
Chapter 6: Protagonist (1)

Episode 2 – Protagonist (1)

The subway stopped around halfway past Dongho Bridge.

“Oh my god...”

Several survivors stood up and looked at the scene taking place outside. The ruined Seoul and collapsed buildings. Monsters reminiscent of a giant snake were eating the wreckage of a fighter jet that had crashed into the Han River.

“W-What the hell...!”

I recognized their identity at once. An ichthyosaur. A monster that was commonly called a sea serpent. It would later be classified as a Grade 7 monster in the world of Ways of Survival.

One of the ichthyosaurs looked in this direction.

“U-Uwaaah! It is coming!”

People screamed with fright. But I just looked apathetically at the approaching ichthyosaur. These guys couldn’t be a threat.

Kurururung!

The ichthyosaur circled around the bottom of Dongho Bridge and vanished into an air bubble.

In the world of Ways of Survival, 'scenarios' took precedence over anything else. As long as we were protected by the scenario, we wouldn't have to deal with such monsters straight away. At least for now.

[Compensation settlement is delayed due to an unexpected scenario check. Please wait.]

The compensation settlement should've started right now but only an error message floated in the air.

It was probably due to me. I looked down at Kim Namwoon's body, which only had the torso remaining.

According to the original Ways of Survival, Kim Namwoon killed most of the people in this carriage and moved onto the next scenario. But I stopped it.

If my thoughts were right, those who would be angry at Kim Namwoon's death would appear. Here? Not here. They were in the sky above.

[Due to the death of character 'Kim Namwoon', two constellations show a faint hostility to you.]

Constellations. They were mysterious beings in Ways of Survival. They sat watching from the distant nebulas and were the masterminds of this tragedy.

Once the constellation's preferences sign appeared, I realized that it was now starting in earnest.

It was funny. A day ago, our positions were opposite. Now they were the ones watching me.

[A handful of constellations admire your scenario.]

[The constellations have sponsored you 500 coins.]

If there were some constellations who disliked me, there would also be some who liked me. Either way, it was an uncomfortable situation. However, I couldn't do anything about them right now. It was my turn to be a clown.

I picked up Kim Namwoon's Swiss knife on the ground and thought.

'Feel free to watch. You will end up paying the admission fee with your lives.'

"...Dokja-ssi? Are you okay?"

I looked up and saw Yoo Sangah's face. Her shoulders were sagging. Blood covered her white blouse and there was a run in her stockings. There was no more of the Yoo Sangah I knew. I held Yoo Sangah's hand and said.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't save the grandmother."

I looked down at the body of the grandmother, missing its head. I didn't know the name of the grandmother. In the future, many people would die in this manner.

Yoo Sangah looked at me with a complicated gaze.

"How is Dokja-ssi so..."

"Yes?"

"Ah, it is nothing. Rather... Thank you."

"What do you mean?"

"That, I..."

I belatedly thought back to the previous scene. I had thrown the net in Yoo Sangah's direction. I knew what she was thinking.

"It was just a coincidence. It won't happen twice."

"Ah..."

Yoo Sangah nodded silently. She didn't know the truth but she was smart. She knew what I meant. Someone lived because of my choice and someone else died. No matter who survived, I didn't deserve a thank you.

[Wow, amazing.]

The dokkaebi appeared in the air.

[What on earth happened here? I was just watching the other carriages...]

There was a mixture of delight and surprise on the dokkaebi's face. Twinkling stars floated over the dokkaebi's head.

I counted the number of stars. One, two, three... Twenty, twenty one. Twenty one in total. He would be happy.

[For 21 people to be connected to my channel... Haha, isn't this quite good? Gosh, thank you for your sponsorship. Constellations. Haha, everyone! Did you properly show off your value?]

The number of stars meant the number of constellations connected to the channel.

21 wasn't a lot, but it was a strange number for a beginner dokkaebi.

[The number of survivors is quite high? The fellow in the next carriage was a nutter as well... It seems that things are quite interesting today.]

The dokkaebi manipulated something in the air. A moment later, a list of survivors came up.

