Contendings

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Contendings

by FallLover

Summary

Before Gigantomachia, Kim Dokja’s Company sends Dokja and Junghyeok to Scenario #49 to collect a giant story from Papyrus. There, they have to contend with the Egyptian constellations, and three risky matches in the battle between Horus and Seth. But an unusual ally is on their side.

Set around Chapter 314, Episode 59: (5) of the novel.

Notes

This was originally published on Archive of Our Own.

This isn't quite at a specific point in the narrative of "Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint", just sometime right before Gigantomachia.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So this is Papyrus’ home?” Dokja asked as he stepped out of the portal from the Context of the Constellations. “It’s impressive.” The portal opened into a large square in part of Benben, Papyrus’ homeworld. The square similar to the one they left: it was high tech, with lots of traffic, and constellations and incarnations walking in many directions, to shop, to talk, or simply to get somewhere else. High-tech ships flew in the sunny blue sky, and tall buildings rose in the distance. It was early in the day, and the sun was high.

Junghyeok kept his usual scowl as he gazed around the area.

Part of Dokja felt an urge to explore the place, and see what it was like. It was so impressive. But they had work to do.

Junghyeok started walking towards the scenario portal for Contendings, which was already thronged with other hopeful incarnations. Contendings was one of Papyrus’ giant stories, so it was a big lure.

Dokja followed Junghyeok, keeping an eye on their surroundings. Han Suyeong and Jeong Huiwon had pushed this on the pair of them as a sort of *vacation* gift, which neither of them were particularly happy about, and it meant that Dokja hadn’t had time to plan for it properly.

“You have to complete it as a couple,” Suyeong said with a grin. “It works perfectly.”

Dokja had to admit he didn’t exactly want anyone *else* to get the story if they could avoid it. Contendings would help make their team a bit stronger against later scenarios. Their only other candidates were really Huiwon and Lee Hyeonseong, and neither of them were suited for the part of the scenario Dokja knew of. The issue was that Dokja didn’t know *the whole* scenario, so he wasn’t as sure of things as he could be. Junghyeok in other turns tended to just run wild and kill everything… which wasn’t exactly what Dokja planned to do. But it also meant that although Junghyeok knew what the first two matches were, he never learned what the third was.

Dokja and Junghyeok waited patiently in the throng before confronting the portal itself. They were finally scanned by a humanoid figure with a large black beetle for a head, and allowed in. Transmission was a lot faster than going to the Context of the Constellations, but then again, Papyrus was a *lot* more powerful than even Bihyeong.

Junghyeok was gazing ahead with his arms crossed, and Dokja *really* hoped he wasn’t just planning to kill everyone. It was a fast method to earn the story, but one that Dokja didn’t want to pursue unless they had to. But before Dokja could think what to say, they were through.

The other side of the portal was in Heliopolis, and opened into a sunny courtyard before an ancient palace near the Nile. Dokja gazed up at architecture he'd only seen in textbooks and online. It was tall and majestic, covered in brightly painted art and fine statuary. The crowd here was smaller than the one in Benben, given incarnations were still arriving, but still large, and they sized up Junghyeok and Dokja with almost tangible hostility.

The story is already at work, Dokja thought as he walked to the side to get out of the way of the portal, with Junghyeok following. The breeze from the river cooled his face in the heat of the sun, and he was grateful that his coat was designed to keep him from overheating as well as somewhat warm. A central problem with getting Contendings was that the story and made its participants more hostile to each other, and more likely to kill, largely due to one of the central characters in it.

[A private message has arrived from the constellation, ***Falcon God of the Sun***.]

Dokja blinked at the message screen and looked around. Everyone around him looked like an ordinary incarnation. Up ahead was a pale stone dais, atop which sat a line of empty thrones. As he watched, constellations materialized before the thrones and sat down, calling attention from the gathered incarnations. The heat became more impressive as more of them appeared and settled down, and released some of their status. It was hard to tell at a distance who was there, though Dokja knew that the constellation who sent him the message was not one of them.

'Midday Sun', Ra, sat at the center of the line, grinning out over the incarnations chatting with each other. She was a tall, muscular woman, with warm brown skin, long, curly, dark hair, and bright golden eyes, and covered in jewelry. Unlike other myth-grade constellations who would normally not bother with such scenarios, she was sitting calmly, waiting for things to happen.

A narrative-grade constellation, Maat, goddess of truth and justice, walked up to the front of the dais, and looked at the portal, which closed. All the incarnations to participate were gathered. Maat was tall and slender, with dark brown skin and long dark hair. She wore a tall white ostrich feather in her hair, and a long black dress, and had a neutral expression on her face. The gathered incarnations grew quiet under her look. [Welcome to the battle for the throne of Egypt. You will represent Horus, working on behalf of the heavens.]

Wind swirled to Maat's right, and a large bird dove down from the sky, landing in center of the small tornado. It turned into a tall, muscular man. As the wind died, the constellation gazed down with an unreadable expression at the audience. He had dark brown skin and wore a bright blue headdress ending in a white and gold falcon mask that covered the upper park of his face. He wore a thick golden usekh, armlets, bracelets, and anklets, and a white shendyt with a golden belt. He radiated the energy of a narrative-grade constellation.

Dokja clicked accept on the message.

Up on the dais, Horus was quiet as Maat continued, [Your opponent will be the supreme god of Egypt, the usurper, Seth.]

Sand gathered in a mound to Maat's left, and ominous laughter filled the air. The sand rose up high and formed itself into the figure of a tall, muscular but lithe, man. He had pale skin, and wore a white headdress with a long black mask with tall ears and red eyes, that covered much of his face, save for his white-toothed daring grin. He wore a thick golden usekh, armlets, bracelets, and anklets, and a long black shendyt. He crossed his arms and scoffed at the incarnations. [What a pathetic-looking lot this round.] His voice was arrogant and filled with disgust.

Horus looked at Seth as angry mutters filled the air. But the chatter grew no louder than mutters.

Seth also exuded the power of a narrative-grade constellation, one even more powerful than Horus. He was the god of war, and no one wanted to test him. The air grew even hotter with him standing there. All the narrative-grade constellations and one myth-grade constellation gathered in one on its own was nearly suffocating, even for Dokja. It didn't bode well for the scenario.

