935 Episode 55 Giant Tree (1)

「Even without a forest, trees grow. No matter how much they grow, no one would call them forests.」

—Breaking the Sky Sword Master Namgung Minyeong.

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Leaving Kyung Sein in Namgung Myung's care, we raced through the streets of the 'New Murim District'.

We saw incarnations engaged in fierce battles all over the Blue Dragon Castle.

"There! Chase them!"

The martial artists were chasing the incarnations listed on the 'Tribute Holders List'.

"No! Not me!"

"Kwaaaaak!"

"That guy just stole my tribute!"

The 'New Murim District' was in utter chaos.

[Many constellations rejoice in the struggle of the incarnations.]

[The constellation, 'First Heavenly Demon', shakes his head in disappointment.]

[The constellation, 'Emperor of Power', rejoices at the vibrant energy of Murim for the first time in a while.]

Constellations, appearing from nowhere, watched the entire scene.

「Even though we'd reached the 70th scenario, the scenery before our eyes was no different from the subway in the first scenario.」

To survive, to ascend to a higher scenario, they harmed one another. They killed those who had once been comrades, and those who had been indebted to them. They plundered those who greeted them with a smile, and stabbed those they respected in the back.

"Aaaaah! Don't chase me! I told you not to come!"

Among them, there was a familiar face.

The man who had judged me when I first entered the 'New Murim District'.

I think he was called 'Jeon Yeongwoo', a second-class examiner.

[An incarnation with five tributes is approaching.]

He, too, seemed to be an incarnation on the 'List of Tribute Holders'.

"Kill him!"

The examiner, an arrow pierced through his thigh, hurriedly took a step forward and fell to the ground. A magical arrow, imbued with magic, took advantage of the opportunity to strike.

"Eek!"

The examiner hurriedly protected his head and ducked.

Kagagang!

The arrow deflected off my sword. The incarnations, who had spotted me from afar, stopped in their tracks, wary.

I extended my hand to the fallen examiner and asked.

"Are you alright?"

"Well, you…"

I had received a small favor from him before. Of course, his intention was to sell me out to another company, but he had clearly been kind to me, a newbie.

"There! There's a human with 100 tributes here!"

Instead of grabbing my hand, the examiner pointed at me and shouted. Then he got up and limped away.

I watched his back for a moment.

「Perhaps the Breaking the Sky Sword Master has seen this kind of 'forest' for a long time.」

Those who, to protect their own roots, would not hesitate to kill the roots of other trees.

The place where the roots of such trees intertwined was Murim, where the law of the strong reigned supreme.

"Wait, 100 tributes?"

The incarnations, who had belatedly discovered me, approached me hesitantly.

"There’s another one for 40 next to it."

"That guy—"

Jung Heewon, standing beside me, sighed softly and pulled out her broken skull mask.

A belated roar of shock echoed.

"Oh my God, it’s the Light Sword Emperor!"

"Haaaaaa!"

"The slayer of the ascended!"

Before Jung Heewon could even begin to assert herself, the incarnations all turned their backs and began to flee. Jung Heewon shook her head, looking at the incarnations, then added,

"You're still the same, Dokja-ssi."

"What do you mean?"

"You trust people too easily. From now on, be careful who you reach out to."

Jung Heewon looked at my hand, which was wandering in the empty air, and said,

"Not everyone in this world deserves to be saved. Sometimes, it seems like you, Dokja-ssi, want to save everyone."

Not everyone deserves to be saved. I couldn't understand how Jung Heewon had arrived at that answer. However, her answer made me feel a little sad.

「The incarnations who have proven their worth through long scenarios have gathered here.」

The incarnations who proved their worth in the first scenario and finally reached scenario number 70.

Clearly, both they and we struggled to survive and made it this far.

「What did we prove back then to survive?」

Did we even prove something in the first place?

And what did my brother want me to see and feel here?

Kugugugu!

Explosions continued throughout the city.

There were about five locations where the explosions were coming from.

Probably the headquarters of the company.

I turned to Jung Heewon and asked.

"Do you happen to know where Breaking the Sky Sword Master is imprisoned?"

"I only know that it's in the basement of a certain company."

Jung Heewon had been exploring the 'New Murim District' to rescue Breaking the Sky Sword Master. However, even she seemed unable to pinpoint the exact location of Breaking the Sky Sword Master's imprisonment.

I recalled the list of companies currently representing the 'New Murim District'.

If they were capable of imprisoning someone as powerful as Breaking the Sky Sword Master, it had to be one of them.

