**Chapter 252: Elder Lich Subjugation Battle (3)**

"Missing persons?"

At my questioning look, Amel Drexia explained the situation.

"I told you before that black magicians went on an expedition to the 19th floor."

"Yes."

I heard about this when Amel Drexia took my condom full of semen, saying she would give it to a talented junior.

The 19th floor, which had been rumored to house the miracle of resurrection since ancient times, was nothing short of a dream place for black magicians.

To those who had all experienced losing someone precious, the word resurrection held a value that couldn't be exchanged for anything else.

That's why the black magic faction periodically sets out on expeditions to the 19th floor to search every corner of it.

Throughout countless expeditions, all places in the 19th floor had been explored, resulting in the most detailed map among all floors of the labyrinth.

Even though everyone now felt that there was no such thing as a miracle of resurrection, people didn't let go of that thread-like hope.

So the black magicians set out on another expedition this time too, and that was just a month ago.

"But they're more than ten days late from their expected return date, and there's no contact through the one communication artifact they have."

In the dangerous labyrinth, there could only be one reason for communication to be cut off.

"Something must have happened. And we can't ignore the rumors about an Elder Lich appearing on the 19th floor."

"So, you want help to rescue those people?"

"Similar, but I don't think explorers who've been out of contact in the labyrinth for over ten days are alive. I just want to collect their bodies. As a fellow practitioner of black magic from the same faction, we should at least give them a funeral."

It sounded strange for a necromancer to collect bodies, but it wasn't entirely wrong.

Those who go on expeditions to the 19th floor are upper-middle rank among intermediate explorers.

What necromancer could ignore such attractive corpses?

"Alright. Body collection. I'll help."

"Of course, you probably wouldn't accept it easily since you have your own path to follow... huh?"

"I said I'll help. But we have our conditions too."

I looked at Amel Drexia's party.

"Please join us in hunting the Elder Lich."

A horse beastman warrior, an immortal slime tanker, a magician, a necromancer, a temple paladin, and a priest, it was a party with such good balance that it's surprising how they gathered such a combination.

They show little signs of fatigue despite reaching the 18th floor, making them quite an attractive force.

If we could bring them in as allies, they would surely serve as an excellent breakwater against the undead controlled by the Elder Lich.

"I wondered why you were here, so that's why?"

Amel Drexia's eyepatch sparkled as she looked at the hidden party members while saying "you."

Seemingly having used some kind of detection magic, I gestured to Nuer, who was hiding, that it was okay to come out and answered.

"Yes. If you refuse, there's nothing we can do."

Amel Drexia showed a slightly troubled expression.

Though collecting bodies from who knows where in the swampy 19th floor would be difficult, she seemed hesitant about whether they could handle an Elder Lich.

"Puruk. Amel. If it's an Elder Lich, isn't it an undead monster? If we do it right, couldn't you make their undead your own?"

"Unless the Elder Lich is near death, even I would find it difficult to steal control of the undead..."

"Pururuk! Still, I think it's a challenge worth trying. If they're undead created by that Elder Lich, getting lucky and collecting even two would make targeting the lower floors possible. Their party's strength looks considerable too, this is rather an opportunity for us."

"..."

Amel Drexia's worry deepened at the words of Kentarina, the horse beastman carrying her on its back.

"Alright. We'll help too. But we get to collect the Elder Lich's undead."

However her answer that followed was one of acceptance.

I smiled at the joining of reliable reinforcements and offered my hand.

"Good. We don't have a necromancer anyway. But can you help with our matter first? I think I might have a way to help with your situation."

"Huh? How? We don't even know the exact location yet, so we'll have to go to the 19th floor to find out..."

Amel grabbed my hand with a slightly tense face and tilted her head.

"Among the missing members, there's a woman named Jeremy, right?"

"Ah, yes. That one who seemed like a woman but not quite... Come to think of it, we talked about that one with you before too. Anyway, why?"

