

Gourmet 31

Chapter 31: Food God Becomes a Chef

"...Why don't you handle this too?" Brock said, pointing at the sack of onions sitting next to him. The sack was filled with at least twenty kilograms of unpeeled onions. However, the moment Minhyuk touched the sack, all of the skin covering the onions instantly disappeared.

"I'm done. Does this mean that I could learn to cook now?! Wheee!" Minhyuk shouted in joy after receiving the quest completion notification.

After a while, Len came inside. He roared, "Just peel it if you're going to peel it! Quit yapping around!"

"...Captain Len. This guy has already finished peeling the garlic. Ah, the onions too."

Len frowned when he heard Brock's words. He quickly checked the sack, only to discover that the garlic cloves had been peeled perfectly.

'Does he have some kind of special ability?'

People outside the Chef class rarely had a skill that could help them process the ingredients. However, the situation right now showed Len that Minhyuk had one. Thus, he had no choice but to say, "Sigh... Fine."

Minhyuk smiled happily when he saw Len nod, knowing that he was agreeing to his stay in the kitchen. He asked, "What should I do first?"

Going to work early in the morning had made Team Leader Park Minggyu very exhausted. He even brought a pack of red ginseng to suck on, just so he could go through the rest of the day with enough energy. When he looked up, he saw Lee Minhwa already sitting in front of her monitor. He greeted, "Good morning."

"Ah, Team Leader. You're here," Lee Minhwa said. She looked like she had been waiting for him to arrive.

Team Leader Park straightened out his clean, crisp suit before sitting down on his chair and looked at her curiously. He asked, "Why, what's happening?"

"Player Minhyuk has made contact with the secret NPC."

"...The secret NPC?" Team Leader Park asked as his forehead creased.

Secret NPCs were either strong people hiding their strength, or retired, reclusive masters that looked like normal people. If players could make contact with them, they would give players quests with amazing rewards.

"He volunteered for the Bordy Subjugation Troops, and then he asked to be placed in the military kitchen."

Team Leader Park's eyes widened in surprise at Lee Minhwa's words. He exclaimed, "From what I recall, the military kitchen should already be full, right?"

"Player Minhyuk increased his favor with the soldier in charge of personnel management."

"This guy is really wild... Why does the secret NPC have to be a chef NPC? That player, does he think that he was born to eat?"

"Well, I believe that eating good, delicious food is definitely a good thing," Lee Minhwa said with a grin.

"Hmmm... That might be true, yes. However, I believe the quest related to this secret NPC is already being tracked and pursued by someone else. Right?"

"Yes. That's right. The 'Twilight Chef' is looking for him and has already reached Isbin Village."

Team Leader Park tapped on his chin as he started to think deeply. Seeing his reaction, Lee Minhwa smiled lightly, saying, "We've been paying too much attention to Player Minhyuk these past few days. Anyway, there's probably no possibility of Player Minhyuk receiving that quest..."

"No chance of getting it at all..." Team Leader Park mumbled as he continued to ponder over this matter.

If they thought about it normally, that assumption would be correct. The NPC, Len, would ask the Twilight Chef to retrieve the Level 50 Orc Tribe Chieftain's essence for him. Quests were divided into shareable and unshareable quests. Shareable quests were quests that anybody could receive. It would depend on the NPC, but in some cases, the NPC would also choose to give the quests to others. It did not matter even if another player had already received it and was making good progress.

On the other hand, unshareable quests were quests that the NPC would not give to another player once another player was halfway through a linked quest. The NPC would not be able to even provide any information about the quest, to any other player. After all, ?Athenae God? would notify the guardian Len about it.

However, Team Leader Park still shook his head in denial and said, "Len will likely teach Player Minhyuk some basic cooking and allow him to acquire cooking skills."

"Is that so?"

"However, as soon as the Food God learns how to cook, a different power will open for him again."

"Yes."

The Food God's cooking was different from ordinary players' cooking. However, it would only show if the player learned how to cook. Every game needed players to explore on their own so they could add different flavors to their own gaming experience. The Food God had already found out that he could increase his stats in the beginning, but once he learned how to cook, he would be in for another surprise.

"However, we don't know if Player Minhyuk can receive the cooking skill yet."

"...Yes?"

"He has to get close to Len first before that can happen."

"Are you saying that it's impossible?"

"It's impossible. If you think about it, the odds are not in his favor. So, the possibility of him getting the skill and the quest is quite slim," Team Leader Park said, eyes shining brightly.

"There's an orc tribe living near the Bordy Plains. Unless a strange and weird variable pops up, Player Minhyuk won't be able to hunt the orc tribe."

"You're right."

"Right, let's put this aside for now. What's the Replica Specialist doing now? Isn't he changing his job class to the legendary class?"

"Ah, please wait."

The two people quickly changed their topic of discussion.

The subjugation troops began their trek towards the Bordy Plains. With the start of the expedition, the military kitchen embarked on their busy schedule, preparing the soldiers' meals within the cooking carriage. The cooking carriage had an area of around 30 sqm inside. Of course, the carriage was not that big on the outside, but it was possible to have a large area inside because of a special magic.