"There are constellations that faced you back then."

Jung Heewon recalled her memories.

"Agni, the Purifying Flame. Apollo, the Almighty Sun. Vidar, the Ender of War."

Agni of Veda, Apollo of Olympus, and even Vidar of Asgard. Coincidentally, they were all constellations that descended here to meet 'Kim Dokja of the Snowfield'.

What's unusual is that Asgard, to which Vidar belonged, didn't have any subcontractors here.

"The owner of Baekrokdam."

A beastman of Baek Toknam, a constellation affiliated with Tamra. As expected, it was the one who ate the stories of 'Kim Nokja of the Snowfield'.

Of course, not all constellations were like this.

"The White Flame Dragon of Sighs."

One constellation was presumed to belong to the Black Cloud. And—

"There was also a guy called the 'Drinking Demon'."

A drinking demon.

It never appears in the main story, but if I recall correctly, it was a constellation affiliated with the White Cloud.

"One of those constellations must be the culprit."

"It's not the White Cloud or Black Cloud Foundation. I've already thoroughly investigated those areas."

I glanced at each location where explosions were coming from.

The area where the explosion was heard was limited, so visiting them all in order would be a viable option.

But right now, I was marked with [Fate]. If I chose the wrong path, Breaking the Sky Sword Master could be the first to be attacked by the ascended heavens.

I looked up into the void and spoke in my head.

'Unchanging One, are you listening?'

Unchanging One.

It was the recorder I had met when entering the 'Record Archives' a while ago.

He was originally a recorder who wrote the records of <Veda>, but now, through a contract with me, he had become my 'assistant recorder'.

[The Recorder of Fear, 'Unchanging One', answers your call.]

He seemed to be listening, and he immediately responded.

I picked out a few questions that needed to be answered immediately and asked him.

'Do you know who the guys who put [Fate] on me are?'

The 'Unchanging One' seemed to hesitate for a moment, then quickly answered with a sentence in the air.

「The Afterglow Library.」

The Afterglow Library?

「A record group formed by low-level recorders.」

「Like the 'Black Book Society', they participated in the 'Fate Record' of the Demon King of Salvation.」

Judging by the description, they seem to be similar to the 'Recorder Group' who stopped me last time.

In that case, there's no need to hesitate any longer.

'I will rewrite [Fate] now.'

Confronting the Breaking the Sky Sword Master while holding [Fate] was risky, so I immediately unleashed the power of the Recorder. But...

Tsutsutsutsu!

The moment I touched the [Fate] they had written, a strong spark enveloped my hand.

The repulsive force was incomparable to the previous time I modified [Fate].

It was strange. Surely, this was a [fate] bestowed by the 'lower-level recorders'?

[The Recorder of Fear, 'Unchanging One,' says modifying fate is not recommended.]

'Why?'

[The Recorder of Fear, 'Unchanging One,' says that [fates] with inaccurate definitions and weak enforcement are sometimes difficult to modify.]

I reviewed the sentence of the [fate] I had received.

「Kim Dokja of the 'New Murim District' will lose his 'precious thing'.」

As the 'Unchanging One' had said, this [fate] contained points of interpretive uncertainty.

「One, can you clearly identify me as the target of that [fate]?」

I am called Kim Dokja by people, but in reality, the body I possessed was not 'Kim Dokja'.

So, is this [fate] truly targeting me?

「Two, what exactly is the standard for 'precious things'?」

[Fate] hadn't even properly defined whether 'precious things' were people, objects, or something conceptual.

[The Recorder of Fear, 'Unchanging One,' says this 'Fate' doesn't need any revision.]

I understood what he was saying.

[Fate], with its uncertain definition, was difficult to revise, but there was a way to circumvent it.

That's probably what the 'Unchanging One' wanted to say.

I nodded and asked a second question.

'Do you by any chance know about the confined area of ​​Breaking the Sword Sword Master?'

He seemed to have prepared an answer, as the sentence immediately came to mind.

「It's highly likely he's imprisoned in the basement of <Olympus Technology> or <Tamra Heavy Industries>.」

「Both companies have underground prisons that imprison 'fear'.」

It's a shame the locations of <Olympus Technology> and <Tamra Heavy Industries> weren't clearly specified, but the fact that the options were narrowed down to two was a significant gain.

'Good. Wait until I call again.'

[The Recorder of Fear, 'Unchanging One', serves your command.]

I quickly relayed the information I'd discovered to Jung Heewon.