The main scenario window popped up before Dokja's eyes:

[Main Scenario #49 – Contendings]

Category: Main

Difficulty: ???

Clear Condition: Win at least two out of three matches.

Time Limit: 3 days

Reward: Giant Story related to 'Contendings', goodwill from the Nebula <Papyrus>, 4,000,000 Coins, ???

Failure: -

Dokja appreciated that at least the failure state was open-ended. The stakes were a little lower, at least from the Star Stream Administration Bureau. But he knew their *real* opponents weren't the Bureau or even the two constellations on the platform. As Dokja gazed around at the other incarnations listening in, hungry for more info, it was quite obvious whom Dokja and Junghyeok would have to worry about.

[The winner of the most matches will take the final prize,] Maat said. She looked over the assembled incarnations. [But there can only be one winner.]

She's warning all of us, Dokja thought. He could see it in the eyes of the constellations watching, as they gazed hungrily at the gathered incarnations. The real story they were interested in was in the incarnations fighting each other, as always.

Maat raised a hand and a tall, pale jar appeared before her. She reached inside and pulled out a slip of papyrus, and then unrolled it. After she finished reading it, she looked back up at the crowd. [The first match will be underwater breath-holding!]

[The constellation, ***Abyssal Black Flame Dragon***, scoffs.]

There were eyerolls at this. Holding your breath underwater was a skill easily buyable for a lot of incarnations at this point. But that wouldn't be the main issue.

[Only one member of each group may participate in this match,] Maat continued. [You must choose which of you will go.]

Scenario windows appeared before all the incarnations.

[Sub Scenario – Underwater Breath-Holding]

Category: Sub

Difficulty: D-F

Clear Conditions: Hold your breath underwater longer than Seth. Only one participant per group can participate in the scenario.

Time Limit: None

Reward: 2000 Coins

Failure: Seth will win the round.

Dokja and Junghyeok looked at each other.

[The character 'Yu Junghyeok' has activated Midday Tryst.]

--I'll go. This will be simple.

Dokja glanced around at the other incarnations talking quietly to each other. It was a good idea to keep their plans where no one else could hear them, and Dokja knew that Junghyeok would be the correct choice for this match anyway. But there could still be issues…

--Just remember to stay below the water. If the fighting gets bad and you get kicked out…

--I know what I'm doing.

Dokja smiled and shrugged. When it came time to choose, Junghyeok clicked the window to say he was going.

After all the incarnations made their choices, Seth laughed on the dais. [Well then, let's get going!]

Dokja and Junghyeok both looked down when sand began to churn beneath Junghyeok's feet, and then pulled him and one member of all the other parties to the riverbank. Seth rode a moving sand tornado of his own, a grin on his face and the white train of his headdress floating over his neck.

Dokja didn't say anything through Midday Tryst, knowing it would just annoy Junghyeok. Powerful as Junghyeok was, combating Seth himself could be an issue. Seth was one of the most powerful constellations in Papyrus, even though he was only narrative-grade. In certain turns, he became a myth-grade status, and took over fighting Junghyeok after Ra's defeat. While he'd be weaker now, Kim Dokja's Company, even with Junghyeok, wasn't strong enough to take on all of Papyrus. And the Junghyeok whom Dokja knew wouldn't be so stupid as to push that. So Dokja would trust Junghyeok to keep his wits about him and survive.

The remaining incarnations approached the riverbank in caution, all looking at each other. Dokja could feel them all wondering if they should do something *now*: get rid of the partners of those underwater to leave them weak when they emerged. You needed two partners to complete the entire scenario, so losing one was a disqualification, unless you could team up with another sole incarnation already present, which was risky.

Dokja glanced at the dais, where the constellations sitting on the thrones were either chatting or gazing at the river themselves.

Maat stood where she was before, her expression neutral.

Horus had his arms crossed and also gazed at the water. The surface was still. Whatever was going on beneath, nothing was showing.

Dokja refused to check a clock. He believed in Junghyeok. Breathing underwater for prolonged periods was nothing for him. And he'd fought more opponents than those who had gone into the river, and in worse conditions. There was a similar water fight in one of the earlier turns, and even then, Junghyeok came out victorious.

Though Dokja also thought about how if Junghyeok was doubtless fighting other incarnations, which he could still manage. Worse, though, Seth was *also* down there. And Dokja felt colder at the idea that Seth was *also* fighting and perhaps killing off incarnations.

One of whom was potentially Junghyeok.

[A private message has arrived from the constellation, *Falcon God of the Sun*.]

Dokja accepted the message and read it just as he had the first.

[Your comrade will be okay.]

Dokja kept himself from looking up at Horus. It would be too risky. The other incarnations of Papyrus wouldn't support Horus interfering this way. But this new message was strange. Was this Horus using his stigma, 'Intuition'? But why did he care about Dokja's state of being? It wasn't necessary for their earlier agreement. Though Horus said he'd used Intuition earlier to contact Dokja in the first place.

[I know you're the ones who will win.]

Dokja gazed out at the water instead, trying to take Horus' words to heart. Intuition was similar to other prophetic skills. He had to trust that Junghyeok *would* be fine. The man had dealt with far worse, after all.

The waters began to churn. Incarnations on the shore began to talk loudly, some demanding, "What's going on?!"

The first incarnations began crawling out of the water, where their partners came to meet them. Many were simply damp and breathing hard. But as more returned to shore, some sported injuries that often bled freely on the ground.

The waters churned more violently, and those on the shore backed off a little. A number of incarnations were tossed out of the waves, landing on the beach, most unconscious. Some crawled off.

But Junghyeok was not among those ejected from the waters. So Dokja watched. He tried not to let his unease about the whole scenario fill him. It wasn't just Horus' message, [If you promise to help, I can help you], or that Dokja couldn't see what was happening underwater. It was also the way Papyrus conducted this. For instance, they weren't relying on the dokkaebis at all. Normally, a dokkaebi would be performing Maat's role, even if it didn't quite fit the scenario. But Papyrus was an ancient and powerful nebula, and they did things their way, and Maat being present better fit the giant story. And they could have mere incarnations face a *narrative-grade* constellation like *this*. This was far harder than the current form of Gigantomachia.

