

Gourmet 1021

Chapter 1021

Conir and Herakel were clearly two of the strongest people in the Beyond the Heavens Empire. But from the most ordinary wives down to the pot-bellied uncles and the old men, they all viewed Conir and Herakel as people they needed to protect.

Perhaps because the two of them had intellectual disabilities, they did not possess the greed that ordinary humans did. The two would greet each and every single one of the people of the empire who passed by the ramyeon shop that they were running. People would often look at them with motherly and fatherly smiles.

Of course, the same was true for the most prominent figures of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“How dare you hurt my babies, the apple of my eyes...”

The Spear God cared for them as if they were truly his grandchildren.

“Balaman. I will take your neck.”

The Fallen Emperor Brod was their ever-dependable uncle. Like the two, the countless people who appeared around Minhyuk were overcome with fury.

“Their hyung is the Battle God.”

Of course, the same was true for Minhyuk. He felt highly furious.

Minhyuk met the escorts, who were supposed to guide Prince Cardin safely back to the Luvien Empire. He had been talking to them when he heard the Vassal’s Voice’s notification telling him Conir was in danger. Minhyuk did not waste any time. He immediately warped to where Conir was.

When he appeared, he saw Balaman and his knights mocking and trampling on his beloved brothers.

[Duke Balaman. Level 831.]

[Red Skull First Knight Vaghanen. Level 778.]

[Red Skull Second Knight Achaner. Level 754.]

[Red Skull Third Knight Praenon. Level 732.]

[Red Skull...]

Minhyuk glared coldly at everyone around him, including Duke Balaman and his Red Skull knights. He could tell their basic level was slightly higher than the Swords of the Gods. There was also the Black Skull Knight Order. The average level of their members was at Level 620, which proved that they were no easy opponents.

Duke Balaman looked slightly flustered when the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor and executives appeared before him. However, he soon laughed.

“The Beyond the Heavens Empire has gotten involved with Prince Cardin. Once I become the emperor, I will take down the Beyond the Heavens Empire in my first week on the throne.”

This was how confident Balaman was of his powers. He even thought that this situation was better.

“It’s better like this. I can wipe you all out in one go,” Balaman arrogantly declared.

Balaman had been training the Black Skull Knight Order members for a very long time because he was preparing to become the emperor in the future. Their training was far more intense than the training that the Swords of the Gods received.

‘The outstanding and brilliant names of the Beyond the Heavens Empire vassals are no match against my Red Skull knights. After all, my knights have overcome countless hardships and adversities.’

Balaman was confident about this matter.

Boom—!

At that moment, the Red Skull First Knight Vaghanen leaped toward them. As if on signal, the rest of the Red Skull knights lead the Black Skull knights and charge toward the people that appeared.

Vaghanen wanted to exchange blows with Spear God Ben. He thought, *‘He’s the one who became the Spear God because he received the recognition of the Gods.’*

Vaghanen’s assessment of Spear God Ben was just like that. He believed that the only reason Spear God Ben was able to become the Spear God was that he inherited the power of the previous generation's Spear God.

‘I have trained with Duke Balaman for a long time and had many brushes with death during the process.’

But that was not all. He had also gone to find several world-renowned spear masters to compete with the spear. The result? He knocked all of them down in one strike. He was even powerful enough to be comparable to Don, the previous commander of the Swords of the Gods.

When his spear clashed with Ben, he felt power not strong enough to lift a pair of chopsticks.

‘As expected. My assumptions were correct. His spear doesn't even feel heav...’

The moment he thought so, Vaghanen had the illusion that his spear was being sucked somewhere.

“You believed too much in your strength and grew conceited. *Fufu.*”

In the first place, Ben did not respond to his attack. He just gently let it slip past him.

Clang— Clang, clang!

Vaghanen frantically thrust his spear, but Ben evaded every single one of his attacks with ease. Ben even avoided his attacks by applying minimal force to his ankles.

Unfortunately for Vaghanen, his preconceived thoughts about the hardships and adversities that Ben had experienced were utterly different from reality. This was mainly because Ben did not tell

anyone in the Beyond the Heavens Empire about how he became the Spear God. Ben, an old veteran, had experienced hundreds of deaths to the point that his soul was left on the verge of extermination during the Spear God's trial.

Slash, slash, slash—!

Ben's spear easily pierced through Vaghanen's body. Immediately after that, a rain of blood fell as Ben used his spear to pierce the necks of the Black Skull knights charging at him.

Red Skull Praenon was flustered when he saw Vaghanen, the first knight of their order, get beaten so easily. But he quickly came back to his senses.

'Asura and Elizabeth.'

Asura Ascar was a woman widely discussed in the Luvien Empire. But in the end, she was nothing but a mere foreigner. If they were fighting based on brute force, then perhaps his chances were a bit tilted. But since she was a stranger, her skills fell far behind his own.

Bang—!

Asura and Praenon's swords collided.

'The Beyond the Heavens Empire's foreigners could not even hold a candle against the Luvien Empire's Sword of the Gods First Knight Order.'

Because of that, Praenon concluded that she was no match for him. He began to put heavier pressure on Ascar and her bloody greatsword. A greatsword had a stronger destructive power compared to other swords. The problem was it was heavy and could reduce one's speed significantly.

Clang, clang, clang—!

However, the only data they had in their hands was from the past. Because of that, there was something that they did not know. And that was the fact that Asura Ascar had continued to grow.

"Asura's Two-Sword Style."

Boom—!

Blood, which seemed like it would flow on the ground, gathered and turned into swords in Ascar's hands.

"How dare you do that to those two cuties(?)" Ascar said, her wrath almost reaching the heavens.

Slash, slash, slash—!

When Ascar was still known as the Ghost of the Battlefield, her primary weapons were twin swords.

With two swords in her hands, Ascar began to push back Praenon. Praenon was taken aback when he saw her flashy two-sword style swordsmanship. Even so, he remained calm. He tried to release his sword light to create a gap and counter.

[Mana Control.]

[Your mana has been controlled and restricted by Elizabeth's power.]

“...!”

On the other hand, Ascar remained free of the restriction.

“Blood Storm.”

Slash, slash, slash—!

A massive storm of blood engulfed Praenon and made him scream.

“Keuaaaaaack!”

Meanwhile, Great Demon Elpis, Gorfido, Love, Hope and Happiness, Sword of the Gods Luo, and the rest dealt with the more than 350,000 strong troops of the Black Skull Knight Order at a rapid pace.

“...”

Balaman was somewhat shocked by the unexpectedly good performance of the Beyond the Heavens Empire during the battle.

There was one thing that he did not know of. It was the fact that he and his Black Skull Knight Order were just a mere part of the Luvien Empire, while the people of the Beyond the Heavens Empire that had gathered here were their best elites. At this moment, Balaman realized that the Beyond the Heavens Empire was not behind the Luvien Empire.

‘This is getting a bit dangerous.’

The warmongering Balaman saw Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor Minhyuk and Brod charging straight at him.

Bang—!

He swung his sword at Minhyuk, who was rapidly approaching him and went ahead to clash swords with Brod.

Brod was quite impressed when he clashed swords with Balaman. He thought, *‘So there were still talents like him in the Luvien Empire?’*

The extent of Balaman’s power was beyond imagination. And the fact that Brod could not get the advantage and overwhelm him was proof of this. Balaman quickly changed his plans.

As mentioned before, Balaman was an ordinary human being, yet he was also not. One of the reasons for this was that he signed a contract with the God of Death even though he was not the God of Death’s successor. The only downside to this was that the price that he had to pay was his soul. And this price was far too steep. The contract stipulated that he would become the God of Death’s slave for eternity once he died and went to hell.

This just went to show how much Balaman wanted to become an emperor. He desired it so much that he even willingly sold his soul. After signing the contract, Balaman was able to gain several unusual powers. And this was one of those powers.

[Song of the Black Skull.]

[The Song of the Black Skull restricts the movement of all but one person.]

[Those who have received the restriction will be unable to move while the song is playing.]

[The Song of the Black Skull's duration is thirty minutes.]

Ttiriririri~

Everyone in the area froze on the spot when the flute's strange and eerie sound rang. Even Ben, who had leaped into the air to stab the neck of one soldier, was left frozen in mid-air. The soldiers, who Elpis stabbed in the abdomen, were also frozen mid-scream. The only thing that everyone could move was their eyes.

[Those who have received the restriction of the Song of the Black Skull will not receive any damage.]

[Only those the skill caster has chosen can move freely while the Song of the Black Skull is still playing.]

And the one chosen by Duke Balaman was none other than Minhyuk. Balaman could not help but cackle when Brod, fighting with him, stopped moving.

“Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor. This battlefield is yours and mine alone.”

Duke Balaman was a lunatic. But on the battlefield, he was the most rational and wise. And he had judged that killing Minhyuk was of the utmost priority.

“You are nothing without the protection of the Spear God, Brod and Luo.”

[Red Skull's Coliseum.]

Crack, crack, crack—!

This time, thousands of red skeletons broke out from the ground. Minhyuk tried to move away from his current position, but one of the red skeletons had already held him tight and forced him to remain where he was. The skeletons gradually piled up and turned into massive walls, creating a space for Balaman and Minhyuk to fight.

[Balaman's attack power will increase by 7% inside the walls of Red Skeletons.]

The skeletons even created a ceiling and closed off the entire space. Finally, Minhyuk and Balaman disappeared from everyone's view.

Silence engulfed the entire area. The noise inside the coliseum seemed to have been cut off from the rest of the world. Even the sound of weapons clashing against each other had also disappeared. Everyone was frozen because of the Song of the Black Skull.

But one thing was obvious. The people from the Beyond the Heavens Empire were anxiously calling out to Minhyuk, who was trapped inside the Red Skull Coliseum, in their hearts.

‘Your Majesty...!’

‘Your Majeeeeeesty!’

‘How- How can this be! This ridiculous power...!’

There was worry for Minhyuk in everyone's eyes.

Meanwhile, Prince Cardin was also left unable to move. He had been away for a long time and did not know the exact story. But he had heard some stories about the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire.

The Luvien Empire had grown increasingly large under the rule of Nerva. The Beyond the Heavens Empire, an emerging nation, became a threat to the Luvien Empire. But what was surprising was the fact that the Beyond the Heavens Empire was only 1/20th, perhaps even less, of the Luvien Empire. There was one reason why the Beyond the Heavens Empire could be on par with Luvien.

‘It’s because of his outstanding vassals.’

Cardin had heard that the emperor was very competent. But the fact that his vassals held power beyond this world remained. But what about Duke Balaman?

‘He possesses an extreme power.’

Cardin had also heard of Duke Balaman’s reputation.

‘He killed ten million troops by himself.’

It was quite a ridiculous story. In fact, it was something that could only be heard in legends. But it was also possible. Cardin had heard that he fought the war for two months when he killed the ten million troops. That was right. The story about Duke Balaman single-handedly killing ten million soldiers and overthrowing an empire was a legend.

Because of that, Prince Cardin believed that the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor would not be able to defeat Duke Balaman.

Time kept flowing just like that. Even so, there was no sign that the Song of the Black Skull would end anytime soon.

Drip, drip, drip—!

Blood slowly started to flow through the walls made from red skeletons.

“Du— Duke Balaman!”

“Your Majesty Minhyuk!”

And along with this grotesque scene, the song finally ended.

The Black Skull and Red Skull knights all erupted in cheers.

“Duke Balaman has killed the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor!”

“This is an achievement that will go down in history!”

“The new emperor of the Great Luvien Empire has brought punishment upon the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor!”

Crack, crack, crack—!

Then, the Red Skull Coliseum began to crumble and fall apart at that moment. The Red Skull knights looked beyond the crumbling walls with bright smiles. And Prince Cardin? His face grew ugly.

Finally, they saw the scene hidden from their view.

“What bullshit are you saying?”

It was the scene of Minhyuk standing tall while Duke Balaman lay on the ground with blood all over his body.

Chapter 1022

[Red Skull Coliseum.]

[Balaman’s attack power will increase by 7% inside the walls of Red Skeletons.]

[You are trapped inside the Red Skull Coliseum.]

[Anyone trapped inside the Red Skull Coliseum cannot consume any food, potion, or consumables made in advance.]

[The Red Skull Coliseum will collapse on its own after thirty minutes.]

[However, if Balaman’s HP drops below 40%, the Song of the Black Skull and the Red Skull Coliseum will end in advance.]

These were the notifications that rang in Minhyuk’s ears. He was looking around the coliseum, which was larger than he had expected. He was in a constant state of tension as he remained on guard against Duke Balaman.

‘Duke Balaman is the greatest reason why the Luvien Empire is what it is now.’

Nerva was saying that he should never become the emperor. Still, it was true that Duke Balaman was one of the contributors who made the Luvien Empire what it is now.

As someone who loved wars, he purged all kingdoms and empires that went against the Luvien Empire one after another. Minhyuk even heard that he reaped the heads of more than a hundred monarchs of kingdoms and empires by himself. He was a human born to fight.

“Let’s get this done quickly. I’ll have to kill Brod right after you.”

Duke Balaman did not perceive Minhyuk as a threat. After all, any dishes made in advance and placed in the inventory were made useless inside the Red Skull Coliseum. But that was not all. Duke Balaman also possessed the artifact called the “Absolute One’s Breaker Ring.” It was a God-rank artifact that could ignore powers like barriers.

Minhyuk did not know about this fact and said, “Let’s Have a Meal.”

Minhyuk immediately tried to create an invincible barrier to find a way to respond to Duke Balaman. But that was where the problem was. Duke Balaman stood in front of the barrier for a moment before walking past it as if nothing blocked his path.

“Shit...!”

“Black Skull’s Grudge.”

Black skulls appeared and slammed straight into Minhyuk.

[The Black Skull’s Grudge has made you weaker.]

[The first attack that lands on your body will completely ignore your defenses.]

[The first attack that lands on your body will have an additional 3,200% damage.]

Slash—!

Balaman swung his sword and slashed Minhyuk.

[Your HP has dropped below 81%.]

Minhyuk's eyes grew wide from shock. His HP dropped by nearly 20% with just a simple attack from Duke Balaman.

'From what I heard, he is known for being able to cast debuffs using the undead.'

Duke Balaman was not only a brilliant knight but also someone who could cast shocking debuffs. This was why he could be said to be a powerhouse who did not lag behind Duke Vlad.

'I think it's because of that ring? I don't think my invincible body will be able to exert its power because of that ring.'

Minhyuk had seen the skull-shaped ring on Duke Balaman's fingers flash with red light when he struck at him.

Minhyuk quickly used Like the Wind and narrowed the distance between them to try and fight back. He dug in and aimed for Duke Balaman's heart as he cast Sword of Frenzy. But Duke Balaman quickly twisted his body and avoided the attack. All the while raising his sword and cutting Minhyuk's body down.

Slash—!

[Your HP has dropped below 78%.]

The damage Minhyuk received had significantly reduced compared to the first attack, but it was still surprising.

Clang— Clang, clang— Clang—!

Duke Balaman pressed forward and put heavy pressure upon Minhyuk. With Duke Balaman attacking him closely, Minhyuk quickly triggered the Intangible Sword.

Boom—!

The power that would allow the sword to hit his opponent pierced Duke Balaman's chest.

"Ugh!"

Hundreds of invisible swords immediately followed it. Surprisingly enough, Duke Balaman could evade the hundreds of invisible and intangible swords, which could ignore all defenses just by using his senses alone.

'Isn't he a monster?'

At this moment, Minhyuk felt the same way when he was overwhelmed by Envoy Viel in the past.

Minhyuk summoned Viel's Puppet Doll and the Ego Chain Sickle and sent them toward the madly charging Duke Balaman.

Clank, clank, clank—!

Viel's Puppet Doll was the most potent and most lethal weapon. When partnered with the Ego Chain Sickle, it could be said that their power could reach its peak.

“You have many cheap tricks up your sleeve, huh?” Balaman grinned. “It's not hard to break a weapon with an ego equivalent to a child's, you know?”