[Survivors from the 3434 Train to Bulgwang, Carriage 3807: Kim Dokja, Lee Hyunsung, Yoo Sangah, Han Myungoh and Lee Gilyoung. A total of five survivors.]

Five people. More people than I thought survived. I looked at the faces of the survivors one by one.

Lee Hyunsung had a good physique and excellent motor skills, so it was expected that he would survive. I even expected Yoo Sangah to a certain extent.

In addition, Lee Gilyoung. If my guess was right, 'Lee Gilyoung' was the name of the boy standing next to me. The fluids from the crushed grasshopper was still on the boy's hands. It was the grasshopper I had squeezed.

The boy was looking at his mother, who lost her head. The boy's mother had abandoned him to join in on killing the grandmother. The boy had just watched the whole thing from beginning to end.

I hesitated for a moment before touching the boy's shoulder. It wasn't foolish sympathy. To put it simple, this was...

That's right. Hypocrisy.

"Kid."

The boy slowly turned his head and in his eyes, I could see the fear of death that he encountered for the first time in his life.

Unavoidable instincts. This boy wasn't grieving his mother's death. He was just afraid of his own death. It was natural. He was human.

“Do you want to live?”

The boy’s eyes shook anxiously. His body trembled with a force that couldn’t be resisted. Then little by little, the boy’s head moved.

“Then let’s go together.”

Lee Gilyoung moved slowly and came close to my legs. Yoo Sangah was watching me with an impressed expression. I unintentionally caused another misunderstanding. In fact, it was meant to be seen. But the target wasn’t Yoo Sangah.

[A few constellations are impressed with your good deed.]

[The constellations have sponsored you 200 coins.]

I couldn’t help thinking that it was a low move. But I also wanted to live.

Given the upcoming major events, it was essential to draw the attention of the constellations right now.

“W-Will you release us now? Didn’t you get what you wanted?”

Han Myungoh in a torn shirt shouted from half a dozen steps away.
Department Head Han Myungoh. He was a lucky human.

But I couldn’t help wondering. Why was Han Myungoh riding the subway when he had so much money? This was the man who had shown off a new S class Mercedes-Benz not long ago.

[Hrmm, released? Haven't you seen outside? Do you really want to go out there?]

The dokkaebi chuckled.

[It is somehow admirable. In fact, I didn't expect much from this carriage but you managed to pass the first scenario. This proves that bugs deserve to survive.]

His words made us realize our position. Maybe we were like grasshoppers in his eyes.

[Now now, shouldn't there be a reward for overcoming the hardships? As a reward for the first scenario, you are entitled to the sponsorship of the 'constellations.' Waahhh! How about it? Aren't you looking forward to it? Hmm, you are all unenthusiastic. This is really a big deal.]

The reaction was natural. I was the only one here who knew what 'constellation' or 'sponsorship' was.

The sponsorship of the constellations. The meaning was obvious. One of the key events of Ways of Survival, 'Sponsor Selection' was about to begin.

[Hmm, everybody has confused expressions. I can easily tell you. Right now, you are incredibly weak. If you are thrown into the scenarios that will take place, you will be killed when you meet a weak ground rat, let alone a 'kruk.' But kindly, there are some great people in the universe who pity you and would like to sponsor you. Do you understand what I am saying?]

Lee Hyunsung finally couldn't stand it anymore and opened his mouth.

“What are you saying? Who is sponsoring whom...”

[Hmm, my words are just entering dirty ears. Isn't there an old saying in South Korea? It is better to see it once than listen a hundred times. So experience it directly. Well, the less fortunate ones might not get the chance. Hahahat!]

I was tense. From now on. A good choice here would make my survival in the future easier.

“Dokja-ssi? Two strange choices suddenly appeared in front of me...”

“I don't know even if you ask me.”

This was naturally a lie to avoid suspicions. By the way, there were two choices. Yoo Sangah was quite lucky.

“Do it comfortably. Think of it as an aptitude test.”

“Aptitude test...”

“Nobody knows what the situation is anyway. Why not do it comfortably?”

“Ah... I understand.”