Chop, chop, chop, chop—

Len's hands were moving swiftly as he sliced the cabbage thinly. When he turned to look around, he saw their new recruit, Minhyuk, who had hard bread stuffed in his mouth as he washed the dishes diligently. After he finished washing the dishes, he filled a tub with hot water and soaked all of the plates and utensils in it for disinfection.

"Is it hot?"

"Nope, I'm fine!"

"The first thing you have to learn in cooking is hygiene and sanitation. Disinfecting the tableware can kill the bacteria that can cause food poisoning."

"Yes, I'll clean them all!" Minhyuk answered loudly as he continued to work diligently. It was true that he joined the military kitchen to eat more food. However, he also chose to join this unit because he wanted to be able to make more delicious food.

Perhaps, he could be considered to have an impure intention, and just wanted to get some sort of benefit from them, like what Len said before. However, Minhyuk never intended to force them to give it to him. He believed that he had to provide an equivalent exchange for whatever he wanted to gain from them. That was why he was doing his best on the job assigned to him.

Minhyuk disinfected the dishes and made sure that there was not a single speck of oil left on them. However, that did not mean that his work was done. No. Minhyuk quickly placed the potatoes inside a large basin filled with water. Then, he started to peel the potatoes.

"Captain, that guy's working really hard? Maybe he wasn't just saying empty words?"

"...I see."

Who among the players would even want to log inside the game just to peel garlic, or wash and disinfect the dishes? It would be better for them to just go back to real life, and work in a restaurant to get paid for their work. However, for some reason, Minhyuk worked hard in the game.

Then, a commotion suddenly occurred outside.

Kkiiii, kkiiii!

Kkiiii, kkiiii!

"It looks like monsters have shown up."

"Are you going to help them?"

"The duty of a military chef is to cook and feed the soldiers. Anyone who can't perform their own duty is pathetic."

"That's right, each and every one of us should fulfill our own duties! Chew!" Minhyuk said as he continued to eat his hard bread.

"Why are you still eating that? Haven't you been eating that since earlier?"

"I'm hungry."

"...Hmm," Len hummed, shaking his head at Minhyuk and his antics. However, one thing was for sure, his interest was already piqued by this strange, young foreigner.

When the time for food distribution arrived, Minhyuk dashed around, swiftly carrying the containers that they would need to distribute the food.

"Come on, I'll do this instead. Brock!"

"Haha, don't run around like that or you'll get hurt!"

"Brock, it's better for me to get hurt, instead of you and the hands that you use to cook."

"Is that so?"

A chef's hands were both their treasure and weapon. A chef that injured their hands would not be able to cook simply because the blood from their injury might drip on the food, and in the worst case scenario, cause food poisoning.

After moving all of the containers, Minhyuk shouted, "Soldiers, please get your meals!"

"Oh, it's finally time to eat."

It would take five long, exhausting days for the subjugation troops to reach Bordy Plains. Although they had encountered the goblins early in the morning, there were only twenty of them. A small

number compared to the reports of those terrorizing the entire plains. From what Minhyuk heard, none of the troops had received severe injuries. They only had scratches and gashes small enough to be considered minor injuries.

"What's on the menu today?"

"It's spaghetti, with the special touch of our mother-like Captain Len!"

"Oh, I see. But boy, which part of Captain Len looks like a mother to you? Isn't he more of a bandit?"

Minhyuk's eyes narrowed as he whispered to the soldier, "Actually, I know that too. It's a spaghetti that has the special touch of a bandit-like Captain Len! But I heard that our soldier Venetto has the best face among all of the soldiers."

"Bwahahahaha! This guy truly knows what he's saying! Look at him, Rand. You really picked a good chef this time!"

[You have gained Venetto's favor.]

"This rascal is very good at talking, eh!"

All of the soldiers loved Minhyuk very much. He had a fresh face and the gift of gab, and he was always working hard. He was inherently different from the other players that only moved stiffly when the goblins made a surprise attack!

[You have gained Rand's favor.]

[You have gained Arden's favor.]

Minhyuk's favor with others was also increasing today! Then, the soldier named Venetto grabbed his shoulders. Seeing, the item on his hand brought a twinkle to Minhyuk's face. Then, Venetto said, "Boy, I watched you earlier, it seems like you like eating? Would you like to try some of this beef jerky?"

"Oh! Thank you very much! Venetto! You're like a king, a god, an emperor, a general, an admiral and the majesty, combined all together!"

"Huh? What are you saying?"

"You're the best of the best!"

"Hahahahaha, I've never seen someone becoming so happy just by receiving something to eat. Foreigners usually hate it."

"Oh my gosh, how can they do that! There's nothing better than eating!" Minhyuk shouted, carefully receiving the jerky that Venetto handed over to him. He even had an expression as though he could not understand the others at all. Then, Minhyuk realized something. If he became friends with the soldiers, there was a high chance that they would give him delicious food!

"I want to introduce my daughter to you, do you know how pretty my daughter is, huh?! Look at this. This is my daughter's portrait. It was painted by an artist!" Venetto said, showing a painting of him and his daughter.

"W...what's this...! She looks like an orc that's wearing makeup!"

Minhyuk felt like he was facing the greatest challenge ever since he started his life as a flatterer with a glib tongue. He had to think how to phrase his words nicely so that Venetto would not feel bad.

‘But...was it even possible?!’