Balaman had encountered weapons like this hundreds, perhaps even tens of thousands, of times before. After clashing blades with Viel's Puppet several times, Balaman grabbed the puppet by the neck and slammed it on the ground.

Bang—!

He stomped on the puppet's head before plucking the swinging chain sickle from the ground. The duke struck the chain sickle once and forced it to get stuck on the ground.

Boom—!

[Skull's Restriction.]

[The Black Skeletons neutralize Viel's Puppet Doll and the Ego Chain Sickles.]

Then, he summoned several black skeletons. They moved to suppress the body of Viel's Puppet Doll and prevented the Ego Chain Sickle from moving.

‘What the hell is this...?’

In just ten seconds, Viel's Puppet Doll and the Ego Chain Sickle were rendered immobile and disabled.

‘Do I have to trigger Calamity?’

No, Minhyuk had a hunch that if he used Calamity right here and now, he would be the one beaten.

‘If I can cut down his HP below 40%, then the Red Skull Coliseum will collapse.’

That was the goal that Minhyuk had to go after. As that thought crossed his mind, he quickly triggered his Almighty Tool.

Shwaaaaa—

Minhyuk threw the ingredients of the dish that he wanted to make in the air. At the same time, the Almighty Tool, which was a spatula, turned into a basket on its own and caught all of the ingredients that he threw in the air.

Thud—

Then, he threw the Bizarre Cauldron out. The pair of Almighty Tools repeatedly changed their forms on their own and straightened the cauldron. Balaman was quite shocked to see this scene.

‘I have never heard that he had this power before?’

Tools that moved and cooked on their own? It was pretty fun. But he was confident that Minhyuk would die even before he finished cooking.

Shwaaaaaaa—!

Minhyuk, hearing the crackling of the flames, tried to focus on Balaman again.

“Black Skull’s Final Attack.”

Hundreds of black skulls appeared and got sucked into Balaman’s sword. Then, this sword soon struck Minhyuk.

Slash—!

“Keuhaaaack!” Minhyuk groaned. But even at the moment that he was forced to fold and collapse, he was still able to land a strike on Duke Balaman. At the same time, beads made of blood were absorbed in his body and restored some of his HP.

Balaman was impressed by Minhyuk’s response to his attacks. He said, “It seems like I have to truly kill you here today.”

The Minhyuk that Balaman knew was nothing but a Food God. Yet someone, who possessed the Food God class had that much power? There was also the fact that Minhyuk had not yet eaten any dishes as of the moment.

Balaman judged that if Minhyuk could eat his dishes, he would become stronger and better than him. But a brief look behind Minhyuk and he could tell that the dishes that those self-cooking tools were making were only likely to be finished after the walls made of red skeletons collapsed.

Shwaaaaaaa—!

When he looked back at Minhyuk after taking that very brief glance, he saw that there were now two swords in the emperor’s hands.

God’s Dual Sword Technique was a skill that could increase Minhyuk’s attack speed by as much as 70%. Not only that, it also had the power to increase the damage of Minhyuk’s skills by 1.4 times. And when he successfully launched a series of consecutive attacks, he could double the number of attacks he had released. In fact, God’s Dual Sword Technique was considered overpowered because of the increase in speed.

Immediately after that, Minhyuk also triggered the Black Dragon’s Armor. The armor, which was created by a transcendental being, changed. Black scales appeared and began to cover his entire body.

Slash— Slash, slash— Slash—!

Minhyuk gritted his teeth.

‘The ring does not get triggered every time.’

Something would be neutralized whenever a red light flashed from Duke Balaman’s ring.

Minhyuk danced around Duke Balaman with his two swords and surprisingly overwhelmed the man. Blood spurted out of Balaman’s body with every cut that Minhyuk made. But it did not take too long for Minhyuk to feel frustrated.

Balaman looked down at Minhyuk with a calm and expressionless face. It was as if he was looking at nothing but a mere novice.

“An emperor must be strong.”

This was Balaman's personal opinion. Minhyuk could not help but agree.

"They should never be weak, like you, who only knows how to hide behind your vassals."

Despite the blood gushing out of his body, Balaman was still smiling. Not long after, the blood that dripped down his body shook. Then, it got sucked back inside his body. Just like that, his injuries began to heal again.

"..."

"I have been drinking troll blood since I was a child in preparation to become an emperor."

That was right. Balaman had wanted to become an emperor since he was a child, and his mother and father also wished for him to do so.

Because of that, he had been enduring harsh and unbearable training since he was a young child. Several decades had passed since then. Fueled by the desire to stand at the highest position, not only did he endure harsh training for so many years, he even went so far as to sell his soul to the God of Death.

This just went to show how much Balaman wanted to become the emperor. And yes, he was fully prepared to carry the heavy weight that accompanied such a title.

"You bastard, do you think you have the qualifications to become an emperor?"

Slash, slash, slash—!

Balaman smirked as he watched Minhyuk swing his sword at breakneck speed. Minhyuk felt helpless and frustrated when the man before him continued to mock him.

"You are weak. You only became an emperor because of your vassals."

Creak, creak, creak—!

Clack, clack, clack—!

Hundreds of screaming black skeletons appeared before getting sucked inside Balaman's sword.

Bang—!

Minhyuk, who used God's Dual Sword Technique, could recover 90% of his HP. But with just one attack, it fell to less than 45%.

"Urk!"

Nevertheless, Minhyuk still stood back up. Not only did Balaman imply that Minhyuk hid behind his vassals, but he also seemed to say that he was the only one deserving of becoming an emperor because he had been working hard for his goals.

Indeed. Minhyuk admitted that his path was relatively smooth compared to Brod or Spear God Ben's paths. Perhaps Brod or Grandpa Ben were the ones deserving of his seat. But there was one thing that he was sure of.

“Even so...”

Flash—!

Minhyuk charged forward once again with his dual sword technique and began. He slashed and hacked at Duke Balaman, saying, “I have all the qualifications to become an emperor. And it's far more than yours.”

[Sword of Carnage.]

[The Dual Sword Technique is still in effect!]

[With the Dual Sword Technique, your sword's consecutive attacks will be doubled!]

[You can attack your enemy 76 times per second!]

The effects of the Dual Sword Technique already doubled the consecutive attacks of the skill he had triggered. But he did not stop there. He also added another power to it.

[Double Skill]

[You have a 1.2% chance of triggering Double Skill. Upon triggering, the skill's effects will be doubled.]

[The system can no longer measure the extent of your power!]

It combined the Dual Sword Technique, Sword of Carnage, and Double Skill.

‘*This is dangerous...!*’ Balaman thought. But his thoughts were cut short. It was because Minhyuk had already gone past him.

“Because I have also persevered and endured countless trials and hardships.”

Slash, slash, slash—!

One second. That was the time it took for hundreds of slashes to cut Balaman's body.

“Keuaaaaaaaaaack!!!” Balaman screamed. This was the same person who did not even release a single groan when he was hit by Herakel's club or Minhyuk's attacks before.

But then, a gigantic red skull rose to the sky.

[Blood of the Red Skull.]

[The Blood of the Red Skull restores 70% of your HP.]

Balaman's body, which the attacks had ravaged, recovered once again.

“No. A bastard like you does not have the qualifications to become an emperor! I am the one that is truly worthy of the emperor's throne!”

Balaman truly believed this. He had dyed the battlefield red with the blood of his enemies just for this long-time dream. And now, his opportunity had come. He no longer wanted to fool around.

Rumble—!

“The Advance of the Skeleton Army.”

Tens of thousands of black skeletons floated above them before being absorbed by Balaman's sword. Playtime was over.

Minhyuk looked at Balaman, who ran toward him and said, "No. I am the true emperor."

Then, with a cold and piercing glare, he said, "Transcendence."

[You have activated Transcendence!]

[You have gone beyond your limits and transcended to another realm!]

[You have gone beyond your limits and transcended to another realm!]

The notifications rang constantly in Minhyuk's ears.

[The buff effect of the "Spicy Braised Chicken" will not be in effect during the thirty seconds of the Transcendence's activation!]

[The Transcendence's buff effects have now been applied!]

[All of your stats have increased by 35%!]

[All of your attack power has increased by 29%!]

[All of your defensive power has increased by 36%!]

[All of your skill levels have increased by +2!]

[Your resistance to abnormal statuses has increased by 40%!]

[Your total HP and MP have increased by 30%!]

[Transcendence will remain in effect for thirty seconds!]

A black stream of energy appeared and enveloped Minhyuk's body. Then, he used the Sword of Carnage, which he had saved using his Save Skill, and again cut Balaman.

Slash, slash, slash—!

With the increase in his stats and attack power, the current Minhyuk stood far beyond Balaman. Seeing Balaman endure the Sword of Carnage with gritted teeth, Minhyuk hacked and slashed at the man with his sword carrying the symbol "Crazy."

Slash, slash, slash—!

Balaman was bombarded by Minhyuk's attack, which was immediately followed by explosions. Nevertheless, Balaman tried to endure and remain on his feet.

"I... will become an emperor... I want..."

Balaman was a lunatic. His desire to become an emperor had turned him into a madman.

Flash—!

Balaman collapsed at the same time Minhyuk's Transcendence ended. At the same time, loud cheers erupted in Minhyuk's ears.

"Duke Balaman has killed the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor!"

"This is an achievement that will go down in history!"

“The new emperor of the Great Luvien Empire has brought punishment upon the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor!”

The loud cheers made him frown.

Thud, thud, thud—!

Minhyuk looked at them with a cold and piercing glare the moment the walls made of red skeletons crumbled and collapsed completely. He said, “What bullshit are you saying?”

The Black Skull Knight Order troops and the Red Skull knights were all left dumbfounded by the scene in front of them.

“Ugh...”

The echo of Duke Balaman’s groan indicated who the winner and loser were in the battle between the two.

Meanwhile, Prince Cardin looked at the scene in disbelief. He thought, ‘*How the hell...? Are you telling me that the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor is really strong?*’

While they were left dumbfounded by the shock, Minhyuk also received a shocking notification.

[The God and Knight has been triggered!]

Minhyuk’s face grew ugly.

Chapter 1023

When Minhyuk first acquired the Battle God’s Origin Authority: God and Knight, it randomly guided him to someone who could become his God’s Knight. But during the God’s Succession Ceremony, he was able to level up the skill. Because of that, the effects of the skill had also changed.

Origin Authority

- If you find a talent that you truly covet, the God and Knight will guide you or develop a situation where you can obtain the talent as your own. Players are also included. This can only be used once every two months.*
- The system will search and recognize strong men and powerhouses that can shock the world once every six months.*
- It will provide a method and guide you or create a situation that will help you attract the talent to become your knight.*
- Obtain more than fifteen God-rank NPCs to unseal.*
- Obtain more than 400 Legendary-rank NPCs to unseal.*

•*Reach Level 1,000 to unseal.*

Unlike the previous God and Knight, where he could only be randomly guided to a potential candidate for a God's Knight, he now had two ways to find candidates. One of the effects stated that he would be guided to a powerhouse with talents that could shock the world once every six months.

'It hasn't been triggered ever since.'

This effect was different from the previous random activation. It said the system would search for and recognize a powerful candidate. But it hadn't been triggered ever since the skill had leveled up. There was one main reason why it hadn't been triggered before.

'It means that the system has not recognized any strong powerhouse.'

And now, the God and Knight was triggered.

'God and Knight has the power to guide me to someone who has outstanding power and can become a God's Knight.'

That has been the case even before. All the candidates it had chosen became knights who were very helpful to Minhyuk. They also had something in common.

'They are those who can change or become evil because of something else.'

Of course, there were other reasons for triggering the God and Knight. But for Minhyuk, Duke Balaman did not fit any of those reasons. Wasn't he just some crazy warmonger?

"Ugh..."

Balaman was slowly coming back to his senses.

Minhyuk looked around him. He could see that the members of the Beyond the Heavens Empire began to fight fiercely with the Black Skull Knight Order troops once the Song of the Black Skull. The Beyond the Heavens Empire was overpowering the Black Skull Knight Order and quickly reducing their numbers.

[His parents have forced Balaman to train to become the emperor since he was young.]

[He had lived a life where his body had to endure a burning and searing pain with every waking moment. A life where he was forced to read up until the point where he had to sleep and go to bed. A life that was suppressed and restricted.]

[He had lived a life where he had to walk a particular path under pressure. Because of that, he developed the idea that he was the only one qualified to become an emperor.]

[If you overpower him and show him what frustration is like, then you can take him in as your knight and vassal.]

"..."

Whether he wanted to or not did not matter. Duke Balaman lived under the pressure of becoming an emperor the moment he was born. Because of that, he was led to believe that he would and should become the emperor.

“I will never let you go!!!” Duke Balaman shouted as he drew out the last of his strength and tried to stand once again.

Duke Balaman seemed to have been under the effects of brainwashing. Since he was young, he was led to believe that only he could become the emperor. That was why he firmly believed he was the only one truly worthy of the throne.

While other children enjoyed a delicious and warm dinner with their parents, he was forced to drink the troll’s blood to the point that he wanted to vomit them out. He was made to bathe in a river, which had waters beyond freezing, that was said to have the effects of strengthening the body. Also, he had been told to swing the sword constantly to develop excellent reflexes from six years of age.

Duke Balaman’s parents belonged to families that were driven away or executed because of treason. For some reason, they were able to survive. However, they were driven crazy by their desire to make Duke Balaman the emperor.

When Duke Balaman was fifteen, they could safely and successfully send him to the Luvien Empire. As someone who had been forced to live excellently since childhood, Balaman naturally stood out from the rest.

He continued to hide the fact that he belonged to a family of traitors and grew stronger day by day. Even so, his crazy parents could not satisfy their thirst.

Make a more significant contribution!

Stand out more!

Take the head of the enemy general!

Make sure that you do a great job in this war!

His hands were dyed by the blood of many every single day. In the end, he became a lunatic drunk on victory. But by the time Balaman became a duke, his crazy parents had died. They died without seeing Balaman become an emperor. But despite that, Balaman did not stop because the path he was forced to take from the beginning was the path to becoming the emperor.

“Ugh...” Balaman groaned as he stood up.

He was a man not dictated by the path he had walked. Even though he wanted to die and give up so many times, he still stood up again and again and again. That was why he deserved the emperor’s throne. He was the one truly suited to sit on that throne. He has to fight. He had to get back on his feet and kill the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor.

The black energy that surrounded Minhyuk’s body dispersed.

‘The power of Transcendence is great. But...’

But this man could no longer fight against him. Duke Balaman stood up and looked around the Black Skull troops and the two surviving Red Skull knights. He still held hope that they would win.

Then, Duke Balaman saw the Food God’s Almighty Tools, which were moving by themselves, finished what they were doing.

Gulp—

The Beyond the Heavens' Emperor's throat bobbed.

“...!”

This was a power that Duke Balaman had never heard of.

‘He doesn’t need to eat the food?! He can just consume it right away?!’

At that moment, two dice appeared, bursting in black and gold light illuminating the world.

Then, Duke Balaman caught sight of the expression on the face of Prince Cardin, someone he believed to have lived a life of luxury and ease.

He saw the eyes of the Black Skull troops, who had always trusted and followed his orders, carrying their strong faith and trust in him.

He also saw the contempt and disgust in the faces of the people from the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“I— I have never lost.”

A skeleton wearing ragged robes and holding a scythe floated over Duke Balaman's head. Then, this skeleton got sucked into his body.

[Exploiting the God of Death.]

[You are borrowing the power of the Reaper in exchange for your life.]

[In exchange for a greater power, 10% of all the power in your possession will be destroyed once the Exploiting the God of Death's duration is over.]

[To pay the price of borrowing the power of the Death Reaper, your lifespan will be reduced. You will die after a year.]

It was a skill that could only be invoked with death as collateral. The fact that Duke Balaman triggered such a skill was a testament to his desire to become the emperor.

Crack, crack, crack—!

Balaman's power grew by leaps and bounds.