Jung Heewon seemed surprised at how I'd figured it out, but instead of asking, she said,

"<Olympus Technology> is west of Blue Dragon Castle. <Tamra Heavy Industries> is southeast."

There were two options. Ultimately, we had to choose one.

But unfortunately, before we could choose, there were those who had chosen us first.

"Is that the Light Sword Emperor?"

"Strike! We'll go first!"

They were the ascendants and incarnations of each company.

"Gungmyung-ssi, things are going differently than you expected."

Namsung Myung said the martial artists would avoid us after seeing our prowess. But it seems not everyone was like that.

"There's no way those guys could have defeated Agni!"

"Even if that's true, they're injured. If we all fight together, there's nothing to fear!"

The incarnations of the companies surged forward, their voices roaring. It was a truly immense crowd, hundreds of feet in all.

Perhaps behind them were the incarnations who instigated this.

I kept a close eye on the five ascended beings leading the incarnations at the rear of the group.

Jung Heewon, who had been observing the situation, drew her sword and said,

"Dokja-ssi, go first. I'll follow soon. I can handle those guys on my own."

The moment I saw Jung Heewon's back, a message of fate echoed in my head.

「Kim Dokja of the 'New Murim District' will lose his 'precious thing'.」

I shook my head and stood beside her.

"No, we'll move together this time."

"Even if we don't—"

"I know you're not yet in a position to fight properly."

Jung Heewon was strong. However, her injuries from her battle with Agni hadn't fully healed. Furthermore, if her opponents were ascended beings, and with so many of them, her chances of winning were slim.

"The same goes for you, Dokja-ssi."

Jung Heewon also had a clear understanding of my condition. In reality, I wasn't in a position to unleash the same powerful attacks I'd unleashed against Agni.

I'd already used 'King of Fear' mode once, so I couldn't use it for the time being. I could still use 'Demon King of Salvation' mode, but I had to conserve it.

If I exhausted all my strength here, I wouldn't be able to save the Breaking the Sky Sword Master.

"So, we should move together."

"Yes?"

"Follow me."

I grabbed Jung Heewon's arm and started running.

"Where are we going? This way…"

My running direction wasn't west, where <Olympus Technology> was, or southeast, where <Tamra Middle School> was.

"Whether we go west or southeast, there will be even more incarnations waiting for us. No matter how strong we become, we can't face the entire Murim."

"So you have some kind of plan?"

"Heewon-ssi, why do you think they're chasing us?"

Jung Heewon thought for a moment and answered.

"Isn't it because of the tributes?"

The tributes. The core of this 'scenario', the sacrifices necessary for ascension.

I smiled faintly and answered.

"We have a total of 140 tributes. And the 'altar' ritual requires 30."

"Huh...?"

"Isn't that strange? Even if they take all our tributes, only four incarnations can ascend. That means they can't all ascend."

"Then why are they...?"

No sooner had she finished asking than the ascendant's question came from the back of the line.

"I will award 3,000 D-Coins to the first one to take the head of the Light Sword Emperor!"

The incarnations, emboldened by the ascendant's declaration, accelerated and began to pursue us.

Jung Heewon, realizing something belatedly, spoke.

"Couldn't—"

"That's right."

The given 'tribute' is limited, and not everyone can ascend through this main scenario.

No, not everyone wanted 'ascension' in the first place. Even if you become stronger and advance to a higher scenario, you'll only end up as the tail of a dragon at best.

There are those in this city who have given up on ascending, declaring themselves masters of the ruined forest.

"When all the ascendants leave, who do you think will rule this place?"

Jung Heewon answered with a hardened expression.

"Those with the most D-Coins, I suppose."

[The constellation, 'White Flame Dragon of Sighs', nods.]

[The constellation, 'Drinking Demon', watches your every move.]

[The constellation, 'Omnipotent Sun', glares at you.]

I nodded, gazing at the stars that twinkled indifferently.

Jung Heewon asked again.

"So what? To stop them—"

"It's simple. We just have to respond the same way they do."

"They're a corporation. No matter how rich you are, you can't have more coins than them."

I spoke, watching the road to the 'auction house' approaching.

"Normally, that would be the case, but..."

This city was made of my brother's flesh and blood. Therefore, the most 'valuable' things here were already decided.

"It's different in this 'city'."

Perhaps, as Namgung Myung said, the time had come for a wind of change to blow through this Murim.

However, this change would be somewhat different from what Namgung Myung had envisioned.