Minhyuk believed that he would lose his beef jerky if he offended Venetto.

‘T...that absolutely can't happen!’

Cold sweat dripped down Minhyuk’s forehead and back.

"Boy, why aren't you speaking? Isn't she beautiful?"

The problem was that even a newly-born hedgehog would be much prettier than Venetto’s daughter!

"S...she's very pretty."

"I know, right? But, why are you sweating so much? You should speak more specifically about her beauty."

"I was quite surprised with how free and wild her eyes and nose are... No, I was very, very shocked."

"Wild and free?"

"Yes. Heh... Wild and free, she's beautiful no matter how you look...?"

"Bwahahahahaha! Friend, I'll set you up with her once the subjugation quest is over!"

‘What, what a terrible thing to say...!’?Minhyuk thought as he dashed away from Venetto.

Then, Len appeared and said, "Boy, let me borrow you for a bit."

"Yes?" Minhyuk asked, following Len straight to the cooking carriage. He had been notified about the increase in his favorability with Brock and Len before when he was doing his chores. ?Len placed a chopping board in front of Minhyuk.

"Grab the knife."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to teach you how to cook."

Minhyuk was elated to hear his words.

[You can now learn cooking skills from Len.]

[You have gained 4 reputation points.]

[Accepting his proposal will trigger a skill quest.]

Minhyuk's lips twitched as they curled up in happiness. He could finally acquire cooking skills and learn how to cook, which meant...

‘I’m going to eat more delicious things!’

Chapter 32: Food God Becomes a Chef

Learning cooking skills could guarantee an increase in the quality of the dish. The most important improvement would be on the taste and flavor of the dish. Acquiring cooking skills would also allow the player to gain Dexterity (DEX). Dexterity (DEX) was a very helpful stat in almost all areas of expertise.

However, it was a very difficult stat to increase. Once a chef player invested points in their DEX, the flavor and taste of their dish would have a significant increase in quality. At the same time, this change would only be noticeable if the DEX had reached twenty. For example, if a player chose to increase their STR, they would get an increase of +3 in their physical attack power. For DEX, increasing it to +20 would result in a +1 in flavor.

In any case, what was the reason why Minhyuk played this game? Was it not because he wanted to enjoy food? The reasons stated above were more than enough to make Minhyuk desire to increase and hone his DEX. However, there was just one problem...

'The DEX stat, like reputation, can't be increased with bonus points.'

In addition, DEX could only be increased through performing repetitive motions or special circumstances, such as creating something outstanding or spectacular.

'From what I heard, repeatedly practicing a skill until mastery will let me gain a DEX point.'

In other words, Minhyuk would be able to gain DEX, as long as he repeatedly practiced his cooking skills. The same was true for other skills that required DEX. As long as the player practiced their skills repetitively, they would be able to increase their DEX.

"Yes! I'm very grateful that you're willing to teach me. I will do my best!"

[Quest: Acquisition of Cooking Skills]

Rank: C

Requirement: Attained Len's favor

Rewards: Cooking skills

Penalty for Failure: You won't be able to learn cooking skills for 3 months.

Description: The skilled chef Len told you that he will teach you how to cook. The basic skills needed to cook are cutting, chopping and slicing. Fill your Knife Skill bar to 100%!

"Alright. I'll teach you how to hold a knife," Len said, holding out a blue kitchen knife to Minhyuk. Then, he proceeded to teach Minhyuk how to hold a knife properly. He carefully pointed out where Minhyuk should place his palms and fingers, until he was able to hold it properly.

"You have to use your thumb and index finger to hold a knife properly. Your other three fingers will support the knife. Go on, grab the top of the blade of the knife with your thumb and index finger. Hold it tightly, and make sure that the knife is stable. Most people would usually grab the handle of the knife with all of their fingers."

"Aha, I see. So that's how you do it," Minhyuk said. In fact, that was how he was holding the knife already.

"You may have noticed that the color of the knife and the chopping board are the same. Do you have an idea why that is the case?"

"Why is the color of the knife and the chopping board the same? Let's see... Hmm... Is it because the blue knife and chopping board are only used to chop vegetables?"

"Oh. Boy, how did you know?" Len asked, looking at Minhyuk in surprise.

In fact, Minhyuk had always been watching the chefs closely while he did his chores in the cooking carriage. He saw them use the red knives with a 6-degree edge and red chopping board when they were cutting meat, while the blue knife and chopping board were used when chopping vegetables. That was how he knew.

"Unlike what others think, there are set rules and regulations inside a kitchen. This is one of the most basic rules. What would you do if you saw a restaurant using the same chopping board and knife to process all of their ingredients?"

"I'll report them!"

"That's right," Len said, grinning at Minhyuk. In fact, Len had already thought about teaching Minhyuk how to cook earlier. After all, he made this promise and offered it as a quest reward. However, the more he talked to him, the more satisfied he became.

'His eyes are sparkling.'

To Len, Minhyuk looked like a student who thoroughly enjoyed learning. Minhyuk also treated the soldiers well. He was generally kind to everyone.

At that moment, Minhyuk began to chop an onion.

"Wait," Len said as he stopped him.

"Eh?"

"You're pushing the knife. What you're doing is not chopping, but crushing."