At the same time, both the golden and black dice floating above Minhyuk's head stopped rolling and showed the number three.

Duke Balaman slashed at Ben and sent the old man flying away.

Slash—!

“Urk!”

After sending Ben flying away with a single strike, Duke Balaman charged straight at Minhyuk with fearsome momentum. Conir and Herakel, who had recovered from their injuries to some extent, jumped out to stop him. Even Great Demon Elpis and Brod jumped in his path while Elizabeth tried to control the system. But...

[The power of the Death Ripper cannot be controlled or restricted.]

Slash—!

When the notifications rang, Herakel was sent flying back by one of Duke Balaman's punches.

“Berserk.”

Great Demon Elpis triggered the Devil Judge's Sword's Berserk to amplify his powers before using the Devil Judge's Final Chapter.

“Splitting the Great Demon.”

A gigantic sword light made of black demonic energy shot toward Balaman. However, Duke Balaman ripped the sword light with his sword light as if ripping a simple piece of paper.

Fwoosh—!

Blood burst out from Elpis' chest. Brod immediately jumped forward and blocked Balaman's path.

“Get out of my way!!!”

Balaman had given his life to the God of Death and was determined to fulfill his one and only goal: to become the emperor.

‘I must become an emperor!’

That was his sole reason for living. But...

“Mercenary's Pinnacle Swordsmanship. Final Chapter.”

Hundreds of red sword lights appeared and ran rampant.

“Death Wolf.”

Hundreds of wolves appeared. They ran toward Balaman and began biting and tearing him apart. But despite the blood gushing all over his body, Balaman continued forward. He ignored Brod and walked past him.

I need to cut down Minhyuk.

My sole reason for existing must not disappear.

And behind Brod was Minhyuk, who had already received the effects of the Overlapping Delight.

“Absolute Defense.”

Minhyuk immediately triggered the absolute shield. The Absolute One's Breaker's Ring on Balaman's finger flashed at that moment.

Slash—

Balaman successfully cut down Minhyuk, who was looking at him indifferently despite the blood spurting from his body. Seeing this, Balaman went crazy and swung his sword non-stop. The problem was that Absolute Defense blocked the following attacks. The Absolute One's Breaker's Ring could not break through everything every single time. This was a fact that Minhyuk had already known about earlier, so he took advantage of it.

Minhyuk had chosen to use the effects of the black die on the skill attached to the Sword of Aeon. The skill that he chose was none other than The Annihilator's Sword.

The Annihilator's Sword was a skill that could increase his attack power by 11,000% and create an explosion that could devour the entire area within a forty-meter radius. This power received the effects of the black die, which had cast the number three, doubling the skill's effects.

Slash—

Minhyuk just slashed Duke Balaman once. But that single attack carried 22,000% damage and instantly dragged Balaman's life down to the bottom.

Flash—!

With a flash of white light, an explosion erupted and devoured an entire area with an eighty-meter radius.

Bang—!

When the light caused by the explosion disappeared, what greeted them was the sight of Duke Balaman on the ground with a mangled and torn body.

Balaman looked up to the sky as he listened to the screams of the Black Skull and the Red Skull knights and troops.

“Duke!!!”

“DUKE!!!”

After the fierce and desperate battle, the army of almost 400,000 strong was reduced to less than 100,000. The once one hundred Black Skull Knights were now down to twenty-five, while the Red Skull Knights only had two surviving members left. All of these people gave up fighting and ran to surround Duke Balaman. The only reason why they were alive was to make Balaman the emperor. Their existence was solely dependent on Balaman's existence.

Balaman continued lying on the ground and staring at the blue sky.

“...”

He continued to stare blankly at the sky for a long time. Why did he do so? He did not know. But for some reason, he felt very relieved. This was his first defeat. But it made him feel like his burden was slowly disappearing. It was as if his defeat told him he did not have to be an emperor. As strange as it was, he felt it was telling him he no longer had to kill.

“I never knew it was this beautiful.”

He was talking about the blue sky above him because, for the first time in his life, Balaman could feel its beauty.

Meanwhile, the Beyond the Heavens Empire executives surrounded and pointed their swords at them.

“Thank you.”

“It was our pleasure to be under your command.”

“We will follow you even in hell, Duke Balaman.”

Even though the swords were all pointed at their necks, his troops still laughed. There was one last thing that Balaman wanted to say before he died.

“I’m sorry.”

Balaman, born to the wrong parents and raised in an extreme environment, raised the Black Skull Knight Order the same way. He viewed them as if they were his second self and treated them like he was treated. These were the very first words filled with emotion that he told his men.

Then, Duke Balaman saw Minhyuk looking at him. The man asked him, “Balaman, have you heard of the power of the God and Knight?”

Balaman’s eyes grew wide when he heard those words. He immediately recalled the effects of the skill. Why did he know about it? It was because the Luvien Empire’s intelligence department was extensive and far-reaching. The Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor has used that power to bring influential people like Elizabeth to his side. And every single one of these people had a story to tell.

It was true that he also had a story to tell. But he had now let go of such a story. But Balaman could tell that the power of Minhyuk’s God and Knight seemed to have chosen him as a target.

‘Is he trying to enslave me? Or maybe he wants to keep me alive?’

Thud, thud—

No one, not even the people from the Beyond the Heavens Empire, stopped Minhyuk from approaching Balaman and making his choice.

‘This is His Majesty’s choice.’

‘It’s also true that Balaman would greatly help the Beyond the Heavens Empire if he joins our side.’

‘He might be trash. But I will respect whatever choice His Majesty makes.’

Balaman stared at Minhyuk, who was looking down at him. His expression remained calm and relaxed. As someone raised solely to become an emperor, he felt like he could live a different life from this point on. He could live a comfortable life like how Elizabeth had changed and lived a life of satisfaction and contentment.

At that moment, Balaman made his decision. He said, “Right—a slave. I will become your slave and kill any man you wish for me to kill. Just take my men under your wing.”

Relief flashed on Balaman’s face. He smiled as he continued, “I no longer have to live a life that has to run madly for the sake of becoming an emperor.”

He felt so at ease and comfortable.

“What bullshit are you talking about?”

“...?”

A shadow was cast over the head of Duke Balaman, who was overcome with his emotions.

“The God and Knight might have been triggered. But...” Minhyuk said as he raised his hand. “...I will give up the chance to turn you into a knight.”

Stab—!

The members of Beyond the Heavens Empire, the troops and knights of the Black Skull Knight Order, and even Balaman did not expect Minhyuk to do this. With his sword, Minhyuk stabbed Balaman, who looked relieved, through the heart.

‘Balaman has turned into a lunatic after being forced to live a life where the only path to him was to become an emperor?’

That was bullshit. That was Duke Balaman’s nature. Was he supposed to let this man, who had now been defeated, live in the Beyond the Heavens Empire and have guaranteed comfort for the rest of his life? Minhyuk felt like he had no reason to do that.

That was why Minhyuk rejected God and the Knight for the first time.

Minhyuk twisted his sword in Balaman’s chest before pulling it out of the now-enraged duke. Despite the anger on the man’s face, Minhyuk just stared at him indifferently. Not long after, Balaman’s body lost its vitality.

“DUKE!!!”

“You bastard!!!”

“I won’t let you go!!!”

Minhyuk looked at them coldly as he gave his order to his men. He said, “Kill those who resist and tie up those who surrender. Those who surrender will be bound and turned into slaves. They will be left to work in the ‘Breath of Lava Mines’ until their deaths.”

The Breath of Lava Mines was a mine owned by the Beyond the Heavens Empire. Its temperature exceeded seventy degrees Celsius. Although the mine was filled with countless precious ores and minerals, people did not dare collect and mine them. This was because it was too hot and too dangerous for the laborers.

Minhyuk decided that he would use these people here and exploit them until the day they died.

“Have you ever been begged for mercy? Back then, did you give those people mercy when you plundered and killed them?”

Minhyuk was very confident that he would not regret this choice.

[The God and Knight has failed...]

Yes, he did not have any regrets even after the notifications rang.

[A variable has appeared!]

“...?”

Minhyuk looked puzzled. Then, he saw a black energy appear and got sucked into Duke Balaman’s body.

[Duke Balaman refuses to die.]

[Duke Balaman has persistently collected the Death Knight's Life to fight against the God of Death.]

[Due to the Death Knight's Life, he will become an undead! He will only be available to you for a year!]

[The God and Knight has been triggered.]

[The reason Balaman collected Life was because he feared being exploited by the God of Death upon his death. He was someone who feared death more than anybody else.]

[Balaman only has a tiny bit of ego left.]

This was the first time that this had happened. And it left Minhyuk shocked.

When Minhyuk saw that Duke Balaman only had a bit of ego left, he realized that God and Knight had told him he could become the second Viel's Puppet Doll.

'Duke Balaman would not have any summoning time restriction, unlike Viel's Puppet Doll.'

On top of that, Duke Balaman was also much stronger than Viel's Puppet Doll. Also...

'Did the God and Knight predict this situation...?'

Minhyuk was left stunned by this thought.

Chapter 1024

As mentioned, the God and Knight was usually triggered for those who lived a life they did not want or could still change. But from what Minhyuk could see, there was no benefit to having Balaman in their ranks even if he decided to change.

But the situation has changed now.

'He has died under my hands and has already paid the price that he had to pay.'

Even though he became an undead and a Death Knight, it did not matter. In the first place, the reason why Balaman was so afraid of death was because he feared not being able to think and dream anymore.

[Balaman only has a tiny bit of ego left.]

The birth of the second Viel's Puppet Doll was just around the corner. He would become a killing weapon that would obey Minhyuk's orders alone.

Minhyuk looked at Balaman, who had turned into an undead. He looked a bit too different to be called a Death Knight. Although blood continued to drip all over his body, it was obvious that his wounds were already starting to recover. And compared to the other Death Knights, his figure did not turn into that of a skeleton.

Then, Minhyuk asked Balaman, "Would you like to die again, or will you obey me?"

Even if Minhyuk chose to bring Balaman to his side, the duke would serve him for a year. After that year, he would return to the arms of the God of Death. But even though there was only a tiny bit of ego left in this version of Balaman, it seemed like he was still afraid of that moment and

immediately nodded in answer to Minhyuk. The moment Minhyuk received the answer, a notification rang in his ears.

[The God and Knight have succeeded!]

[You have acquired the ownership of the One who is Dead but is Not Dead.]

[You can kill him anytime you want.]

Then, Minhyuk stretched his hand out to Duke Balaman. He said, "Give me everything that you have."

"..."

Minhyuk was confused because he could not hear the acquisition notifications for the platinum and artifacts even though he had already killed Duke Balaman. It seemed that this was because Duke Balaman had not truly died yet.

Not long after, Duke Balaman, who had become a well-behaved and obedient dog, handed over everything, including his ring, artifacts, and even the sword he had been using.

[You have gained 75,414 platinum.]

[You have acquired the Absolute One's Breaker Ring.]

[You have acquired the Ducal Sword.]

[You have acquired the Gleaming Ducal Armor.]

After Minhyuk took everything away from Balaman, he saw the Black Skull Knight Order troops, going on a rampage earlier, stop to look at their master and owner.

"Lord- Lord Balaman."

"Even if you have died, we will still obey and follow you!"

They were the type of people who would serve their master forever, even if they knew that Balaman had already died and had become a puppet. As for Minhyuk? He had no intention of giving them a good look.

Minhyuk had recently made headlines when he decided to embrace the prisoners from the Qingdao Kingdom. However, these people here were inherently different from them. They had exploited, plundered, and killed others. That was why he intended to take them away and suck them dry until their deaths.

Minhyuk knew that these people would only obey Balaman's orders. So, he approached the duke and whispered in his ears. Then, Balaman conveyed his words. He said, "We should never forget the sins that we have committed. We will pay for the price of our sins and devote our lives to the Beyond the Heavens Empire up until the moment we die."

"*Sob, sob, sob.* We understand."

"We have received the duke's orders!"

“Even if the Beyond the Heavens Empire denounces us, we will never forget the sins that we have committed!”

Now, Minhyuk had earned people he could freely and thoroughly use. Then, another notification rang in his ears.

[The 94,415 soldiers of the Black Skull Army, 24 knights of the Black Skull Knight Order, and 2 Red Skull Knights, who followed and obeyed Balaman, have become the slaves of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.]

“Take away everything that they have on them. A pair of simple clothes and a pickaxe is enough for them.”

Perhaps because of Balaman’s words, the men who followed him hurriedly took everything they had and gave it to Minhyuk’s men.

When Minhyuk totaled everything, he realized that he had received almost a million platinum and a variety of quality weapons, armor, artifacts, and many other things from them. All of these would greatly help the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

Among these items, Minhyuk desired the Absolute One’s Breaker Ring. He had checked the details of the item after he exploited(?) Balaman.

- A 5% increase in Abnormal Status Resistance.*

- Active Skill: The Breaker*

Active Skill

The effects of “The Breaker” were evident at a glance. But Minhyuk could not help but frown.

“Hey.”

“...”

Balaman, who only had a little ego and had become completely obedient, turned to look at Minhyuk.

“Why is it so different from when you used it?”

That was right. The Absolute One’s Breaker Ring that Minhyuk personally experienced felt much more significant than this. It felt like it could ignore anything tagged with “absolute” for around five to ten seconds, not just two seconds. There was also the 20,000 requirement for mana. It was much larger than he expected.

‘If it needs 20,000 MP, it will deplete 15% of my MP in one go.’

There was also a penalty. This meant that Minhyuk had to weigh the consequences before using the artifact.

‘I think Balaman was able to use this after one minute. But according to the description, I can only use it after fifteen minutes.’

Balaman answered, “It’s... because the ring... is custom... made... for me...”

“What effects does it have when you have it equipped?”

“I can break anything every forty seconds for a certain amount of mana.”

The difference was undoubtedly huge.

‘It’s still an excellent artifact.’

Heleina-class strongmen and powerhouses often possessed a power that allowed them to ignore absolute and invincible barriers. The fact that he would have the power to break those things with the help of this ring, even if it was only for two seconds, was a testament to how unique this artifact was.

At that moment, Prince Cardin nodded lightly to Minhyuk and said, “Allow me to greet and express my gratitude to you, Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor.”

Minhyuk had saved Prince Cardin from a huge crisis. Of course, he had heard that the Luvien Empire and the Beyond the Heavens Empire were bitter rivals. But the fact that he received their kindness and grace this time would remain.

‘He’s an extraordinary person.’

Cardin never expected Minhyuk to overpower and win against Balaman. His vassals were also people who should never be messed with.

‘Of course, I would have been able to overcome this crisis if I had the help of my master.’

But that was not his power. He would only be borrowing the power of his master. Minhyuk nodded lightly.

“Nerva had asked me to bring you back to the Luvien Empire.”

It might have looked like Minhyuk had been brought to this place because of Conir and Herakel. That was why he specifically mentioned Nerva's request. There were many reasons for that.

“Thanks to the help of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, the Luvien Empire will be able to go to even greater heights.”

You have received my help. Don’t ever forget that.

“Our troops have received quite a significant amount of damage. However, since it was for the greater good, it’s fine.”

“...”

Prince Cardin could see that even though Minhyuk was saying it was okay, his expression told him it was not acceptable at all.

“It’s really fine.”

“...”

At that moment, Cardin recalled how Conir pretended he did not know about the Becoming Hero Elixir that he had given the boy earlier.

“Conir! Conir got this for you, *hyung!*”

Then, at that moment, Conir appeared and handed over the Becoming Hero Elixir, the outstanding elixir that can increase all of one’s stats by 1, to Minhyuk.

“That’s mine...”

“I see; our dear Conir was able to obtain this precious elixir. Hahaha. Our dear Conir got a precious elixir!” Minhyuk quickly responded.

Prince Cardin snapped his mouth shut when he realized the situation.

“Anyway, it’s really fine. We’re fine even though the Beyond the Heavens Empire has received quite! A huge! Amount! Of damage!”

“...”