At Amel Drexia's questioning words, I took out a cloth bundle that Denshi had been carrying in his backpack.

-Whoosh!

As soon as I spread the bundle, Amel narrowed her eyes at the head that clicked and spewed blue ghost fire.

"Dullahan?"

"It's someone who turned into a Dullahan a few days ago. And I suspect Jeremy raised the corpse."

At those words, Amel Drexia's eyes widened.

"That's impossible, undead can't be maintained unless they're collected right after their master dies...plus the distance..."

The answer this phenomenon points to, which seems impossible in her eyes, is only one.

"Still, it might be evidence that the expedition team is alive."

-Click. Click.

Dullahan Anya's head clicked and pointed somewhere.

Perhaps where Anya's head is pointing, we might find the missing expedition members.

\*\*\*

Regardless of whether the expedition team was alive or dead, since we agreed to handle our business first, the Elder Lich hunt took priority.

Our party headed toward the descent portal while analyzing each other.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Balkan. To spend ten gold coins for me..."

Meanwhile, Hope approached me.

He was a male priest who had become a wreck after being raped by a back alley turf clan.

He seemed to be talking about the money I contributed when I heard that Fusilini and Aldente were seeking unicorn tears to save him.

"Don't take it too much to heart. If you're really grateful, just make sure to cast a recovery miracle later."

"Yes! Absolutely!"

After Hope, who nodded vigorously saying he would definitely save me even if I was in mortal danger, Aldente and Fusilini came next.

"Turu-tu para-papa!"

"Yes. I'm glad to see you too. But how did you manage to get unicorn tears?"

"We got lucky. We heard some were on sale and scraped together every coin we had. Without the gold coins you gave us, we absolutely couldn't have saved Hope. Thank you. Really..."

I waved my hand and helped Fusilini up as she bowed deeply in gratitude.

"Are you Mr. Balkan?"

The last to approach was the paladin of the Earth Mother Goddess Order.

"Thank you for saving Priest Hope."

[Lv.40 Beer]

[Current blessings and curses Beer possesses: 4]

The paladin who didn't even reveal her name briefly thanked me for saving Hope and then awkwardly lingered by Hope's side.

"That's Beer. She's a quiet person. She said he fell in love at first sight when she saw Hope attempting suicide by hanging so she immediately formed a party contract too. Thanks to her, Hope got proper mental care."

Fusilini whispered softly to the ear part of my helmet.

"...She's mentally sound, right?"

"...Her tastes are a bit unusual."

Even with some minor flaws, a level 40 paladin would be right below Nate Elin, Serif's escort, and I felt momentarily envious of them for obtaining such combat power at a bargain price.

But since my party members weren't inferior anywhere either, I decided not to be jealous.

After assessing each other's capabilities and establishing some trust, we focused back on exploring the labyrinth.

There were six from my party and six from Amel Drexia's party.

Even if it was the 18th floor, it couldn't stop the advance of twelve upper-middle rank intermediate explorers.

In fact, there weren't many monsters blocking our path either.

"Is the 18th floor usually this scarce in monsters?"

"No. Usually there are plenty of crocodiles ambushing from under the swamp and poisonous jellyfish, and quite a few flying monsters too..."

Amel Drexia shook her head and expressed doubt at my words.

Apparently we weren't the only ones who felt uncomfortable about the lack of monsters.

Aldente and her other party members also showed questioning expressions, but no one knew the reason.

We finally reached the edge of the 18th floor without finding an answer, and crossed the descent portal without major incident.

And so we arrived at the 19th floor.

The floor was still hot and humid, the tropical trees grew even more densely, and the swamp that had only gripped our ankles now rose to our shins, making movement even more difficult.

And the presence of monsters that was barely felt on the 18th floor entered our detection range.

"Master. Up ahead."

I nodded to Denshi, who detected it with her sharp hearing and spoke quietly.

-Swish.