"Ah..."

"You have to pull and slice. There are plenty of reasons for pulling and slicing, but the most important reason is freshness."

"Freshness?"

"That's right. The freshness of the onion will last longer if you pull and slice. Push the onion together with your left hand's knuckles as you slice it so that it would not slide everywhere."

"Oh...!" Minhyuk let out a gasp. The information that he was learning was very useful. Just following Len's instructions was enough to make him feel that his skills have leveled up. Len taught him for a while before going out of the carriage. He was dragging a sack filled with radishes when he came back.

"These are all bad radishes. We didn't throw it away because Brock uses it for knife practice. Use these to practice."

"Yes!"

"Boy. You're not going to chop it with that mysterious skill of yours, right?"

"No, sir. Heh..." Minhyuk chuckled awkwardly. In fact, Minhyuk could really use that method to finish his task. However, he truly believed that learning how to use the knife was an important part of this learning experience. It was an essential part of learning how to cook.

"Ah, you can eat the hard bread, soft bread, and milk left in the storage. You can also eat the leftover spaghetti from the meal earlier."

"Oh, oh, oooooooh...! Thank you! Captain Len, you're the best!"

‘Look at this guy.’

Without knowing it, Len's gaze towards Minhyuk had already become kinder, warmer. After all, Minhyuk was a hard-working boy. He thought to himself, 'It will take him one whole day to finish the entire sack.'

Minhyuk immediately practiced on the radishes the moment Len went out.

Chop... Chop... Chop...

Just the sound of the knife hitting the chopping board could tell anyone listening in that the person chopping the vegetable was not experienced. However, Minhyuk still felt happy as he continued to do his task.

'I can make more delicious food!'

It had been established that whatever Minhyuk set his mind on, he would give his utmost. Besides, a person would not be able to fully express their happiness at discovering and completing a new and fresh achievement.

Minhyuk was left immersed in his chopping task. An hour flew by in a flash. However, his proficiency did not improve at all. The only difference was that he was starting to gain confidence in himself. He decided to take a short break before continuing his chopping exercise.

"Yo, new recruit. Are you doing well?"

"Yes!"

"Let's see," Brock said as he stood beside him to check his work. However, Brock was shocked at what he saw.

'What the hell, why is he so good at it?!'

Minhyuk was much better than what he thought. Although the chopped radishes were still a bit messy and sloppy, his speed was already increasing. Skilled chefs were known for their quick knife skills. They could use their knife quickly with little to no error. Speed was crucial, especially when dealing with plenty of ingredients. However, for a beginner, gaps and intervals were commonplace.

Four hours later...

Chop, chop, chop... chop, chop, chop!

Minhyuk was still chopping the radishes. Just then, he suddenly frowned and cried, "Ouch..."

Anyone was bound to develop blisters in their hands, after grabbing the blade of the knife with their thumb and index finger for a long period of time. That was the case for Minhyuk. There was a

bright red spot on his hand. It was tingling in pain, but Minhyuk gritted his teeth and continued to push through.

After four more hours...

Chop, chop... chop, chop... chop, chop, chop!

The sound of the gaps from his knife work was slowly decreasing. Brock was shocked to see him still doing the exercise when he came back to check on him. He shouted, "You...you've been using the knife all this time?! Ever since earlier?!"

"Yes, that's right!" Minhyuk answered him lightly.

Brock could only shake his head in defeat as he asked, "Are your hands not hurting?"

"It's fine. I feel like I'm getting a bit better!"

It was true. Minhyuk's knife skill proficiency had increased to 68% after almost half a day of repetition.

'What kind of will does this person possess?'

When Brock first started learning from Len, he could only endure practicing an hour every day. The reason was because his hands hurt so much. However, Minhyuk had endured that pain. He was able to finish an entire sack of radish, and right now, he was even reaching out for another sack.

Chop, chop... chop, chop... chop!

The sound of the knife hitting the chopping board had long become constant and rhythmic. Just listening to it could make one assume that Minhyuk was an experienced kitchen hand. Brock himself was also completely shocked to witness it.

'The gap... There's almost none...!'

Minhyuk was probably unaware, but the more his skill increased, the more proficient he was in handling the knife. He was bound to improve his knife skills. After all, he did not even rest and just continued to practice!

Chop, chop, chop, chop!

Minhyuk finished chopping the radish.

'T...the radish did not move...!'

The radish that Minhyuk chopped did not move... It was only his knife that moved. To others, it would seem as if lines had been drawn on the radish. However, the chopped radish laid down, spread out beautifully on the chopping board, the moment Minhyuk pressed on it with the blade of his knife.

Brock let out a gasp in surprise.

Len had entrusted the dinner menu to Brock before going to the nearest grass field from the subjugation troops' camp.

'Rovel Grass.'

Rovel grass was a delicacy that could only be found in Athenae. It tasted similar to wormwood in reality. Fresh and wild rovel grass tasted significantly better compared to farmed rovel grasses. That was why Len worked hard to harvest them outside. After harvesting rovel grass for quite a while, Len finally decided to go back to the cooking carriage. On his way back, Len met with the subjugation troops' captain, Vald.

"Oh, Len. You received a new recruit this time, huh? The soldiers are very fond of him, or so I've heard?"