Two hours passed (eventually, Dokja *had* to check the clock, based on the alert he set when Junghyeok went into the water). More incarnations emerged from the waters. More of them were injured, some likely too badly to continue the scenario.

Another two hours. Dokja stopped himself from tapping his fingers or reaching out to Midday Tryst to contact Junghyeok that way.

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is very worried.]

[The constellation, ***Prisoner of the Golden Headband***, is excited.]

Forty more minutes passed, and the waters roiled. A whole group of incarnations were shoved onshore, followed by a giant hand made of wet sand, which dragged something forward. A mop of dark wet hair was visible, along with part of a familiar black jacket.

Dokja ran forward to where the hand stopped and pulled Junghyeok out of it. The man was unconscious. There were bloody cuts over his face. But he was breathing, and Dokja sighed deeply in relief. He'd come through okay.

[You have failed to clear the scenario.]

Seth rose out of the water riding his sand, which deposited him neatly on the shore. Fresh sand picked him up and carried him past the fallen incarnations to before the dais, where Maat looked up with a grave expression and said, [The winner of the first round has been decided. The winner of the first match is Seth, God of War and the Desert!]

Seth smirked and looked at the dais where Horus stood.

Horus only gazed neutrally back at him. It seemed like the air grew tenser between them. Perhaps there would be another fight after the match? It wasn't against the rules of the scenario for constellations to do battle.

Dokja held Junghyeok's shoulder, ready to pull them both to safety if he had to. A fight between narrative-grade constellations would be *messy*. They still had at least one more chance to win, but if Horus and Seth really fought here...

Seth finally snorted and turned away, before marching into the palace.

Dokja breathed more easily and squeezed Junghyeok's shoulder. Next time, then.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

About half of the incarnation teams who'd originally entered the scenario were culled in the first round. The remaining half was still relatively substantial: around 35 teams by Dokja's counting. Servants of Papyrus escorted the survivors into Heliopolis, where they were given rooms for the evening. The rooms were fine, with good beds, large windows, bathing facilities, and a full meal.

Dokja had pulled Junghyeok's arm over his shoulder to drag him inside, and Junghyeok woke up with a grumble once they were in the room. He tottered off to the bathroom to bathe.

Dokja sighed and followed after Junghyeok, to make sure the man didn't injure himself.

The bathing room was quite fancy, and even better than the rooms in the Industrial Complex. The walls were covered in painted stones, and the pipes were advanced. The air was pleasantly scented with perfume, and there was an array of soaps and other cleaning products to use. There was enough room for a few people to stand, and the actual bath was a combination pool and shower, with a small electronic pad on one wall for preferences. Junghyeok took off his black coat and set it aside on a tall wooden rack, and then carefully began removing his shirt.

Dokja reached out to help him and said with a rueful grin, "You're making a mess." Water was still dripping everywhere. The air in the room with both of them in it was warm, but not unpleasant. But Dokja knew the whole process of getting his clothes off after being tossed around underwater by a narrative-grade constellation would just make Junghyeok more annoyed.

Junghyeok grunted, but didn't stop Dokja from helping him. He shed a bit of blood from various injuries, too, but nothing too terrible. "Seth is powerful. I was dealing with the other teams just fine, but then Seth came after us."

Dokja gave him an Ellain Forest Essence, and then helped him get to the bathing pool. In the end, Dokja just tossed his own clothes aside and got in with Junghyeok, helping to scrub clean the injuries. The Ellain Forest Essence was going to kick in soon and force its payment of two hours sleep in exchange for its healing effects, so they had to work quickly.

Junghyeok stayed silent and still in the meanwhile, letting Dokja scrub him clean. Afternoon sunlight shown from the skylight overhead, making their slick skin shine, and the room was pretty quiet but for the sounds of water and scrubbing. Dokja's ministrations were more clinical than tender, but Junghyeok didn't complain. Junghyeok simply gazed down at Dokja and his water-slick dark hair and said, "You're not upset I lost."

Dokja nodded as he scrubbed a soapy sponge behind Junghyeok's left ear. He really wasn't upset. "I didn't expect you to. Seth always wins that one." Even in other turns, Junghyeok always lost this round. Dokja kept his left hand on Junghyeok's right bicep to keep him still. Junghyeok was still a bit tense, probably from losing so badly, though at least he wasn't *horribly* injured.

Junghyeok frowned, a bit suspicious.

--You know what the other matches are?

He had activated Midday Tryst. They couldn't risk letting their plans be broadcast. While Biyu would often censor these moments for them on her channel, there was always the risk that something would get through while they chatted.

Dokja also used Midday Tryst to reply.

--Yes. According to the story, Seth usually loses the next round. But it's also where the incarnations get more hostile, to take advantage of Seth being weak. They'll likely try to kill him, which could cause him to kill all the incarnations in the scenario.

There was a low chance of them surviving then, or at least Junghyeok surviving. Dokja wasn't so sure about himself. The second match would be the hardest, though. The third… based on Horus' information, he thought they might have a chance. But it was still strange that Horus had reached out to him. Yes, it would mean that Seth lost, which matched Horus' story, but it would also hurt Papyrus, which Horus shouldn't want.

There was something else going on here, and Dokja didn't like it.

Junghyeok breathed in deeply.

--We'll be careful, then.

Dokja smiled and turned off the shower before he helped Junghyeok out of the bath and into a pale orange bathrobe. Dokja grabbed one too – it was fluffy and even warm. They went into the main room again and Junghyeok settled on the large, comfortable bed, with its soft sheets. Dokja gathered food on a big platter and brought it over to share. It was thankfully simple things that incarnations could eat, and quite good. As Dokja leaned against Junghyeok's side on the bed and sorted through things to try, he imagined Lee Gilyeong and Shin Yuseung fighting over it, it was that good. He also briefed Junghyeok on the match for the next day, still using Midday Tryst.

Biyu appeared and made a worried, "Baa!" over Junghyeok as she floated nearby.