Yoo Sangah closed her mouth and started staring into space. It was a profound expression, as if she had encountered something curious.

The others suddenly became silent. Everyone was reading the options in front of them. I also had my own choices to look at.

[Sponsor Selection]

-Please select your sponsor

-Your chosen sponsor will be your strong supporter.

Abyssal Black Flame Dragon
Demon-like Judge of Fire
Secretive Plotter
Prisoner of the Golden Headband.

There were four choices like a riddle. It meant there were four constellations that wanted to turn me into their incarnation.

Four choices wasn't small considering that the protagonist of Ways of Survival received five options the first time.

The constellations never revealed their true name. Therefore, all contractors must infer the identity of the constellations by words such as 'abyssal', 'demonic' and 'garden'.

Of course, this puzzle was nothing to me, the sole reader of Ways of Survival.

Let's see.

First, the 'Abyssal Black Flame Dragon.'

According to my memory, this constellation was a powerful entity that led the group of constellations called the Black Cloud. I forgot his real name but I remember it was a very long name.

The advantage of this constellation was that the contractor could receive a very strong attack power. In the early days when stamina and strength were in urgent need, there was no constellation as strong as the Abyssal Dark Flame Dragon.

Of course, that was limited to the beginning. As the power of this constellation was more frequently used, the mind became corrupted and the contractor would become a mad murderer.

This constellation usually sponsored the people with the 'chuuni' attribute... I didn't know why the constellation picked me. I felt uncomfortable and excluded this guy.

The second one, the Demon-like Judge of Fire.

I can't believe I was actually seeing this option. Somehow, the strong emotions I felt were enormous.

At first glance, the name was overflowing with evil. But this was actually a trap for the wicked. The 'Demon-like' actually meant 'not a demon.' Then the words 'fire' and 'judge' were added.

A being who wasn't a demon and who made judgments through fire. Paradoxically, the master of this constellation was an angel.

If I recalled correctly, it was Archangel Uriel... In fact, I remembered this because someone in the novel picked this constellation as a sponsor.

It was a pretty decent choice. This was pending. The constellations of 'absolute good' imposed ridiculous constraints if you wanted to use their enormous power.

The third, Secretive Plotter. It was the first time that I, the sole reader of Ways of Survival, had seen this choice.

This name might've been mentioned in passing but... I didn't know it right now. If I could read Ways of Survival more thoroughly then I might get a feel of the constellation.

But I was certain that the owner of this constellation wasn't a very strong entity. Apart from the obvious modifier, there wasn't one 'proper noun.'

Secretive Plotter, it was too simple for a constellation. This one was also pending.

Finally, there was Prisoner of the Golden Headband.

My heart jumped the moment I saw the fourth option. I didn't expect this constellation so early. I doubted my eyes several times. But it was unmistakably 'Prisoner of the Golden Headband.'

At first glance, this name gave off a negative image due to the word 'prisoner'. But you had to pay attention to 'Golden Headband.'

Golden Headband. The smallest prison in the world.

It was a hint that anyone would recognize if they enjoyed reading Journey to the West as a child. There was only one prisoner who was held captive by the golden headband in the journey from east to west.

The master of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, who lived in suffering due to the shackle on his head. The Handsome Monkey King with the 'golden-gaze, fiery-eyes.'

The Great Sage the Equal of Heaven, Sun Wukong.

Among the characters that appeared in the novel, there was one supported by Sun Wukong.

A wondrous power that could sweep through hundreds of incarnations and to kill thoughts with one lightning strike.

The author had described this part with a lot of energy so my memory of it was clear.

I didn't know why such a powerful constellation was showing me interest but if I became the incarnation of the Great Sage the Equal of Heaven, I would be able to survive in this new world more easily than anyone else.

But...

I quickly looked at the door connected to the carriage in front. Beyond that door, 'he' was looking at the selection screen like me.

If I chose The Great Sage the Equal of Heaven... Could I win against him?

[There is one minute left to complete the Sponsor Selection.]

Time was running out. I breathed lightly and looked through my options. My worries didn't last long.