"Yeah, I took one in."

"What made you accept him? You're not very fond of foreigners, right?"

"He works very hard. And..." Len shook his head, the rest of his words turning into a mumble. However, he continued to say, "It's just because he's working much harder than what I thought."

"Is that so? Hmm, that's quite a relief."

For some strange reason, the conversation between the two of them did not sound like a conversation between a squad leader and a chef. It did not sound like a conversation between a senior knight and a lower-ranked knight either. However, the flow was natural. That was because...

Len was once an imperial chef. He was also the Imperial Palace's main chef. However, he was framed and convicted with false charges. He was then demoted here in the subjugation troops.

"Ah, what's on the menu for dinner today?"

"Tonkatsu."

"Oh, my mouth is already watering just thinking about your tonkatsu."

"Fufu, look forward to it."

After their conversation ended, Len turned around and continued to walk back to the cooking carriage. He recalled the words that he muttered under his breath earlier.

'Because he resembled me quite a bit.'

Len felt that the foreigner named Minhyuk resembled him a little. He was still unsure before, but he felt it even more when he was teaching him how to cook. Minhyuk reminded Len of himself from the past.

'Did he finish at least half of it?' Len thought as he entered the cooking carriage.

"How's the tonkatsu coming along?"

"Yes, it's almost done. By the way, Captain, look at that guy over there."

"Huh?"

Chop— chop, chop, chop, chop, chop!

The rhythmic sound of the knife on the chopping board rang loudly inside the carriage. Len thought that Brock was chopping vegetables when he heard the sound. However, Brock was busy manning the frying pan and making tonkatsu. The one chopping the vegetables was none other than the player named Minhyuk. Len was astonished at the sight.

‘The... the sound of the knife is neat...!’

The intervals and gaps of the knife chopping the onion was regular and fast. This was a completely shocking sight. Len couldn’t help but ask, "H, how...?"

Then, Minhyuk turned around.

Minhyuk turned slightly and greeted Len with a bow. Then...

[You have achieved 100% proficiency in your Knife Skill.]

[You have gained 10 DEX.]

[The effect of Food God’s Greatness has been triggered.]

[You have learned the highest level of cooking skill.]

[You have learned Food God's Cooking Skill.]

[You have learned Food God's Cooking Acquisition.]

[You have learned Ingredient Tracking.]

[You have learned Trance.]

"...Huh?" Minhyuk muttered dumbly. A sudden list of skills suddenly popped out in front of him. He did not know if it was because he learned and practiced diligently, but it seemed like he had learned Food God’s Cooking Skill, and even mastered the highest level of cooking.

'...Food God’s Greatness?'

The Food God’s Greatness under his Food God skill window showed another line. It was the skill with a lot of ‘???’ on it.

'Ho...'

The unexpected turn of events had brought Minhyuk delight. He wanted to check all of his newly acquired skills!

Chapter 33: Buffed Tonkatsu

“You were able to learn everything, that’s great!” Len said, as he looked at Minhyuk in surprise.

“It’s all thanks to you, Master!”

"Master..."

“You taught me how to cook, so you’re my master!”

Len grinned when he heard Minhyuk’s words. It seemed like he did not hate the term at all.

Minhyuk wanted to check his new skills right away, but he could not just ignore Len and say,?‘Ah. Wait a moment, Hyung. I’ll just go and check my skills.’

"Come over here."

"Yes?"

"I'll teach you how to fry tonkatsu," Len said, as he led Minhyuk to where Brock was frying tonkatsu.

When Brock saw them coming over, he retreated from the frying pan and took a break from frying the tonkatsu. Then, he said, "Damn, bro. Captain Len never taught anyone how to cook, isn't he being too biased towards you?"

"Hehe," Minhyuk chuckled happily. With Len's help, he would be able to learn more recipes. Besides, the more he cooked, the more his skill proficiency would increase.

'But, according to the notifications earlier...'

The notifications earlier had told him that he had learned the Food God's Cooking Skill.

"Alright. Let's look at the meat first. The blood should be completely drained out of the meat before you season it with salt and pepper."

"Yes, yes," Minhyuk answered with a nod as he listened to Len's explanations. Then, a notification suddenly ran in his head.

[The meat will become less juicy and the taste will drop and deteriorate if you use too much salt to season the meat. Make sure that you use the right amount of seasoning.]

The notification that rang sounded so natural as if it was something that Minhyuk had already known.

'Gasp...?!'

Minhyuk's eyes widened in shock as he thought, 'Is this because of Food God's Cooking Acquisition...?'

He might not have the time to check the skill yet but he could guess that it was because of this skill.

"Next, let's coat the meat with flour."

[Flour is generally used for coating the meat. However, you can also use frying powder as an alternative. Using frying powder will make the dish become crispier and crunchier once it's fried.]

The notifications kept on ringing as information continued to enter Minhyuk's mind.

"After that, we will dip the coated meat in egg and coat it with breadcrumbs before laying it down on this plate over here. Adding some parsley powder to our breadcrumbs will make the flavor and texture of the tonkatsu come alive."

"Yes!"

"Alright. Then, I'm going to fry one first. Watch me closely," Len said as he took a breaded pork cutlet and walked in front of the hot frying pan. To test the temperature of the oil, Len dropped some pieces of breadcrumbs first.