Prince Cardin, who had been extorted(?) by Conir, was now being extorted by the boy’s *hyung*. But in a way, it could only be considered fair.

“Once I have safely returned to the empire and inherited the throne, I will send my vassals to greet you. Is there something that you personally want?”

“But it’s really fine, though?”

“No. I have to do my best...”

“Then, I will tell you what I want.”

Contrary to his previous words, Minhyuk strongly and firmly stated his demands.

“First. I want the Luvien Empire to find and give me the information about all the Eight Pillars Candidates.”

Minhyuk knew that the Luvien Empire had the most extensive and far-reaching intelligence department in Athenae.

“Second. Find information about the Pillar Ingredients.”

“...”

He also knew there were at least two Pillar Ingredients in the world. He was trying to take care of the burdensome matters by making use of the Luvien Empire.

“Third.” Minhyuk smiled lightly. “I hope the Luvien Empire will compensate the Beyond the Heavens Empire with an amount you think is fair for this incident. As I mentioned earlier, the damage our Beyond the Heavens Empire has received is huge. Also, please keep in mind that I am someone who loves to eat.”

Prince Cardin looked around and saw the Beyond the Heavens Empire members standing scot-free after drinking a single potion bottle.

‘Uhm...’

But the reason why they were relatively intact and safe was because they were strong.

"I understand," Prince Cardin agreed. Then, he thought about something for a moment. After remaining silent for a long time, he said, "I think I can fulfill your first requirement right now."

Minhyuk's eyes were colored with surprise when he heard the unexpected words. The first demand that he gave was information about the Eight Pillars' candidates.

"The Teacher, Beradon. He is my master and was once a candidate to become the Eight Pillars."

"The prince's master?"

Minhyuk's surprise grew. The one who taught the prince was once a candidate to become one of the Eight Pillars. But he was still alive and breathing?

Minhyuk had set a new goal: to become one of the Eight Pillars. He believed it was the only way for them to jump over and go beyond the Luvien Empire. And now that he wanted to try to find information about the Eight Pillars' candidates, Prince Cardin's teacher just happened to be one.

"My master does not discriminate when it comes to teaching. Whether you're good or bad, he will teach them and open up a path for them."

Of course, that did not mean that he would teach just anyone.

"But for one to receive the teachings of my master, one has to pass the trials that he had set first."

"What does he teach?"

Minhyuk was wondering what Beradon was teaching.

"Well, how to say this. He can teach you to become stronger, so your mental power will grow, and many more. There is no limit to what he can teach you. He can teach you anything and bring you to the next realm. For example..." Prince Cardin looked at Minhyuk. "He can open up a path for the Food God, who has reached the limits and can no longer climb further. Or, he could give the Battle God, who could no longer grow further, a push and bring him higher."

Cardin looked around him. That was when he caught sight of Spear God Ben. Then, he said, "He can teach those who are stubborn and determined how to bend so they would not break."

Then, he looked at Brod. "He can teach those filled with anger and give them peace of mind."

Cardin chuckled lightly and continued, "He had even told a boy, full of his greed, how to empathize with others and embrace them. That was how endless his powers are."

At that moment, Minhyuk understood what it meant. *'He has the power to make anything and anyone grow.'*

Of course, he had to go through the process, but there was a chance he could create a new skill.

‘Or perhaps I can raise the level of my skills?’

Or he could be given a stepping stone to help him grow stronger.

“But master told me that he wanted to rest. He said that he no longer wished to accept any more disciples.”

Cardin was no fool. He knew he did not need to act favorably and kindly toward the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor. After all, they might just become enemies one day. All he needed to do here was give him the information about the Eight Pillars candidate he wanted.

“It will be up to you to persuade my master to accept and teach you. Here, let me give you a map.”

[You have obtained a map leading you to The Teacher.]

Just as Minhyuk received the map, those who were supposed to escort Cardin safely to the empire arrived. Since they had already met Minhyuk, they silently bowed their heads in greeting.

After watching them leave, Minhyuk returned to the Beyond the Heavens Empire with his executives and their new slaves.

Nerva looked at Prince Cardin and his escort knights, who were being guarded safely by the guards of the Luvien Empire inside. Even though this was their first reunion after separating for so long, no tears appeared in either man's eyes. There was just one thing that Nerva wanted. He hoped the Luvien Empire would be revived and flourish further under his child's reign.

“Now, it will be easy for you to climb and sit on the emperor's throne.”

Duke Balaman, who had become a very fierce and lethal weapon in the hands of the Beyond the Heavens’ emperor, had already killed all the factions and forces that wanted to hinder his path to becoming the emperor of the Luvien Empire before.

Now, Prince Cardin no longer needed to prove his abilities. He was already qualified to become the emperor just by having Nerva's blood running through his veins.

Nerva looked at the remarkable and extraordinarily outstanding prince, Cardin, and asked, “What do you think about the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor?”

Nerva had already let go of everything. Because of that, he no longer harbored any greed, jealousy, or hatred. And it was also because he had put everything down that he could see things more rationally and coolly. He had to admit that the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor stood far beyond Prince Cardin.

“He's an amazing person. Although he's called the Food God, he has a strong power. He truly is the ruler of an empire.”

Nerva remained quiet and added nothing to Cardin's frank and blunt statement.

‘Aside from that, he also possesses a different power.’

That was what Nerva felt when he came to meet Minhyuk.

At that moment, Knight Laghman, who stood behind Prince Cardin, said, "Prince Cardin has told the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor to the place where The Teacher is living. However, he will not be able to learn from the master. I'm sure it would be like a slap to his face."

A small smile lingered on Nerva's face as he listened to their story.

'Eight Pillars' Candidate, The Teacher.'

"The Teacher said he would no longer accept any more disciples?"

Prince Cardin nodded as he took a sip of his tea.

"That's right. Ultimately, what the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor demanded of me will yield no results. First, it is tough to become my master's disciple. Besides, my master personally told me, 'I will no longer accept any more disciples.' That's why I believe what he's doing is all in vain. Hence, the first demand he asked me for would be for naught."

A smile appeared on Nerva's face when he heard those words. "Pfft. I see."

He no longer held hatred toward the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor. He just became someone who watched the steps that he took and the moves that he made. No. To be exact, he became someone who wanted to make sure that Brod sat on the throne that rightfully belonged to him safely.

"Hahahahahahaha!"

Prince Cardin could not help but frown when he saw Nerva laugh loudly for quite some time.

"Father, what's the matter with you?"

After laughing for a while, Nerva looked at him and asked, "What do you think would happen if someone who said he would no longer accept any disciple decided to accept one again?"

"Eh?" Prince Cardin looked puzzled at the question. What was his father talking about? Seeing Nerva look at him as if he was waiting for an answer, Cardin opened his mouth and said, "Thinking that maybe this will be the last time that they will accept a disciple... If they find them valuable and worth teaching, then..."

Cardin suddenly snapped his mouth shut. That was right. Every person wished to find something or someone special for their final hurrah.

"Their final disciple will receive the most special and most precious teachings in the world."

Chapter 1025

Balaman, Minhyuk's new subordinate and the one hailed as the One who is Dead but Not Dead, looked like an ordinary human with pale skin. Since he was not a summons, he did not have the restriction of a summoning time and could stay outside for as long as Minhyuk wanted.

This Balaman, who only had a bit of ego left, and his Black Skull Knight Order had become slaves of the Beyond the Heavens Empire. They received the slaves' brand, which would make them explode if they ever harmed the people of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

They were also sent to the Breath of Lava Mines, a place that was five times more difficult to work in compared to other regular mines. However, they were trained knights and soldiers, so they could endure living and working in such environments. Since they were sent to places that were almost impossible for regular people to mine, the Beyond the Heavens Empire obtained great wealth and fortune.

The Beyond the Heavens Empire also treated them less than half of what the prisoners from the Qingdao Kingdom received. This was proven by the fact that they were only given cabins that were close to collapsing.

Balaman sat atop one of the boulders with a dazed look. Although he had only a bit of ego left, he could still feel his emotions.

'This is the first time in my life, no?'

That was right. This was the first time for Balaman to rest and relax. Although he was just sitting down, the gentle breeze that blew past him made him feel very good, while the chirping of the birds brought his mind peace. It felt very strange to him.

'The dream I have been chasing all my life has disappeared, but...'

He felt so at ease. The slaves, who were working in the mines, also surrounded him. It did not matter if he was alive or dead; these people would never forget they belonged to him.

Not long after, Balaman said, "House... repair..."

"Yes, sir!"

"That's a good idea."

This was the first time in decades that they would do something other than training, training, and even more training. Balaman's men carried the materials and began to hammer away clumsily.

Clang— Clang— Clang—!

They worked together to renovate and repair their shabby cabins with bright smiles on their faces and sweat dripping down their foreheads. Although Balaman's face remained expressionless, he felt happy deep inside.

Rumble—

In the end, the house that they were working on collapsed.

"..."

"..."

"Lord- Lord Balaman?"

As mentioned before, these people had only been training for decades. Their knowledge of architecture was zero. They thought that all they needed to do was hammer at it.

Balaman stared at the cabin that had completely collapsed. With his face devoid of expression, he said, "I'm... fine. I... don't feel... the cold... or... the heat..."

He was dead and alive at the same time. It was fine for him, but that was not the case with the others.

"The temperature today is -17 degrees Celsius."

"..."

Balaman turned silent.

Minhyuk listened to Haze's report.

"The Luvien Empire has sent ten million platinum. *Fufu*. It's enough to fill the gap created when our executives suddenly disappeared."

Minhyuk had been scolded a bit by Haze. This was because he suddenly summoned the Beyond the Heavens' executive, which was a very unreasonable and ridiculous thing to do. But now that Prince Cardin had sent ten million platinum, they could easily fill in the gap they left behind during that time.

After Haze left, Shadow Luo knocked on the door. Minhyuk had entrusted Shadow Luo with the surveillance of Balaman and his men. He had come to report on their current situation.

"After doing this and that... in the end, they broke all their houses."

"...?"

"When they saw me, they asked if I could give them another house. They have been clamoring, saying they would lose their muscles if they slept out in the cold."

"Ah..."

At that moment, Minhyuk realized, '*They are addicted to working out...*'

Their house breaking down was not a problem; the only thing that mattered was working out and exercising. Minhyuk could understand them to some extent.

'They have been training almost their entire lives. Aside from training, the only thing that they could do was to work out. It's only natural that they wish to keep their body fit.'

Beyond the Heavens Empire welcomed the thought of not wanting their bodies to wither.

"Take the expenses for the house from their salary later."

But in the end, they were slaves, and they should never show any preferential treatment toward them. While Minhyuk was thinking about how to make up for the losses that they had gained this time, Luo gave another report.

"Ah. They said chicken breasts, eggs, and unmixed salad are fine for their meals. They also said they wanted to maintain and build their bodies properly while resting."

“...”

Thanks to that, Minhyuk was able to save money on their food. As someone who loved to eat, Minhyuk could not understand them. But since that was what they wanted, then so be it.

Haze, who left after saying that she would count every platinum of the ten million platinum they received, soon came back.

Minhyuk told her, “Haze, what about the thing I asked you to look for information on?”

“We cannot find information about The Teacher Beradon even after checking it with Abel. So, I had to search through tens of thousands of books. I recently found a short snippet from one of the books.”

Minhyuk listened quietly to Haze.

“The Teacher has had two disciples.”

The one Haze was talking about did not include Prince Cardin. If it was information found from an ancient book, then it meant that they were disciples that he had back when he was still a candidate to become one of the Eight Pillars.

‘As usual with this game, Athenae, they will hide hints and only reveal it bit by bit.’

They even wrote one small snippet among tens of thousands of books as a hint.

‘There’s a high chance that these two disciples were extraordinary and special.’

Minhyuk was quite curious about them.

“Haze, I’m a bit stagnant these days.”

Of course, Haze was fully aware that Minhyuk no longer had a path that would allow him to grow even further. Fortunately, he became an Eight Pillar’s Successor. Then, he found out about the existence of The Teacher. It was like raining after a long drought.

“Can I focus on my growth now?”

Minhyuk had to ask this question because he was the head of an empire.

Haze nodded. “That’s alright. After all, you were able to push forward and make the Beyond the Heavens Empire grow even further in just a few short months.”

What Haze meant was that he could do whatever he wanted by himself and play around for a while.

Minhyuk smiled. “Then, I’ll be back later.”

He immediately stood up and set off to find The Teacher, who was once a candidate to become an Eight Pillar.

Events were something that every game had. Depending on what type of event was being held, it could bring back players who have left the game and increase the number of current players. There was one clear thing. Whatever the game was, the company that produced the game would most certainly host events.

But unlike other games, Athenae, which was developed by Joy. Co. Ltd., had relatively fewer events. While other games held events once every two months, players of Athenae had to wonder if they would even get one or two events in a year.

It has already been three years since Athenae was first launched. To celebrate its third anniversary, they prepared an event for the game. President Kang Taehoon was standing behind a podium to discuss the event.

Athenae was just going to hold an event, but it was already attracting the public's attention. Many people had their eyes on Joy Co. Ltd. and were waiting for the event to be unveiled.

Click, click, click—

Like the reporters and viewers, President Kang Taehoon, who stood in front of the reporters and received the baptism of camera flashes, felt very emotional.

He opened his mouth and said, “This event is only open to players below Level 650.”

A reporter immediately asked, “Players below Level 650? Isn't Player Minhyuk the only one who has achieved Level 650?”

“Is this an event made to exclude Player Minhyuk?”

The reporters wondered if Joy Co. Ltd. had imposed sanctions and restrictions on Minhyuk's growth because his power was already too overwhelming. Kang Taehoon did not comment on that. But there was one certain thing.

‘This is not made to put sanctions or restrictions on him.’

They had already decided to exclude players at Level 650 and above a year after the event was planned.

After the commotion died down, President Kang Taehoon continued. “For one month, all players will receive a three times increase in EXP Acquisition Rate and Artifact Drop Rate. When you hunt boss monsters at the same level as yours, you will receive a five times increase in EXP Acquisition Rate.”

“Woah!”

The reporters were, of course, also players of Athenae. The fact that they would be able to receive a three times increase in their EXP Acquisition Rate was already an enormous gain for them. As for the players, those who were getting annoyed and bored because their EXP Acquisition Rate had already started to go down and slow down their leveling because their level had increased would find this as an opportunity to grow faster and finally knock on the walls of a higher realm.

“It's a 3x Event since it's our third anniversary.”

“Amazing!”

All of the reporters burst into admiration after learning about the details of this very unusual event. However, the 3x Event was not necessarily set up because it was their third anniversary.

‘We have judged that we must bring the players to a higher level.’

The levels of the players, except for a small number, did not meet their expectations.

‘Helenia will awaken soon.’

Kang Taehoon did not mention anything about this. Helenia, whose complete revival and descent were interrupted because her fragments had been destroyed, was about to awaken. But they should already know about this.

‘Even though Helenia will not be able to be completely resurrected, back when she awakened briefly...’

Back then, the players could not handle her. To be exact, they were completely overwhelmed by the weakened Helenia. What were their levels now compared to back then?

‘Except for a select few people, nothing much has changed in their levels.’

To put it simply, this event was designed to give the players some foothold so that they would be prepared for Helenia’s awakening.

‘It might seem like we’re just giving them a 3x increase in EXP for a month, but the effects will be huge.’

This event would definitely increase the number of players who can achieve Level 600.

“If Level 400 players level up fifteen times this month, they will receive a 2x Level-Up Potion. The same would be true if Level 500 players level up eight times and Level 600 players level up four times this month.”

“...!”

“Not only that. We will also give out a +5 All Stat Increase Potion for the top ten players who achieve the greatest growth during this event. The player who will achieve the greatest growth among all of the players will also receive a +8 All Stat Increase Potion. This will all be tallied and calculated by the system.”

“For real? They’re just going to give it away just like that?”

“Kghhk! Since they’re doing a giveaway, they’re doing it properly!”

