

## Gourmet 331

### Chapter 331: The Soldiers' Great Battle

Compared to the time when Minhyuk faced Barach, the increase in his stats that he received this time was around 3% less. Even the increase in Ellie's Swordsmanship was a level less than before. However, the temporary 16% increase in his stats and a 3-skill level already allowed Minhyuk to be on equal grounds, perhaps even stronger, than the High Class members of Legend Guild.

In an instant, Minhyuk was already as strong as a High Class right there and then.

*'This is strange.'* Ellie thought, an awkward smile hanging on her lips. Her skin started to crawl and she felt numb at the sudden change in Minhyuk's momentum. She became a little wary of Minhyuk and was about to make the first move when...

*Flash!*

...Minhyuk had already used 'Like the Wind' to narrow the distance between them.

*Fwoosh!*

Ellie struck her sword out but before she could even hit him, Minhyuk had already disappeared from sight. This was *'invisibility'*, the special ability that was attached to Minhyuk's cape.

*Shwaaaaa—*

Then, hundreds of falling leaves began to flutter around Ellie. Right now, Ellie was only wearing thin clothes with no armor over them. Her white clothes fluttered with the fierce wind around her.

*'Strong.'*

The wind was so strong that the strap tying Ellie's hair snapped, making her hair flutter loosely in the wind. Ellie's eyes narrowed sharply, realizing that she could no longer relax, even for a bit. Ellie could tell why Minhyuk used the Fluttering Sword.

*'I can't see him but I can hear him. He's doing this to remove his presence entirely. The fluttering leaves and the wind have become his allies.'*

Ellie could see that Minhyuk was pretty adept at using his skills to his advantage. Just then, the fluttering leaves gathered in one area.

*Flash—*

Ellie's sword moved quickly.

[Quick Sword]

[You can draw your sword 2.5x faster than usual to cut the enemy.]

*Clang—*

Ellie's sword moved quickly towards where the fluttering leaves had gathered, but Minhyuk had already pulled himself back after reappearing.

Minhyuk could only remain invisible for *'two seconds'*, but he could easily make an attack within that time frame. So, Minhyuk used the Fluttering Sword that he had prepared using *'Save'*, a skill

that removed the casting time of the skill. However, Ellie was still able to block hundreds of the falling leaves. After pulling back, Minhyuk quickly jumped and dashed towards Ellie.

‘*Crazy...*’

Minhyuk was completely shocked. The Fluttering Sword that he used this time had a +3 increase in level. That meant that the leaves were longer, stronger and sharper than usual, but Ellie was still able to block each and every single one of them with just a single sword in hand.

This was thanks to Ellie’s ‘*Absolute Senses*’, a skill that she had since birth, which allowed her to maximize her senses up to three times the normal. Each attack from Minhyuk looked like it was in slow motion to her. However, with her preoccupied with blocking that attack, Minhyuk was able to prepare something else. The Devil Judge’s Sword had changed into ‘*Diablo’s Scythe*’?and flew towards Ellie.

Clang, clang, clang, clang, clang, clang—

Ellie quickly left the range of the fluttering leaves and blocked Diablo’s Scythe as her sword tore through the air. Then, shockingly, Minhyuk’s Diablo’s Scythe was suddenly sucked into space.

[Empress’ Absorption]

[The absorbed skill will be triggered just like the original attack.]

And at that moment...

Stab—

...the very same Diablo’s Scythe that Minhyuk had swung earlier appeared behind him and stabbed him in the back.

[Your HP has gone below 70%.]

Just when another scythe was about to hit Minhyuk in the back...

[Physical Damage Reflection! Returns 3x the physical damage received.]

[Physical Damage Reflection has been offset by Empress’ Protection.]

‘...!’

Minhyuk was shocked. ‘*Empress’ Protection*’?

was another skill that Ellie had since birth. She was the strongest person with the highest potential among all of the Named NPCs, an existence called ‘*Supreme NPC*’. And the skill ‘*Empress’ Protection*’?was a skill that greatly enhanced her physical and magical defenses, which also made reflect skills useless. Seeing this, Minhyuk had to make a decision.

‘*To win...*’

Minhyuk immediately rushed towards Ellie after seeing that she had already cut down most of the fluttering leaves.

Flash!

Diablo's Scythe turned back into a sword in an instant, while Minhyuk activated the skill Diablo's Eyes. When using the skill, he would be able to find more than one vital point in his enemies.

Usually, Diablo's Eyes would reveal at least three or more vital points to him, but right now, it was only showing him one. That single vital point was in Ellie's chest. In other words, he had to stab her strongly in her chest.

Dash, dash, dash, dash—

Ellie quickly pulled further away from the fluttering leaves, staring at the tip of the sword that was aiming for her chest. Then, Minhyuk activated another skill. It was none other than the '*Oven of Disaster*'. A ticking timer suddenly appeared above them. The only way for Minhyuk to defeat Ellie was to use his artifact skills.

Clang!

Ellie gently parried the sword aiming for her chest and moved to stab Minhyuk's left chest with her own sword, which flashed red. Starting from the hilt of the sword, a force that seemed like it would tear everything apart radiated fiercely. However, instead of shying away, Minhyuk grabbed the blade of the sword. The strong force tore into Minhyuk's chest and devoured his body.

Slash, slash, slash, slash!?

Minhyuk did not let go of Ellie's sword despite bleeding all over. Rather than letting go, he pulled it deeper into his body and grabbed onto Ellie's clothes.

"...You."

"Noona, you should grit your teeth now."

Then, at that moment...

Tick, tock, tick, tock...

Tick... tock...

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

...a huge explosion engulfed the area. Then, a pentagon appeared on the ground at the same time as the explosion.

[Eivelis' Shield]

[A huge barrier appears to protect you.]

Eivelis' Shield was a skill that would create a huge barrier protecting the person inside it. However, surprisingly enough, attacks could still be made inside the barrier. Protected from the explosions, Ellie moved again, stabbing Minhyuk with her sword once more.

Stab—

But then...

[Monarch's Armor]

[You have used Monarch's Armor's special ability.]

[Your HP and MP will quickly recover at a fast rate.]

...Minhyuk's HP and MP were refilled. However, Ellie was different from him. She could tell that her barrier would not last any longer.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

Crack, crack, crack—

Eivelis' Shield was a skill that maximized the defensive power of the person that used the skill. The skill could increase the defensive power by 300%. However, cracks had already appeared in the barrier. And then...

Bang!

...the barrier broke loudly, the explosion engulfed Ellie and made her fly back. Ellie's white clothes were ripped here and there, her blood dying it red. But even though she flew back, Ellie was still able to use '*Ellie's Swordsmanship*'.

Ellie's Swordsmanship was the skill that Minhyuk always used as a buff skill. However, Minhyuk's fundamentals were vastly different from the original, since he only learned part of the skill.

[Ellie's Swordsmanship.]

[HP increases by 0.5 every second, defensive power also increases by 1.5x, while all stats increase by 25%.]

Shwaaaaaaaaak—

A golden aura began to appear and cover Ellie's body, who thought, '*I did not expect that he would be able to make me utilize Ellie's Swordsmanship fully...*'?

Ellie looked at Minhyuk in awe as he stood up and flew towards her.

Ellie immediately activated her skills. Compared to Minhyuk, there was a passive skill '*Fusion Sword*'?that would be applied the moment Ellie's Swordsmanship buff was activated. She immediately fused two skills using Fusion Sword, and the two skills that she fused were Splitting Sword and Scattering Sword. When fused, a different skill name appeared.

[Roaring Sword]

[Dozens of swords fly towards the enemy, attacking them fifteen consecutive times.]?

It combined the Scattering Sword's ability to attack the opponent consecutively, and the Splitting Sword's ability to shoot a powerful sword towards the enemy. This skill was none other than '*Roaring Sword*'. Dozens of sword lights appeared from Ellie's Sword and flew towards Minhyuk in a fierce manner. They were three times longer and sharper than when Minhyuk expressed the skill. In response...

Shwaaaaaaa!

...Minhyuk triggered Berserk. Fierce black energy spread out from his body before getting sucked back inside his body.

[All abilities will increase by 15%, skills will have an increase of 2.]

[Your total HP will decrease by 3%. Once the skill ends, your HP will be less than 10% and your defensive power will be less than 20%.]

Berserk was a skill that could express an overwhelming strength with the first use and would show a weaker power by the second use. However, even though it was weaker, the power that it could express was still unimaginable.

[Ellie's Swordsmanship has temporarily reached the Pinnacle.]

[You can temporarily use the Advanced Ellie's Swordsmanship.]

[Chapter 9. Sword Like Lightning.]

The skill was completely different from last time. Even this Sword Like Lightning was infinitely weaker than the skill from before. Minhyuk faced off against the dozens of swords flying towards him and used the Sword Like Lightning against Ellie.

“Sword Like Lightning.”

[Sword Like Lightning]

[Several lightning strikes fall down from the sky causing 400% damage to the enemy.]

Dozens of lightning strikes fell down and clashed against the sword lights that Ellie had released. Just like that, the tides of the battle could not be determined. A huge explosion occurred as both the skills collided.

Clang, clang, clang, clang!

“Urgh!”

Clang, clang, clang, clang—

“Kyaaack!”

Ellie also received huge damage from Minhyuk's Sword Like Lightning. Ellie staggered back as Minhyuk fell down on the floor. Minhyuk saw that almost all of his HP had already disappeared.

However, he knew that the skill ‘He Who Overcomes’ would take effect. Even so, he still needed to recover again. So, he took bread and ate it. Almost 25% of his HP had recovered after activating the skill ‘*Absorption Conversion*’.

Ellie, on the other hand, had overwhelming HP so she did not die. No, in fact, Minhyuk was able to do his best because he knew that she would not die.

“Im...impossible...” Ruth said, astonished at the sight. He never dreamed that someone could push Ellie this far.

Then, Minhyuk opened his mouth and said, “Noona, we have a ti...” before falling forward.

[You have used up all of your STM. You have temporarily fainted.]

*Athenae*? had the concept of stamina. Inside the game, the higher the STM, the higher the amount of stamina the person would have. Right now, Minhyuk had used up all of his stamina from the tense battle with Ellie, and was temporarily knocked out.

Ellie smiled lightly and said, “No. I won.”

Then, something surprising happened...

Thud,

...She too, fell unconscious.

“Your Majesty!!!” Ruth shouted, hurriedly checking Ellie’s condition. Thankfully, it seemed like she had just fainted from exhaustion.

It was just by a hair’s breadth. That was the difference between them. Of course, Minhyuk had used all of his artifact skills and abilities, but he had faced Ellie, the person known as the Sword Emperor, and only lost by a few seconds to someone like that. Then, countless notifications rang for Minhyuk.

[You have achieved Spiritual Enlightenment from your fight against one of the Supreme NPCs, Ellie.]

[Ellie’s Swordsmanship has increased by +1]

[You have gained +10 in all five of your basic stats.]

After checking on Ellie, Ruth looked at Minhyuk, his eyes shaking in disbelief. He finally realized why Ellie called for Minhyuk and why she wanted him to awaken to the Pinnacle.

*‘Perhaps he can...?’*

Perhaps Minhyuk could be the one to complete and climb to the Pinnacle, a stage that even Ellie could not reach. Then, the fainted Minhyuk suddenly mumbled, “Nyam... Ellie Noona, I won’t let you go if you steal my spam. Nyam, nyam, nyam. Spam is delicious!”

“...”

Ruth was left speechless. Facts had proven that Minhyuk still thought about eating, even though he had lost consciousness. Ruth thought, *‘Why... do I suddenly feel sad?’*

This was the person that would probably lead them to victory in the Continental War.

### Chapter 332: The Soldiers’ Great Battle

The provocation that Genie, a high ranker and the guild master of the former Legend Guild, sent to China had heated up the entire country. Chinese Ranker Kanex even posted this:

[I applaud Korean Ranker Genie for her courage. The truth is China has always mocked Korea in SNS saying that they will suppress them easily. But as we have witnessed Red Dragon Order’s annihilation a few days ago, South Korea might not be as easy of an opponent as we thought.]

Then, he added:

[In addition, she did not lose her ‘pride’ and spoke bravely, despite being a citizen of the small Asian country named Korea. Come if you can. These words may sound harsh and unkind to us but if I were a citizen of their country, I would definitely raise a thumbs up for them.]

Unfortunately, only a small number of people agreed with this ranker's statement. Another ranker even posted an opposite opinion. This ranker was none other than the Great Wall Guild Master Nangong Hao.

[She's very arrogant. I don't think this is something that those who fled from the captured attack base Berdk should say, at the very least. In fact, it's already safe to say that the battle for Berdk was the core of the power struggle between our countries.]

Many of the Chinese related to these words. People began to leave comments in sympathy with this statement.

[I heard that there's a Korean saying that even a worm will writhe when stepped on but it seems like they're just writhing by themselves.]

They literally meant that the Koreans were wriggling and writhing around. They believed that South Korea was only trying to make one final struggle after being severely pushed back. But Nangong Hao did not stop talking.

[Also, it seems like there's a special territory that we are not aware of, if you look closely in the video of the Red Dragon Order's massacre. I believe they're just telling us to go to them and invade...]

This was the end. This was Nangong Hao's answer to South Korea's Genie's provocation. The rest of his answers were done by the rest of the Chinese citizens.

[He's saying... How dare you act up in front of us, right? LOL.]

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[Ah. LOL. Nangong Hao, if you stab them directly like that the Koreans will be shocked.]

[Nangong Hao's territory is ranked second among all the powerful territories in Athenae. His territory is teeming with Hidden NPCs and he has the Qin Shi Huang's Warriors as his soldiers.]

Most of the Chinese players agreed wholeheartedly with what Nangong Hao said. Since they stepped on South Korea, the players there were writhing around. Besides, they firmly believed that the land that Player Genie, no, to be exact, the Food God, owned would only be shabby when compared to Nangong Hao's territory. Then, Hu Yitian said in one of his interviews...

[Food God? I'll finish him in 20 seconds if he appears in front of me.]

Some people frowned at his cocky remarks, but most of the Chinese players cheered. And just like the Chinese players had expected, another mission that would show their military might appeared in the Continent Cloud again.

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[The location of the 'Warriors' Secret Warehouse' hidden in the Continent Cloud will be revealed to players of both Asgan and Cairon Continent.]

[Benefits and privileges will be given to each continent's players that will be able to send troops to the locations marked in the map and open the Warriors' Secret Warehouse.]

[Players will have a 20% buff for EXP and artifact drop rate during the two day duration of the Soldiers' Great Battle.]

[Players will receive penalties if they attack NPCs.]