Sizzle—

"Drop some breadcrumbs in the center of the pan. The temperature is roughly around 170°C when the breadcrumbs float up. That's the perfect temperature for

frying tonkatsu. If you find the temperature to be higher, add more oil to adjust the heat. If it's lower, adjust the heat of the fire."

The breadcrumbs that Len dropped in the center of the pan floated up. Then, he dropped the tonkatsu into the hot oil.

Sizzle!

The sizzling of the tonkatsu rang out loudly as the meat quickly changed color indicating that it was already being cooked.

"The temperature of the oil is?very?important for this dish. If it's too hot, it might look cooked on the outside, but the inside will not be," Len said, before taking the tonkatsu out of the pan. Then, he placed the tonkatsu on top of a kitchen towel and drained the oil out of it, before cutting it in the middle using tongs and scissors.

Gulp—

Minhyuk gulped. In fact, Minhyuk was barely able to resist shoving Len away after he finished cooking and saying,?'Step aside, I'll eat that!'. Minhyuk fought the desire to eat, instead admiring the perfectly fried tonkatsu, tilting his head to get a better look.

"Wow!" Minhyuk exclaimed, looking at the perfectly cooked meat. The inside was cooked perfectly as well. So, what about the breadcrumbs? It was crispy and crunchy with no signs of being burnt at all.

Len smiled warmly at Minhyuk as he said, "Check it out."

"Yes!"

Just like any other items in the game, it was also possible to check the information of dishes. So, Minhyuk did just that.

(Tonkatsu)

Material Grade: E

Grade: Magic

Requirements: None

Shelf Life: 2 days

Preservation Time: 1 hour

Special Abilities:

?6% increase in attack power.

?7% increase in defensive power.

Description: A little special tonkatsu made by Chef Len.

"Oh...! There really is a buff effect!" Minhyuk shouted in surprise.

Then, Len said, “You might already know this, but the amount of buffed dishes that a chef can make depends on the level of the chef. Normally, a chef can make three buffed dishes in a day. But since I’m at the level of a Master, I can make up to 20 buffed dishes in a day.”

Minhyuk was surprised by this knowledge. Even the fact that Len was at a Master level also came as a surprise. Chefs were ranked from Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Master and Master Craftsman. As far as Minhyuk knew, the highest rank of a chef player in the country was currently only at the Master level.

'Who the hell is Master Len?' Minhyuk thought as he looked at Len.

Then, Len said, “The shelf life also varies greatly depending on the dish’s ranking. That’s mainly the reason why a chef’s dish can be a hit or miss.”

"Ah..."

Minhyuk somewhat understood what he was saying. The biggest advantage of a chef was that anyone could purchase their dishes and receive the buffs whenever they were hunting alone. However, there were also requirements and limitations to this, which was none other than the shelf life being too short.

“Intermediate chefs can cook dishes with a shelf life of up to four hours. However, the shelf life also varies from one dish to another. Well then! How about you try making one now?” Len said, as he poured more oil in the pan, deliberately lowering the temperature of the oil.

“The first thing that you need to learn is to adjust the temperature of the oil.”

"Yes, sir!" Minhyuk answered, recalling the words that Len had told him earlier. Minhyuk started to move, every action meticulous and with care.

'You have to be delicious.'

After all, dishes that were cooked with care tend to be more delicious. Minhyuk’s hands were moving well. It seemed like this was the influence of the Food God’s Cooking Skill. Minhyuk was able to evenly coat the pork with flour, egg and breadcrumbs. All that he needed to do was fry it.

‘Frying tonkatsu is really important! If I mess up one thing, the outside will burn and the inside will not be cooked. This is my first ever tonkatsu! I have to make sure that it’s delicious!’ Minhyuk thought. That was why he was moving carefully. Just then, right before he could drop some breadcrumbs in the center of the pan...

"Huh?"

[The oil's temperature is at 154°C.]

An astonishing notification rang in his ears. Minhyuk immediately raised the heat of the fire before stretching his hand out again.

[The oil's temperature is at 157°C.]

[The oil's temperature is...]

Minhyuk was able to accurately check the temperature of the oil with just a stretch of his hand. It seemed like this method would allow him to create a more delicious tonkatsu.

However, Len frowned when he watched him. He said, "Are you adjusting the oil's temperature after just feeling it with your hand? It's better if you go and get a thermometer to check the temperature. Better yet, feel free to use the breadcrumbs method that I taught you..."

Before Len could even finish his words...

[The oil's temperature has reached the most suitable level.]

Sizzle!

Minhyuk placed the tonkatsu in the oil. The tonkatsu was sizzling and frying well, as if it was dropped in at the most suitable temperature.

'Gasp...!'

'Ack?!'

Brock and Len were both staring at Minhyuk in shock. However, Minhyuk did not notice their reaction. He was watching the tonkatsu closely. Not long after, he took a sieve and brought it near the oil, preparing to take out the tonkatsu.

If anyone were to look at Minhyuk, they would feel as if they were watching a Master Craftsman that had fried tonkatsu all his life. A few moments later, Minhyuk took the tonkatsu out of the oil. He shook the tonkatsu and patted the excess oil before cutting it with scissors.