President Kang Taehoon could not help but smile bitterly when he heard the cheers of the reporters.

The Battle God’s advertisement video had been recently released worldwide. The video showed how Helenia joined hands with King Above Gods Aegaeon and terrorized the Land of the Gods. Of course, this was only a made-up scenario.

But President Kang Taehoon thought, *‘There is a high chance that something like that will truly happen.’*

Since Helenia could not have her full powers, she would use any means necessary to achieve her goal.

‘Whether they can stop her in the future will depend on the players’ behavior and actions.’

The players did not know since Joy Co. Ltd. did not disclose it. But Athenae's Third Era was already about to begin.

Kang Taehoon looked at the reporters and added, "We have received quite a lot of criticisms and complaints about the difference between God classes and ordinary classes."

This was a fact. In the beginning, the God class players stood out too much. This was also primarily true during the second era. The only way for the ordinary class players to surpass the God class players was to achieve Level 600.

The problem was whenever the God class players, who had successfully inherited the throne of the gods, reached a certain level, a portion of the sealed powers would be released.

There was currently only one player who had gone beyond Level 650. But some players were inching closer to Level 650. This was mainly because it was harder for players to reach Level 650 from Level 600 than reaching Level 600 from Level 500.

"The classes, except for God classes, will experience another inflection point once they achieve Level 650."

"...!"

"...!"

A bigger wave was being set off than the wave created by the announcement of an event. This alone would increase the players' desire to level up during the event's course.

Team Leader Park Minggyu approached President Kang Taehoon, who descended the podium.

"President."

Taehoon just chuckled bitterly when he heard his subordinate's call.

"I see. The community sites must have been filled with posts about how this event targets Minhyuk, right?"

Taehoon had already expected this to some extent. Even so, he did not intend to change the event they had planned just for Minhyuk's sake. Also, even though people would criticize them and continue talking about how they were targeting Minhyuk, they were the ones who truly wanted this to happen, no?

'After all, it's a chance for them to approach the Supreme.'

"Yes, that's right."

The report that Team Leader Park wanted to give to him was just as he expected.

'Since Player Minhyuk's level is too high, he would have to go through a long period of stagnation before he could raise his level.'

This was the inevitable reality. And it was proof of how high Minhyuk's level was.

"What I wanted to report was about something else."

“Hmm?” President Kang looked at Team Leader Park in confusion.

Then, Minggyu said, “Player Minhyuk’s level has increased by one.”

“...?”

The confusion on Taehoon’s face grew further as he looked at Minggyu, who was reporting while looking at his mobile phone.”

“But when I checked yesterday, his EXP value for leveling up was just 3%?”

“That’s right. Oh?” Team Leader Park said, his eyes never leaving his phone. “His level just increased by one again.”

“...?”

President Kang Taehoon was rendered speechless. What was going on?

Then, Minggyu said, “Player Minhyuk has received the recognition of the Teacher and is receiving guidance.”

“...!”

Chapter 1026

President Kang Taehoon was shocked by the report that Team Leader Park Minggyu had given him. Was Player Minhyuk being recognized by The Teacher?

‘A way that would allow someone who had grown stagnant to grow further.’

And he had found that way.

“It’s highly likely that Player Minhyuk would grow faster than the players who would benefit from this event.”

Of course, the words “highly likely” were there. Even if he received the teachings of The Teacher, in the end, how far and how fast he would grow would all be up to him.

“Will Player Minhyuk become a variable in Helenia’s awakening?”

The truth was half of Athenae’s population might just disappear during Athenae’s Third Era if they failed to stop Helenia. The players would be forced to log out at least once, and many of the NPCs they cherished would die and disappear forever.

This was why Joy Co. Ltd. had prepared an event to help them and prevent such a terrible situation from happening. Nevertheless, the probability of winning against Helenia was very low.

Although it seemed like a small variable was wiggling into existence right now.

‘The thought of a single player growing stronger and beating Helenia alone is preposterous.’

But it was also possible. After all, Helenia and The Teacher had a close relationship.

‘The growth that one could obtain and experience from The Teacher is endless.’

Kang Taehoon was sure that although The Teacher was only hailed as a candidate to become an Eight Pillar, his power was comparable to the Eight Pillars.

The Teacher, Beradon, looked like an old man. If one looked at his white hair and the age spots blooming on his face, one would not be able to believe that this old man once became someone who tried to become the pillar of this world.

Beradon, with his hands behind his back, took a stroll. He said, "That brat, Cardin, must have arrived safely."

He was sure the brat would ask him for help if ever he was in danger.

"That greenhorn as an emperor? *Pfft.*"

Beradon talked lightly of the man who became the emperor of the Great Luvien Empire. Although Cardin was Beradon's disciple, he knew the young man was still lacking.

It was only natural that he talked lightly about the young man. After all, Beradon had taught countless disciples with talents that far surpassed Cardin's talents.

Were there no empires that could rival the Luvien Empire in the past? No. There were. And that empire was even more remarkable and better than the Luvien Empire. And the ruler of that empire was once Beradon's disciple.

But was that all? The most vicious and terrible master of Hell, the first-generation God of Death, was also Beradon's disciple. The second generation Battle God was also one of his disciples.

Beradon did not distinguish between good and evil when taking in disciples. But now, even though they weren't really good, Beradon tried not to raise and help any evil disciples.

"Brat," Beradon spat out when he thought of someone. However, the look on his face immediately smoothed out.

Beradon had decided that he would no longer accept any more disciples after teaching Prince Cardin.

'I can finally rest now.'

He just wanted to rest and wait for his return to the soil. Now that no one would bother him anymore, he would eat leisurely.

'I wonder if my planted lettuce and other vegetables are growing well?'

Beradon wanted to live a leisurely life. To achieve this dream, he had been working on a garden. Of course, his gardening skills weren't good, so the garden's appearance was quite bad. But the taste of his vegetables could be said to be good.

'Fufu. At least, that brat Cardin could cook a bit.'

As Beradon continued to walk with his hands behind his back, he suddenly recalled Cardin's cooking. Perhaps many would have been shocked to hear this fact.

'My goodness! You made the man leading the Luvien Empire cook?!'

But Beradon was the man who made even the first-generation God of Death massage his shoulders. He even told the second-generation Battle God with a sarcastic voice, *'You're an idiot. You know that, right?'*

Beradon, who was walking towards his garden, was met with a very shocking sight.

"N- No..."

This was because his beautiful garden was gone. It looked like an entire family of wild boars had swept it away.

Beradon might be great at teaching, but when it came to things that needed dexterity? Well, all he could say was that he had shit for hands. But despite that, he still did his best to plant and make a garden. Yet, the garden he had worked so hard to create and grow had become a mess.

Swoosh!

But then, at that moment, a mysterious smell wafted over and tickled Beradon's nose, making him whip his head in one direction. It was a very delicious and stimulating smell.

'This is...?'

The smell was savory and was enough to make one's mouth water.

'Sesame oil?'

He slowly and carefully crept forward to catch the thief(?). That was when he saw a man sitting not far from his garden. The man was holding a huge silver bowl and mixing some *bibimbap*. Next to the man was a bowl of steaming, savory *siraegi doenjang* soup.

'This shameless...!'

The vegetables the man had been mixing in his bowl were all from Beradon's garden. Beradon, who wanted to step forward and confront the man, stopped in his tracks.

'Hoo... You will no longer hate anything if you give up your greed.'

Beradon had been doing mental training constantly.

'Yes, that's right. I can do that.'

He slowly calmed down and opted to spy on the young man. Has he heard the sound of red *bibimbap* being mixed with savory sesame oil? Of course. And it was music to his ears. Saliva started to pool in Beradon's mouth. And from what he saw earlier, plenty of eggs were in that massive bowl.

'Right, that's right. You know how to eat, huh? In this harsh world, people are bound to give you only one fried egg in your bowl of bibimbap. But it seems like he added three of them in his bowl.'

Once the man mixed everything well, he scooped a huge spoonful of the *bibimbap*.

'Bibimbap will taste even better if you scoop a huge spoonful for your first bite.'

A smile unknowingly curled at the corner of Beradon's mouth as he watched the man smile happily as he ate the bibimbap.

'I might not be the one eating it, but I feel like I am.'

He imagined the taste in his mouth as if he were the one who ate that huge spoonful of bibimbap. With every bite of the bibimbap, the crunchy and crispy texture of the vegetables would spread in his mouth. Then, combining the savory sesame oil and the spicy *gochujang* would create a pleasant flavor in his mouth. And the fried eggs? They also added to the harmony of flavors.

'Right. That's it! You know it well! Your mouth is dry because you ate a huge bite of bibimbap in one go!'

At that moment, the man lifted the bowl of *siraegi doenjang* soup and took a sip. Beradon, who was imagining the taste, unknowingly burst out in admiration. He, who was still doing mental training to control his mind, suddenly grew hungry.

I want to eat that bibimbap!

Anger started to surge within him once again.

'I was the one who grew those vegetables in my garden! So, how come he's the one eating them?!'

Even though Beradon was trying his hardest to control his mind and restrain himself, it was getting harder and harder for him to bear. It seemed like his desire for food and his appetite were far greater than he thought.

In the end, Beradon failed to hold back. He jumped out before the young man could finish eating everything up.

"BASTARD!!!" Beradon shouted angrily, his hands still behind his back.

"Munch, munch? Hello?!"

This man was a shameless and unscrupulous thief. How dare he greet him politely while still eating in his garden? Seeing Beradon's face grow uglier by the second, the man realized something was wrong.

The man immediately stood up and said, "Goodness. I see you're an old man. How dare I sit in front of you..." He then proceeded to greet Beradon politely. "Hello, Grandpa!"

"...?"

Beradon felt a bit flustered with how polite the man was. But he still said, "This— You thief! I can't believe you! How dare you dig up all the vegetables I worked so hard to grow in my garden and use them to make *bibimbap*?! I wonder how many *bibimbap* you have already eaten, huh?!"

Of course, Beradon's garden was not so small that everything planted in it would disappear with just a single bowl of *bibimbap*.

But then, the astonished man said, "That— that was a garden...?"

"..."

“But it did not look like a garden at all?”

Beradon could not deny his words. Cardin once told him something similar.

‘Master, I don’t think you should farm. How can you call that a garden...? It looks more like weeds that had survived the trampling of a wild boar.’

Even so, the glare in Beradon’s eyes did not decrease. He said, “How can various ingredients sprout if it’s not a garden, huh?!”

“I’m sorry, grandpa.”

“That’s right. Now that you know, I should also get some *bibimbap*...”

But Beradon was left in despair. Why? Because the man had already finished all of the *bibimbap* in just a short time.

Beradon cried out, “My *bibimbap*...”

“I’m sorry, grandpa. Would you like me to make you some bibimbap with the ingredients that I have on hand?”

“Clean it up!”

That was completely different from eating something made from the garden he had worked hard to create and nurture!

The angry Beradon soon wondered why the man came here. So, he asked, “But why are you here?”

“I came here to receive teachings from the man named Beradon.”

Beradon raised his eyebrow. In the end, Beradon was still a human being. He couldn't view this person, who ransacked his garden and did not even let him have a bite of *bibimbap*, favorably. Besides, he had already decided not to receive any more disciples.

“I’m sorry, but I am no longer accepting any more disciples.”

With those words, the man realized that the old man in front of him was the one he had been looking for.

“Grandpa, please teach me!”

But it was also confirmed that his first impression of the man was good. After all, the young man politely stood up from his seat and greeted him when he appeared. Even so, Beradon still declined. Well, he might have accidentally ruined his garden.

‘Of course, it’s not necessarily because of my garden.’

This was true.

This was absolutely not the case.

“I will say this once again. I have vowed never to accept any more disciples. Go back.”

However, the young man was the type of person who would not give up so easily. Seeing this, a tremendous and overwhelming killing intent began to soar from the body of Beradon, the one who was once a candidate to become one of the Eight Pillars.

‘Yet I did not become one of the Eight Pillars.’

There was one crucial thing. It was inaccurate to say that he “did not become” one.

‘I chose not to become one of the Eight Pillars.’

It was mainly because of his disciples.

Even so, the terrifying killing intent that was spreading from his body was comparable to that of an Eight Pillar. As someone hailed as “The Teacher,” he could help others grow.

‘I can also take it away.’

The power of one of Beradon’s authorities, The Depriver, rose from his body and put pressure on the man in front of him. The first-generation God of Death, the second-generation Battle God, and Prince Cardin; they all despaired before this power.

Beradon did not activate The Depriver against the young man because he ruined his garden. He did this to everyone. It was a kind of “test” of some sort. Unfortunately, even if he initiated the test and the young man passed this trial, Beradon did not intend to take in another disciple.

‘Is he a foreigner?’

This meant that the young man would receive constant notifications regarding this.

[The Depriver.]

[The Teacher is trying to deprive you of what you have learned.]

[As time passes, your stats will start declining, and your level will decrease.]

[A strong and irresistible force is weighing down on you.]

That was right. The Depriver was a power that could make its target grow weaker. And for those who had grown strong and reached stunning heights, growing weaker was a terrible and frightening thing for them. Most people subjected to this power apologized and ran away in despair. But there were a few who realized something.

‘Even if he takes it away from me, as long as I can receive his teachings.’

‘He shouldn’t be doing this just to take it away from us.’

‘That’s right. And even if he takes it away, I will not return.’

These select few people had received Beradon’s recognition.

Creak, creak, creak—!

The branches of the trees fluttered fiercely, and the ground shook and trembled. But the young man in front of Beradon continued to endure, trying to stand rather than kneel.

“Get lost! You did this to my garden... No! I don’t intend to accept any more disciples!” Beradon shouted, putting more pressure upon the young man.

“I truly want to receive your teachings, Sir Beradon. Also, forgive me.”

Forgive him? Why? Beradon could not understand what the young man was saying for a moment.

Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh—!

Then, an overwhelming energy and momentum appeared and began to swirl and wrap around the young man. The gentle and soft eyes of the polite young man disappeared and turned into eyes as sharp as that of a hawk’s own.

Rumble, rumble—!

Under this power, the ground shook and trembled even more while the trees fluttered more fiercely. Even the sky began to roar and cry.

‘Wh- What...?!’

[The opponent has started to suppress the power of the Authority: The Depriver.]

Beradon, realizing that his power was being resisted, tried to release more of it.

[The opponent has wholly suppressed the power of the Authority: The Depriver!]

Vwooooooong—!

The absolute authority that was swirling around Beradon’s body disappeared in an instant.

Beradon was left stunned. Many had visited him and received this trial. However, none of them had been able to suppress his power. Although he had never vowed to receive any more disciples, this fresh and novel experience made him rethink his choices. Interest started to bloom in Beradon.

Minhyuk was not afraid of the power of The Depriver that the old man, who identified himself as Beradon, possessed. This was because he possessed the skill: The Unyielding One.

And when Minhyuk successfully resisted and completely suppressed the power, a shocking notification rang in his ears.

[Beradon has given you a slight recognition.]

“...?”

For Minhyuk, this was a very unexpected notification.

Usually, in times like this, Minhyuk would hear the notification saying, “Beradon’s favor has increased” or something similar. But the notification that rang in his ears had a slightly different meaning.

But something even more shocking rang in his ears not long after.

[You have leveled up.]

“...!”

Chapter 1027

Minhyuk was stunned by the notification he heard after he completely suppressed Beradon's The Depriver.

[You have leveled up.]

Minhyuk's level was currently at Level 656. He had reached the point where his EXP gauge would barely increase, even after completing several quests or hunting boss monsters. If he were to be honest, his growth, which depended on his level, was left stagnant.

'With my leveling up, the easiest way for a player to grow, reaching a point of stagnation, the gap between me and the players will be narrowed quickly.'

Indeed. Players who have not yet reached Level 650 would be able to close the gap since they could level up quickly. That just went to show how different the amount of EXP needed to increase one's level was for players who had not exceeded Level 650 and those who had exceeded the said level.