[Only one player can lead the troops from their continent.]

[Players will be given two hours to vote for their representative. Participating players will be given special rewards.]

[The mission participants must be elected through the players' voting and must be at least Level 500 with a REP higher than 800.]

[NPCs participating in the Soldiers' Great Battle will be resurrected outside the Continent Cloud upon death. However, they will not be able to enter the Continent Cloud again.]

[The Soldiers' Great Battle will begin once the voting period ends.]

These series of notifications rang loudly in the ears of every player present in the Continent Cloud. Nangong Hao laughed loudly and mockingly the moment he heard the notifications.

“Keuhahahahahahaha!”

Nangong Hao was laughing loudly because this event seemed almost tailored for himself. Right? He was the guild master of the Great Wall Guild, and was the person leading the 'Behemoth' territory, the largest existing territory in *Athenae*. The strength of his Named NPCs were also beyond anyone's imagination. What about his troops? Normal territory troops would have an average level of Level 200, with stronger ones at around Level 300. The troops in Nangong Hao's territory exceeded Level 370. And, he even had around 3,000 soldiers in numbers. Nangong Hao thought, *'This is God's will. He wants me to smash the nose of that arrogant woman named Genie.'*?

Nangong Hao's lips twisted in a gruesome smirk as he looked at the information of his most powerful NPC.

?Passive Skill: Lion's Flesh

?Active Skill: Lion's Roar

?Active Skill: Lion's Rush

Black Lion was a legendary NPC. To top it off, Nangong Hao had two legendary NPCs under his banner. A territory with just one legendary NPC could already exert tremendous power. Just look at Black Lion's tremendous attack and defense! That was not all, with the Black Lion's potential at almost 130, he could be considered as the best NPC! And Nangong Hao's territory also had the White Lion, an NPC that was comparable to Black Lion in strength! These two NPCs were brothers, the two NPCs that made Nangong Hao the envy of many Chinese players! My goodness!!! He not only had a legendary class, he also had legendary NPCs as vassals! Did that even make sense?



Nangong Hao was confident in his territory's strength. Not only because there was Black Lion, but also because he had soldiers above Level 350! He believed that his soldiers were more than enough to destroy the South Korean NPCs. He thought, *'My territory is the best!'*?

Nangong Hao was very, very confident.

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On the other side, Genie also heard about the mission that was released in the Continent Cloud. However, the only thing that she did was to examine the strength and power of the legendary NPCs that were the core forces of their territory.

Genie looked through each of them until she reached the weakest legendary NPC. The weakest NPC among all of the legendary NPCs that resided in Atlas territory was none other than Corr. Of course, this excluded *'Haze'*, a non-combat NPC.

?Passive Skill: Athenae's Prayer

?Active Skill: Athenae's Swordsmanship

?Active Skill: Athenae's Shield

The legendary NPCs living in Atlas territory were Ghost Spear Ben, Talmor's Corr, Great Sage Aruvel, Named Legend of Tactics and Strategies Haze, and Sword Saint Conir. Atlas territory also had additional five hidden NPCs that were born when they were training. All of the hidden NPCs in the territory were at *'Epic'* rank. They did not belong to the *'Legendary'* class, but at the very least, they could exert a strength that could rival the power of ordinary rankers with their levels exceeding Level 460.

*'I wonder how strong Nangong Hao's territory troops are?'*

Genie still believed that the troops of the territory known to be the second strongest among all territories in *Athenae* could be formidable. The Chinese players would definitely choose Nangong Hao as their Commander, a position that only one player could participate in.

Genie had also applied for this Commander position. Fortunately, Genie was able to be the one chosen to participate thanks to the influence of the rankers that kept on sharpening their swords and training inside Atlas territory.

[Asgan Continent's 'Genie' has received 2,413,711 votes and will be the one to participate in the Soldiers' Great Battle.]

[The chosen player would not receive any penalty even if they attacked NPCs.]

[Cairon Continent's 'Nangong Hao' has received 41,133,624 votes and will be the one to participate in the Soldier's Great Battle.]

The results were just as Genie had expected.

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Minhyuk had gained a lot from that duel with Ellie. During their fight, he had realized his limits, which allowed him to obtain additional 50 stat points and an additional level in his Ellie's Swordsmanship. And that was not the end of it. Just like Ellie had said, he received the Wishing Stone.

From what Minhyuk had learned, the ‘*Wishing Stone*’ could allow the player to wish for ‘*cooking ingredients*’ for the rewards that they would obtain, once they cleared a trial. This meant that this item was not just for show.

Then, Ellie told him, ‘*Follow the directions in this map. Once you arrive at that place, you will be able to receive a Pinnacle Skill from someone else. Take note that it’s not my Pinnacle Skill, but another Pinnacle Skill.*’

According to Ellie, it would be extremely difficult even for Minhyuk to learn Ellie’s complete Pinnacle Skill. That was why he should try and attempt to learn the other Pinnacle Skill first.

Ellie made sure to explain it to Minhyuk. She said, ‘*Even I don’t know what will welcome you when you arrive there. However, one thing’s for certain. The world’s best swordsman, only next to the Sword God, is there.*’

Minhyuk took the old and shabby map that Ellie had given him and made his way over to the place marked on it. Then, he thought, ‘*Genie will do well, right?*’?

Minhyuk’s strength was now only at the same level with the members of the Let’s Eat Sect. However, Minhyuk could not change to a ‘*High Class*’. There was only one reason, and that was because he was a God Class. God Class players were not given the benefit to change into a High Class since this was some sort of balance adjustment.

So, Minhyuk had to do his best to quickly become stronger. He moved swiftly, crossing mountains and rivers, until he was met with the sight of a gigantic volcano that was steaming with hot lava and smoke.

“...Are you telling me to go there?” Minhyuk asked in doubt for a moment. However, he still decided to jump. The place was like a lava vent. However, it seemed like it was different from that. Minhyuk gathered strength in his legs and jumped in. Then...

Fwoosh!

“Ugh!” Minhyuk groaned unknowingly from the heat. He felt like his skin was going to melt if that ever touched his body. However, none of the heat touched his body as the lava engulfed him.

Before Minhyuk knew it, his feet were already standing stably on the ground. Looking up at the ceiling, Minhyuk saw the lava that he jumped into. He thought, ‘*This is quite amazing and mysterious.*’?Minhyuk was once again in awe at *Athenae*’s ability to make things look and feel realistic.

[You have entered the Innocent Hero’s Trial.]

[You have gained 100 REP.]

Despite the notification ringing in his ears, Minhyuk’s eyes remained fixed towards the front. At the end of his gaze was a statue of what seemed to be a young man with short black hair wearing full-plate armor. There were words written right below the statue.

[The World’s Most Pure and Innocent Hero.]

[He slumbers, awaiting the arrival of his descendant.]

[Sword Saint Conir. Level 796.]

“...!”

Minhyuk was shocked. At first he thought that the statue looked very familiar, from the man’s face, to his posture as he held his sword and executed his swordsmanship. Everything looked extremely familiar. It was so completely unexpected, and Minhyuk was shocked to the point that he mumbled unconsciously, “Why did Conir suddenly appear in this place...?”

### Chapter 333: The Soldiers’ Great Battle

ATV PD Kim Dae-Guk was staring at Genie in the monitor seriously. There was not just one, but dozens of cameras trained on her. Then, a notification appeared on one of the monitors in the broadcasting station.

[The voting has ended, the location of the Secret Warehouse will now be revealed.]

[The Commanders of both the continents should command their NPCs and head to the Secret Warehouse.]

The match between South Korea and China had now begun. However, the expressions of PD Kim Dae-Guk and the rest of the directors inside ATV broadcasting station remained solemn.

This was currently being broadcasted in all gaming channels. However, all of the people, including the other broadcasters and players, were of the same mind. All of them thought, *‘Our odds of winning are slim.’*

Nangong Hao, the player leading China, was the owner of the second strongest territory, Behemoth. They also knew that China’s NPCs had a stronger, and longer, history than the NPCs in Korea.

Only one person could go inside the Cloud Continent with every ticket, and these tickets were distributed equally to both China and Korea. But for the NPCs, their admission tickets did not have any limits and restrictions, unlike the tickets given to players. For that reason alone, the Chinese would most definitely fill in their slots with high-leveled people. On the other hand, Korea, which was infinitely smaller than China, had a weaker military force and smaller number of players. That was still the case, even if both China and Korea could lead 3,000 troops.

“PD Kim!!!!” One of the employees shouted urgently.

Genie only selected the top NPCs among the NPCs gathered in the territory. Then, she said...

[The rest should wait here.]

“...!”

“...!”

PD Kim Dae-Guk and the director were both taken aback. They were broadcasting this over the three great broadcasting station’s gaming channels. Even the citizens watching this broadcast would definitely be taken aback.

“N...No... It’s not enough... You...you need to fill in the numbers...!”

“Are you crazy?!!!”

In just one glance, they could tell that there were only around 400 NPCs chosen for this match. That was in addition to the 700 troops that were left by Genie inside the territory. In other words, they would only have 1,100 troops against 3,000 troops. Did she mean that they would fight against the carefully groomed enemy NPCs with just that number alone?

“...No way,” PD Kim Dae-Guk said bitterly. Even the director was bitter. It seemed like he knew what the PD meant.

“We’ll definitely lose.”

“I think it’s because they know that they’ll lose this battle so they’re trying to minimize the damage.”

These words were quite bitter but perhaps Genie’s choice was the ‘*truth and reality*’ that they had to face. If they lost here while losing a lot of troops too, then the damage that Korea would receive would be enormous. Comments came in fast after that. It seemed like the viewers thought they understood what Genie was trying to do.

[Ah... I think she made that choice because she knows that it would be a big deal if all of the troops went and they got destroyed.]

[Isn’t that choice a bit too sad and pitiful?]

[No. Don’t you think it’s not alright to lose even before they tried?]

[Genie, you became my girl crush when you declared war on China the other day but I’m very disappointed in you...]

[Perhaps Genie’s choice is correct. It might be better for them to keep those 2,000 troops and make a better plan for the future.]

PD Kim Dae-Guk collapsed in a heap of helplessness when he saw those comments. All he could do was watch the monitor blankly. He once confidently left a comment in the World War Official Website saying ‘*Wait for us, World. Our country, South Korea, is coming.*’. PD Kim Dae-Guk believed that each and every Korean citizen were of the same mind right now. But then, Genie’s confident smile flashed on the monitor.

“...What?”

How could she smile so confidently after knowing that they would lose? PD Kim Dae-Guk murmured, “Director...”

“Huh?”

“Did you watch the 2018 World Cup?”

The Director smiled excitedly and said, “Of course!”

Was there someone from their country that did not know about that World Cup? In that World Cup, South Korea had lost two consecutive games and was left facing Germany, the team ranked number one in the FIFA rankings, as their third opponent. It was a match that would determine who would move forward to round 16. What was the public’s reaction back then?

*‘It’s a relief if we don’t lose 4:0.’*

*‘Should we even watch the World Cup today?’?*

*‘Why should we watch?! We’re going to lose anyway!’?*

*‘I’m betting on Toto.’*

*‘Which one are you betting on? Our country?’?*

*‘Of course in Germany!’?*

None of them expected that their country would win. In fact, they only wished to have a draw. But, as it turned out, what was the result back then? Although Korea failed to move to round 16, they were still able to defeat FIFA’s number one, Germany, 2:0.

“Boy, did you watch the World Cup too?”

“Yes, I was a child back then but...”

PD Kim Dae-Guk smiled as the words of his father rang in his head. He said, “My father cheered loudly back then and said...”

The Director looked at PD Kim in interest, waiting for his next words.

“...Our country has always produced miracles.”

The words set the Director’s heart ablaze with hope. He clenched his fists and looked at the monitor. PD Kim Dae-Guk also turned to look at the monitor as he murmured the rest of the words that his father had said.

“So, don’t give up hope until everything is over.”

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Nangong Hao led his 3,000 strong troops and began their campaign as the Chinese commentators began to talk.

[Nangong Hao finally begins his attack towards the ‘Warrior’s Secret’ Warehouse.]

[Nangong Hao is the guild master of the Great Wall Guild, one of China’s largest guilds. As an individual, he has proven himself to be a powerful Chinese ranker as a swordsman at Level 504.]

[Right now, you can see Black Lion and White Lion marching, each with around 1,000 troops under their command. There are also around 200 Qin Shi Huang’s Warriors under the Great Wall Guild’s banner. Each warrior is said to be above Level 450.]

[According to our estimates, his military force is, on average, around Level 450.]

[That’s not all. Nangong Hao’s Qin Shi Huang’s Warriors consist of at least seven knights at Epic-rank, with a potential that exceeds 100. From what I heard, each of them were around Level 480-490 and can grow much stronger than that. At first, their level was only around Level 420, a level that matched their ranking as Epic, but Nangong Hao had increased their level by around 60-70.]

[Wow. That's unbelievable. I can only be in awe. No matter how high the NPC's potential is, it's hard to do that. Only Nangong Hao can cultivate such forces!]

[However, I'm sure that the players from the Asgan Continent will also be tough to deal with. The main characters on their side are the unknown little boy and the man from the demon race, who had both just recently appeared. We can consider them as the core forces of the Korean side.]

[However, wouldn't they just prove to be useless in front of the Black and White Lions?]

[That's a very likely outcome. Both Black and White Lions are brothers. They receive a seven percent buff from each other's abilities so their levels are almost around 530.]

[Although the little boy and the man from the demon race looked strong, it seemed like they're only around Level 500.]

The commentators kept on talking. Then, one of the commentators piped up in surprise.

[Huh? This is breaking news! Asgan Continent's troops are marching towards the Warrior's Secret Warehouse with just around 1,100 soldiers!]

[Then, that means that the Asgan Continent has already given up this battle.]

This was also something that was relayed to the advancing Nangong Hao.

Hearing those words, Nangong Hao...

*"Keuhahahahahahaha!"*

...laughed loudly. Where did Genie's confidence go? Where was the person who cursed them and told them to come if they could go? It seemed like she was struggling to minimize the damage to their troops right now?

*'A ridiculous and laughable woman.'*

It seemed like her dignity and pride disappeared, with just the slightest change in their situation. But then, the woman appeared in front of Nangong Hao. She appeared with around 200 troops behind her.

[Ah. Genie, the Commander of the Asgan Continent, has appeared right at this moment!!!]

[She showed up with only 200 troops.]

[What in the world is she thinking?!?]

[However, I can't see the mysterious little boy and the man from the demon race, the NPCs that played active roles in hunting the Red Dragon Order, anywhere among their ranks?]

[Maybe they were just temporary NPCs.]