As I raised my arm, my party members and Amel Drexia's party immediately stopped and began preparing for battle by drawing their weapons.

It was good we had agreed on signals beforehand. Fortunately, since Amel had handed over command authority to me, her party members also followed my judgment.

Luckily, our location was full of waist-high weeds, making it suitable for hiding.

Given the strength of our group, there wasn't much tension, but we absolutely couldn't let our guard down.

With cautious eyes, I watched the monster gradually approaching us and blankly opened my mouth.

"...What is that?"

Amel Drexia behind me muttered in a surprised voice but rather, that's what I wanted to ask. What on earth was that thing?

I swallowed my surprise and observed the monster before my eyes.

A snake's tail smoothly swimming through the sticky swamp and above it, visible purple-skinned genitals and torso similar to a human female.

It was clearly a Lamia, a monster that mainly appears in swamp or lake environment floors and catches humans by constraining them with its snake tail or seducing them to eat them but that Lamia's shoulders and above were horribly torn off as if smashed by a blunt weapon.

It had no neck and no head.

Even though it shouldn't be able to see ahead or feel any sensation, the Lamia kept moving somewhere.

No matter how tenacious a monster's vitality might be, with such a fatal wound it should have immediately spat out its soul stone and died.

However, the Lamia was moving and acting normally even with a body that should have met death long ago, as if some force was forcibly leading her.

"...undead..."

Amel Drexia barely muttered.

"Someone has turned the dead Lamia into an undead and is controlling it."

Who could that someone be?

The Elder Lich? Or another necromancer? I don't know. Right now, just focusing on the Lamia before us was overwhelming enough.

The Lamia undead was holding other monster corpses in both hands.

They were clearly the corpses of crocodiles and poisonous jellyfish, monsters that appeared more frequently in the 18th floor than the 19th.

The Lamia undead, unable to sense our presence due to its lack of ears and eyes, headed somewhere.

And that place would, with high probability, be where the one controlling this undead was located.

"...That direction. The swamp graveyard."

Denshi, who had spread out the map, informed us that the location the Lamia undead was heading towards was exactly where the Elder Lich was.

If so, what we needed to do was decided.

"Let's track it."

Following the enemy's puppet to where the prey would be gathered was our job.

\*\*\*

Following the Lamia undead, we arrived at a settlement.

Tombstones torn from the swamp were set up like a fence around it, and undead with monster bodies were guarding the perimeter like sentries.

In the center of the settlement protected by undead guards was a mountain of monsters.

Not just Lamias but Wyverns, poisonous jellyfish, crocodiles, bone jaguars, acid trolls, and various other monsters from nearby floors, and even explorers.

The Lamia undead we had followed threw the monster corpses it had brought onto the mountain of monsters, then left again somewhere.

And there weren't just one or two undead bringing monster or explorer corpses. We counted over ten with our eyes alone.

On top of the mountain of monsters emanating a disgusting rotting smell, a giant tombstone was placed like a chair.

And on the chair sat an Elder Lich, a skeleton-shaped being emanating such unpleasant magical energy it gave goosebumps, like a monarch ruling over the settlement.

And below such an Elder Lich, black magicians were lined up with shackles on their necks and legs like slaves, raising monsters from the mountain of corpses.

Amel Drexia held her breath upon confirming their faces. They were clearly the missing expedition members.

Among the expedition members, all with haggard appearances and terrible guilt and deep fear etched on their faces...

We could spot one woman who alone hadn't despaired, with a familiar face that seemed to be sharpening the blade of revenge.

[Lv.44 Jeremy]

[Current blessings and curses Jeremy possesses: 3]

-Click! Click-click-click!!!

The Dullahan in my hand began to vibrate violently while spewing blue ghost fire.

I felt strangely connected in heart with Click Anya.

Even if temporary, I couldn't just stand by watching an old companion being mocked by mere monster rabble.

-Shing!!

The axe drawn with clear blue blade energy fit perfectly in my hand.