But now? When the notification "...has given you slight recognition." instead of the usual "...favor has increased." rang, Minhyuk's level increased by one.

'He is The Teacher.'

Beradon was even close to becoming one of the Eight Pillars.

'It seems like I have met a far greater man than I have imagined.'

At this point, Minhyuk realized that Beradon had the power to help him go past his stagnant state and grow further. He also learned that the growth that he might experience might just be infinite.

Meanwhile, Beradon looked embarrassed as he stared at Minhyuk. He thought, *'I wanted to know if he would still want to learn from me once he had lost everything that he had. That was why I used The Depriver on him.'*

This was the first time that Beradon had experienced something like this. To think someone was able to neutralize and even wholly suppress The Depriver. The problem was Beradon had already vowed never to accept any more disciples.

'I feel like my mind could be changed...'

But for some reason, his interest was piqued.

'He has strength and power hiding behind his kindness and courteousness.'

Even so, that would not change the fact that the young man had destroyed his garden. So, Beradon, with a curt expression, said, "You neutralized my power, yes. But I still don't like you."

"..."

Minhyuk was rendered speechless. The system notification told him that Beradon had recognized him a bit, but his expression was completely different.

"Be honest. It's because of the garden, right?"

“What nonsense are you on about? I’m not such a petty person! I wouldn’t hold a grudge against you just because of my garden. And even if I am, do you have the right to say anything to me?”

That was true. Minhyuk would have nothing to say to salvage the situation. After all, Minhyuk had ravaged Beradon's garden and was left with nothing to eat for the day.

‘Ho?’

Beradon might have grown a little fond of the young man before him and felt there was a chance he might change his mind. Nevertheless, his desire to not accept any more disciples remained the same. And at the right moment, Beradon thought of a trick to drive the young man away.

“Well, if you go all the way to the east of this mountain and dig some of the things raised under the protection of the Lord of the Mountains, then I will give you a small lesson.”

Ring!

“Alright. Since I’ve eaten all of the things from your garden, I’ll get them for you and make you a meal. If you are satisfied after eating the meal I have served you, then I hope you can give me due recognition.”

“Recognition? It’s not that easy for someone to receive my recognition.”

Before heading out, Minhyuk was curious about one thing. So, he asked, “Grandpa, I heard you have two extraordinary disciples. If I get what you wanted me to get, can you tell me who they are?”

Of course, Minhyuk would gain nothing even if he knew who they were. He was just curious about these two extraordinary disciples, whom Beradon personally nurtured.

“Alright,” Beradon agreed, nodding his head despite the apparent reluctance in his voice.

Minhyuk bowed as he headed east of the mountains.

‘*My two extraordinary disciples...*’

Beradon smiled bitterly. He did not know which book it was written on for the young man to learn about this fact.

Usually, legends would be weaved with false stories. To some extent, it could be said to be true. But at the same time, it could also be said to be untrue.

‘I have had three extraordinary disciples.’

The remaining one remained unknown to the world. Of course, even if the young man could obtain the ingredients, he only planned to tell him about the two. At that moment, he thought of another one of his disciples.

‘The most outstanding, the most evil, and the kindest.’

Then, Beradon burst into a fit of laughter.

“He will not be able to get anything from the Lord of the Mountains.”

Beradon giggled as if he found it pleasant.

Minhyuk continued to walk east and trek the mountains, finally seeing a vast expanse of stunningly beautiful grassland. The place was located so high up in the mountains that one could feel like they could touch the sky.

And in this vast and neverending grassland, Minhyuk saw what he needed to obtain. They were growing beautifully under the sun.

‘Ho. There are a variety of vegetables and herbs here. I can see aster, spinach, bean sprouts, bok choy, cabbage, and many more.’

The sight alone was enough to make Minhyuk’s mouth water. Minhyuk took one cautious step toward the ingredients.

‘The Lord of the Mountains.’

Minhyuk thought that Beradon was underestimating him. He started thinking about how he was much stronger than what Beradon believed him to be.

Thud, thud, thud—!

The ground suddenly shook as heavy thuds rang out. Minhyuk, who recognized the sound, immediately turned toward the direction where it came from.

BANG—!

“Keuhaack?!”

Minhyuk was sent flying away. At the same time, an unbearable pain washed over him. It felt like all of the bones in his body had been broken. A part of the solid and sturdy Transcendental’s Armor had also been left dented.

[Your HP has fallen below 87%.]

Minhyuk was shocked.

‘What the hell is this...?’

A simple collision brought him tremendous damage?

Minhyuk hurriedly rolled on the ground to offset the impact of the collision. Then, he stood up to identify what hit him.

‘A cow?’

It was a gigantic cow. And it even had a horn growing out of its forehead!

[Lord of the Mountains. Level 786.]

[If you kill the Lord of the Mountains, the ingredients they own and protect will wither.]

Minhyuk, who would initially start to drool the moment he sees a cow like this, has never seen one with such a high level before. And from what it looked like, it seemed like the Lord of the Mountains was not something he could eat.

In a way, the Lord of the Mountains was just a cow. But its eyes flashed as it glared a warning at Minhyuk.

‘Get out of here.’

The sight of the cow digging the ground with its hind legs looked frightening. But Minhyuk needed the things that it grew and protected over there.

“Can’t you just let me get some of your things over there?”

The Lord of the Mountains immediately charged at Minhyuk when it heard what he said. After accelerating instantly, its speed seemed to be hundreds of kilometers per hour. Minhyuk did not even have the time to react. One blink, and the gigantic cow was already right in front of him.

Minhyuk hurriedly cast Intangible Sword.

Slash, slash, slash—!

The Intangible Sword slashed and cut all over the body of the Lord of the Mountains. But from what it looked like, the gigantic cow did not receive much damage.

‘It can resist the Intangible Sword, an attack that ignores all defenses?’

The meaning of those words was simple. The Lord of the Mountains possessed a ridiculously high HP volume to the point that the damage of the Intangible Sword could be neglected.

‘Isn’t this guy at a level that is much higher than a boss-rank monster?’

Minhyuk felt he understood what the Lord of the Mountains was like. It was a Named Monster, but it did not have many special attributes.

‘In exchange, it possesses an incredibly high HP, defensive, and attack power.’

Simply put, the Lord of the Mountains was quite similar to Herakel.

“Like the Wind.”

Minhyuk thought he could use the gap created by the Intangible Sword to escape it.

Thud—!

But then, the Lord of the Mountains twisted its body slightly and stabbed Minhyuk with the horn on its forehead.

“Ugh!”

Minhyuk, sent flying once again, thought, *‘I have two options.’*

The first option was triggering Absolute Defense. Then, he would get as many ingredients as he could in the seven seconds and run away. The problem was that it was a hazardous method, and he wouldn’t be able to get that many ingredients.

‘And it would be a problem if it follows me.’

‘I need to overpower the Lord of the Mountains.’

The Lord of the Mountain looked like it could destroy a mountain with its body alone. And its level was also high. It was an opponent that was strong enough to force Minhyuk to log out.

Flash—

Minhyuk hurriedly used Sword of Frenzy and sent it again toward the charging cow.

Ting—

“...?”

Minhyuk was speechless by the Lord of the Mountains’ ridiculously high HP and overpowered defensive power.

Bang—!

The Lord of the Mountains chased right behind Minhyuk after slamming into his body.

[The Lord of the Mountains is going berserk!]

[The Lord of the Mountains’ speed has increased significantly.]

The cow, which was already incredibly fast, had grown even faster. After sending Minhyuk flying into the sky, it immediately charged toward him and sent him flying even further. Of course, the damage that Minhyuk had received was less since the impact that he received was less because his body was zipping through the air. But his HP had already fallen so low.

[Your HP has fallen below 44%.]

[Your HP has fallen by a considerable amount in such a short period. Your body is in shock.]

[Your bones are fractured. Your movements will be restricted.]

Minhyuk, who was reduced to such a ragged state, considered another option. How about triggering Calamity?

‘If I use Calamity, then the Lord of the Mountains will die.’

If the Lord of the Mountains died, then the ingredients would wither. This meant that he would receive a penalty for failing the quest. In other words, he would gain little from this option.

Then, how about using another skill?

‘No. I would be beaten before having time to cast my skills.’

There was one choice that Minhyuk could make in this situation.

“Summon Hanwoo.”

Thud—!

“MOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

It was to summon an existence that was in a similar form to the Lord of the Mountains.

The equally gigantic Hanwoo stopped the charging Lord of the Mountains. The skill “Hanwoo’s Charge” could help him control his size. If he grew as huge as possible, he could cover a wider area. But that was not the only thing. Hanwoo’s Charge could also be used at that size.

“Hanwoo’s Charge.”

Hanwoo, who had become as massive as the Lord of the Mountains, charged toward the opponent.

“Viel’s Puppet Doll. Ego Chain Sickles.”

Minhyuk then summoned the two to try and subdue the gigantic cow.

Bang—!

The Lord of the Mountains collided with Hanwoo. The force of the collision did not push back Hanwoo. He even started to push the Lord of the Mountains back slowly.

Then, Viel’s Puppet Doll and the Ego Chain Sickle moved. Viel’s Puppet Doll moved to attack the back of the Lord of the Mountain while the Ego Chain Sickle moved to strike the back of its neck.

“MOOOOOOOO!!!”

Hanwoo roared wildly. The roar stopped Minhyuk, Viel’s Puppet Doll, and the Ego Chain Sickle. It was as if the roar told them they should not interfere in his battle.

Thud—!

And finally, the Lord of the Mountains staggered from being pushed back. The Lord of the Mountains tried its hardest to fight back, but in the end, it collapsed. Hanwoo snorted and returned to his original form, the Bull Demon King.

Minhyuk, who watched everything on the sidelines, saw the gasping Bull Demon King reach out a hand toward the Lord of the Mountains.

“It was a good match.”

‘What the hell is going on...?’

But something far more shocking happened in front of Minhyuk. The Lord of the Mountains, trying hard to catch its breath, started to turn red. Even the ferocious horn as sharp as a trident on its forehead had turned red. Then, with a flash of light, the Lord of the Mountains changed forms and became human.

The Lord of the Mountains was the same as Hanwoo, who could change into human form whenever he wanted. But what was more shocking was that the Lord of the Mountains was a woman.

“This is the first time I have met someone of the same race. It’s an honor to meet such a beauty,” the Bull Demon King, Hanwoo, said.

This was the first time that Minhyuk had seen Hanwoo act like this. Then, he saw the Lord of the Mountains’ cheeks grow even redder after hearing Hanwoo’s experienced and practiced words.

“I’m also very honored to meet you. How about we turn back into cows together, graze, and eat hay over there?”

“*Fufu*. Why don’t we have a cup(?) of water by the beautiful river beside it? I think that would be perfect.”

“Uhm... Ex- Excuse me...”

The two cows, going to walk somewhere, turned to look back at Minhyuk when they heard his cautious call.

“Can I take those?”

“Who is that human?”

“He’s my master.”

“You can take them.”

“Ah. Yes...”

Minhyuk readily(?) accepted the words and harvested all the ingredients he could see. When he saw Hanwoo and the Lord of the Mountains walking somewhere together, he felt happy yet uncomfortable at the fact that things were quickly resolved.

That was right. He felt happy yet uncomfortable.

‘*Why...?*’

Chapter 1028

Rumble—!

The sound coming from Beradon’s stomach was as loud as thunder. He might be starving, but he had a smile on his face.

‘*Fufu. He’s probably receiving a beating from the Lord of the Mountains now.*’

The Lord of the Mountains had been protecting these mountains for a long time. What Beradon asked Minhyuk to dig were ingredients that had been growing with the nourishment of the power and energy of that Lord of the Mountains.

The truth was, Beradon had tried countless times to pick some of those ingredients but every single time resulted in failure. That showed how ferocious, strong, and swift the Lord of the Mountains was.

'I could kill it if I wanted to.'

But there was no reason for Beradon to kill the Lord of the Mountains.

This test he presented to the young man was by no means easy.

'It's because the ingredients that grew from the energy of the Lord of the Mountains will wither on the spot the moment it dies.'

What if the young man was able to suppress it? Well, Beradon was sure that he still could not get those ingredients. The ingredients would eventually wither if they were forcibly taken from the Lord of the Mountains.

The young man was the one who was able to resist Beradon's power. He might just be stronger than he expected. But even if the young man was strong, the only way for him to obtain those ingredients was for the Lord of the Mountains to give it to him willingly.

"Fufufu!" Beraden laughed happily.

However, just ten minutes later, he was taken aback,

"I brought the ingredients."

"...?"

"It's a bit hot, right?"

Beradon stared blankly at the young man, who was carrying the ingredients in his hands, while two cows who took the form of humans followed behind him with flushed faces.

"Sir Hanwoo, why is your name Hanwoo?"

"Fufu. Do you know the meaning of Hanwoo?" Hanwoo chuckled, his words carrying a deep meaning. And Minhyuk? He laughed awkwardly on the side as Hanwoo said, "My master said that Hanwoo is the best and most outstanding cow."

"Oh my! That's so cool...!"

"I heard that there's 1+ and 1++, but my master said that he named me Hanwoo because I'm a great and amazing cow greater than 1++."

"That's amazing! Excuse me, can you give me a name too?"

Minhyuk was left flustered. He knew that the Bull Demon King would be hurt if he knew the true meaning of Hanwoo 1++. So, he hurriedly racked his brain to find a suitable answer to the Lord of the Mountain's question and be done with the topic altogether.

'This is the American Server.'

And based on the American beef grading system, their best and most fantastic beef was graded prime.

"P- Prime. How does Prime sound?"

“Oh my! Prime, huh? That sounds amazing! What does the name mean?”

“In America, it’s the best tasti— no... It’s the most outstanding and excellent cow on this continent.”

“Thank you! I will return this favor to you later!”

[You have given the Lord of the Mountains a name.]

[The Lord of the Mountains is delighted with the name “Prime.”]

[Prime’s favor has increased.]

[The Lord of the Mountains Prime promises to do you a favor once.]

As he looked at the Lord of the Mountains Prime and Hanwoo standing together, Minhyuk thought, ‘*Even so, Hanwoo is still the best.*’ This fact remained unchanged.

Beradon looked back at Minhyuk. He was amazed by how thorough he was.

“The Lord of the Mountains is one of the few remaining members of the Bull Demon Race. She must have felt lonely because she could not meet any members of her race.”

He thought that the young man named Minhyuk was experienced.

“I did not expect that you would take advantage of the fact that she is a member of the Bull Demon and win her over with a handsome man.”

“...”

Minhyuk actually wanted to subdue the Lord of the Mountains. As for the rest... It was taken care of by the Bull Demon King.

“That’s amazing. You wouldn’t be able to get those ingredients even if you overpower and subdue the Lord of the Mountains. I can’t believe that you can get what I couldn’t from the Lord of the Mountains by using such an out-of-the-box thinking and method.”

Beradon sincerely admired Minhyuk’s ways.

“I have to acknowledge and recognize you with this.”

This was what Minhyuk had been waiting for. Then, the notifications rang.

[Beradon has given you a slight recognition.]

[You have leveled up.]

Minhyuk looked at the notifications in awe. He thought, ‘*This is really cheat-like.*’

And the situation was more cheat-like because it was Minhyuk. The increase in his level once he received Beradon’s recognition was not restricted by the amount of EXP he had in his EXP bar. As long as he received the recognition, his level would increase by one, no matter what. So, whether at Level 1 or Level 500, they would level up by one.

As someone who stood at the top of the official rankings, Minhyuk received the greatest effect from this.

‘At my level, it has become tough to level up. An increase in my level is worth a lot.’

If he were hunting, Minhyuk would have to hunt regularly for about a month and a half before he could level up. Of course, this was with the exception of boss monsters. So, it could be said that the situation had allowed him to take a huge step closer to Level 700.

: The Thing Protected by the Lord of the Mountains.]

[You will be able to receive a small lesson from Beradon.]

But before that, Beradon smiled faintly at Prime and Hanwoo.