Junghyeok patted her cotton ball head a little and smiled at the sight of her. But he was clearly getting drowsy. His eyelids were lowered and he wasn't talking as much, even through Midday Tryst.

Dokja set the food aside and helped Junghyeok settle properly in the bed. He startled slightly when Junghyeok grabbed his hip pulled him in for an embrace. They usually slept like this,

with Dokja curled up with his back to Junghyeok's chest. But it was still a little early – not even quite early evening yet – and Dokja had planned to prepare for the next match, based on the information Horus had given him…

Junghyeok's hand squeezed Dokja's hip.

Dokja smiled and set an alarm for himself to finish preparations later. Then he settled down properly and got under the blankets. The room was nice and warm, and the Ellain Forest Essence healed Junghyeok. Things were good, though the outlook was still a little grim.

"Tomorrow will be harder," Dokja said, quietly. He was unsure why their companions thought this would be a good vacation. Maybe Suyeong was exercising her dislike of Junghyeok and trying to kill Dokja through stress?

The lights dimmed, and Biyu floated down to snuggle in the pillows between their heads. Her golden horn glowed in the darkness.

"Yes," Junghyeok said. "Since you'll have to guard me."

Dokja frowned and looked back at him. "What do you mean?"

"You can't exactly make a boat, can you?" Junghyeok's hands rested easily on Dokja's stomach, and his expression was weary. He was warm at Dokja's back.

Dokja grimaced. "Well no…" He didn't have that skill. But the warmth of Junghyeok's hand on him made him feel less of a sting at the words.

"So that's my job. You have to watch my back."

Dokja smiled softly. Junghyeok wasn't *exactly* pointing out that Dokja was incompetent. Just allocating work properly. "You trust me with that?"

Junghyeok snorted and lowered his head so that his nose came to rest against Dokja's left shoulder. "Foolish questions."

Dokja grinned and settled back against Junghyeok's chest. He had faith they'd win easily.

In the morning, after a hearty breakfast, the remaining teams gathered again before the dais of constellations. Maat was there again, and Horus and Seth appeared beside her, looking little different than before. The tension was a bit lessened than the previous day, with so many fewer competitors, but things were still tense: if Seth won this round, all incarnations would lose the scenario. It added even more desperation.

Seth only smiled, and his sha mask made his smile more intimidating.

Maat reached for the pot again, and drew forth another scroll. After a moment she said, [The second match will be… stone boat racing.]

There were murmurs among the incarnations as messages popped up before them.

[Sub Scenario – Stone Boat Racing]

Category: Sub

Difficulty: D-F

Clear Conditions: Construct a stone boat and travel across it on the Nile to the finish line before Seth.

Time Limit: None

Reward: 2000 Coins

Failure: Seth will win the round.

Racing a stone boat across water is a ridiculous idea, Dokja thought as he gazed unhappily at the message.

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is worried.]

[The constellation, ***Secretive Plotter***, is curious about what you will do.]

Fortunately, Dokja *did* have a trick for it. The issue would be dealing with Seth, who was far more powerful than Junghyeok, and thus could build a boat faster. All the participants were teleported to a quarry where they could find stone to use, which was on the other side of the Nile from where Maat had called the scenario. Even before any of the incarnations could get their bearings, Seth raced over to some stone and quickly swung his giant black khopesh against the rocks to cut them apart easily. Even the incarnations, who saw feats of strength similar to this all the time these days, were impressed.

They also knew that although Seth made the task look easy, he needed his focus. And the easiest way to make sure he *lost* the race, was to get rid of him *now.*

Seth seemingly paid no heed to the incarnations sneaking up on him, but as they neared, he grinned and said, [You’re stupider than your predecessors.]

Dokja, standing watch while Junghyeok went to work cutting apart stone and shaping it into a boat, had to agree, as he watched Seth use his sand to easily cut down the attacking incarnations. Sand crocodiles roared from the ground to chase off scared incarnations, while sand spikes went after others. It was a massacre.

Two groups of incarnations seemingly thought it would be wise to take Dokja and Junghyeok out as well. Dokja presumed it was because Seth had gone after Junghyeok personally. The incarnations had seemingly allied with each other, and three of their party members were buff

and clearly battle-hardened, wielding intimidating weapons. Dokja easily dispatched them with Unbroken Faith, leaving them twitching on the ground. Then he continued to keep his watch, keeping an eye on Seth and the other incarnation teams. He'd have helped Junghyeok, but the man seemed inclined to craft his own materials.

The good news was that Junghyeok quickly finished building their boat. He then used an ability he got, which normally let incarnations run across water, to make it float on the water. It easily carried both him and Dokja. Dokja used an engine he bought from the Dokkaebi Bag to get the boat moving quickly.

A few other incarnation teams also had some success, and they were all moving as fast as they could. No one had the time to focus on killing off the competition at this rate, which was convenient, as it made Dokja's job easier.

Once they were on the water, Dokja breathed a little easier. The first big part of the scenario was done.

[Hey!] Seth yelled.

Dokja looked back to see Seth rushing to finish his boat and race after them. Even growing smaller in the distance, the situation were worrying. Dokja said, "Are you ready?"

Junghyeok scoffed. But he had the crossbow that Dokja gave him. They would need to be fast.

Seth's boat raced across the water, wasting multiple incarnation boats as it went. It was clear he was aiming for the head of the pack, where Dokja and Junghyeok were located. Take them out, and he'd take out his potentially strongest competitor.

[A private message has arrived from the constellation, ***Falcon God of the Sun***.]

"Now," Dokja said. He was protecting the engine and steering the boat, so he couldn't help Junghyeok if the man needed it.

Junghyeok stood up, anchored himself, and raised the crossbow, aiming at Seth's boat. Wind whipped at his dark hair, and water sprayed behind them. He fired. The arrowheads were tipped in story metal.

Seth deflected the first shot with his khopesh, and then the second, and the third, but the fourth wasn't even aimed at him. It struck his boat instead, burying itself in the side. He frowned at it in confusion, and his eyes widened in shock as vines burst from the arrowhead, devouring the boat and making it crumble to bits. It was a fast-acting and powerful plant that Dokja had located the previous night on the Dokkaebi Bag, and bought. Seth wouldn't be able to repair it fast enough to win the race.