'...He learned well.' Len thought, looking at Minhyuk in amazement.

Meanwhile, Brock rubbed his eyes in disbelief as he thought, 'He, he's even frying tonkatsu better than I do...?'

"How is it?"

"It, It's great!"

"Hehe!" Minhyuk laughed in delight.

"Since this is the first tonkatsu that you made, you can have it for yourself."

"Oh!! Thank you," Minhyuk said excitedly. He quickly placed the tonkatsu on a plate and added some thinly sliced cabbage, buttered corn and mashed potatoes on the side. Once he completed the plating, a notification went off in his head.

[Please choose one from the two choices: Buff Ability or Food God's True Worth.]

Minhyuk decided to choose the buff ability to try and check out what it was. It was because he had yet to make any dish with buff abilities since he started cooking inside the game.

'This choice won't change the flavor of the food, right?' Minhyuk thought. However, he shook his head at the useless thoughts and made his final choice.

'Buff ability.'

[You have finished making a tonkatsu.]

[The dish belongs to the Normal grade.]

The dishes made by chefs were also graded accordingly. It was also a convenient system since it followed the item's ranking. The dishes were graded Normal, Magic, Rare, Unique, Epic, Legendary, and God.

"You must have completed a normal tonkatsu," Len said as he crossed his arms and smiled. He continued to say, "You did pretty well on your first tonkatsu. But since your skill level is still low, there's nothing we can do about the dish grade. This has the same concept as hunting monsters. The higher the level, the better the food, and the more money you make."

Minhyuk immediately checked the information on his tonkatsu.

(Tonkatsu)

Material Grade: E

Grade: Normal

Requirements: None

Shelf Life: 4 days

Preservation Time: 12 hours

Special Abilities:

?10% increase in attack power.

?8% increase in defensive power.

Description: A delicious tonkatsu made by an unknown chef. This is his very first tonkatsu.

"T...there's a buff...?"

"A normal grade dish has a buff...?"

"Yes. There really is a buff."

Len knew that Minhyuk was not a person who would lie. So, he asked, "Can I check it?"

Minhyuk nodded his head. Len quickly approached the dish and checked the information.

"W...what in the world is this..." Len muttered, before becoming speechless.

Was this something possible? No. This was something that went beyond common sense. Among all of the beginners in cooking, Minhyuk was at Level 1. No one at that level could make a dish like this with such a ridiculous buff. It was almost as if the buff was at a Master Craftsman's level.

Of course, luck might have played a huge role in this, since it had a huge influence in cooking. However, Len believed that this was something that was beyond luck.

"Ah, can I check the cooking skills that I acquired for a moment?"

"Cough.?Alright, go ahead," Len answered, coughing awkwardly.

"This rascal... Who the hell is he?"

Len had never heard someone make a dish at this level with this much buff. Minhyuk quickly checked the notifications that rang earlier. The first skill that he checked was Food God's Cooking Skill.

(Food God's Cooking Skill)

Passive Skill

Level: 1 (Currently unable to level up.)

Effects:

?You can apply a buff that is much more outstanding than any other chef's buff.

?The shelf life and preservation times of your dishes will be much longer compared to other chefs.

?Your buff capacity is higher than other chefs.

?You can set the buff capacity to the level that you want.

Minhyuk understood most of the skills except for the part where he could set the buff capacity. So, he clicked on the skill's detailed explanation.

[Setting the buff. You will be given a 100% buff capacity daily. You can divide this 100% however you like. You can divide it to a smaller fraction to distribute to a lot of people, or you can choose to set the number of dishes that will have a buff. It is the same if you choose Food God's True Worth. Your dish will have additional stats. However, cooking a lot of dishes will consume a higher buff capacity.]

'Aha.'

Now that he read the detailed explanation, it was quite easy to understand. This meant that Minhyuk could add more buffs into a dish if he focused on just one single dish. However, doing so would consume more of his buff percentage than cooking for more people. Minhyuk checked his buff percentage.

'30% has been filled already.'

From what Minhyuk could infer, the buff percentage would start at 0% everyday. Once the bar reached 100, Minhyuk would probably not be able to make any more buffed dishes for that day. He wondered how much the consumer's power would increase if he made a lot of buffed dishes.

He might be uncertain about that fact, but he was certain that it would definitely be above any ordinary chef's dishes. Even the shelf life and preservation time would be longer than any other chefs' dishes.

In other words, Minhyuk's buff capacity had already gone beyond Len's buff capacity. Len had mentioned earlier that ordinary chefs could make from three to twenty buffed dishes if they tried hard enough. As for Minhyuk, he had already surpassed that.

Food God's Cooking Skill! Anyone who knew about this skill would definitely be shocked. And then, there was Trance too. Trance was a passive skill with no level. In other words, it could not improve further.

However, the additional effect that this skill brought to a chef's cooking was incredible. It could help make the dish better, through various factors like the delicateness of the method, the effort put

into the dish, or even the focus and concentration used when making the dish. Minhyuk had received all of these great abilities! However, he still looked very disappointed.

Len, unaware of his great skills, looked at Minhyuk worriedly and asked, "What's wrong?! Boy, did you get a different skill from others?!"

"...How to say this, it seems like I've gotten plenty of awfully good things, but..."