“Even I found the Lord of the Mountains to be a pitiful being. She protected these mountains every day, not knowing whether other members of her race were still in existence. Thinking she was the only one left, she felt unhappy as she continued protecting these mountains.”

Of course, Beradon had been attacked by Prime a few times before. However, the main reason why they did not clash that much was because Beradon cared for the bull demon. So, when he saw the Bull Demon King before him, he could not help but impart a small lesson upon him.

Beradon could not see through another person’s heart and read their minds at will. However, he had more knowledge than anybody else in the world.

“There is a place where the few surviving members of the Bull Demon Race live.”

“...!”

Hanwoo’s eyes grew wide when he heard that. The truth was, the Bull Demon King was not from these lands. He had always been curious about his race. After all, he could turn into a cow or a human at will.

Then, he met Prime. After sharing a deep and strong love(?) with each other, he asked Prime if she knew if there were still other people from their race. But the female bull demon said that she did not know either. It seemed like the answers they sought were in Beradon’s hands.

Minhyuk was also interested in their conversation. He thought, *‘There are more beings like Hanwoo and Prime out there?’*

Hanwoo, with his Hanwoo’s Charge, was an excellent vanguard who could wipe out more than 100,000 enemies in one go. After using everything he could use in his cow form, Hanwoo could change into human form and fight again.

‘Are you saying that there are more Hanwoos out there?’

Minhyuk already made a scenario in his head.

During the battle with the Great Luvien Empire! The Beyond the Heavens Empire had far fewer troops than the enemy. However! There is a vast herd of dozens of gigantic cows charging toward the black sea created by the forces of the Luvien Empire!

‘That’s crazy.’

Of course, Hanwoo was also showing a great interest. He asked, “Are there more people like me?”

“Is that true?”

And the same was true for Prime. Except for Hanwoo, she did not know if there were still others of the same race as her.

“Let me draw a map for you.”

Hanwoo held the map Beradon had given him tightly, proof of his curiosity about his own race.

“Originally, there were thousands of bull demons in existence. But a lot of them had died.”

“Who killed them?”

Beradon chuckled at Hanwoo’s question. He said, “That’s something you must figure out on your own.”

Hanwoo was very grateful that Beradon told them this much information. Then, he immediately turned to look at Minhyuk. Minhyuk welcomed such a development. So, he nodded in agreement.

“You have my permission.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Not long after, Hanwoo and Prime, with the map in their hands, left.

Beradon, who was looking at Minhyuk, murmured, “Oh my. So, you’re the Food God.”

Then, he sat on a nearby rock. Then, he continued, “You came to find me because you can no longer grow. All the people blocked by that wall always wanted to come and meet me.”

That was right. Leveling up was the easiest and most typical way for a character to become stronger. However, to achieve a much stronger power than the power gained by just leveling up, one had to grow and develop one's class.

And now, both of Minhyuk’s classes, the Food God and the Battle God, had reached a point of stagnation. For him to unseal more of the power of the Battle God and the Food God, he had to reach Level 700. The problem was that the road to reach Level 700 was far too bumpy, and the process would give him little to no gain.

What Minhyuk needed was a breakthrough that would allow him to get out of this stagnant period.

“*Fufu*. You have been clinging to what has been set for you.”

Minhyuk could not understand what Beradon meant when he clung to what was set for him.

“Foreigners only grow after following what has been set and decided for them.”

“Do you mean...”

Minhyuk still could not understand.

What has been set and decided for them? It was none other than quests. Completing a high-ranking quest would give a much higher EXP than completing an ordinary hunt. It also allowed them to obtain something special, like an increase in stats or a class-specific artifact.

Yes, it was just as Beradon said. Minhyuk had been growing by completing quests. Quests were set by the system. And that was also the reason why he had reached the limits. Although some quests would appear suddenly sometimes, Beradon was still correct.

“We can just create one of those set things.” Beradon smiled faintly. “Just like this.”

[The Growth Cultivator has been activated.]

[The Growth Cultivator is observing you.]

[The Growth Cultivator has started to create quests related to you!]

“...!”

At this moment, Minhyuk realized that Beradon was the person who could make something even if nothing had been set. In other words, he could create quests that Minhyuk could no longer reach for.

‘This is nuts!’

Minhyuk was very shocked. The notifications came continuously while he was still reeling from the shock.

[The Growth Cultivator has started to chase after something related to the Food God.]

[The Growth Cultivator has started to chase after something related to the Battle God.]

The notifications grew silent for a moment. At the same time, Beradon closed his eyes and muttered, “Hmmm. This is much better.”

Beradon was quite shocked. He did not expect that the Food God would also be the Battle God.

Not long after, the notifications began to ring once again.

[The Growth Cultivator is creating something related to the Battle God.]

Beradon opened his eyes. Then, a smile that was by no means gentle appeared on his face as he looked at Minhyuk. He said, “As I have mentioned, I have no intentions of taking any more disciples.”

Minhyuk understood what he meant.

[The Growth Cultivator has started to increase the difficulty of something related to the Battle God that it is creating!]

‘Hey- Hey! This gramps...?’

Then, Beradon opened his mouth again and said, “But if you can accomplish this, then I will accept you as...”

A sparkle appeared in Beradon’s eyes.

“...my last disciple.”

Ring!

‘...’

Minhyuk was stunned.

“I did not create something out of nothing.”

Minhyuk’s ears perked up as he listened carefully to Beradon’s words.

“I’m just converting something that already exists into something that has been set for you.”

That was right. Not everything could be linked to a quest because it was related to the Battle God. But Beradon had this overpowered and cheat-like power that allowed him to link something related to his target into a quest and add rewards.

That was when Minhyuk saw the “???” written in the rewards portion of the quest.

President Kang Taehoon, who had finished the third-anniversary announcement press conference, boarded the car and returned with Team Leader Park Minggyu.

“Player Minhyuk has met Beradon, who can create a foothold for players to grow further. He will definitely achieve shocking growth during this period.”

He may also obtain greater power that could help him fight against Helenia.

‘It’s still not enough.’

This was what President Kang had concluded.

But not long after, Minggyu’s eyes widened when he checked his phone. He said, “President. I received a message from Lee Minhwa.”

“...?”

Minggyu hurriedly gave his report, “The Teacher, Beradon, has created one quest related to the Battle God with the power of The Growth Cultivator.”

“*Ahem...* He’s really an amazing NPC.”

NPCs could create quests related to themselves. But The Teacher? He could make a quest for the Battle God even if they weren’t related to each other at all.

“If Player Minhyuk completes this quest, he will reach even higher heights.”

Nevertheless, Kang Taehoon believed that it was just limited to that.

Then, Team Leader Park opened his mouth again and said, “The quest rewards include ‘???’ and ‘Final Disciple’.”

“WHAT?!”

The Teacher would accept a final disciple?! This was very shocking. When he first heard the report, Taehoon thought Player Minhyuk had just received another quest to help him gain a foothold to grow even further.

Team Leader Park relayed the hypotheses he created based on the message he received from Lee Minhwa. He said, “The quest has ‘???’ on it, right? Beradon set the rewards. Assuming that Player Minhyuk truly becomes his final disciple... then I think he will be able to gain a foothold that will allow him to continue to grow.”

“The reason?” President Kang asked, tension evident in his tone.

Team Leader Park said, “That ‘???’ written as one of the rewards... there’s a chance it will allow Minhyuk to use ‘The Growth Cultivator’ temporarily for a few months.”

“...!”

President Kang Taehoon’s eyes grew wide. A player would be allowed to access The Growth Cultivator. Of course, it would be impossible for them to obtain this power permanently. However, as Team Leader Park said, they could still use the skill, albeit temporarily. And if that happened?

“Player Minhyuk will probably create a variety of quests related to his classes and charge straight toward Level 700.”

And there was also one thing that they had to take into consideration. The Growth Cultivator was a power equivalent to the Eight Pillar’s Disaster.

Chapter 1029

Locke, one of the executives of Beyond the Heavens Empire, was a man with a face and a personality(?). And there was one thing in the Beyond the Heavens Empire that he could say he was the best in and was most proud of—it was none other than his body.

Locke was very proud that no one in the Beyond the Heavens Empire had a body that was fitter than his own. He was a man who only had working out and exercising in his mind.

He had been dumped by a woman recently. Usually, men would look for soju and get drunk on alcohol when they got dumped. As for Locke, in his sorrow, he ran to the gym. He whipped out his

protein shakes and lifted weights, trying heavier ones than usual. Funnily enough, the sadness and frustration of that day allowed him to lift much heavier weights.

Simply put, Locke was a gym-loving guy who only knew one pattern: game, gym, sleep.

After finishing his workout, Locke logged back inside Athenae.

“Hoo. I wonder if anyone would like to work out with me?”

Unfortunately, no one around Locke wanted to join him in his healthy workout routine.

‘If I can find people to come and work out with me, then I think I can break down Level 600’s third wall.’

Sometimes, having a competitor would allow a person’s motivation to burn brightly.

While pondering this matter, Locke went to where Balaman, the slaves, and the prisoners lived. The Beyond the Heavens’ executives would always take turns patrolling and supervising Balaman, his men, and the rest of the people they had brought in.

Locke looked around the area where the prisoners from the Qingdao Kingdom were and listened to their conversations.

‘They’re all working very hard.’

All of them were doing their best in their work and studies. And from what he could tell, they were all very grateful for the grace and kindness that the Beyond the Heavens Empire had bestowed upon them. They were all pleased since they were given comfortable and warm homes to live in. They even went so far as to praise the Beyond the Heavens Empire when they saw Locke doing his patrols.

After checking where the Qingdao Kingdom prisoners were, Locke went to where Balaman and his men were. Of course, they were still being exploited by the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

‘Tsk, tsk. These bad bastards.’

Minhyuk had ordered his men to give at least the bare minimum of support to Balaman and his men. It was because he said they might have a place to be of good use. In the first place, Minhyuk did not pay much attention to them. Of course, the same was true for the rest of the Beyond the Heavens’ executives.

When Locke arrived, he saw Balaman and his almost a hundred thousand men exercising. Shockingly enough, even Balaman, who had now become the living dead, was exercising.

“Take advantage of the break time... continue... exercising... If... you stop... your muscles... will be lost...!”

“Yes, sir!”

“Yes, sir!”

Locke was in awe when he saw the muscles rippling on their bare chests. When he saw one of the guards approaching him, he asked, “What are they doing?”

“The Exploited Ones are only given a short break. But every time, they will rush out of the mines and exercise. They said they will lose their muscles if they slack off or something...”

“What about their food?”

“Their three meals daily consist of chicken breasts, salad without sauce, and some fruit. To be honest, it has helped us cut a huge amount from our food costs.”

Locke was completely overcome with emotion. Many people did not understand him, but he finally found people who shared his views and values.

“Soon... muscles... strength...!”

“Uwaaaaaaah!”

“Uwooooooh!”

Then, he heard their roars.

Locke had a long-time dream. There was this war movie, 301, that was a huge sensation overseas.

‘This is Spwarta!’

It was a film set in ancient times in which strong, muscular, and healthy bare-chested soldiers go off to war.

Locke could not help but shudder in excitement at the thought of running bare-chested at the vanguard with these people and shouting, *‘This is Spwarta!’* It would be a spectacle.

Locke walked toward Balaman, whose muscles were bulging. When Balaman saw Locke and his bulging muscles, he seemed to recognize him as someone of the same kind as them.

However, Locke did not intend to show them any warmth and care. So, he asked coldly, “Bench press, squats and deadlifts. How many can you do?”

Minhyuk, who received a new quest related to the Battle God from The Teacher Beradon, could not help but shudder. He was sure that the “???” written in the rewards had something to do with the gods inside the God’s Prison. So, just as it was written in the quest description, he had to go to the Land of the Gods and meet Erach, the God’s Prison’s warden.

But before that, Minhyuk had to fulfill his promise to Beradon.

“You bastard. My stomach is going to stick to my back now!”

Minhyuk had promised Beradon that he would cook a dish using the ingredients protected by the Lord of the Mountains. He even said he should give him proper recognition if the old man were satisfied with his dish. Simply put, he just used a few words, but he was able to obtain an opportunity to increase his level once more. Because of that, Minhyuk wanted to put his heart and soul into cooking this dish.

Various colorful vegetables were among the ingredients he had on hand. So, what should he make? The same bibimbap that he had eaten earlier?

‘That’s delicious too. But right now, I think something else suits him better.’

The temperature in the mountains was quite chilly. Parts of the mountains had snow, too, which seemed to bring a greater and more penetrating chill to the body. There was a dish that used such colorful vegetables while simultaneously warming the body. It was none other than shabu-shabu.

“I’ll make you some warm soup.”

Beradon’s nose had turned runny from the cold weather, acting completely unlike his name as The Teacher as he nodded at Minhyuk. Then, he said, “A warm soup. I’m looking forward to it.”

Minhyuk began to cook the dish. There was nothing much for him to prepare. All he needed to do was make the shabu-shabu broth, the vegetables, and the beef.

He sat opposite Beradon and gently dumped the vegetables into the broth he had prepared. The vegetables included bok choy, bean sprouts, water parsley, and mushrooms.

When Beradon saw that the broth had already started to boil, he tried to stretch out his chopsticks and pick one of the vegetables.

“The vegetables are not yet fully cooked.”

“Hmm,” Beradon hummed, licking his lips in regret.

Instead of that, Minhyuk presented him with something better.

“At this time, it’s not the vegetables but the beef we can eat. All we need to do is blanch it a bit.”

Beradon quickly clamped a piece of beef for shabu-shabu that Minhyuk had offered him with his chopsticks and dipped it in the boiling soup. It only took a few seconds for the meat to get cooked. Beradon tasted the beef without anything else first.

‘It’s warm. And the smooth and soft yet chewy texture tastes excellent in my mouth.’

With a happy smile, Beradon picked up another piece of beef. This time, he dipped the blanched beef in the chili sauce Minhyuk had prepared earlier.

‘The spicy yet sweet sauce captures the greasy aftertaste of the beef and balances it out quite well.’

While the two were eating the beef, the color of the soup began to change a bit. The beef’s flavor slowly seeped into the broth. The best part? The vegetables were now cooked and ready to be eaten.

Minhyuk picked up some beef along with plenty of vegetables. Then, he dipped everything in the chili sauce and put it in his mouth.

Munch, munch, munch—

The combination of the hot broth absorbed by the vegetables, the soft and chewy texture of the meat, and the distinct flavor of the chili sauce spread in his mouth and created a delightful harmony of flavors.

“Ho.”

“Munch, munch.”

Their breaths fogged as the two men continued eating the warm dish in the snowy mountains. When they finally reached the climax of their meal, Minhyuk said, “I’ll add some knife-cut noodles.”

He added and cooked some knife-cut noodles in the soup. At the same time, he took out some well-ripened kimchi. Once the knife-cut noodles had been cooked well, Minhyuk scooped some soup and noodles. Steam rose from the noodles as he scooped them into a bowl, handing it to Beradon. Then, he scooped some for himself. After that, he scooped up a huge mouthful of noodles and put them in his mouth.

“Sluuuuuuuuuurp!”

A feast of chewiness erupted in Minhyuk’s mouth the moment he chewed the knife-cut noodles. After eating the noodles, Minhyuk grabbed the bowl and took a sip of the soup.

“Kyahaa! I feel so warm inside!”

The chill in his body seemed to have melted away. Then, he took another huge bite of the noodles. But this time, it was accompanied by a mouthful of well-ripened kimchi.

Crunch, crunch—

‘As expected, knife-cut noodles taste best with kimchi.’

Minhyuk smiled happily. When he turned to look at Beradon, he could tell that the man was enjoying himself.

Beradon, who caught sight of Minhyuk looking at him, said, “*Ahem, ahem.* It’s edible.”

His words were completely different from his actions. After all, the old man had been eating the shabu-shabu in a hurry. At this moment, Minhyuk thought that the old man was quite cute.