Seth glared at Dokja and Junghyeok and raised his weapon – now a bow – and fired at them, even as his boat sank under him.

Junghyeok raised his sword and cut the arrow down, but Dokja heard him grunt as his sword met the arrowhead. The arrows of Seth were powerful, and left shockwaves in the air.

Seth fired more.

The farther they got away, the harder it was for the arrows to reach them, but Junghyeok grunted on each hit he blocked. He was sweating.

Dokja wished the engine would let them go faster, but focused on getting closer to the shore. Thankfully all the other incarnation teams were behind them.

“His boat is gone,” Junghyeok said eventually, making Dokja want to sigh in relief. “He’s swimming back to the shore.”

“At least he can’t exactly get to us by swimming,” Dokja muttered. It wasn’t exactly one of Seth’s talents.

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is impressed with your actions!]

[The constellation, ***Prisoner of the Golden Headband***, is laughing at Seth.]

[Constellations have sponsored you 3000 coins.]

“The other teams are fighting each other,” Junghyeok noted. “But none of them are targeting us.”

Dokja nodded. As expected, with Seth out of the way, the incarnations once again became the primary competition, and the antagonism of the giant story took over. Perhaps they thought that messing with Dokja and Junghyeok’s boat – the boat that had felled Seth’s – was a *bad* idea. It meant that the pair had a tense but relatively easy travel. Dokja wondered what it would be like to do this without the fear of dying. Just him and Junghyeok, and the wind in their hair. It was almost scenic.

“Focus, Dokja,” Junghyeok said as he shot at a competitor who drew a bit too close for comfort. “We haven’t won yet.”

Dokja smiled. “Of course.”

[The winner of the stone boat race has been decided,] Maat announced when Dokja, Junghyeok, and the other surviving incarnation teams gathered back on the shore before the dais. The observing gods were all assembled on their thrones, with Ra smirking from her seat. Horus stood by Maat’s side, looking calm. [The winners are the representatives of Horus!]

[You have met the conditions to clear the sub scenario.]

[You have earned 2000 coins.]

Seth seethed from his place near Horus. It was clear he hated all of this. Dokja wondered why he even agreed to participate in a scenario he knew he was meant to lose. Contendings was similar to Gigantomachia in some ways: Papyrus ran it a lot for incarnations to try for. The roles were set. Perhaps Seth had no choice in the matter, but still wanted to try and change things.

Dokja thought it would get exhausting over time, and being the villain would probably be uncomfortable. How could you face your companions in the nebula if they planned on stories where you always lost?

[Rest tonight,] Maat said to the incarnations. [For tomorrow is the final match. You will be facing off against your own partner. And the goal is domination.]

Incarnations blinked. There were fewer of them now, with many leaving after the boat race, too damaged by their competitors to go on. Everyone could have won the scenario, given Seth didn’t make it to the shore in a boat, but the incarnation infighting outdid many of them.

[Sub Scenario – Domination]

Category: Sub

Difficulty: S

Clear Conditions: Domination over your partner.

Time Limit: 1 day

Reward: 4000 Coins

Failure: Seth will win the round.

Dokja studied the message, a bit unsurprised. It made sense. Now each party resembled the true battle: that between Seth and Horus. If there could be only one winner, then one must come out on top.

[Good luck,] Maat said.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Junghyeok followed Dokja to their room, Junghyeok used Midday Tryst again.

--You know what the third match entails.

--Yes.

“You never made it this far, right?” Dokja said aloud. Junghyeok tended to ignore this scenario or kill all his opponents, winning by default.

Junghyeok nodded.

“Well that’s okay,” Dokja said as they kept walking. “We’ll get through it like we always do.”

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is grinning.]

[The constellation, ***Prisoner of the Golden Headband***, is curious about your plans.]

Junghyeok still had a suspicious look on his face, and Dokja asked, “Do you trust me?”

“On what?” Before Dokja could reply, Junghyeok stiffened and looked up ahead at a turn in the hall.

Dokja frowned. *An ambush?* It made sense, particularly given the upcoming third match. Horus’ information had been specific about the requirements for the third match, and noted that this would happen, and help fulfill the requirements for Dokja and Junghyeok to win. They rounded the corner, and there before them were four teams, all incarnations of Papyrus, gazing ahead at the pair.

Dokja scanned the teams briefly, noting that they were all pretty powerful. These were all groups who hadn’t attacked Seth earlier, and focused on building boats. The woman in front was short and muscular, and carried an impressive spear in her hands. Her eyes were lined with kohl, and she glittered with jewelry. Her character profile said her name was Halima. She was the most powerful of them all. Her teammate, Salih – a tall and thin man with long dark hair tied back behind him – was a nearly equally powerful man. Green energy sparked in his hands.

Junghyeok didn’t have his hand on his sword. He simply gazed at the groups, ready for whatever they had.

“The match doesn’t start yet,” Dokja said to the groups. “You should rest before the last big day.” It could be dangerous to tangle with Papyrus’ incarnations technically outside the matches. Papyrus was already in an iffy territory when it came to Kim Dokja’s Company.

But that didn’t mean Dokja was just going to back down from this. Besides, it would help them win the match, and that was the end goal.

“We’ve heard of you,” Halima said, her voice low but pitched far. “You’re dangerous. It’s a shame you didn’t bring more back-up.”

Dokja smirked. “I brought all the help I need.”

Junghyeok leapt forward, and Halima raced forward to meet him. The other incarnation teams stepped forward, too. Multicolored light and smoke filled the air.

Dokja had to activate Way of the Wind to dodge a few attacks: Papyrus incarnations were powerful. Even with Junghyeok cutting through them, they were a force to be reckoned with. Dokja wondered why they hadn’t gone up against Seth. Surely, with their abilities, they’d have been able to take him?

A dark, boomerang-like weapon flew right at Dokja’s head moments before Omniscient Reader’s Viewpoint warned him *Head* and he ducked down. The weapon buried itself in a wall behind him. The incarnation aiming for him lifted two more of them. Their edges were sharp and glinted in the torchlight of the hall.