Temporary NPCs were NPCs that helped players during their quests. Temporary NPCs would provide help for the players, but would have no reason to stay with them if they were idle. It was an

entirely different concept from vassals. In fact, the Chinese only speculated this. After all, it did not make sense for strong NPCs like them to willingly fall under the control and command of a player.

“Miss Genie, I wonder why you only came here with just 200 of your troops? Aren’t you aware that an army that had lost its Commander is like a light and useless leaf fluttering in the harsh winds?”

Athenae

had a good ‘*translation system*’ so there were no problems communicating between the two of them. Besides, Nangong Hao was very confident that even if the troops that Genie had brought were the best of the best, they were still strong enough to deal with just 200 of them. After all, he had 3,000 troops behind him. He wondered if the remaining 900 troops were preparing for some kind of strategic tactic as their last struggle.

Then, Black Lion, with his black mask and double sword, folded his arms as he guffawed and said, “Hahahahaha. Nangong Hao, can you see that?”

Black Lion did not have any respect for Nangong Hao, the guild master. This was because both Black Lion and White Lion were too free-spirited for Nangong Hao to control.

“I’m talking about that old man! Look, it’s like they brought that ragged old man just to match the number of people!”

Nangong Hao chuckled at Black Lion’s words. That was exactly what the old man looked like. He even believed that the old man was just around Epic, or perhaps almost at Epic rank. That was probably the reason why that old man had joined the battlefield. But...

“What a unique hairstyle for an old man...” Nangong Hao said with a laugh. The old man looked old, but he had long, luscious black hair, tied up in a ponytail. Nangong Hao could not help but laugh at the sight.

Then, Genie raised her arm up in the sky. The moment she clenched her fists...

Dash, dash, dash, dash, dash!

...something unexpected happened. Nangong Hao thought that Genie was here to negotiate but she suddenly started to attack with her 200 soldiers.

“Wh...what?!”

*‘Is there such a f\*cking idiot? Does she really think that they have a chance at winning? Or maybe...’*

“There may be troops hiding in the area. Don’t let your guard down.”

...they were just acting as a distraction. Black Lion and White Lion both stepped forward.

“We have to take the initiative.”

“Let’s start with that girl.”

Black Lion and White Lion stood confidently in front of their enemies and got into position. Black Lion and White Lion were both close combat fighters. Their main specialties were consecutive attacks, quick jabs and kicks. Their fists and kicks were so fast that it was even hard for rankers that transferred to High Class to deal with them and endure the onslaught of their attacks. Then, the commentators' explanations began.

[Aaaaaah! The 200 soldiers are now rushing towards the troops from the Cairon Continent!!!]

[It's a completely incomprehensible strategy!!!]

[Did they believe that they have a chance at winning?]

Then, the 200 soldiers collided with the 3,000 strong troops. To be exact, they appeared right in front of the Cairon Continent troops.

[This is an unexpected but fierce match!]

[White Lion and Black Lion stepped forward to defend against Commander Genie and her troops!]

[We'll be able to see their wide area of attack specialty skill soon, the Thousand Fists and Thousand Kicks!]

White Lion's main specialty were his fist attacks, while Black Lion's main specialty were his kicks. The skills that these two used together could easily devastate a 20 meter radius. Perhaps they might be able to lay waste to the 200 troops in a single attack once they entered their range. Then, the old man with the head of black hair rushed towards White Lion.

[Aaaaaah! That old veteran soldier chose the wrong opponent! Why did he choose to go to White Lion?]??

[I can already tell that he'll die without even crossing fists and swords thrice...]

The commentators continued to speak, but then something completely beyond the realm of common sense happened in front of their eyes. The old man thrust his spear forward, and everyone firmly believed that White Lion would be able to stop the attack. But...

Stab!

...White Lion's neck was completely pierced through. He turned into ashes and disappeared in a span of two seconds. This was the one shot kill that they had only heard of!!!

[Screech!]

The commentators let out some incomprehensible words in shock. It was actually the sound of one of the commentators kicking a chair in surprise.

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

The commentators, the live comments and the viewers that watched the broadcast were all left in silence. But then...



[There... there's a woman standing over there!]

Dozens of drone cameras from the Chinese's side flew to get a shot of the woman standing on top of a small hill. The woman was wearing a white priestess robe and had her hands stretched out towards the 200 troops from the Koreans' side. The woman was so beautiful that it was enough for people to call her an angel that descended from heaven. She was considered to be the most beautiful woman in *Athenae*, including the women from real life. The woman rumored to be sent to the world by God *Athenae*?himself to become his agent in this world.

The commentator's voice trembled as he spoke...

[S-S-S-S-S-Saintess Loyna is, is standing over there! But how come...]

[Saintess Loyna is helping the soldiers from the Asgan Continent...?]

China, no, the entire world watching the Continental War between China and Korea, were all left in shock.

#### Chapter 334: Overwhelmed

After Minhyuk had completed the trials of the legendary territory, Atlas, he was allowed to bring in three Athenian priests through the help of the Legendary Priest, Louis. And, because this was a promise between God *Athenae* and the Food God, the lord of Atlas territory, *Athenae* Religion had to send three of their men to Atlas. Minhyuk received Kenneth and Lloyd as priests for his territory. As for the remaining person, he immediately asked Saintess Loyna for a favor.

However, Saintess Loyna was undoubtedly a prominent figure that symbolized *Athenae* Religion and was an NPC that appeared in all of the *Athenae* Religion Temples all over the world. She was the subject of envy, admiration, and wonder. Everyone wondered what kind of abilities she had. Of course, her ability would naturally be a buff ability.

The Saintess of the *Athenae* Religion, Loyna, had an excellent buff ability! However, there was one setback. Her 'AOE buff' could not exert much power. Of course, if it was compared to the value and worth of Saintess Loyna's name, then her power was truly meager. In fact, her AOE buff was slightly weaker when compared to Mei Wei's buff. On the flip side, Saintess Loyna's targeted buff was said to be extremely outstanding, to the point that Mei Wei's ability could not even compare at all.

The request for Saintess Loyna to migrate to Atlas was because she and Guild Master Minhyuk had built a close friendship. However, she could only make a decision to become a 'Temporary NPC' for the territory. Loyna told Minhyuk that she would come to Minhyuk's aid, or lend her hand to the Let's Eat Sect once when they needed her help. That was the reason why Loyna was on the Asgan Continent's side during this Continental War.

Before their 200-strong troop clashed with Cairon Continent, Loyna participated in Asgan Continent's operation meeting. In the center of the meeting was a girl named 'Haze'.

*'The enemies are looking down on us. In other words, we can catch them off guard. So, we will only march forward with 1,000 troops and leave behind 2,000 troops.'*

*'Why??'*

Haze simply answered Genie's question with a, *'They'll be a hindrance.'*

‘Ah...’

The 2,000 troops did not come from Atlas. As for the troops of Atlas Territory that grew tremendously strong over a short period of time, the help of the other players’ troops would most probably not be helpful to them at all. They might even become a hindrance to their operation.

*‘The enemy has Black Lion and White Lion as their trump cards. And that’s not all, they also have a cold-blooded mage, as well as the Vice Tower Master of the Assassin Tower among their forces.’*

Black Lion and White Lion were very famous figures. How did they know about this information? This was all thanks to Conir’s ‘Ramyeon Torture’. Rumel, the vice leader of the Red Dragon Order, was forced to eat thirty bowls of ramyeon a day. He could not stand the ‘ramyeon torture’ and ended up spilling all of the information that he knew. And, the Red Dragon Order had *excellent* information.

*‘Saintess Loyna’s targeted buff is very outstanding, so we must first take the initiative and hunt either the Black Lion or White Lion with the help of her buff.’*

To catch the enemy off guard, they have to hunt their strongest and most powerful figure. It was a good strategy. So, they discussed it with Saintess Loyna.

Grandpa Ben looked like an old veteran soldier that had difficulty wielding his spear at first glance. Anyone that saw him would laugh and mock him. How ridiculous would the sight be for Black Lion or White Lion, right? So, Saintess Loyna cast her buff on Grandpa Ben. She had been hiding on the hill, before suddenly appearing, and used her Athenae’s Prayer the moment Grandpa Ben dashed forward.

[Athenae’s Prayer]

[Ignores 80% of the enemy’s defensive power and deals a 400% damage for three seconds.]

Saintess Loyna was a figure that could never be owned or be subordinated by players. The reason? It was because the balance would be broken. If Loyna belonged to someone, instead of a bus, they would be riding the *KTX* train. The power and influence that she wielded was that immense. She had the power to let anyone ignore 80% of their enemies’ defense!

Grandpa Ben dashed forward fiercely with his spear, while White Lion just leisurely stretched his fist and stepped forward. Grandpa Ben had been Minhyuk’s vassal for quite a while now. At first, his status was like this:

?Passive Skill: Minhyuk’s Fan

?Active Skill: Ghost Spearmanship

?Active Skill: Ghost Defense Arts

This status was almost equivalent to Black Lion’s status. However, that was Grandpa Ben’s status almost a year ago. He was now on a completely different level.

?Passive Skill: Minhyuk’s Fan

?Active Skill: Ghost Spearmanship

## ?Active Skill: Ghost Defense Arts

Ben's outstanding potential allowed him to keep on growing stronger. Although he kept on extracting luwak coffee beans, Ben had never missed a day of training. There had been an influx of strong people coming to Minhyuk's territory and Ben had always competed with them, like Kaistra and Corr, and had achieved an explosive growth in his strength.

On the other hand, White Lion just leisurely prepared to counter Grandpa Ben's strike. He thought, *'I should grab his spear first and strike him on the neck. That way, I can easily break his neck.'*

After all, Grandpa Ben did not use any special skills against White Lion, the Fist Master! However, there was something that White Lion had failed to realize. If he was considered to be the Legendary Fist Master, then Ben was the father and master of all of the spearmen in the entire Asgan Continent.

Among the Ghost Spearmanship skills that Grandpa Ben had, there was a 'Pinnacle Spear' that could be triggered in an instant. The Pinnacle Spear was a skill that increased Grandpa Ben's instantaneous damage by around 900%, ignored his enemy's defense by 30%, and increased his instantaneous attack speed by as much as four times.

White Lion's hand moved to grab Grandpa Ben's spear the moment he saw Grandpa Ben thrust it towards his neck. However, contrary to his expectations, White Lion failed to grab the spear. This was Grandpa Ben's technique that was four times faster than White Lion's own skill level!

In an instant, White Lion's throat was pierced by Grandpa Ben's spear. The strike to White Lion's vital point ignored 80% of his defense and had an additional 1,000 damage. There was even the critical strike triggered after Ben struck his vital point.

"Keuheok!" White Lion gasped as he grabbed his neck, dying helplessly on the spot.

"...!"

"...!"

"...!"

The fierce momentum of the Cairon Continent's troops faltered and dampened.

"You, youngsters, are easily frightened," Grandpa Ben said as he watched the enemy troops retreat after seeing him walk leisurely with his hands behind his back. The old man had killed White Lion in one strike. Even Nangong Hao was in a panic.

*'This...this is impossible...?'*

Nangong Hao knew that there must be a difference of 100 levels for their enemy to kill White Lion in one shot. That gap in the level was like the difference between heaven and earth.

*'Are you telling me that old man is over Level 600?!'*

In fact, Ghost Spear Ben had temporarily reached that level thanks to Saintess Loyna's buff. Then, Ghost Spear Ben demonstrated his AOE skills.

[Ghost's Attacking Spear]

[Dozens of spears will stab through the enemies' vital points.]

Stab—

Stab—

Stab—?

Stab—

Stab—

Dozens of soldiers from the Cairon Continent were stabbed and died on the spot. Nangong Hao took another step back after seeing his soldiers on the frontline die one after the other. However, he came back to his senses not long after.

“The old man might be strong, but he's only one person!!! Attack the old man!!!”

No matter how strong the old man was, he would not be able to do anything if they ganged up on him. One man alone could not stand against thousands. Nangong Hao, Black Lion, and the thousands of soldiers from Cairon Continent rushed forward to attack Grandpa Ben.

Ghost Spear Ben immediately used his Ghost Defense Arts the moment they gathered around him. He slammed his spear on the ground, causing a powerful wave of red aura to sweep outwards and pushed the enemies back, effectively protecting himself from their assault.

Then, a woman flew up in the sky with her whip extending far and wide as she swung it down on the ground.

Crack—

“Aaaaack!”

“Keuaaccck!”

Even before the whip slammed on the ground, the enemy soldiers that tried to block it had been slashed. It was as if the weapon that attacked them was a blade and not a whip. The whip then continue its trajectory onto the ground, unleashing a powerful spark that created spider web-like cracks.

[The Whip Warriorress' Rage.]

[A huge explosion of lava will engulf your enemies and inflict 600% damage the moment your whip slams on the ground.]

Blazing red lava spouted out from the cracks in the ground and devoured the troops from Cairon Continent.

“Aaaaaack!”

“Sa...save me!”

Nangong Hao looked at his troops being devoured and melted by the hot lava in disbelief. He thought, *‘She killed more than 50 soldiers in an instant...’*

There was only one thing that came to mind after seeing that much power.

*‘High...High Class?’*

A gap was created amidst the enemies after Genie retracted her whip. Then, mysterious weapons suddenly sprang up from the ground. Spears and swords appeared and pierced through the bodies of the troops of Cairon Continent.

“Ugh... Aaaaaaaaack!”

The enemy soldiers fell down, grabbing their ankles and bodies that were pierced through by the blades of the weapons that suddenly sprouted from the ground. Then, mysterious soldiers crawled up from the ground. They were none other than the soldiers of Atlas!

They had used ‘Underground Digging’, a strange training that Ghost Spear Ben had made them do. Throughout the course of their training, their Underground Digging skill had reached Level 7. Ghost Spear Ben was fully aware how strong and powerful the land was especially if it was used effectively in a fight. Just like that, hundreds of Cairon Continent troops had died under the hands of the Atlas soldiers that sprang out from the ground.

*‘This...this is impossible...!’* Nangong Hao thought as he looked at the scene in confusion.

Even if they dug deeply underground for a surprise attack, it was difficult for ordinary territory soldiers to pierce through and land a successful attack on his Qin Shi Huang’s Warriors and Cairon Continent soldiers. Nangong Hao’s troops were on average at Level 350, while his warriors were around Level 440. Alas, the enemy attack was successful. Just with their level gap, his troops should have been able to trigger their evasion.

As it turned out, the Atlas territory troops were, on average, over Level 450. And that was not all. They had reached Level 6 in their spearmanship thanks to their great spearmanship instructor Ben, Level 7 in swordsmanship with the help of Conir and Corr, and even Level 5 in archery with the help of the former archery gold medalist, Root.