Not long after, Beradon placed his bowl down and took a deep breath. “*Hoo...* I can’t eat anymore, though...?”

“But there’s still some left?”

They still haven’t put the cherry on top! Minhyuk took a lot of the shabu-shabu broth out before adding rice and egg to the pot to make some porridge. Minhyuk, who had finished his porridge, saw Beradon emptying his bowl quickly as if someone was going to take it away from him.

“I thought you said you can’t eat anymore...”

“*Hmph!* You brat! You should finish the food on your plate. How can so many dishes come out from just a single pot?”

There were many reasons why Beradon was so surprised.

First, he was able to enjoy the taste of meat.

Second, he was able to enjoy the taste of vegetables.

Third, he was able to enjoy the taste of noodles.

And fourth, he was able to enjoy the taste of rice.

It was an extraordinary yet delicious and delightful dish.

[Beradon has given you a slight recognition.]

[You have leveled up.]

And immediately after that, Minhyuk's level increased again. In just one day, Minhyuk could raise his level by three. At this point, Minhyuk realized he was at least 5% stronger than yesterday.

"You're quite the chef, huh?"

But there was still something left. Beradon had made a promise before Minhyuk went out to fetch the ingredients.

"Now, please tell me who your two most outstanding disciples are?"

Beradon frowned when he heard the question. It was the beginning of a story that he did not want to reminisce about, but a promise was a promise.

Soon, Beradon said, "Helenia."

"...!"

Minhyuk's eyes grew wide. Helenia, who wanted to destroy the entire world, was Beradon's disciple. He jumped up from his seat and could not help but look at Beradon with an indescribable expression on his face.

"She has killed a lot of people and tried to take away a lot of things. Were you shocked and disappointed at the fact that I taught her?"

Minhyuk did not know how to answer the question. Perhaps Beradon helped her grow stronger like that, no?

"I do not discriminate. There is no good or evil in my eyes. I teach anyone qualified to receive my teachings. I may not be evil, but does that mean I only have to teach good people? Who set up that logic?"

Minhyuk could not bring himself to deny the old man. Also, he already knew that nothing good would come out even if he argued over this.

"What about your other disciple?"

Beradon smiled faintly as he looked up to the sky. Then, he said, "Athenae."

"...?!"

The shock that Minhyuk experienced was far more than the shock he received when he heard Helenia's name.

Athenae was the Greatest God and was also one of the Eight Pillars. She was the one who ruled everything in this world. That alone was enough to prove how much of a big shot she was. It was surprising to find out she had also been Beradon's disciple.

“Can you tell me more about them?”

“You damn brat! You asked me about the two, but I believe we never agreed on that.”

Beradon has no reason to tell Minhyuk their story.

“Do you think my mouth is so loose, huh?”

Minhyuk shook his head. Beradon’s mouth was indeed a tough one to crack. If he could easily hear the story about Athenae and Helenia, then the entire world could listen to their story just as easily.

“Enough. You should go. If you’re unable to complete this, don’t even think about coming to see me again,” Beradon said as he walked away with his hands behind his back.

“I will do my best so that I can come to see you again,” Minhyuk said, greeting Beradon politely before disappearing on the spot.

Beradon, who continued on his walk around the mountains, had a severe look on his face. He thought, *‘I know. Many have died because I did not distinguish between good and evil.’*

Thinking that it was the last time, he had accepted another disciple. At that time, he felt this disciple of his was stronger than Helenia and wiser than Athenae.

Beradon looked up to the sky and recalled the disciple he loved and hated most.

Team Leader Park Minggyu discussed this with Lee Minhwa on the Special Players Management Team.

“The players are in a very festive mood. After all, they have received a 3x increase in EXP Acquisition Rate for an entire month. Even the players who have achieved Level 600 are working hard to reach Level 650.”

“How many players do you think will reach Level 650 by the end of this month?” Team Leader Park mumbled. He already knew the answer to this question. He just wanted to voice it out.

Lee Minhwa smiled bitterly. She said, “Maybe around two hundred?”

“Right.”

But would those two hundred players and Player Minhyuk, the bastion of who President Kang spoke, be able to stop what would happen?

Of course, just as Minggyu discussed with Taehoon in the car, Minhyuk had received a foothold that would allow him to grow even further. But according to their calculations, even if Minhyuk became more muscular, it would still be difficult for them to beat Helenia. Team Leader Park could not help but think they still had a long way to go after considering the upcoming disaster.

Minggyu stared blankly at the screen, which showed Beradon’s situation. There was a sad smile on Beradon’s face as he looked up to the sky.

[Crunch– crunch–]

The sound of someone walking through the snow of the snowy mountains rang. Team Leader Park jumped to his feet when he saw the face of the man who appeared on the screen in front of him not long after.

In shock, he could not help but murmur, “Is this another bastion...?”

Beradon, with a sad smile, looked at the man walking up the mountain path. The man looked very handsome, with fair skin and black hair. He was also one of the Eight Pillars and his third disciple, who left him.

“It’s been a long time, Obren.”

Chapter 1030

Obren was born as one of the Six Monster Gods. Unlike most of the Six Monster Gods, who lived up to their names and became monsters, he lived a lonely yet content life surrounded by books for thousands of years.

At that time, Athenae knew.

–Obren, that child. He’s more intelligent and more outstanding than any of my other children. Whether it’s the Six Monster Gods or the Absolute Gods.

Beradon recalled the words of her disciple, Athenae. He remembered the day clearly; Obren, having lived alone for thousands of years, came to see him.

–I want to protect mankind.

After meeting Kronad, the popes, and the paladins, Obren wanted to find a way to become stronger. Beradon could feel his noble and gentle heart that sought ways to help him protect Kronad and the rest of mankind from all of the threats and dangers in the world.

Obren was a talented child with a good heart. Because of that, Beradon accepted him. As he taught Obren, he realized that something was wrong. He found something unusual about Kronad and the people Obren wanted to protect.

–Obren, the scariest thing in this world is mankind.

Although Beradon told Obren these words, his trust and belief in Kronad and the humans were firm and unshakeable. When Kronad began to create an army to take down the Land of the Gods, Beradon moved to stop Obren.

–Obren, can’t you see that something’s wrong? Why are humans going against the gods? In the first place, Kronad just wants to become a god by killing the other gods!

–No. Kronad definitely has a noble and lofty will. I will protect Kronad.

Beradon eventually used force to stop Obren to ensure that his most cherished and outstanding disciple would not go the wrong way. However, in the end, Obren pushed him back.

–I’m sorry, Master. I have to protect them. I promise to find you and apologize later.

Obren, who left just like that, had not returned to see him. Then, Beradon heard that Obren was forced to kill countless gods and millions of humans because of a “Slaughterer’s Dish” that Kronad fed him. That was when Obren took on the name Evil God and became one of the Eight Pillars.

At that time, Beradon wanted to become one of the Eight Pillars, but he eventually gave up. He blamed himself for being unable to stop his disciple from walking down the wrong path. He did not deserve to sit on such a seat.

Not long after, Obren disappeared. Beradon heard from someone that Obren had turned into a seasoning jar.

He would miss this disciple of his from time to time. He missed seeing his disciple smile as he read a book and greeted him with a “Master.” whenever he saw him coming.

“Master.”

“...”

There was an unknown glint in Beradon’s eyes as he looked at Obren. Beradon had been living a life cut off from the rest of the world. He did not know much about what happened outside.

Then, Obren said, “There’s something I want to protect again.”

“Ho– Hohoho.” Beradon laughed dejectedly.

The child, who had turned evil because of his desire to protect someone, came to see him again because there was something that he wanted to protect again.

“Can’t you choose to live for yourself this time?”

Beradon did not want to see his cherished disciple get hurt once again, and he hated it. He hated that his disciple left and abandoned him because he wanted to protect something. Obren, who left him to protect someone, was subjected to such an incident. But whether it was the past, the present, or the future, this child remained good-hearted and kind.

When he heard Obren’s bitter laughter, Beradon asked, “Alright. So, what are you trying to protect this time?”

Obren answered, “There’s this place called the Beyond the Heavens Empire.”

Beradon narrowed his eyes and said, “Do you think you can deceive the eyes of this old man?”

Obren smiled bitterly. It seemed like his master could still see through someone else clearly, even after so much time had passed. So, he said, “There’s this person I want to protect.”

The Athenae Community Site was buzzing. Why? This was all because of the triple EXP Acquisition Rate event that Joy Co. Ltd. has recently announced. Of course, their interest would naturally be piqued, especially after they announced that the top ten players who achieved the best growth during this period would receive a +5 All Stat Increase Potion. The player with the greatest growth would receive a +8 All Stat Increase Potion.

[But if we’re talking about achieving the greatest growth, wouldn’t the novice players have the greatest advantage? Don’t they get stronger quickly even though they play only for a few days?]

[Is that so? But from what I understand, the “greatest growth” that Athenae had announced would depend on their levels. For example, Even if it is listed as a Level 1 player increasing their level by 100 and a Level 600 player increasing their level by ten this month, their ranking would be determined by calculating the total EXP they have accumulated and how strong they will become. Then, they will be given their rewards appropriately.]

[Oh.]

[Ah. Hahahahahaha. I think Minhyuk’s nursing a stomach ache just about now. Hahahahahaha.]

[Yep. I think so, too. After all, all players will receive a 3x increase in EXP and Artifact Acquisition Rate, and he’s the only exception.]

[Do you think there’s a conflict between Joy Co. Ltd. and the Beyond the Heavens Empire?]

[It sounds possible.]

[Woah. But if Minhyuk gets the +8 All Stat Increase Potion, then he will be able to become very strong. shivers]

[Agreed. But in the first place, it seems impossible. From what I know, the EXP needed by a God-class player to level up is three times the amount required by an ordinary-class player. But our Lord, the Food God, also has the sub-class Battle God.]

[If you get a sub-class, you’ll need more EXP to level up, right? And if we add to that the amount of EXP required by the Battle God, then... shivers. Then, does that mean that he needs at least ten times the EXP of an ordinary-class player before he can level up? Wow. That’s nuts...]

[How the hell was he able to increase his level to this point? Hahahaha.]

[Fortunately, Minhyuk has become a king and then an emperor. AFAIK, the EXP level of the kings and emperors will increase a bit every time their territory, kingdom, or empire grows more than the set territory. I think it is some kind of privilege.]

[Tbh, it’s incredible that he can have the highest level of EXP with that many restrictions.]

Then, at that moment...

[Huh? Our Lord, the Food God has just leveled up again?]

[Woah. WTH? What’s he doing right now?]

Just a few moments after President Kang Taehoon made an official announcement, Minhyuk achieved a ridiculous feat of leveling up twice in a row. Because of that, most players were left wondering if he was doing some grand quest.

When Minhyuk’s level increased by one again, everyone was left stunned. Those who like to bite and gnaw at others also began to speak up.

[Well, it seems like he’s doing a special quest. But guys, no matter what he does, Minhyuk will not be able to be one of the players who grow the most.]

[Nope, nope. There’s a way. Pfft.]

There’s a way. Many players were interested when they saw those words.

[He only needs to kill Named Monsters non-stop.]

[Hahahahahahaha.]

[Wow. Look at this guy going all sarcastic.]

[Leave him be. He looks like he's feeling a sense of superiority just because he got a 3x EXP Acquisition Rate and Minhyuk did not.]

[Bros. Why is a Named Monster called a Named Monster? It's called a Named Monster because it's rare. Ordinary players wouldn't even be able to see one in two months.]

[*sigh*. Where can we even find Named Monsters to kill?]

The players just laughed off the ridiculous nonsense spouted by one of the players.

Erach, the former warden of the God's Prison, talked with the next generation Battle God, who came to find him. Although Minhyuk was the Battle God, he was very polite when he asked about God's Prison, so Erach explained carefully what the place was like.

"Instead of calling it a prison, I think it's more appropriate to call it 'pandemonium.' The other gods and guards call it like that."

"Pandemonium?"

"It's a very chaotic place. When you hear the name God's Prison, you might think it's only a place where gods who have done something wrong are locked up. Right?"

Minhyuk nodded.

"But those locked up inside that place are not limited to gods. There are powerful monsters, which the gods think are a pain, and gods, who were defeated in a power struggle, imprisoned there. There are so many different beings locked up in that place."

'Monsters that the gods think are trouble?' Minhyuk thought, a flash of interest appearing on his face.

The gods were all-mighty. If even these gods thought they were troublesome beings, then it was proof of these monsters' strength.

'Are they God-rank monsters?'

Minhyuk continued to listen to Erach's words.

"Because they're all locked up in the same prison, it has created a pandemonium. Since they had been locked up in that place for a long time, they had started gathering and joining forces. Because of that, it had become quite difficult to control the prison. The Battle God and the other gods are very relieved. They 'think' that they would not be able to get out of prison because of Mother Athenae's absolute power."

"*Think?*" Minhyuk looked confused.

This one word meant that Erach had a slightly different view of the prison.

“I have been inside the prison and have seen those monsters. I strongly emphasized that we must prepare to fight against them and not neglect them like we are doing now. I have told them these words countless times before.”

At this moment, Minhyuk realized that the quest related to the Battle God that Beradon created for him was related to this.

“But the other guards treated me as if I’m a madman. Even the other gods ignored my words. I am sorry to say this, but I am terrified.”

The mere thought of them was enough to make Erach nervous.

“Remember what I said earlier?” Erach said as he walked together with Minhyuk. “The gods, who have been defeated in a power struggle, are also imprisoned in the God’s Prison. Do you think those gods will just continue to stay meekly and count their fingers inside the God’s Prison for all eternity?”

If Minhyuk were in that position, he would not sit still. He would definitely give it his all so that he could get back his power and authority. But it seemed like the other gods remained unbothered because of “Athenae’s Absolute Power.”

‘No. Rather than ignoring, it’s more like they’re just watching from the sidelines.’

It was because they were busy. And since they were busy, they did not want to worry about something that had not happened yet. They might be gods, but they were no different from most humans. Perhaps they were thinking that it would be fine as long as it did not cross the paths of their lives.

“I’m worried. Especially because the previous generation Battle God, Evan, is there. He is the one pushed out of his throne by the current generation Battle God, who is leading the Land of the Gods.”

Minhyuk stopped in his tracks. He seemed to have realized why The Growth Cultivator had created this quest. He felt his breath turn ragged.

‘Am I supposed to meet with the previous generation Battle God?’

He did not know what kind of person the previous generation Battle God was. However, there was a chance that he would open up another path for his growth.

Then, Erach said, “It would be good if nothing happened. But if something really happened, I think this would be a good chance for you, the next generation Battle God, to establish yourself.”

Yes, that was indeed the case. It was Minhyuk’s job to solve what the other gods did not want to do as they sat on the sidelines.

Not long after, the two stood in front of a gigantic iron gate.

“If you go inside, you can meet with the other guards. Since you’re the Battle God, it won’t be difficult for you to go in and see the situation inside,” Erach said as he bowed politely. “I don’t ever want to go back inside that place again.”

After he watched Erach disappear, Minhyuk could not help but feel nervous.

‘Perhaps this is the place with the most strong beings gathered in the world.’

Many such beings had been trapped inside this place for a long time.

Minhyuk carefully opened the gigantic iron gate and stepped inside. The moment he entered, a notification rang in his ears.

[The power of Athenae dwelling in the God’s Prison is weakening.]

[Monsters and gods abandoned and turned crazy are about to run out and wreak havoc in the world!]

[Warning!]

[Warning!]

[Danger!]

[You have entered the dungeon with the highest level in Athenae.]

[The average level of the prisoners of the God’s Prison is at Level 700.]

[Your EXP Acquisition Rate will double.]

[Your Gold Acquisition Rate will triple.]

[Mobs imprisoned inside the God’s Prison have a meager Artifact Drop Rate.]

[You can only leave the God’s Prison after you have purified the place. The only other way to go is to be forced to log out.]

Then, Minhyuk saw the guards lying in the pool of their blood. They had long turned into cold corpses.