Dokja activated miniaturization and raced forward across the floor, dodging arrows made of light and a giant cat’s paw. He didn’t have time to take in the sight of one of the incarnations who’d transformed entirely into a black cat. He pulled out Unbroken Faith and leapt towards the incarnation throwing weapons at him, and cut the man down before he could throw more.

There was a yowl and Dokja turned to see Junghyeok tossing aside the limp body of the cat shifter. Two more incarnations lay unconscious on the floor, leaving four more incarnations standing.

Halima stood before the group still, bleeding cuts covering her arms. She glared at them both. “What are you?!”

“We’re just competitors here for the story,” Dokja said with a smile. “You could let us go and return to your rooms if you want.” But would they just try to attack the pair in their room? The tension of the scenario was pushing them all to kill each other. And judging by the character profiles he was seeing, different constellations from Papyrus had stakes in these incarnations winning the story. It would be embarrassing for Papyrus if they lost a story to outsiders.

“Afraid you’ll lose?” Halima demanded as she hefted her spear. The other incarnations were weary.

“Why would I be?” Dokja replied, glancing around. “Three of your teams are disqualified.”

Halima blinked and looked at their fallen members. It was true: Junghyeok and Dokja’s actions had gotten rid of one team entirely, and the partners of two others.

“Unless this is a ploy to cut down each other before the final match,” Dokja said with a smile, glancing between the remaining incarnations. “I’m sure whatever your constellations promised you didn’t involve actually sharing the prize.”

The Egyptian incarnations glanced at each other suspiciously. The aggression of the scenario lent itself in Dokja’s favor here. For a while, they had Junghyeok and Dokja as their enemy, but now that Halima’s team was the only intact one, and the remaining solo incarnations weren’t familiar with each other, it was a question of if they would team up still to take out Kim Dokja’s Company.

“We have them!” Salih cried, raising his sparking hands. “Just stay focused!” He had a tiny boot print on his cheek from where Dokja had launched off to avoid an attack, and knock him out of Yu Junghyeok’s way.

“No,” one of the solo incarnations said, reaching down to pick up the half-transformed cat incarnation. “We’re done. I’m not putting my life on the line for some stupid cheat.”

Halima snarled, “Coward!”

The solo incarnation ignored her. The other solo incarnation picked up his teammate too.

Halima glared at Junghyeok and Dokja. She and her teammate were still ready to fight. She raised her spear and rushed forward.

Dokja stretched as he walked into their room. “Well that was a wake-up, wasn’t it?” Between the two of them, Halima and Salih were left unconscious in the hallway. Papyrus wouldn’t be happy about this, but it was a choice of “beat the incarnations or die”, so what else could they do?

Junghyeok shut the door behind them, looking none the worse for wear. “You’re strangely confident. You think we won’t get ambushed again?”

“The constellations bet a lot with that move,” Dokja said with a smile, glancing around the room. There was a whole table of fresh food for them. “They wanted to take us out before we could take the story. They’ve been paying attention to us.” He hadn’t noticed Papyrus in Biyu’s channel too often, but given Horus knew about Dokja, likely they were all keeping themselves aware of powerful incarnations. They’d be upset at the beatdown Dokja and Junghyeok gave their incarnations. “But it’s unlikely they have enough for a second wave.” Though there were still other teams, perhaps they were all focused on preparing for the next day.

[The constellation, ***Prisoner of the Golden Headband***, is pleased with your confidence.]

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is nodding.]

Dokja grinned at Junghyeok, knowing things were about to change in the chat. “What we *should* be focusing on instead is how you owe me for the good job I did today.”

Junghyeok frowned. “What do you mean? I did most of the work.”

Dokja sighed dramatically, and then said, “Biyu, dumpling time.”

Biyu said, “Baa!” There was a small ding sound. That was the signal that she was doing a temporary hand-off to Bihyeong, who could better monopolize “dumpling time”. The channel wouldn’t be off or entirely paywalled, but it would be more limited, with specific messaging and pointed blurring requiring coin payments. Dokja had set up the system with Bihyeong, and eventually Biyu, in advance.

“Here?” Junghyeok asked, confused. “Really?” He was clearly surprised, but not angry or backing off.

Dokja stepped forward and grabbed Junghyeok’s collar. “Why not? It’s the end of a scenario tomorrow. We might as well celebrate while we can.” Then Dokja pushed forward and kissed Junghyeok.

Junghyeok wrapped his arms around Dokja’s back and leaned into the kiss, before pulling them both back to stand near the bed.

--This is not planning for tomorrow.

Despite Junghyeok’s annoyed tone, Junghyeok didn’t pull away. In fact, he held Dokja a bit tighter.

--Just indulge me.

“The good job you did, hmm?” Junghyeok said after he broke the kiss and looked down at Dokja thoughtfully. “While you mostly sat and watched me do everything?”

Dokja pouted a little. “I got us all the items we needed! I set up the engine! I took care of two incarnations on my own and helped with others!” It was a bit *too* whiny, but the constellations liked when he was extra bratty. The coin sponsorship notifications were decently regular in his ears.

Junghyeok scoffed and pushed him away. “Undress.”

Dokja raised an eyebrow at him. “You’re giving me orders now?”

Junghyeok smiled back at Dokja. “It’s good for you to remember your place.”

Dokja rolled his eyes even as he shuffled off his white jacket and set it aside, glad his chat was turned off so he couldn’t hear whatever the constellations were saying. The coin sponsorship messages were coming in a little faster, so the channel was doing well, anyway. “Remind me what our nebula is called again?”

Junghyeok scowled at Dokja, but his eyes were glued to the man’s chest as Dokja removed his shirt, revealing his pale skin covered in mostly old scars. Even after he’d restored his constellation body, it was a bit of a mess. Moving through scenarios and everything related to them was wearying.

Dokja stepped forward and gazed down thoughtfully at Junghyeok. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“Your pants are still on,” Junghyeok said, glaring up at him. “You didn’t follow my order.”

“Only if you take yours off, too.”

“I’m not going to,” Junghyeok said as he gazed down at Dokja with heated eyes. “I’m going to fuck you just like this. It’s what you like best, after all.”