At the same moment, the Koreans that were sitting in front of their TV and despairing at their supposed defeat...

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Let’s goooooooooo!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

...ran around their houses and screamed!

“Look at those bastards’ faces!!!! Our South Korea is winning!!!!”

Even the people eating chicken and beer in chicken restaurants jumped up to scream and hug whoever was sitting next to them. They even danced! Even the people in subways...

“Woowooow! So cool, Genie!!!”

...watching the live broadcast on their smartphones shouted loudly, before covering their mouths and looking around in embarrassment, after they caught the attention of the other people riding in the subway. All of the citizens of South Korea were of one mind as they cheered.

PD Kim Dae-Guk clenched his fists as he watched the scene on the monitor. Surprise and shock colored his voice as he said, “Genie, those troops, those vassals and guild members... All of them are working under Let's Eat Sect Guild's Master, Minhyuk?”

At this moment, the players, even the Chinese players, thought of Minhyuk as if he was an existence that they could never reach. His existence was like ‘*A sky beyond the sky*’.

### Chapter 335: Overwhelmed

Nangong Hao bit his lips tightly as he watched his Qin Shi Huang's Warriors being slaughtered by the soldiers that suddenly popped up from the ground. In just a moment, his 3,000-strong army had fallen into a state of great confusion. Nangong Hao's vision turned black as he thought, ‘*The people must be jeering loudly...*’

This was a Continental War, a war between two countries, and Nangong Hao had confidently, no, *arrogantly* guaranteed his victory in an interview with a media outlet before. However, right now, he was actually losing the most important battle? The Soldiers' Great Battle? The worst part was that his 3,000-strong troops were being ridiculously trampled on by just 1,000 soldiers!

After a while, Nangong Hao managed to rein in his emotions, and his breaths evened out as he grew calm. He thought, ‘*Just who did you say was going to lose?*’

Nangong Hao just lost his mind for a moment after seeing the enemy's powerful display of force. However, they still had the upper hand. Besides, even their numbers trumped their enemies. Even though the enemy was doing well now, it was still a fact that their own strength was overwhelming. Nangong Hao also had the ‘Black Knight Order’ with him.

What was the Black Knight Order? They were a group of their most elite NPCs that had been formed ahead of this battle, albeit in a hurry. These were the people that the players of China had entrusted to go with Nangong Hao. There were around five people with the average level of around Level 480~490.

Nangong Hao had also succeeded in transferring into the High Class ‘Sword Master’. So, even though he lost his momentum for a while there, he was still able to easily get back on his feet.

“Spread out into a defense circle!” Nangong Hao issued his order as he dashed forward. Sword Master Nangong Hao's specialty was none other than the sword. In addition, his sword was different from the sword of ordinary swordsmen.

[Aura]

[Your sword will ignore 50% of your opponent's magical and physical defense.]

Nangong Hao's sword turned blue as sword lights began to shoot out from it.

Fwish, fwish, fwish, fwish, fwish—

Dozens of sword lights scattered and slaughtered Nangong Hao's enemies as his Qin Shi Huang's Warriors dashed forward valiantly.

Shwaa! Shwaa! Shwaa!

The warriors all held square shields on their hands and formed a wall with that. Through the gaps in their shields...

Fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh!

...they started shooting their arrows.

"Aaaaaaack!"

"Keuaaaaack!"

Screams began to ring from their enemies.

[Ah, Player Nangong Hao responded calmly to the threat.]

[He looked like he was flustered and confused by the enemy's tactic, but he was able to quickly come back to his senses.]

[As expected of the owner of Behemoth Territory.]

The Chinese commentators hurriedly launched back into momentum as they talked about Nangong Hao.

The moment Nangong Hao's forces spread out into a defense circle, their defenses had increased by 40%. This skill was none other than 'Qin Shi Huang's Shield', a skill that could only be used by plenty of people. With this shield, they could use the bow, the spear, and the gun safely, without receiving any harm or damage from their enemies. And there was also another tactic...

*Crackle—*

A gap appeared in between the shield as a noose stretched out and entangled a soldier's neck.

"Aaaaaaack! S...save me!"

Once the soldier was dragged inside, the shield's gap was closed and the soldier was stabbed to death. And just like that, they opened a gap in the shields from time to time, dragged the soldiers in, and killed them before closing the gaps once again.

"Keuhahahahahahaha! You won't be able to pierce through this shield!" Nangong Hao cackled loudly as he watched Genie use a one-shot attack skill called 'Unruly Whip'. It was a skill that increased Genie's whip's slashing force by 300% as well as an additional damage of 700%.

Shwaaaaaaa—

Alas, the Qin Shi Huang's Warriors immediately used the 'Shield Wall' the moment the whip landed. The Shield Wall tripled their defense for ten seconds, a defense that was comparable to an Iron Fortress.

Nangong Hao chuckled from behind the shield. Their enemies might have shown a fierce momentum at first but they already lost over 70% of their men. The smaller the number of their troops remained, the more certain their defeat was.

Nangong Hao quickly led his stronger men forward, while commanding the weaker ones to fall back and shoot arrows. He thought, *‘Fufufufufu, our army has mastered archery, spearmanship and horsemanship!’*

For an ordinary territory, it was hard for their soldiers to master just one thing! However, Nangong Hao’s territory soldiers had mastered everything that they could master. They were even equipped with weapons and armors that ranked from general to rare. More than a thousand of his men were wearing artifacts! At this juncture of the game, it seemed nothing could be as amazing as this.

Nangong Hao’s troops might have slowed down at first but their enemies remained weak. Once his main force stepped forward, he was confident that they would be done for. He ordered, “Kill them all!”

“Yes, sir!”

“They might be retreating soon enough.”

Nangong Hao was confident that they would never be able to break through his shield. And, if they could not break through, the enemies would never have any chance of winning.

Just then, a soldier in full armor standing to the left spoke up. He said, “Commander!”

“What?” Nangong Hao asked, turning to look at the soldier whose helmet was tilting down to his chin and covering his face.

“Do you put the noodles, or the soup, in ramyeon first?”

“Of course it’s the soup...”

*‘Wait, isn’t that too out of the blue? And why does his voice sound like that of a boy’s?’*

Then, another voice piped up from Nangong Hao’s other side. The voice said, “Let’s get this over with quickly. I have to write the second volume of ‘Why Did the Prince Go Out Tonight?’.”  
Hmmm.”

*‘What? Write? What kind of bullshit title is this?’*

Then, the two people took off their helmets.

“I’m Conir!!! Wrong! Conir knows that you have to put the pot first!!!”

“I’m Aruvel!!! ‘Why Did the Prince Go Out Tonight’ is on a 50% discount!!! Buy it for only 15,000 gold!!!”

Nangong Hao looked at the two in a daze for about two seconds, from the sheer ridiculousness of their words. He looked at the demon named Aruvel silently as the man said, “Ah. I wanted to copy Conir too.”

Only then did Nangong Hao’s expression turn to one of horror. He shouted, “Hurry, there are rats hid...”



Stab!

Conir's sword stabbed Nangong Hao's sides.

"Keuheok!"

Nangong Hao safely twisted out of the attack's range, thanks to his fast reflexes. Then, Aruvel aimed his spear towards the soldiers that formed the shield.

[Demonic Dragon's Spear Arts]

[Exploding Spear.]

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

The soldiers forming the shield were all concentrated in one area. With that single attack from Aruvel who was above Level 600, more than 200 soldiers were killed instantly, while the lucky few were severely injured at the very least. The shield collapsed just like that.

Meanwhile, Conir continued to attack Nangong Hao.

"Don't think that you'll get me that easily!"

"Yeah! Conir will get you!"

Nangong Hao quickly narrowed the distance between him and Conir. In fact, Nangong Hao was someone that held a sword in reality. To be precise, he was someone trained in various martial arts ever since he was young. And in *Athenae*, opponents on a similar level could easily be dealt with and overwhelmed by the other, depending on their control on their bodies and skills. No, he believed that he would be able to overwhelm Conir with his control.

However, when Nangong Hao's sword, which was dyed in blue, stabbed Conir, the boy just lightly struck the tip of his sword and easily offset his sword skill. Then, Conir stabbed Nangong Hao in the thigh before swiftly moving around to attack his Achilles' heels.

[You have received an attack on your vital point.]

[Your movements have been restricted.]

"Noona told Conir not to kill you!"

"Keheok!!!"

Nangong Hao looked at the boy ridiculously. It was much harder to keep an enemy alive than to kill one. This was because in a fight between life and death, showing mercy towards one's enemy was being cruel to oneself. However, doing this meant that the boy was far stronger than what he had expected.

Nangong Hao had no choice but to plop down and nurse his Achilles' heels, while watching the situation on the battlefield with a dismayed expression. He saw Aruvel jumping around the soldiers.

"I'll tell you why the Prince went out tonight!!!"

"What bullshit!"

"Dieeeeeeee!!!"

Spurt!

Stab, stab, stab, stab!

The soldiers continued to rush forward, only to fall down in front of Aruvel, who continued to chime in, "A few days ago, the wild and free-spirited Prince snuck out of the Imperial Palace and pretended to be a beggar roaming around the city. By chance, a woman graciously served the Prince a meal. She was the poor commoner, Benjamin! The Prince fell in love with her and went out every night to meet with her and get hot in bed... Creak, creak!"

"Uwaaaaaack!"

"Aaaaaaack!"

"Crazy bastard!!!"

Aruvel freely gave a spoiler to the book that he wrote! It seemed like he hoped to pique their interest, so they would buy his book! However, strangely enough, the soldiers were actually listening to Aruvel, despite being in the middle of a war.

*'Aaaaah! This is a story between a commoner and a Prince! The story might be filled with spicy hot scenes, and it arouses curiosity!'*

Then, Aruvel said, "It's on a 50% discount!!! Buy one for 15,000 gold! Buy two for only 40,000 gold!!!"

Stab!

Stab!?

Stab!

"Keheok! Why does it get more expensive if I buy two books!!!"

"It's up to me to decide!"

*'This, this bastard is crazy too! What the hell!'*

The demon wrote spicy bed stories, but the problem was that he was strong too! Nangong Hao tried to regain his calm as he looked around.

*'This is a war between soldiers. Even if they pierce through our shield, they still won't be able to deal with thousands of soldiers with their numbers alone.'*

Then, the troops collided. However, something very surprising happened.

Stab!

Stab!

Stab!

Spurt!

The enemy soldiers were extremely powerful! They jumped into the fray and slaughtered the Qin Shi Huang's Warriors mercilessly.

*‘This...this...! How can this be possible...!’?*

Nangong Hao could hardly believe his eyes. His troops were completely overwhelmed. Even the arrows they shot...

Stab, stab, stab!

...accurately stabbed through the chests of Nangong Hao’s troops. They even dealt fatal and critical blows to his troops with countless explosions.

This was the power of the Atlas soldiers that had undergone strict training from excellent instructors! They were even equipped with amazing artifacts created by the collaboration of Hyemin’sDaddy the Hepas’ Descendant, and Golden Hammer Dwarf Lant! Their artifacts were far more superior than those belonging to the soldiers of Behemoth Territory. After all, their artifacts were equipped with a 20% chance of ignoring the enemies’ defense as its most basic option.

*‘Wh...what the hell...!’?*

Nangong Hao could not understand what was happening at all. His territory was hailed as the second-most powerful territory in the world!

*‘Are you telling me that this territory is the number one territory in the world...?’*

Nangong Hao did not know where the strongest territory in the world was and he was only making his own assumptions.

Atlas Territory was still pretty much at the bottom of the Integrated Territory Rankings. For the Territory Rankings, there were various factors that needed to be met for them to increase their rankings, like activities in the territory, EXP, etc. Basically, Atlas Territory was still at the bottom of the food chain, since this was their first ever appearance.

In other words, for all intents and purposes, the second most powerful territory in the world was being trampled and beaten by the lowest ranked territory.

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Meanwhile, Minhyuk had just entered the Innocent Hero’s Trial.

A man, with sharp, handsome and refined features and standing at a height of 185 centimeters, stood in front of a crystal ball and watched Minhyuk. The man watched as Minhyuk stood in front of his statue in shock.

[Why did Conir suddenly appear here...?]

“...!”

The man was in disbelief. The challenger that entered his own trial actually knew about his identity! That was because the tall and handsome man was none other than Conir.

Chapter 336: Overwhelmed

Out of all the troops that Nangong Hao brought, around 1,500 were left alive. There were still a large number of soldiers.

“Archers!”

The Atlas soldiers pulled their bowstrings taut. And when they let go...

Fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh-

“Keuaaaaaack!”

“Ugh!”

...their arrows accurately shot their enemies' vital points.

[Critical strike!]

The crowd rushed forward to try and dispose of the archers that sent nearly 100 arrows over. However, the archers were not just simple archers. They drew their swords and fought valiantly against their rushing enemies. They were not just good at archery, spearmanship and swordsmanship, they were proficient in everything. Some of them also jumped on their horses with their spears.

Clip, clop, clip, clop!

These were the 100 Atlas Cavalry Men! The 100 soldiers whose talents were recognized by Kaistra and went under intense training under his tutelage!

Stab!?

Stab!

Stab!

Stab!

Stab!

The crowd would shift and open every time the cavalry passed by. It was as if Moses was present and was creating his miracle once again.

“Hihihihing!”

“Hihihing!”

Even the horses that the soldiers were riding on were not just any normal ones! They acted as if they were one with the soldiers that rode on them, and were not just simply running. Kaistra had once told the soldiers, *‘The horses are your comrades. You will help them when they’re in danger and they will help you when you’re in danger.’* The soldiers never forgot those words. They raised their horses with love and care, until each and every one of them had reached the maximum favor of the horse that they were with.

One of the horses reared its hind and kicked the enemy that was rushing from behind.

Kick!

“Euaaaaaack!”

“Hiiing!”

Sometimes, the horses would even raise their front legs to kick and slam their enemies fiercely, fighting together and protecting their master riding on their backs.

Park, who watched the entire situation of the battlefield, shuddered and thought, ‘*Are you watching this, our previous Food God?*’

He also could not believe his eyes. The soldiers of Atlas had grown incredibly strong in just one month. Their growth was beyond any common sense. It was extremely explosive, that Park could already imagine how Minhyuk’s Atlas would surpass the Atlas of the past. This was all possible because of Minhyuk’s greatness and influence.

“Forward!”

The 200 Atlas’ Death Corps soldiers marched forward and went wild on the battlefield.

