**Chapter 253: Elder Lich Subjugation Battle (4)**

Jeremy thought blankly.

'How many nights have I stayed up?'

He couldn't remember getting proper sleep in the past few days.

Not just him, but the other expedition members beside him were the same.

"Grrrr!"

-Slash!! Slash!

"Ughh...!"

In the moment he let his guard down, he rolled on the ground from the intense heat and pain felt from behind.

It was a sensation he had felt every day without fail for the past few days, so he could tell who was behind it.

The undead Acidic Troll.

The Acidic Troll, which evolved from poison-bearing trolls in the swamplands, was a savage monster with a massive muscular body like an orc, and on top of that, it was a powerful revenant enhanced by the magic wielded by the Elder Lich.

-Slash! Slash!

Every time the muscular arms of the undead Acidic Troll swung, the sound of flesh tearing mixed with the crack of a whip rang out.

With each swing of the rapidly wielded whip that appeared and disappeared, terrible pain rose from his back.

Though one might think he'd become numb to the pain after being beaten to death for days, the sensation of pain never became familiar.

It just hurt terribly.

"Ugh, s-stop..."

With arms, legs, and neck all bound, all he could do was utter words begging for mercy.

It was laughable.

A human being whipped by an undead, and bowing his head in cowardice asking it to stop beating him but not a single person here could laugh.

It wasn't a situation to laugh at, and no one had the energy to laugh either.

"Gr, urgh...!"

The undead Acidic Troll grabbed Jeremy's hair as he lay fallen from the whipping, lifted him up, and made crying sounds while pointing at the mountain of corpses.

Jeremy roughly understood the meaning of that cry.

'Raise all the corpses of monsters and explorers piled as high as a mountain. If not, you'll be whipped again.'

"......"

"......"

Though it was a crude threat, no one resisted those words.

By now, the expedition members' faces showed no will to escape, only deep despair and guilt.

It wasn't the undead Acidic Troll before them that they feared. The same went for the other undead guarding this area.

Even in their worst condition, they were explorers who had reached the 19th floor, and if they were prepared to die, they could escape from this hell.

That is, if it were under normal circumstances.

Jeremy felt an enormously unpleasant presence emanating from behind his companions, it was the master of the undead Acidic Troll.

A being sitting majestically on a gravestone placed like a throne, looking down at the ground below.

A monster emanating an overwhelming presence as if announcing itself as the ruler of this area, no, this floor.

"Elder Lich..."

Someone muttered that name in a voice drenched in fear.

A skeletal monster Lich that wielded necromancy, and among them, an individual possessing exceptional strength.

Meeting this unique individual that scattered streams of magi all around, distinguishing itself even from other Elder Liches, was the starting point of all calamity.

Their team, preparing to leave the 19th floor after completing their expedition as usual, suddenly encountered two beings.

—Black magicians? Perfect timing. We can use these ones too.

The woman in the white gown said that while casually patting the Elder Lich's shoulder, and the Elder Lich bowed its head to the woman.

Just as they were getting goosebumps at the sight of a human and monster appearing like master and servant, the expedition members were subdued by the undead controlled by the Elder Lich.

The Undead Acidic Troll, one of the undead imbued with the Elder Lich's magi, cunningly beheaded the priest first.

Having lost their most effective means of resistance, the expedition team was instantly brought to their knees before the Elder Lich.

Even then, the expedition team's will to resist remained. After all, explorers were beings who faced countless hardships.

—Sigh. Those bastards from the Explorer Union... no, because of that bastard who destroyed my lab, what trouble this is. You need to cause absolute chaos until I retrieve my research materials from the lower floors.

But whenever they recalled the white-gowned woman who sighed and gave orders to the Elder Lich before leaving, they felt intense discomfort and fear.

The sight of her commanding that powerful Elder Lich like a mere servant.

The despair that even if they somehow escaped from the Elder Lich's grasp, an equally or more powerful being would reach for them.

'Can't win, absolutely, absolutely can't win...'

'What if they just cut our throats if we resist carelessly, are you sure that undead monster won't kill us and turn us into undead? Really?'

Most of the expedition members were black magicians and necromancers.

They knew what it meant to be unable to truly die, to have their dead bodies forcibly raised and toyed with by mere monsters.

In the end, they succumbed to that fear.

To preserve their lives, they abandoned even their human dignity and used the power they had worked so hard to build to follow the monster's orders.

Judging by the white-gowned woman's words to cause chaos, it was obvious how the undead they were creating would be used.

The actions they took to preserve their lives would take the lives of other explorers.

The Elder Lich seized control of the undead created by the expedition members and used them as it pleased to create the "chaos" ordered by the white-gowned woman.

It killed nearby monsters and explorers to raise them as undead, expanding its forces further.

Even after those forces filled the swamp graveyard enough to be called a colony, the Elder Lich did not stop and desired to control more undead.

"Grrrk."

The Undead Acidic Troll pulled Jeremy's hair and jerked its chin toward the mountain of corpses. The meaning was to quickly create undead.