Dokja’s cheeks warmed. It *was* true. Junghyeok just looked really good in those clothes.

“Now take your pants off.”

Dokja met Junghyeok’s glare with one of his own.

Junghyeok smiled. “Fine then.” He grabbed Dokja’s shoulders and spun them around, pushing Dokja down on the bed on his stomach. Junghyeok leaned forward and said, “Leave this spot and you’ll regret it.”

Dokja scoffed, but stayed still.

Junghyeok reached down and grabbed Dokja’s pants before yanking them and his underwear down, revealing his ass. The skin was a bit reddened from Dokja’s pants being yanked off in such a manner. “If you’re going to be impertinent, this is what you get.” Junghyeok let Dokja’s pants pool around his lower legs, keeping him trapped.

Dokja pushed himself up for a more comfortable position, and then felt a pair of wet fingers push inside him. He was somewhat loose from their recent moments together before the scenario, so it didn’t hurt, but it was still a bit surprising. It didn’t help that Junghyeok was brutal as he pumped his fingers in and out, making Dokja rock back and forth on the bed.

Junghyeok kept his right hand on Dokja’s hip as he worked. He brought his left leg up onto the bed to spread Dokja’s legs wider. “I’ve clearly been too lax lately.”

Dokja scoffed and pushed back on Junghyeok’s hand, trying to get him to go deeper. “What makes you say that?”

“You’re still talking back to me,” Junghyeok chided. He pulled his fingers out and undid his belts, then unzipped his pants.

Dokja turned off the coin sponsorship notifications: they were coming in too fast and getting to be too overwhelming. He’d asked Junghyeok once if *he* turned them off during dumpling time, to which Junghyeok had simply glared, clearly deeply unimpressed with the question.

Junghyeok grabbed Dokja’s right leg and moved it farther to his right. Then Junghyeok pressed his cock into Dokja’s ass, making Dokja grunt softly. Then Junghyeok took hold of Dokja’s hips and began yanking him back and forth. On every thrust, Junghyeok’s cock moved deeper and harder into Dokja, making Dokja gasp. Junghyeok leaned down and said, “Better.” Dokja could hear the grin in his voice.

Dokja decided that Junghyeok was *far* too smug about all this, even if he always was. The truth was, Junghyeok's smiles were also just terrifying, and Dokja wasn't sure what to do whenever he experienced them. His soft ones were cute, but his voracious ones… Dokja felt a shiver down his spine of danger whenever he saw them. And weirdly, that made him harder.

--Are you going to tell me what the third match is?

Dokja panted as Junghyeok's fingers squeezed his hips.

--I'm a bit preoccupied!

--Really?

And that was when Junghyeok picked up his pace, making Dokja bounce even more on the bed.

That wasn't encouragement! Dokja thought as he scrabbled for balance. He knew he must look desperate and overwhelmed, and they'd barely done anything yet! *Will this be enough…?*

--I can see you thinking.

--How can you even see that when I'm bouncing this much!

--Maybe if you tell me what the third match is, I'll slow down.

Dokja stayed stubbornly silent, and Junghyeok laughed and thrust even harder. It made every push just on the edge of too painful, but shoved Dokja just that much closer to delicious release. He was sweating, and the breeze from the window wasn't helping. They'd come in right from fighting the Papyrus incarnations, and hadn't bathed or eaten. The bed was a mess of sand and salt water, and the sheets, soft as they were, scraped a little because of the mess.

But somehow they'd survived battling a narrative-grade constellation and fighting some powerful incarnations. They'd won one match. And if this worked, then…

Junghyeok grunted and shoved deeper into Dokja, squeezing him tightly and decreasing his pace as he came deep in Dokja's ass.

Dokja was close to the edge, but not *that* close, and the filling sensation of Junghyeok's come only made his closeness more frustrating. He couldn't help a whine escaping his lips. He was pathetic.

Junghyeok leaned over his back, kissing his spine. Then Junghyeok murmured against Dokja's skin, "You're so pathetic, you couldn't come yet? Fine." He reached out and almost *delicately* brushed Dokja's cock, which was leaking on the bedspread.

Dokja grunted. That was far from enough! And Junghyeok was being rude about it!

Junghyeok chuckled against him, and then grasped Dokja's cock and *squeezed.*

Dokja jerked as his orgasm was practically choked out of him. It was a brutal way to come, but it got the job done, and he shuddered through his release, falling boneless on the bed.

[You have met the conditions to clear the sub scenario!]

"…What?" Junghyeok said. He must have seen the message, too. His grip slackened.

[You have earned 4000 coins.]

Dokja shut his eyes, relieved. *Good.*

[You have earned 4,000,000 coins as a reward for completing 'Contendings'.]

[You have earned the giant story!]

[The giant story, 'Together to Combat Enemies' is responding to your level!]

"What is going on?" Junghyeok demanded.

"Domination," Dokja said, breathing easily on the bedspread, even in a loose pile of spent limbs as he was. "That was the end of the third match." *Together to Combat Enemies? What does that do? Hopefully it makes us stronger…*

"…*That* was the third match?" Junghyeok was clearly still skeptical.

"It was the second part of it. The first was defeating the incarnation attack. And the second, well… You know some of the scenarios involve sex. You just always avoid them."

Dokja could practically *feel* Junghyeok's discomfort. Back when they'd begun a relationship, he'd agreed to the concept of dumpling time because it meant some extra coins, even if they didn't really need it (and he didn't mind making it clear to others just who owned Dokja's ass). Most of the time, though, they had the stream turned off, which was unusual for incarnations to be allowed. But they had enough push for Bihyeong to deal with it. And Biyu was happy to do it for them.

This was a little different, though Junghyeok had to be aware that it was likely Papyrus would have been watching them. Still, Dokja felt a *little* bad about it.

--I'm sorry. If I'd told you, the constellations would have been suspicious. We might have lost the match.

--You didn't trust me.

Dokja winced.

--I trusted you. But I also… didn't exactly believe our other backer.

--Our other what?

--Horus approached me before the matches started officially. He's been feeding me info about them.

--Why?

--It's complicated.

Junghyeok sat for a minute, thinking it over, and then he repositioned himself. "The constellations can wait a bit."