The Black Knight Order, whose level was considerably higher than the other soldiers, also moved forward. However, they were being pushed back by the excellent strategies and tactics that the Atlas soldiers were pressuring them with. The Death Corps were the elites of the elites, and they were being led by Ghost Spear Ben, Talmor’s Corr, Sword Saint Conir, as well as Great Sage Aruvel.

In the end, Nangong Hao was forced to use his last resort. He thought, ‘*Suicide Troops! Blow yourselves up!!*’

These Suicide Troops were special soldiers created in the event of emergencies. They were literally covered with bombs all over their bodies. The soldiers would lose their lives in exchange for terrifying explosions from the bombs planted in their bodies.

The Suicide Troops numbered around 50 people. Nangong Hao had tried to refrain from using these soldiers. After all, the public might blame him once their soldiers were lost. However, they would inevitably die anyway, so he figured, might as well. Besides, the public’s stance might soften a little bit since the NPCs that died during the Soldiers’ Great Battle would be resurrected in their territories once again.

With Nangong Hao’s orders, around 50 soldiers moved out, their expressions at rapt attention.

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[Aaaah! 50 soldiers suddenly started rushing forward to the 200 enemy soldiers in the lead!!!]

[What are they doing? Are they not concerned about the enemy’s attacks?]

China was now in a state of panic. They had been certain that Nangong Hao and his Behemoth territory forces were going to win! But, as it turned out, they were losing ground. The Chinese NPCs were being pushed back and were losing ground against the South Korean NPCs, no, to be exact, residents of Minhyuk’s Atlas.

Everyone had stopped in front of a device, whether it was in front of a computer store, in front of the screen in the bus terminal, or even in front of a building’s electronic display, just to watch the scene.

“There...there are monstrous beings like that in South Korea...?”

“This can’t be... Our China is one of the strongest countries in the *Athenae* worldview.”

That was right. China was one of the powerful countries in *Athenae*

worldview. On the contrary, Korea, despite being the producer and creator of the game, was a very weak country. No one, even the *Athenean*?experts, expected South Korea to play an active role in

the Continent Cloud. As fate would have it, they were overwhelming a 3,000-strong troops with just their measly number of over a thousand.

Then, Nangong Hao's 50 soldiers suddenly dashed forward. The Chinese players watched with bated breaths as the 50 soldiers jumped and hugged who they assumed were the most powerful soldiers among the 200 enemy troops. Then...

Baaaaaang!

An explosion rang out, covering everything within a five meter radius of those 50 soldiers.

"..."

"...Sui...suicide bombers?"

"Wasn't that amazing?"

The suicide bombers' explosive power was very amazing. It engulfed the soldiers around them with just a single blast, killing off their enemies one after the other. That was right. China might still have a hope of winning this war.

[Behemoth Soldiers made themselves explode!!!]

[Fortunately, even if they exploded, the NPCs that died during the Soldiers' Great Battle would be resurrected in their territories! What an amazing explosive power.]

[If we can kill the enemy's strongest forces, then we have a chance of winning.]

Hundreds of millions of Chinese that were watching the broadcast sighed in relief. That was right, after all, China could not lose that easily, right? But then...

[H...huuuuuuuuh?! Wh, what is that?!!!]

[G...ghost?! Are those ghosts?! What are those?!]

The flustered and panicked voices of the commentators rang loudly in the speakers, as the cameras panned and focused once again to the area where the explosions happened.

The dust settled down, only to reveal the soldiers of Atlas territory in a semi-transparent state after dying from the explosion. Then, something more surprising happened. The Atlas soldiers began to attack their enemies, their movements much faster and more ferocious than before.

"Wha...what the hell is that?!!"

"Is South Korea teeming with those?!"

The Chinese players were unaware, but this was the skill that all 200 of the Death Corps had learned, *'The One who Returned from Hell'*. It was a skill that restored 40% of the Death Corps' HP in the event of death and brought them back in a semi-transparent state. The skill would also increase all of their stats by 20%, and their physical and magical defense by 40%. In other words, the Atlas Death Corps' soldiers were now as strong as someone at Level 500. The speed at which they trampled on their enemies also increased significantly.

[Hiiiiiiik!]

[Euaaaaaack!]

The Behemoth territory soldiers looked like they were trembling in fear. In the end, the forces from Behemoth territory were all wiped out except for one man, Nangong Hao. Even Black Lion had been killed during the battle.

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Genie walked slowly after the forces from Behemoth territory had been wiped out. Even their leader, Nangong Hao, had collapsed after being attacked at his vital points.

“Don’t think that you’ll win just because you won this one time!” Nangong Hao shouted, while gnashing his teeth in anger.

Genie had kept him alive to make him suffer. After all, Nangong Hao had taken to SNS and interviews to mock South Korea. That was also the reason why Genie did not hesitate to humiliate him as well.

Shwaaaaaa!

The sword in Genie’s hands moved to cut off Nangong Hao’s neck. The scene looked exactly like the beheading scenes in the movies. Then, she raised the sword that she used to cut the enemy’s head high in the sky...

“Uwaaaaaaaaah!”

...and roared. The Koreans watching this scene felt their hearts heat up and soar.

Then, the notifications rang for Genie.

[Let’s Eat Sect’s Guild Level has increased.]

[Let’s Eat Sect’s Guild Level has increased.]

[Let’s Eat Sect’s Guild Level has increased.]

[Let’s Eat Sect’s Guild Level has increased.]

The notifications rang non-stop. This was an inevitable result, even if they were in the Continent Cloud. After all, the Let’s Eat Sect, a guild at the bottom of the ladder, overpowered and defeated the guild sitting at the top.

On this day, the Let’s Eat Sect climbed to ninth place in their Local Guild Rankings. Minhyuk’s guild was slowly making its way towards becoming the strongest guild in the world.

\*\*\*

Minhyuk entered the Innocent Hero’s Trial and was met with the adult version of Conir in the form of a statue. It was proof that Conir was a being that stood at a pinnacle, considering that this was a place where one could awaken into the Pinnacle.

*‘From what I heard, Conir was the person that created the foundation of the Knight Tower’s Faramil Swordsmanship.’*

Minhyuk knew about that fact, but he never imagined that he had reached the Pinnacle. Conir was also a figure that was once considered as the Saint.

[Sword Saint Conir. Level 796.]

This was the first time that Minhyuk had ever seen an NPC with this monstrously high level. Would his Ellie noona also be at this level? After all, she was considered as the best NPC currently.

*‘No. Not at all. It’s impossible.’*

Minhyuk shook his head and left those doubts behind as he moved forward. He needed to keep moving deeper inside to challenge the Innocent Hero’s Trial. After walking for some time, Minhyuk was met with a set of stairs that seemed to reach the skies. Minhyuk quietly looked up and counted the number of steps.

*‘There’s a total of 25 steps.’*

Strangely enough, each step was far higher than any ordinary stairs. Then, the notifications began to ring the moment Minhyuk went in front of the stairs.

[You can challenge the Innocent Hero’s Trial.]

[The Innocent Hero’s Trial has a total of 25 gates.]

[Achieving a high score will give you better rewards.]

[Every gate will have a different trial.]

Minhyuk did not forget to use the Wishing Stone that he had received from Ellie.

[You have used the Wishing Stone.]

[You can now choose the rewards that you will receive—artifact materials, cooking ingredients, potions, parchments, etc.—upon trial completion in every trial.]

The Wishing Stone was an amazing item that would allow Minhyuk to gain ingredients whenever he completed a trial. Of course, Minhyuk chose cooking ingredients without any hesitation.

[You have applied the Wishing Stone’s Cooking Ingredients.]

[You can now receive cooking ingredients whenever you clear a trial.]

Minhyuk looked up at the stairs once again. The number of gates for the trial was 25, which corresponded to the number of steps of the stairs in front of him. Minhyuk firmly placed both of his feet on the first step of the stairs. Then...

Flash—

...Minhyuk disappeared in a flash of light as his view completely changed.

\*\*\*

Conir, in the form of a young man, watched the man take his first step through the crystal ball.

*‘Who in the world are you?’*

This was the question that floated in his head. It was clear that the man knew him. As Conir watched the man enter the first trial, he thought, *‘A being from hell will appear in the first trial.’*

A monster from hell that no other player had ever encountered before! This was the being inside the trial.



Meanwhile, Conir looked down at his body. His body was now translucent. It was even flickering as if he was going to disappear at any moment.

*‘My power is slowly disappearing...’*

Conir looked at his translucent hands as he moved somewhere else. He glanced at the crystal ball for a moment and thought, *‘Hunting a being from hell is not an easy feat. Perhaps the first trial can be considered to be more difficult than the tenth trial.’*

After all, they had to deal with that monstrously strong being. Then, he turned around and went to a mysterious river and submerged himself in it. This was the ‘River of Eternal Life’, a river that helped him, someone that had already died in the past, to breathe and live once more.

Conir rested there for two hours. After taking a rest there...

Shwaaaa—

...Conir stood up, his body no longer translucent as he walked back to the crystal ball.

*‘Did he die?’*

Conir wondered if the man had died as he approached the crystal ball, only to be shocked.

*‘What...what the hell?!’*

He was met with an astonishing sight. The demonic beast from hell that was placed in the trial was none other than Hell’s Gatekeeper, the three-headed Cerberus. And that very same Cerberus was wagging his tail in front of the foreigner, who...

[Sit! Wait!!]

...was talking to Cerberus as if he was talking to his pet dog. What was more surprising was the fact that Cerberus obediently sat down in front of the foreigner.

Then, the man took out a big piece of meat, gesturing as if he was holding a gun, before saying sharply...

[Bang!]

Cerberus collapsed on the ground as if he was shot. When the man rubbed Cerberus’ belly, Cerberus gasped and purred as if he was enjoying the treatment.

“Keheok!” Conir gasped in surprise.

Cerberus was rumored to be a Level 650 ferocious being. However, what was comical was when the man patted the ground with his hands, as one of Cerberus’ heads tried to snatch the meat in his hands.

[Happiness, you! You know that this is for your brother, Love, right? Didn’t I tell you that I, your hyung, will get mad if you get too greedy? Huh?!]

[Kkiiing... kkiiing...]

[You just ate your portion!]

[Kkiing, kkiing...]

Cerberus looked like he was a pet dog being scolded by his owner. What was appalling was the name. The head in the left was named Happiness, the head in the center was named Love, and the head in the right was named Hope.

That was right. Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus had now been named as Happiness, Love and Hope by the unknown and mysterious man.

"..."

All Conir could do was stare at the scene, speechless beyond belief.

Chapter 337: The Innocent Hero's Trial

The notifications rang the moment Minhyuk got warped after stepping foot on the first step of the stairs.

[The First Trial of the Innocent Hero has started.]

[Either hunt the Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus, or find other methods to climb up to the Second Step.]

The trial was a choice between hunting, or finding other ways to move forward. Then, another notification rang in Minhyuk's ears.

[With the influence of the Wishing Stone, you can obtain Capri's Buckwheat once you complete the trial with outstanding results.]

"Oh...!"

Minhyuk's expression changed, as he quickly checked the information about Capri's Buckwheat. From what he gathered, buckwheat naturally changed flavors depending on the season that it was planted. However, Capri had devoted his time to studying it, and found a way to enjoy delicious buckwheat through all four seasons. In fact, he had succeeded in it. Even the taste was said to be more delicious than any other buckwheat in the world. Capri's Buckwheat also had a special ability that allowed one random artifact skill to increase by a level.

*'Hiyaaa... Buckwheat, huh...'*

Minhyuk was thinking about the things that he could eat with buckwheat when he realized that the temperature of the surroundings was getting hotter than normal.

*'Why is it so hot?'*

When Minhyuk looked around, he was surprised to see a river of lava flowing to the side, with scalding steam puffing out from time to time.

*'If it's this hot, then...'*

There was only one food that came to mind and that was none other than 'cold noodles'. Minhyuk decided that he would eat cold noodles and spicy mixed noodles the moment he cleared this trial.

*'Also, isn't there that dish that can pair perfectly with cold noodles and spicy mixed noodles?'*

It was none other than charcoal-grilled meat and dumplings! Just the thought alone could make Minhyuk's mouth water.

That was when he saw a huge door in front of him. The door was around nine meters tall and was very wide.

*'Cerberus...'*

Cerberus was a monster that was well-known to most. He was the three-headed Hell's Gatekeeper.

Creaaaaaak—

The huge door slowly opened on its own as the three meter tall Cerberus walked out.

"Grrrrrrr!"

"Grrrrrrrrruwoo!"

"Graaaaaa!"

Cerberus growled ferociously as Minhyuk looked at the level floating above his heads.

[Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus. Level 650]

Cerberus was a very high-leveled monster that rarely appeared in Asgan Continent. That very same Cerberus suddenly dashed forward.

Dash—

"Graaaaaa!"

Cerberus leapt high up in the sky as Minhyuk used his Rampant Sword. No, he tried to use his Rampant Sword. Just when he was about to activate the skill, the mouth of the head in the middle opened and a white light flashed, shooting towards Minhyuk's sword. He had no time to avoid the attack. Then, he heard the notification.

[Your skill has been nullified.]

"...!"

Then, Cerberus' right head let out a breath of blazing flames, and they were as hot as the Hellfire that Ali usually summoned.

Puhaaaaaa—

Minhyuk immediately summoned Beanie as he used his passive skill, Absolute Defense. Beanie and Minhyuk became invincible for two straight seconds.

"Oink!"

Beanie sat on Minhyuk's shoulders as he looked at the ferocious Cerberus drooling out in front of them. Then, Cerberus leapt again and tried to bite Minhyuk with all three of his heads.

*'He's quite fast and very strong.'*

Minhyuk could already imagine how sharp those teeth were, after seeing them gleam under the light. He could tell that anything would be ripped and torn apart with just a single bite from those mouths. Then, the left head opened its mouth as a cold, frosty breath sprayed out.

“...!”

Minhyuk intuitively felt that he needed to get out of range of that cold breath. So, he tried to block, before using Like the Wind to retreat. Then...

Shwaaaaaaa—

...Cerberus shot his cold breath and immediately froze the ground solid.

Unfortunately, Minhyuk's arm got caught in the aftermath, despite using Like the Wind to retreat.

[Your arm has been temporarily frozen and has been restricted from moving.]

[Your HP has fallen below 80%.]

*‘Strong.’*

It was already difficult to deal with one head, but Minhyuk had to deal with all three heads attacking him at the same time. Each of the three heads even had different characteristics and attributes. The head on the left could use frost, the head on the right could use fire, and the head in the middle could nullify attacks. It even had the skill that could allow its body to harden, using it to attack Minhyuk.