Considering that all undead in this area were being controlled to follow the Elder Lich's will, this was essentially the Elder Lich's will.

"Eek..."

"Qu-quickly. Squeeze out the magic..."

"No, I want to stop now...please..."

Even while uttering words mixed with despair, the expedition members tried necromancy while wringing out their magic power that was already consumed to its limit.

But after days of overwork, their magic vessels had become empty like dried-up wells.

What more could be done with a dry well that yields no water no matter how much you try to draw from it?

"......"

Jeremy, glancing at the struggling expedition members, blankly stared at the mountain of corpses while still having his hair grabbed by the undead troll.

Jeremy had already attempted escape once. More precisely, he had used magic with intense desire.

Necromancy attempted by squeezing out all his magic power.

Using up all the materials he had saved to revive Anya, he cast necromancy while thinking of Anya who he should be protecting.

It was an uncertain gamble with unknown success or failure. Even now, he doesn't know the result.

But why?

From a little while ago, he kept getting the intuition that the necromancy had succeeded because he felt as if dead Anya was somewhere nearby.

"Grrrrrk!"

The Undead Acidic Troll roared harshly at seeing Jeremy grinning without even attempting to use necromancy.

Monsters don't consider human circumstances. They just think it's defiance and raise their whip again.

-Slash! Slash!!

Even though the fiercely falling whip struck his back, Jeremy didn't even flinch.

Strangely, the whipping that had been terribly painful until just moments ago didn't hurt now.

It was strange that while his senses seemed much sharper than before, pain felt duller.

The meaningless smile on Jeremy's lips grew deeper at that bizarre sensation.

"Grrrk! Grrrrrk!"

The troll revenant understood this as mockery against itself, and by extension, against the Elder Lich.

What was the reason for keeping them alive like this? It was to use them like slaves to create more undead.

But the human before it seemed to have given up on that. Otherwise, he wouldn't be showing such a meaningless smile.

A broken human has no more use.

Srrrrng—!

The Undead Acidic Troll put down its whip and drew the sword at its waist.

The curved blade with a cold edge, taken from the expedition's swordsman, showed its presence in the monster's hand.

"Grrrk."

The Undead Acidic Troll growled briefly like an executioner judging a prisoner.

As if asking if he had any last words, Jeremy blankly lowered his head.

'Am I going to die now too?'

Like Anya whom he had loved desperately.

As death approached, along with Anya, he suddenly thought of one man.

Brother Balkan, who had stopped him when he was about to give up on life after Anya's death.

Though their relationship was brief, he was truly a brother because he had saved his life and showed him which direction to go.

He had run forward with just one goal that man had reminded him of, to revive Anya...But that too would end today.

Swoosh—

As the blade of judgment was raised, its shadow fell over Jeremy's head.

Jeremy tightly closed his eyes at seeing the shadow of the quickly falling blade.

'Sorry. Anya. I'm sorry. Brother—'

-Slash!!!

A heavy sound of flesh being cut rang in his ears.

......

......

"...Huh?"

Jeremy, who had thought it was the sound of his head falling off, opened his eyes in confusion at the suddenly quiet surroundings and his still clear consciousness.

-Thud. Drip drip.

He saw red blood falling on his shoulder belatedly. Soon after, a stinging pain came.

The Undead Acidic Troll's acidic blood was falling drop by drop on his shoulder.

The confusion grew stronger. What exactly was this situation?

As he tried to raise his head in bewilderment, something beside him collapsed to the ground with a thud.

Jeremy's eyes took in what had fallen to the ground.

It was a massive purple muscular body bleeding red blood.

In the Undead Acidic Troll's neck was an axe emanating dazzling light.

"Gr, rk..."

In the eyes of the Acidic Troll, whose neck was more than half torn off, were etched confusion, doubt, and deep fear.

Perhaps in a struggle to survive, black magic energy flowed from the troll's neck and pushed against the axe.

But the massive axe, as tall as a well-built person, began to hungrily devour the troll's magic energy and neck as if they were delicious food.

It wasn't a mistake. The axe blade really was opening up and eating the troll.

-Clank. Clank.

Then came heavy footsteps walking on ice.

The undead, gravestones, and swampland in the trajectory where the axe had flown from were all frozen.

The massive figure wearing dragon scale armor looked around at the crowd frozen by the sudden intruder's appearance, then approached the Undead Acidic Troll.

Swoosh—

After naturally cutting off the Undead Acidic Troll's neck and pulling out the axe, he rested it on his shoulder and looked down at Jeremy while speaking.

"Why do you keep causing trouble in the labyrinth?"

Though there was incredulity mixed in his voice, Jeremy smiled brightly upon hearing that voice.

How could he forget that voice?

"Brotheeeeer!"

Balkan smirked at that intense reaction and raised his fist high into the sky.

-Boom!!!!

Taking that sign as a signal flare, massive magical chains and a sun-like heat ray struck the Elder Lich directly.