story you obtain here will be historical. And a legendary story is good, too...]

"Anyway, from my current perspective, there's no reason to clash with the Recorders. It's much more profitable to just sit back and relax before ascending, and that's why I've already prepared a reincarnation bus for that purpose."

[A reincarnation bus?]

"There is something like that."

Of course, I had no intention of just sitting back and relaxing before ascending, but still, it's all about the way you throw your cards.

I thought this would increase the reward by at least one point, but Bihyung's expression was surprisingly strange.

[Hmm. I didn't expect that. I thought you'd harbor a greater grudge against the Recorders than anyone else.]

"Grudge? What are you talking about?"

[Have you already forgotten what happened at the Recycling Center?]

I pondered what happened at the Recycling Center.

There, I confronted Lycaon, the fearsome recorder, but I didn't particularly harbor any resentment towards him. In fact, I felt a sense of gratitude towards him.

[What? You didn't know until now, didn't you? You know the powers of the recorders, right?]

I briefly recalled my encounter with Cheon Inho and answered casually.

"They're recorders, so they'd record."

[That's right. When recorders record the 'past,' it becomes 'history.' Then what if they record the 'future'?]

Recording the future?

[Anyway, you can't remember what happened back then. You're truly…]

My expression hardened involuntarily.

Future records.

I knew better than anyone else what they meant.

"Are you talking about [Fate]?"

A mischievous smile appeared on Bihyung's face. On the Star Ladder, and at the Recycling Center, I was sentenced to [Fate].

And in return for that fate, I lost my eldest brother, and I even became an outcast.

A rage slowly began to boil deep within my heart. The image of my brother, repeatedly reduced to misery to fight that damned fate, was still vivid before my eyes.

"The 'Fate' proclaimed by the Great Nebulae back then... does it have anything to do with the Recorders here?"

[Exactly.]

Bihyung laughed, his lips parted.

[Now, in this 'New Murim District', all the 'Recorders' who once wrote your 'Fate' at the request of the Great Nebulae are gathered.]

\*

[You have accepted the new 'Sub-Scenario.']

After my private meeting with Bihyung, I stepped out of his cap.

[The constellation, 'Bald Leader of Justice', asks where the hell you've been.]

[The constellation, 'God of Wine and Ecstasy', whines that he too wants to see the dokkaebi's cap.]

[The recorder who likes squinty characters says that squinty characters are indeed full of secrets.]

The gazes of the constellations and recorders poured in as soon as I left. It wasn't surprising, considering I'd caused such an incident at the auction house and then suddenly disappeared.

Bihyung's 'Dokkaebi Communication' rang in my ears.

—Then please take care of me. Contact me if anything happens.

"Bihyung, one last question."

—What is it?

'Where are my comrades now?'

The information from the recorders and the lump was important, but this was the question I most wanted to ask.

—I can't tell you. It violates the probability.

If the probability was limited even though he was merely revealing the location of incarnations, the reason was obvious.

「My colleagues have become beings of such great stature.」

After a brief silence, Bihyung spoke.

—Instead, I'll show you this.

A light finger snap was heard from somewhere.

[This week's Emotion Rankings have closed.]

[You have received the required reward.]

[You have received 500 D-Coins.]

A screen appeared beyond the D-Coins pouring from the air.

[Your Emotion Rankings will be recorded in the 'All-Time Emotion Rankings'.]

All-Time Emotion Rankings.

I checked the list before me.

As expected, there were names I recognized.

+

3rd place, A Pile of Tentacles from a natural disaster-level Outer God, 9000 D-Coins, Kang Ilhun.

+

Kang Ilhun, the name of Killer King.

+

6th place, the right and left arms of a natural disaster-level Outer God, 8,500 D coins, Lee Seyeon.

+

Lee Seyeon, Yerin's name.

+

8th place, part of the lower body of a highly damaged natural disaster-level Outer God, 8,100 D coins, Min Jiwon.

9th place, 85 low-damage disaster-level Outer Gods, 7,800 D coins, Lee Dansu.

…

+

Even the names of the editor and the Dansu ahjussi.

There lay the history of my colleagues. The history of their struggles and survival in this horrific hell.

The reason Bihyung showed this was clear. He was telling me:

See with my own eyes what happened over the past eight years. And as a latecomer, I must diligently follow in their footsteps.

Then, a message rang in my ear.

[Your current emotional ranking is '2nd'.]

[Would you like to register your name in the rankings?]

Emotional ranking 2nd.

That meant there was another person above me.

I checked the rankings again.

+

1st place, unidentified nail fragment, 10,000 D coins, ■■■.

+

The submitter's name was filtered.

I looked at the filtered name, and then again.

—Get a grip. This city's final scenario will begin tonight.

I nodded and said.

"Don't worry."

At least in this scenario, I won't be the one who needs to get my head straight.