*‘Their level might be above 600, but their powers are beyond that.’*

That was usually the case for beings with tricky abilities that were hard to deal with. Then, Minhyuk hurriedly took out some bread from his inventory to restore his STM with the help of ‘Absorption Conversion’. Just then...

“Grrr?”

“Grrr?”

“Grrr?”

...Cerberus' three heads suddenly looked at Minhyuk with interest, their tails wagging fiercely. The left head looked like he was saying something as they continued to wag their tail.

“Grrrr. *(Hey. Don't wag our tail. We, Cerberus, have our own pride to maintain.)*”

“Grrr. *(It's not like I can stop it from wagging just because I want to.)*”

The attention of Cerberus' three heads was focused on the bread in Minhyuk's hands. When Minhyuk brought the bread to the left, the heads followed along and turned together to the left. When he brought it to the right, they all turned to look at the right.

*‘Ho?’*

Minhyuk recalled that dogs had very large appetites, in fact, they were several times larger when compared to a human's appetite. Minhyuk pondered deeply. He was aware that if things continued at this rate, it would be difficult for him to clear this trial. If that was the case, what would happen then?

*'I won't be able to eat my buckwheat noodles.'*

Minhyuk would only be able to obtain cooking ingredients if he cleared the trial and obtained a good enough result. But if things went on like this, he would not be able to get anything at all. So, Minhyuk slowly placed the bread on the ground as he watched Cerberus stop in front of him, while watching the bread intently.

"Wait!"

"Grrrrrrrr? (What did he say?)"

"Grrrrrr! (I don't know!)"

Cerberus ignored what Minhyuk said and tried to approach him. Seeing this, Minhyuk quickly picked up the bread and ate it. He also made sure to eat it very, very, very deliciously. It was as if he was teasing Cerberus with the food.

"Kyaaa! This red bean bread is really, *really* delicious!!!!"

"...!"

"...!"

"...!"

Cerberus' three heads turned to look at Minhyuk as if they had lost everything in the world. Then, Minhyuk took out another piece of bread.

*'Repetitive training is very important for dogs!'*

"Wait!"

"Grrrrrr! (What?)"

"Grrrrrr! (It seems like we won't be able to eat the bread if we get closer!!!)"

Cerberus stopped in their tracks for a moment and when they tried to walk, Minhyuk ate the bread again. Then, Cerberus finally stood still as Minhyuk used his 'Create a Recipe' skill. The food that they wanted to eat the most right now was dried pollack soup.

*'The dog's healthy food, dried pollack soup!!!'*

This was the food that was usually fed to dogs that had undergone surgery during hot summer days. It was a dish that could help them feel energized and rejuvenated.

Minhyuk started cooking, leaving the piece of bread in front of him. When he saw Cerberus started to approach him, he said, "Oho~ No~"

"..."

“...”

“...”

He quickly removed all the salt from the dried pollack soup, added the tofu and thoroughly beat the eggs. Minhyuk quickly finished the soup. After he let it cool down for a bit, he placed it in front of Cerberus.

Gulp, gulp, gulp—

Slurp, slurp, slurp—

Cerberus bowed all three of their heads and ate the dried pollack soup in three separate bowls! In fact, the only things that Cerberus ate in hell were rotten centipedes, decaying humans, and the stinky water from a nasty river. After eating only those things before, they were suddenly fed with the food that Minhyuk, someone who's DEX reached 3,000, had made. Food that had reached a godly level!

As the three heads continued to eat, they seemed to hear an angelic voice singing in their ears. The voice sang, ‘*Destiny~~~*’.?This was fate! Cerberus emptied three bowls in an instant. They suddenly pretended to sit down as they wagged their tail at Minhyuk, who had no desire whatsoever to accompany them, nor be with them.

*‘From what I heard, dogs eat a lot more than humans. If that’s the case, then how much can they eat?’*

So, Minhyuk just wanted to talk with them and move peacefully to the next trial. But...

*“Huff, huff, huff, huff.”*

*“Huff, huff, huff, huff.”*

...they grinned at Minhyuk and continued to shake their tails gently. Then, all of a sudden...

*“Kiiing, kiiing, kiing...”*

*“Kiiiing,?kiiingg....”*

*“Kiiing...”*

“...”

...their faces looked like the epitome of the words, ‘*You, become our master!*’

Minhyuk felt a sense of foreboding as he said, “N... No. Guys?”

However, no matter what he said, Cerberus had already decided by themselves.

*“Grrrrr! (We’re taking you as our master! Come on, quickly take us in. Master!)”*

*“Grrrrrr! (I want to eat some more, master.)”*

*“Grrrr. (Yeah! You have to be the one.?Master.)”*

“...”

Minhyuk's face crumpled. When a shocking notification rang, he looked like he was about to cry.

[Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus, swears their eternal loyalty to you.]

The scenario that Minhyuk imagined in his head was just trying to persuade Cerberus to let him go to the next trial, not one where they would become his pet dog! Alas, since it had already come to this, Minhyuk had no choice but to accept it and move on to the next trial. Minhyuk nodded reluctantly, tears brimming in his eyes.

[Cerberus is different from Hidden NPCs.]

[Please give them a name.]

Cerberus was not an NPC, but a monster. Just like Beanie and Rune, they needed to have a name. After taking a lot of things into consideration, Minhyuk gave them their names. He said, “You're Love, you're Happiness and you're Hope.”

Sniff—

Minhyuk sniffed proudly, he was in awe of himself.

*‘Wow. Look at my naming sense...’*

So great!

The Hell's Gatekeeper, Cerberus, now named Happiness, Love and Hope. Dubbed as the three musketeers, they smiled brightly at Minhyuk. Then, the notifications rang.

[You have completed the First Trial extraordinarily.]

[You have gained 100,000,000 EXP.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

Minhyuk's level had now reached Level 481. Considering that his guild members were all beyond Level 500, his level was still quite low.

[You can now increase the level of one of your artifact skills.]

[With your surprisingly amazing results, the artifact skills that were excluded before could now be strengthened too.]

[You have acquired Capri's Buckwheat.]

Minhyuk could finally eat his cold noodles.

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Minhyuk did not immediately climb up to the next trial. He first used the buckwheat that he received to make some cold noodles. My goodness! Would anyone believe it if he told them that he actually had some cold noodle machine in his inventory? Well, Minhyuk was that kind of person.

In front of Minhyuk, were bowls of cold noodles and spicy mixed noodles, all made of the buckwheat that he received and covered with a thin layer of ice. He also had some Ssamhyuk Naengmyeon's charcoal grilled meat and dumplings placed on the side.

Minhyuk first cut his cold noodles in a cross shape, then he tasted the cold broth before adding some vinegar and mustard to his bowl. Then, he grabbed some eggs, pears, pickled radish and meat together with some noodles, before slurping them up.

A smile gently hung in the corners of Minhyuk's lips as the flavor of the cold noodles spread in his mouth. There was even a hint of sourness from the radish and sweetness from the pears.

Then, Minhyuk wrapped a piece of meat with the noodles and placed it in his mouth.

"Sluuuuuuuurp!"

The sweet charcoal-grilled meat added a dash of savory to the dish. Then, Minhyuk grabbed the steel bowl containing his cold noodles to drink the cold soup.

"Ugh! Brain freeze!"

After feeling his head start to pound from the coldness, Minhyuk then turned his attention to the dumplings. The juice of the warm dumplings spread in his mouth the moment he bit into them. The flavors of the dish blended perfectly in his mouth. Minhyuk smiled happily as he ate the remaining half of the dumpling in his mouth.

After finishing his cold buckwheat noodles, Minhyuk turned to eat his spicy mixed noodles. He quickly broke the yolk of the egg placed on top of the noodles and mixed them together.

"That's right, this is the best way to eat spicy mixed noodles."

Minhyuk's mouth was watering as he continued to mix the noodles gently. After mixing the noodles, Minhyuk slurped the spicy mixed noodles in his mouth. He also did not forget to eat some dumplings together with the noodles. The dumplings were, in a way, to control the spiciness of the spicy mixed noodles. Charcoal-grilled meat was a perfect match for the spicy mixed noodles too.

"Sluuuuuuuurp!"

After eating his cold buckwheat noodles, Minhyuk gently turned to the side.

"Kkiiiing..."

"Kking, kking, kking..."

"Kiiiiiiiing."

Cerberus had their bellies and faces flat on the ground as they watched Minhyuk. They looked like golden retrievers waiting for their owner to pay attention to them.

"..."

Despite them acting cute, Minhyuk still shed tears at the thought of how much food these guys would eat in the future.

At the same time...



Conir, who rewound the crystal ball to see how Cerberus became Love, Happiness and Hope, gulped unknowingly.

Gulp—

“Looks...looks delicious...”

He also muttered words out loud without realizing it.

## Chapter 338: The Innocent Hero's Trial

*“Slurp!”*

Conir hurriedly wiped the drool that dripped down from his mouth. He thought to himself, *‘Get, get your act together.’*

My goodness! He was once hailed as the continent's Sword Saint. Rudor, the best Black Sorcerer of that time, could not even shake Conir's mental power with his brainwashing magic, but now!

*‘I can't believe I actually got entranced just by watching others eat.’*

Conir knew that the man was strange. Then, he looked at the Second Trial.

*‘The Second Trial... the Trial of Desire.’*

The Second Trial, the Trial of Desire, was literally a trial that gave the challenger what they wanted the most.

*‘Beautiful women, money, honor or power.’*

These were the things that men wanted the most in the world. Basically, the Second Trial's challenge was to get out of the place that was filled with what the challenger desired the most within the time limit.

*‘Anyone with a strong mental prowess can get out of there,’* Conir thought as he focused on the crystal ball to monitor the situation once again.

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Special Players Management Team.

Team Leader Park was staring at the monitor gravely. Player Minhyuk had entered the Innocent Hero's Trial and had performed a spectacular job by taming Cerberus and turning them into his subordinate during the First Trial.

“For some reason, I think there will be a *‘Love, Hope, Happiness’* house placed in front of Atlas Territory from now on. Right?”

“...”

Team Leader Park Minggyu became speechless.

*‘My god! These names would actually be written on the house where Cerberus, Hell's Gatekeeper, would live?!!!’*

What was more surprising was the fact that Cerberus willingly turned their belly up and wagged their tails for their owner, Minhyuk!

“*Ugh,*” Team Leader Park groaned lightly and saw that the Second Trial was now about to begin.

“The Second Trial is the Trial of Desire but... Player Minhyuk’s desire is...” Team Leader Park murmured as he continued to look at the monitor. Both Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa had their guesses.

The Second Trial was something that was meticulously created by the Athenae Production Team and was very different from other trials. The game system would read the player’s desire and literally express it in front of them. The trial would literally create the most wonderful dream that the player could ever have.

Usually, ordinary people would not want to wake up from their happiest dreams. The trial’s challenger would not even realize that they were inside the trial, albeit only temporarily, upon entry. It would just feel like a wonderful dream that they would not want to wake up from. The player just needed to do one thing, and that was to leave behind the desires laid in front of him. The player had to come back to their senses by themselves, and escape the trial.

Team Leader Park shook his head and said, “There’s no one else in the world that loves food more than Player Minhyuk. He’s always been greedy for food, more so than anybody else.”

If anyone looked closely at Minhyuk, his love for food would look like ‘greed’ itself. Anyone that saw him would wonder how he could become someone that was so gluttonous. He was more greedy for food than powerful artifacts and rewards. So, it was a foregone conclusion that this trial would not be easy.

Then, Minhyuk appeared in front of the monitor as Lee Minhwa exclaimed, “Wow, the trial... is an Aeshley Buffet?”

Aeshley Buffet was said to be famous for their affordable prices and delicious array of food!

Lee Minhwa said, “If you go there, you have to eat their boneless chicken. *Gulp*—.”

Then, she gulped loudly. Team Leader Park turned his head. For some reason, Lee Minhwa felt that Team Leader Park had become just a tad bit restless. But then, he said, “...I agree.”

“...?”

That was right. Aeshley’s chicken was the way, the truth and the life!

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Minhyuk burst out in exclamation, “W...wow...!”

He looked around in admiration at the sight in front of him. This was because he was in Aeshley Buffet, a place that he wanted to go so much to. The buffet that his dad’s friend, the CEO of Carend Enterprise built! He used to go often with his friends when he was younger, each time with fierce determination on his face.

*‘Hey, let’s go to Aeshley today and eat our money’s worth?’*

*‘Fufufufu. It’s not that hard to eat our money’s worth. Let’s go, I’m hungry!’*

Whenever Minhyuk said that, he would always stay true to his words and eat his money’s worth. As for his friends, they would usually stop after around two or three plates.

“Welcome~”

The employee guided Minhyuk and asked, “Have you dined at our shop before?”

“Yes, yes, yes!”

Surprisingly enough, *Athenae* was able to copy the exact same Aeshley Buffet in reality inside the Second Trial.

*‘This place is heaven!!!’*

Minhyuk’s steps were swift and quick as he took a plate and served himself food. His plate was piled up with boneless chicken, Aeshley’s main attraction! And that was not all, he also served himself carbonara, tomato spaghetti, and even the pizza slices from the pizza corner! Minhyuk also did not forget the dish that he always had as his first dish whenever he came to Aeshley. It was none other than creamy corn soup.

The bowl of creamy corn soup, an array of plates filled with different dishes, as well as cider and glasses of ice were prepared and laid out on Minhyuk’s table. He smiled brightly as he exclaimed loudly, “Thanks for the food!”

The main advantage of a buffet was that one could taste a variety of dishes. Some would choose to focus on one dish before going to another, while some would choose to taste a variety of dishes in one sitting.

The first thing that Minhyuk tasted was a spoonful of his creamy corn soup. The warmth and sweetness of the soup spread in Minhyuk’s mouth and stimulated his appetite.

*‘Eating soup first in a buffet protects your stomach and allows you to eat more in a buffet. Fufufufu,’* Minhyuk thought as he continued to whet his appetite with the creamy corn soup.

Meanwhile, the timer kept on ticking in the upper left corner of his vision...

[57M 56S, 57M 55S, 57M 54S...]

Minhyuk grabbed his fork and stabbed the steaming boneless chicken in front of him and said, “Kggghk. This is really Aeshley.”

Then, he put the chicken in his mouth after admiring it. The soft and juicy texture of the meat that immediately followed the crunchy texture of the chicken skin made Minhyuk’s mouth curl up in a smile.

After finishing the boneless chicken, Minhyuk turned his attention to the spaghetti. He dragged the carbonara and tomato spaghetti to him and used his chopsticks to roll the carbonara, before putting it in his mouth. The carbonara was cooked moderately as seen with its light and taste flavor in his mouth. The tomato spaghetti, on the other hand, tasted sweet and sour at the same time.