Dokja's face burned. "You can't be ready to go again!"

--Then you should start explaining quickly.

He was annoyed, but not truly angry. He always disliked when Dokja kept information back. But this wasn't too major, which Dokja knew, and it was why he'd taken the risk, to make their performance more realistic.

Dokja groaned as Junghyeok started working him over, but he was glad to know that they still had each other's backs, even if Dokja was likely to not have a backside at all at the end of this.

After Junghyeok finished, and Dokja managed to figure out walking once more, they cleaned themselves up, ate a quick meal, and then went to the front hall to meet with the constellations, who were gathered together to wait for them.

Horus and Seth stood on either side of Maat again, and the other constellations were assembled beyond them, on thrones again.

Ra had a sharp expression on her face, and her golden eyes glowed. Some of the other constellations looked annoyed. One constellation in particular was glaring at Dokja. Doubtless she disliked that their attack had failed. A green fire burned in a brazier before her. The anger from the whole group was somewhat palpable.

Dokja wondered just what Papyrus would do against him *now*.

Horus' expression, however, was neutral, but this time he met Dokja's gaze. There was *knowing* in there. Dokja knew Horus couldn't admit to cheating with them on the story acquisition, but still. This was cutting it. Perhaps Papyrus had stepped in to help with that attack in the hallway, but it's not like Dokja hadn't been prepared, too.

Seth had his arms crossed and was glaring at Junghyeok and Dokja as they approached. [So you're the winners?] Seth scoffed. His stories were out and burning the air around him.

[Calm yourself, Uncle,] Horus said, gazing at him. [They won. That's all.]

Seth shook his head but didn't say anything else.

[You have successfully won two matches,] Maat said. She didn't seem particularly pleased, either, but she kept herself focused on the task at hand. [You have received your rewards and may go if you wish.]

[Just like that?!] Seth demanded, stepping forward and glaring at Maat. [You're not even going to inspect them to make sure they're being truthful?]

[It was on the Star Stream, Uncle,] Horus said. [We saw.]

Dokja's cheeks warmed to hear someone else say it like that, and he was glad he'd explained more earlier to Junghyeok. There were different versions of this mythology: in some, Seth attempted to assassinate Horus, but sometimes Seth approached Horus in an attempt to seduce him and prove dominance in bed. Horus outplayed him and dominated Seth in turn, proving his right to rule Egypt. So to complete the scenario, Dokja and Junghyeok had to act out the parts of Seth and Horus, and it had to be *seen*.

[And you're just going along with this?] Seth demanded of Horus. [This makes us look weak!]

Dokja imagined if the other incarnation teams were present, there would be grumbling from them, too. More incarnation teams had been Egyptian, and he'd wondered how many of them knew about the match details ahead of time or if constellations had helped *them*, too. But given none of them were here, it seemed that wasn't the case. The people Dokja and Junghyeok fought were nowhere to be seen.

It also put Horus' actions in an even worse light, because this meant doubly so that no Egyptian incarnations would be taking their story, which would likely rile up the nebula even more after that devastating loss in the incarnation versus incarnation fight.

Horus stepped forward and grabbed Seth's arms gently, squeezing them. There was a soft, happy smile on his face. [It doesn't. It makes us look generous.]

Seth glared up at him. [You're too sentimental. The other nebulae will laugh.]

[Then let them. They have no idea what to do with themselves.] Horus pulled Seth close to himself, so that Seth leaned on his chest. Horus' left arm was wrapped around Seth's back.

Seth didn't push away, and even seemed to lean into him a little.

The woman who glared at Dokja and Junghyeok was glaring at Horus and Seth before, but rolled her eyes and looked away. Other constellations were avoiding looking at them.

They don't like Horus and Seth's relationship, Dokja thought. *Perhaps there's infighting in the nebula?*

Horus gazed at Dokja and Junghyeok, who were watching this in confusion. [Thank you for your participation. You may stay and enjoy the palace, or depart. Incarnations in this scenario are liable to still be somewhat hostile until it ends properly.]

“We’ll go,” Dokja said. “Thank you.” He could feel the growing frustration from the other constellations, which was saying something. Even Ra was starting to look more annoyed. He was glad that at least Cleopatra and Benu weren’t around.

Horus nodded, and rubbed Seth’s shoulder as Dokja and Junghyeok turned and headed back to the portal that brought them here.

--So he wasn’t lying.

Dokja agreed, Horus hadn’t been lying when he contacted Dokja and asked for his help to clear the scenario.

[I want someone outside Papyrus to have this story.]

He’d given Dokja all the details about the matches, in a way that would give them a leg up over the other incarnations. He even specifically told Dokja what to buy in the Dokkaebi Bag, and noted that while they’d lose the first match, they’d win the other two.

[Don’t focus on Seth. Focus on winning. Most everyone else will be focused on beating him, and that will give you an advantage.]

But what happens when they attack us?

[Are you doubting your own abilities? You’ll win. So long as you stand by your partner.]

He clearly cared for Seth, and wanted to do this to help Seth. Perhaps to get rid of another giant story that only made a fool out of Seth. Dokja had considered how hard it was to constantly play the villain in a story for the amusement of other people. But what was must it be like to watch someone you cared about suffer over and over, unable to change it? And to be surrounded by constellations who would push hard to keep it that way? No wonder Horus had asked for help, even from something of an enemy of Papyrus, like Dokja. Now the scenario would end faster.

[The nebula ‘Papyrus’ glares at the nebula, ‘Kim Dokja’s Company’]

Well that’s expected, Dokja thought. There were a lot of things they were mad at him for. And he didn’t mind helping someone and taking this story from them.

Junghyeok wrapped his arm around Dokja’s shoulders, making him feel more reassured.

[The constellation, ***Demonic Judge of Fire***, is happy!]

[Constellations have sponsored you 2500 coins.]

“Let’s return to the others,” Junghyeok said, ignoring Uriel.

Dokja smiled. He could feel the new giant story inside him. They'd done what they could here, and he supposed it wasn't the *worst* of vacations after all. "Yes. We need to see what trouble they've gotten into."

Chapter End Notes

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