“Wahahahaha!” Minhyuk laughed happily as he stood up from his seat to get more food.

Although this was a virtual world, the employees and staff of this restaurant could also think and communicate since this was a world that was temporarily created. Adelei, the employee that was on duty, watched Minhyuk before rushing to her manager.

“M...Manager.”

“What is it?” Barrod, Adelei’s manager, asked curiously.

“A customer has emptied his plate in 22 seconds.”

“...?!”

*‘Emptied their plate in 22 seconds? Is that a speed a human can accomplish?’*

“Are you joking with me right now?” Barrod asked angrily. He was known for his bad temper so Adelei immediately placed her hands together and bowed after seeing him become angry.

“How can a person only take 22 seconds to empty their plate? Did he place two pieces of boneless chicken on his plate and ate it all in one go, huh?”

“N...not at all!”

“Ha! I’m already so busy that I feel like I would keel over but... Kid, you’re really...”

Barrod looked really pissed. It was dinner time, their hottest and busiest period. It was only normal for him to get angry at his employee that had the gall to play jokes on him, right?

Barrod walked to check the situation for himself as he said, “If what you said was true then I will give you my salary this month. But, if you’re not telling the truth, you better be prepared!”

The store manager strode forward angrily only to stop in his tracks.

“...?”

Barrod tilted his head in confusion.

*‘What’s that?’*

He could see seven clean plates piled up on the table, which made his already tilted head to tilt even further.

“By any chance, did some athletes come to that table?”

“N...no sir.”

Aeshley Buffet always removed empty plates the moment they were emptied. There was no way that their employees would fail to clean them up. In other words, those plates were emptied in record-breaking time.

“...”

The manager hurriedly rushed to check the bill for that customer, to determine the time that he started the buffet. He was appalled after confirming the time.

*‘He ate seven plates in 4 minutes and 38 seconds...?’*

Was he even human? Then, someone coughed beside Barrod and said, “Since you made a promise, I will take your salary this month.”

Adelei rubbed her middle and index fingers with her thumb!

“N...no. That, no...”

“Manager, you’re not going to take back your words, right? Hoho. There’s no way, right~ A man should never go back on his words, right? Are you telling me that Manager is not a gentleman? Eyyy~ That’s. Not. Possible, right? Hohohoho!!!”

“...”

Adelei made her manager shut his mouth before he could even retort. She was a woman that truly knew how to talk and converse with others!

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Minhyuk never stopped eating. This time, his plate was filled with meat: pork ribs, A ?smoked salmon, and even duck! He only gently grabbed a piece of ribs and it had already ripped apart. When he placed it in his mouth, the soft and sweet flavor of the ribs filled his mouth. There was not a single piece of meat left on the bone when he chewed on it. It was divine! Minhyuk dipped his duck in mustard sauce, while he enjoyed his smoked salmon with some apple dressing and onion!

“Keuhahaha! A buffet is really great!”

The employees eventually gave up on cleaning up his empty plates. For the record, Minhyuk had already piled up 47 empty plates. It did not end there. This time, he turned his attention to the fruits. Minhyuk attacked the Hawaiian mango salad and watermelon.

“Ugh. So cold! My teeth!”

Hawaiian mango salad was a fruit salad with frozen mango. Biting the mangoes with your teeth would make your teeth ache from the coldness. However, the sweet and crunchy texture of the watermelon was enough to bring a smile back to Minhyuk’s face.

He did not stop there. Minhyuk even asked the employees to make him a bowl of warm rice noodles to warm his chilled stomach.

“Sluuuuurp!”

The bean sprouts, together with the rice noodles, had a crunchy texture as he placed them in his mouth together. The kimchi on top of the noodles was like icing on the cake.

Meanwhile, the timer...

[11M 15S, 11M 14S, 11M 13S...]

...kept on ticking. Minhyuk just hummed as he picked up his plate and went to the dessert section.

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Conir was both shocked and bewildered as he watched Minhyuk eat. He said, "Your greatest desire is to eat?"

Of course, eating, hunger and appetite were part of a human's basic instinct. However, Conir never expected that Minhyuk's desire was eating. Then, Conir thought, *'He has a weak mentality.'*

The man looked like he was not aware that this was a trial as he indulged himself in his desire. He did not even look at the timer that kept on ticking.

*'Will there be no one that can learn my Pinnacle?'*

Conir sighed as he watched the man stand up with a bowl and prepared a huge serving of bingsu.

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The members of the Special Players Management Team shook their heads.

"It seems like even Player Minhyuk can't overcome the sweetest trial."

"Yeah..."

There were only a little over two minutes left in the timer, but Player Minhyuk still asked the employee for a large basin, as he began to make some bingsu. He piled up a huge amount of finely ground ice in the basin that was almost enough for 40 people. He also added some rice cakes, cereals, and red beans, before adding snacks like Pepperro and the likes. That was not all. Player Minhyuk went to the dessert section and grabbed handfuls of fruits, and around three heapings of vanilla ice cream on top of it. He was like a master in making bingsu. There were now only 20 seconds left.

"...So, there are things that even Player Minhyuk can't do," Team Leader Park said as he nodded. Just then, something unexpected happened.

[Lalalala~ I've already eaten everything, time to go~]

Player Minhyuk walked to the stairs leading to the next trial. With only two seconds left in the trial, Minhyuk stepped on the stairs while eating bingsu happily.

[Player Minhyuk has completed the Trial of Desire.]

"...!"

"...!"

Team Leader Park jumped up from his seat as he thought, *'What...what the hell...?!'*

He was left flustered and unable to understand the situation.

“Was he aware of the trial from the very beginning?!!!” Team Leader Park shouted in shock.

The only thing that they witnessed earlier was Minhyuk eating like a madman. But, from what just happened, it almost seemed like he had been conscious of the fact that it was a trial the moment he entered.

“A person can still be conscious of what he has to do, despite being faced with his greatest desire?”

Most people would deny the truth and reality when faced with the sweetest of dreams. They would always want more.

“By the end, he took away at least 40 servings of bingsu. He really has my respect!” Lee Minhwa, a promising glutton herself, exclaimed in awe.

“...”

Team Leader Park went speechless at Lee Minhwa’s words. Then, he thought, *‘Player Minhyuk suffers?from eating?addiction, how did...’*

Lee Minhwa might not know this fact, but Team Leader Park was fully aware. It was mainly because he knew that Minhyuk was suffering from a disease where he needed to constantly eat. That was why he thought that Minhyuk would not be able to overcome his desires. It was a very rare disease, what can a human’s willpower do against it? It was even a very terrifying and ridiculous disease that had killed someone just a few years back.

However, after thinking about it further, Team Leader Park wondered how Minhyuk stayed sane despite the hardships brought about by his disease. It must have been very hard, right?

*‘It seems like he has been controlling his monstrous appetite with his strong mental power...’*

The disease that Minhyuk had was a disease where he would not be able to stop himself from eating. But Minhyuk was able to control it to some extent. Based on that, Team Leader Park could tell that Minhyuk had a very strong willpower. After all, he was a man that was literally wrestling with his disease just using his strong mentality.

“He’s really cool, huh...?”

Fighting a disease with his willpower? Nothing could be cooler than that. Just as he was admiring the fact, the voices of the temporary employees rang loudly through the monitor.

[H...how can he eat 131 plates of food in an hour by himself...?!]

[Is...is he still human?!]

Then, Lee Minhwa said, “For Player Minhyuk, this trial was killing two birds with one stone. He can eat well in a buffet, and clear the trial at the same time.”

That was right.

However, the truth was the Production Team was very proud about the trial of desire, so much so that they had bragged about it. Alas, the trial that they were so proud of just made Minhyuk full and become stronger!!!

Meanwhile, Team Leader Park looked at Minhyuk through the monitor. He was smiling as he thought, *'It was because it's him. That's the only reason why he can catch two rabbits at the same time.'*

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[The Innocent Hero's Second Trial will now begin.]

[You will be undergoing the Trial of Desire. Please get your senses together and get away from your current situation and go to the next trial.]

*[Completing the trial will give you +1% in both physical and magical defense.]*

These were the notifications that Minhyuk heard when he entered the Second Trial, the Trial of Desire. However, this notification rang when Minhyuk was immersed in his happiness after seeing the variety of dishes in front of him. Minhyuk had always been constantly monitoring what kind of food, and just how much he ate, whenever he sat on the table to eat.

*'All I need to do is step on those stairs.'*

That was all he needed to do to complete the trial.

Minhyuk was someone that constantly toed the line between reality and dreams. He could just grab his wallet and run out of the mansion to relieve his intense hunger anytime that he wanted, but he did not do so. There was one time when he got so hungry that he got angry and screamed inside the mansion. However, even if he shouted to vent out his anger, he still did not eat.

Minhyuk's everyday life was a balance between 'fantasy' and 'reality', and he had always chosen reality. He had chosen to live longer for his father, for the people that cared for him, and for himself. Minhyuk was truly someone that had the power to overcome his desires and fantasy.

So, when he came in, he thought, *'I can just leave here as long as it's still within the time limit, right?'*

This was the precarious balance between fantasy and reality! But this time, it was a bit different. Minhyuk would be able to eat to his heart's content and earn rewards, despite still being conscious.

After eating well at Aeshley's Buffet, Minhyuk made a huge serving of bingsu enough for at least forty people, before walking away with the basin in his arms with a hum. When he ate a spoonful of the deliciously sweet bingsu, the sweetness immediately pervaded his mouth.

"Kggghk~ Brain freeze!"

Then, he stepped on the stair's third step.

[You have completed the Second Trial.]

[You have gained 5,000,000 EXP.]

[You have gained an additional +1% to your physical and magical defense.]



Unfortunately, there were no notifications that popped up in the Second Trial that mentioned anything about gaining ‘ingredients’. That was in fact the main reason why Minhyuk took his own sweet time in completing the Second Trial, as he decided to leisurely enjoy his food.

Through this trial, he was able to gain an additional 1% in his physical and magical defense. For rankers, the amount of physical and magical defense were usually in the hundreds. With that number, an increase of 1% meant that they would gain at least around 4 or 5 points in their defense, which was not small at all. There were even 23 steps left in this trial. What would happen if Minhyuk was able to conquer all of these steps?

*‘Won’t I completely change by then?’*

The reward that Minhyuk received from the First Trial was an enhancement of one of his artifact’s special abilities. The reward had strengthened Minhyuk’s Monarch Armor’s special ability to recover 100% of his HP and MP, and changed it to:

*‘HP and MP will recover to 100%, while your physical and magical defense will increase by 50% for ten minutes.’*

In other words, his artifact’s special ability had improved dramatically.

“Kyaaa!”

Minhyuk arrived in the Third Trial while still eating his 40 servings of bingsu. He even added plenty of Hawaiian mangoes and fruits, and made sure to add some condensed milk on top of it. Just as he was eating like that...

Step, step—

...he heard someone approaching.

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Asgan Continent was home to countless towers. There were towers for non-combat classes like the Chef Tower, the Blacksmith Tower, the Painter Tower, and many other towers. There were also towers for combat classes like the Knight Tower, the Mage Tower, the Archer Tower, the Warrior Tower, and the Assassin Tower.

These towers acted as a source of strength for the novice *Athenae* players that just received their classes, as well as a source of class quests. In fact, it was a well-known fact that the masters of these towers had power comparable to the kings of kingdoms.

The most powerful towers among the combat towers were none other than the ‘Knight Tower’ and the ‘Mage Tower’. The person that served as the Knight Tower’s first tower master, as well as its founder, was none other than Knight Arakhan, a knight that once dominated the entire continent. He taught the members of the Knight Tower the amazing swordsmanship called Faramil’s Swordsmanship.

However, Arakhan had once made a shocking and unbelievable statement. He said, *‘This swordsmanship was not created by me, but by a little boy.’*

Arakhan's statement brought shock to the entire continent. However, none of them believed his words. They just thought that he was being 'humble'. They also thought that he wanted to create a legend so he was just spouting baseless nonsense.

However, what Arakhan said was the truth. The creator of the Faramil Swordsmanship had taught Arakhan the swordsmanship. The only thing that he did was to modify it and make it much easier to learn, before spreading it to the world. Although Arakhan was hailed as the best knight of the continent, he was completely defeated under the hands of a boy. The boy that defeated him was named '*Conir*'.

Arakhan walked as he thought, '*Only the chosen ones could awaken the Pinnacle.*'

Arakhan had been temporarily awakened because of the Innocent Hero's Trial. He had readily responded to Conir's request based on his pure admiration for the young man named Conir.

*'I wonder how great the person that overcame the Second Trial is?'* Arakhan thought as he walked, only to stop in his tracks.

"Kgggghk~ Bingsu is really more delicious if it's already starting to melt, right?"

Arakhan stood as he stared at the man standing in front of him.

"Ah! Hello!"

"Huh, oh? Ah. Hello?"

Arakhan returned the man's polite greeting as the man continued to say, "Please wait, let me just finish my bingsu!"

The man was polite and amiable, so Arakhan ended up nodding and waiting for him to finish his food. The man in front of Arakhan ate bingsu deliciously, while Arakhan thought, '*Huh? Why did I agree to wait for him?*'

Arakhan was confused and bewildered. He watched as the man covered his bingsu and ate it up, only to look like he lost everything in the world after finishing it. He even had tears in his eyes as he looked at his empty basin.

"*Sob... I ate everything... What to do... I feel like I will cry just from the thought of not seeing you anymore...*"

His eyes were so sad, it was as if he had lost his brother!! He truly looked like he was going to cry!!!

"I've been too complacent... Ha... Please comfort me..."

"Ah, oh... R...right..." Arakhan said, momentarily forgetting about his mission, as he approached the man and patted him on his back.

"It...it's alright. The bingsu went to a better place... In your stomach..."

"*Sob.* Really? I can eat it again, right?"

Arakhan patted the man's back in confusion. He wondered to himself, '*Why am I comforting him?*'

To be fair, the man looked so innocent and pure! Since he was polite, Arakhan had forgotten his pious obligation for a moment. After coming to his senses, Arakhan hurriedly widened the distance between them, as he stared at the man.

*‘Why do I feel like this is somewhat familiar...?’*

Arakhan felt a sense of familiarity from the man. After pondering deeply, he realized, *‘He’s similar to Conir...’*

Innocent, pure and polite. The man kneeling in front of Arakhan strangely resembled the Sword Saint Conir of the past. For Arakhan, this thought was a little amusing.

Then, the notifications rang for the man, Minhyuk.

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[The Innocent Hero’s Third Trial has now begun.]

[Arakhan, the Legendary Sword of Asgan Continent of the past, has entered the trial as your guide.]

[Challenger Minhyuk’s status will temporarily change.]

[All of your stats will reflect your body’s condition in reality.]

[All of your equipped artifacts will be restricted and cannot be used.]

[You can use whatever means necessary to hunt the monsters that will appear in front of you.]

[You will get a reward with every monster that you hunt. Successfully hunting all five monsters will give you a better reward.]

[With the influence of the Wishing Stone, you might be able to obtain ingredients whenever you hunt a monster.]

“Hmmm,” Minhyuk hummed as he looked at his stats.

**(Minhyuk)**

.

Minhyuk nodded. Reflecting his body’s condition in reality meant that whatever status his body had in reality would be expressed as stats.

*‘Isn’t this trial quite extraordinary?’*

For some reason, Minhyuk felt that this was similar to the trial that he took for Sword God Valen in the past. However, he could also tell that it was subtly different.

First off, the words '*whatever means necessary*' was added in the notifications. Ordinary players might overlook this phrase, after all, it did not matter what they did, since they were just going to hunt monsters, right? However, Minhyuk interpreted it differently. Based on the notifications, he inferred that he could literally make use of everything around him and take full advantage of their usefulness.

Minhyuk looked around. He felt that the trial area was similar to a military training ground with swords, spears, bows, and even horses lined up. It looked like a common military training ground.

*'Normally, I would go for one of the swords over there.'*

It was only natural. After all, he could not use his current artifacts now and he could not fight barehanded, right? However, what if he thought differently and leaned towards something unconventional?

"Oh! Isn't Sir Arakhan's sword very cool and amazing?"

"Boy, you have very keen eyes, huh?"

"Ahahaha! Is there anyone in this world that wouldn't be able to recognize the greatness of your sword?"

"Hahahahaha! You're good with words!"

Minhyuk grinned to himself and thought, '*Let's get on with it. Fufu.*'

\*\*\*

The Production Team and Story Team were both currently inside the Special Players Management Team. This was because the Third Trial was part of an important category.

Lee Suk-hoon, the Development Team Leader, was impressed as he said, "Wow. He noticed that in just one glance?"

He was amazed with Minhyuk's sharp, keen eyes. However, Lee Suk-hoon smiled. He did not seem worried at all as he said, "Arakhan is not an idiot. Will he even willingly lend him his sword?"

Arakhan's sword was truly available for use in this trial. However, it was nigh impossible to be used. After all, the NPCs in *Athenae* had a high degree of freedom! And for them, their swords were like their own lifeline, especially for someone like Arakhan, a once prominent figure in the past. He had often showed off his great love and care for his sword!

The Production Team willingly removed Arakhan's sword's '*restriction*' for this trial. This was because they were confident that no one would be able to accomplish such a feat. Was there even someone that could borrow the sword of a past Legend, Arakhan?

At that moment, a very ominous voice rang in the room.

[Have you eaten?]

They could see Minhyuk smiling through the monitor. Lee Minhwa's mouth opened blankly as she thought, '*It...it started! Player Minhyuk has used his devil's whisper...!*'

Then, Arakhan said...

[It's been hundreds of years, so it's safe to say that I haven't had a meal, right?]

[Nooooo!!!! This! You haven't eaten anything for hundreds of years...?! This breaks my heart!!!!]

Then, everyone in the room saw the corners of Minhyuk's lips curling up ominously!

## Chapter 340: The Ruler of the Forest

"That, that smile..." Team Leader Park shouted as a chill ran down his spine.

However, Team Leader Lee Suk-hoon just smirked. He said, "What? You think Player Minhyuk's seduction through food will work every time? Arakhan is a legendary figure. Besides, a sword is a knight's lifeline! Arakhan will be different from the rest."

Lee Suk-hoon was brimming with confidence. Team Leader Park nodded in response. Just like what Lee Suk-hoon said, Arakhan was the Legendary Sword. Aside from that, he was the first Tower Master of the Knight Tower, right? It would not make sense if he lent his sword to Player Minhyuk.

Then, Team Leader Park recalled something before saying, "From what I recall, this trial has five stages. If the challenger receives an impossible score, a hidden system will be triggered, is that correct?"

"That's right. However, we only see it as something impossible. To be honest, Player Minhyuk's stats are a reflection of his body's condition. From what I saw, his stats are not that of an ordinary person, but that of a national athlete. Even if that was the case, it would still be hard for him, as an ordinary person, to hunt monsters."

"Hmm..."

That was a fact. The third trial was comparable to an ordinary person hunting monsters. Unfortunately, the monsters were extraordinarily strong.

"Then, what will happen if an additional system is triggered?"

"The monsters that will appear will become more powerful and the rewards will be more amazing."

Team Leader Park nodded after hearing that answer. It was a hidden system that did not differ much from other systems. After all, it was a privilege for the players that had reached the realms of the impossible.

*'Right, it's just like what Team Leader Lee Suk-hoon had said...'*

No matter how much Player Minhyuk tried to fool and cajole Arakhan, would someone like him really fall for something like that?

"I see, so we can rest assured."

Flinch!

Lee Minhwa's eyes widened as she turned to look at Team Leader Park after hearing his words.

*'The...the taboo words...!'* Lee Minhwa thought, feeling very, very worried.

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The young man who introduced himself as Minhyuk, looked at Arakhan with tears in his eyes!

"It really pains me!!! How can you not have eaten any meals for hundreds of years?! *Sob, sob, sob!*"

"Is...is that so?" Arakhan said, feeling that it was truly the case after hearing Minhyuk's words. After all, he had waited here for hundreds of years to help guide Conir's descendants.

Then, Minhyuk held Arakhan's hands and said, "I'll treat you to a very delicious meal."

"N...no. Before that, the trial..."

"Shhh," Minhyuk shushed, placing his index finger on Arakhan's mouth. Then, he continued to say, "I know everything. Just tell me what you want to eat. Don't worry, I'm a chef that cooks delicious food! Besides, I'm so happy that I met with Mister Arakhan, that I want to do my best to cook a dish for you!"

Arakhan was completely moved by his words. He thought, *'He's very considerate. And he even wants to do his best for me?'*

[You have received Arakhan's favor.]

The notification rang in Minhyuk's head. It was to be expected. After all, even his face was showing the deepest and most sincere expression.

All of this was in Minhyuk's plans. Besides, the thought of receiving ingredients for every monster that he hunted was enough for him to show sincerity in his words and actions. These words truly came from the depths of his heart! As long as Arakhan ate his food, he would definitely be entranced and enchanted!

Then, Arakhan said, "Toast. I want to eat toast. With strawberry juice."

"I see."

Minhyuk nodded. This was something that he already knew since he had used his 'Create a Recipe' skill earlier. The toast that Arakhan wanted was even the 'Crunchy Ham and Vegetable Special Toast' that was commonly seen in the market. The biggest takeaway here was that it also happened to be Minhyuk's favorite flavor.

So, Minhyuk quickly whipped his pan out and spread plenty of butter on it to grill the bread, the ham, and the well-beaten eggs. After grilling and frying everything, he took the bread and spread some jam on top of it. As Minhyuk applied the jam, he made sure to add some 'Sea Honey' in it.

*'Fufufu.'*

Minhyuk chuckled ominously and quietly, as he finished the toast and moved on to make strawberry juice. Of course, Minhyuk replaced the sugar with the highly addictive Sea Honey.

After finishing everything, Minhyuk wrapped the toast with a wrapper and served it to Arakhan, together with the strawberry fruit juice. Then, the same toast and fruit juice appeared in front of Minhyuk through his 'Joy of Eating Together' skill.

*'Toast...'*

The only reason why Arakhan wanted to eat toast was because his wife used to make it for him back when he was still alive. His wife was a very good cook and toast was something that she did the best.

The man named Minhyuk said that he was a good cook, but Arakhan believed that he would not be able to satisfy his palate. Still, it would be fine as long as he could savor that fantastic flavor once again.

Arakhan slowly took off half of the wrapper and took a bite of the toast. The moment he bit into it, he tasted the warm and soft bread, the sweet apple jam, the savory ham and cheese, as well as the soft eggs that worked in perfect harmony with the crunchy cabbages. The flavor was indescribably delicious!

For a moment, Arakhan did not know what to say. His mind went blank and turned weird as he said, "D...Darling!"

Screech!

Minhyuk, who was enjoying his toast, turned to look at Arakhan with trembling eyes. He said, "Your...your type..."

"N...no! Ahem, ahem."

.

To be honest, the toast in Arakhan's hands right now tasted much better than the toast that his wife made for him.

*'How can it taste like this...'*

Arakhan was shocked as he reached out for the strawberry fruit juice.

Slurp—

Sweet and delectable strawberry fruit juice flowed into Arakhan's mouth as he sucked on the straw. There were even strawberry bits that he could bite with every mouthful. Arakhan could not help but be amazed by the refreshing sweetness and coolness of the drink.

*'Wow...'*

Arakhan visibly sped up as he continued ravaging his crunchy toast and sweet strawberry juice. He said, "This is the best toast that I have ever tasted. Thank you."

"I did my best since Mister Arakhan told me that this is your first meal in hundreds of years."

Then, the notifications rang for Minhyuk once again.

[You have received Arakhan's favor.]

Minhyuk decided to ride the rhythm.

"That... by any chance..."

Minhyuk carefully chose his words and said, "Can I borrow your sword?"

"Hmm? Are you talking about my sword?" Arakhan asked as he looked down at his sword, the very same sword that had been with him for decades. The sword that saved him and countless other lives from his enemies. Then, Arakhan felt the flames of anger burn in him.

"Boy, I can see that you also use a sword. You should know how important a sword is to a knight. But you still asked me to lend you my sword? It seems like you don't understand it well... I'm very disappointed in you."

[Arakhan's favor has decreased.]

This was when Minhyuk learned that the 'sword' was like a knight's second life, their very own lifeline. He thought, *'It's harder than I thought. Then, let's switch methods.'*

The trial had no time limit after all.

*'It will take a little more time for the addicting effect of the honey to take effect.'*

Then, Minhyuk said, "I'm so sorry. How dare I think of Mister Arakhan's sword. I was just very curious about it. I will be careful next time."

"Right. It's good that you understand."

Arakhan was quite upset, but thinking about the dish that Minhyuk made for him, he decided to compromise.

"I feel sorry that I made Mister Arakhan mad at me. I will go back to my world for a moment to look back and reflect on myself."

"Hmm," Arakhan hummed in agreement. He also knew about the existence of foreigners. He smiled after seeing Minhyuk disappear.

"Although he made a slip of the tongue, he's still an innocent and kind young man. *Aaah.*"

That was what Arakhan thought. Then, an hour passed as he waited for Minhyuk's return.

*'That toast really tasted delicious. Even the strawberry juice was delectable.'*

Just the thought of those dishes made Arakhan's mouth water. He recalled the taste of the warm and crunchy toast that he ate earlier. The flavor and harmony that was created from the blend of the sweet apple jam and the various ingredients in the toast was truly scrumptious! There was also that



strawberry juice! It was enough to quench the thirst in his mouth after eating the toast with just a single sip.

Then, about two hours later...

*‘Why do I feel like my body is losing strength? Even my sweat is cold?’*

...something completely incomprehensible happened. Arakhan felt the strength leave his body. Even his mouth and right hand were both trembling and twitching. Arakhan quickly grabbed his right hand with his left hand.

*‘Just a bite of that toast will make me feel better. I’m sure of it. No, not just one bite, just the smell...’*

Half a day passed by in a blink.

*‘T...toast... I want to eat toast...!’*

Arakhan wanted to eat that toast again. However, Minhyuk still had not come back from his world. Arakhan thought that it would be better if he slept, so he went to sleep but...

*“Chew, chew.”*

...he dreamt that he was eating toast. However, a dog suddenly appeared in his dreams, took his toast and ran away.

*“Give me back my toast, you bastard!!! Faramil’s Swordsmanship Chapter Three!!!”*

Arakhan even used Faramil’s Swordsmanship to chase after an escaping dog in his dreams.

*“Huff, huff, huff!”* Arakhan breathed roughly as he woke up in a cold sweat from his scary nightmare.

*‘He should be back now, right?’*

But Minhyuk still did not come back.

*‘C...come back quickly and make me some toast... please...!’*

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Since the first method did not work, Minhyuk could tell that the relationship between the sword and its owner was much more important than he initially thought. So, Minhyuk switched to Plan B.

Plan B was keeping Arakhan waiting for a long time after being fed his dish! In other words, Minhyuk would be using the carrot and stick method. Since Minhyuk had already given Arakhan a carrot, he was now working on giving him the stick.

After spending an entire day in reality, Minhyuk finally logged back inside the game. When he came back inside, he was met with a pale Arakhan. It seemed like Arakhan had been waiting for him.

*“B...boy!”*

“Oh my. I’ve been outside for too long, right?” Minhyuk asked naturally.

Arakhan was sweating and trembling as he said, “Ha, haha. It’s, it’s alright. M...more than that, can you make me that thing that you made me the last time?”

“That thing? What thing?”

“Y...you know... that, that warm and sweet thing...”

This was the usual withdrawal symptoms from food addiction after eating Minhyuk’s food! At first, one would sweat and tremble as the desire to eat more of his dishes surged up from within them. Once things progressed further, they would start to feel extreme hunger and desire to eat that dish again. And by the end...

“Pl...please cook me that dish one more time! I’m not saying that you should cook it for me for free, money is not a problem!”

“*Sigh.*? I have enough money. Mister Arakhan, you don’t look that well. Please take some rest...”

“Boy, your cooking will make me feel better!!!”

“But... didn’t you refuse me when I asked you to lend me your sword?”

“...!”

Arakhan’s eyes widened. That really did happen.

“That... that... that... I’m sorry about that.”

“I cooked for you with all my heart but... *sigh*... I’m already hurt.”

Arakhan readily held his sword out to Minhyuk the moment he heard his words.

Then, Minhyuk said, “I already got hurt! Do you think I’ll feel better just because you are lending it to me now? *Hmph.*”

Arakhan became restless after hearing Minhyuk’s snort. So, Arakhan asked, “W...what do you want? I’ll do whatever you want!”

Minhyuk’s eyes were staring at one place. Arakhan had taken off his armor earlier and placed it there.

‘*Fufufufu!*’

Minhyuk’s smile was borderline sinister. Since Arakhan had rejected him before, it was only right that he get double the price when he cooked for him the next time, right? Minhyuk needed to overcome the trial to get his food, and this was truly a clever method. Then, the notifications rang...

[You can now borrow the Sun God’s Sword from Arakhan.]

[You can now borrow Phrakan’s Armor from Arakhan.]