"There's a but?"

Brock and Len leaned closer and gulped in anticipation.

"None of the skills say that they could make the dish taste better. Sob!"

"..."

"..."

Minhyuk looked utterly disappointed.

Chapter 34: Buffed Tonkatsu

In fact, the skill that he was most hopeful about was something that could be along the lines of 'the taste will become more flavorful'!

"Ta...taste...?"

"Yes..."

Len and Brock looked at Minhyuk silently after seeing how sullen and disappointed he was. To be honest, Len found his reaction absolutely ridiculous. He thought, 'The person who used grade E ingredients to create a dish with plenty of buffs is disappointed because he did not make the food taste better?' He wondered if someone could truly be like this.

'Was his life solely dedicated to eating or something?'

However, Len still approached the teary-eyed Minhyuk to comfort him. He said, "Boy, your cooking skills allowed you to fry the tonkatsu well. I'm sure it will taste much better than ordinary tonkatsu."

"Oh...!" Minhyuk exclaimed loudly, his face turning bright from his words.

"That's right, I shouldn't be this discouraged!"

Minhyuk bounced back from his slight depression after receiving the Food God's Cooking Skill. Then, he immediately checked the Food God's Cooking Acquisition skill.

(Food God's Cooking Acquisition)

Passive Skill

Level: None

Effects:

Significantly increases your ability to learn cooking skills.

You can acquire and learn better recipes for ingredients.

.

In other words, the Food God's Cooking Acquisition was a godly assist. Minhyuk was able to confirm the first effect—significantly increasing his ability to learn cooking skills—when he made the tonkatsu earlier. He was as skillful as a Master Craftsman that devoted his life to frying tonkatsu. For the second effect—acquiring and learning better recipes—the notifications continuously popped up in his head and instilled tips and tricks in his mind.

Lastly, Minhyuk checked the last skill that he acquired.

(Ingredient Tracking)

Passive Skill

Level: 1 (Currently unable to level up)

Penalty on Use: You will be unable to use Food God's True Worth for the day.

Effects:

Once the skill has been triggered, the system will search for the ingredient that will correspond to the type of effect and cuisine that you have chosen. The skill will search within a one kilometer radius. The skill will also suggest recipes according to the buff effect + ingredients + cuisine and will also suggest alternative ingredients for the dish.

It can only be used 3 times

Additional number of uses can be acquired once the skill has leveled up.

Current available number of uses: 3/3

The skill was easy to understand. Minhyuk would be asked to select a cuisine, for example, Chinese cuisine, then he would be asked to input the buff ability that he wanted the dish to have. Once those were set, the system would search for the appropriate ingredients in the vicinity. Once he made a dish with the ingredients that he tracked, he would be able to express his desired buff effect.

'This means...'

Simply put, it would help Minhyuk make a dish that he needed. However, there were also limitations to the skill. One, the ingredient could only be found if it was within the set radius. Two, he would have a penalty for a whole day. Although Minhyuk was not sure, the penalty for a day was a pretty big deal. However, after checking everything, Minhyuk still had a few doubts in his head.

'Currently unable to level up?'

'Currently' pertained to the words 'right now'. In other words, he could not increase the level of the skill at the moment.

'In other words...'

Minhyuk just needed to accomplish and meet the conditions needed in the future to level up the skill. Then, he turned his sight to his status window and was taken by surprise. The 20% beside the Food God had now soared to 50% in the blink of an eye.

'Gasp?!'

It seemed that the percentage of his class could also be influenced by the cooking skills that he learned.

‘Once that reaches 100%, I will definitely be able to level up. And...’

Once that happened, Minhyuk believed that he would be able to cook better and eat more delicious food. With that, Minhyuk finally finished checking his new skills. Then, he let out a deep and long exhale.

“Phew!?I kept it in for too long!”

‘I feel hungry after looking at all those skills!’

To be honest, the thing that caught Minhyuk the most was the tonkatsu and not his skills. Others would definitely look at him in shock if they knew what was on his mind. Perhaps they would even ask him...?Tonkatsu is more important to you than the Food God’s skills?!?However, Minhyuk would surely answer them,?Of course, isn’t that obvious!’

However, even if he wanted to eat it so badly, he had no choice but to check his skills after seeing the sparkling gazes that Len and Brock directed at him.

Since he was finally done with the cumbersome part, Minhyuk hurriedly sat down in front of his tonkatsu and asked, “Can I eat it now?”

"Of course," Len said. Len did not particularly ask him about his Food God’s Cooking Skill. Len was someone who believed that it did not matter if a person had outstanding skills and abilities, they would be considered a chef as long as they cooked for others.

"Hiyaaa..." Minhyuk said, rubbing his hands in anticipation.

Tonkatsu was a simple and common food. However, it was a dish that could not be described by just one word. It was so delicious that only a select few disliked its taste. The first thing that Minhyuk did was to get a bowl of warm udon soup. The soup was one that was often found in places like?Kimbap Heaven.?Then, Minhyuk let go of the knife to pour the special sauce on the tonkatsu. The warm tonkatsu sauce, with thinly sliced onions and mushrooms in it, was still steaming as it covered the crispy and crunchy tonkatsu.

"Kgghk!"

Minhyuk suddenly felt his mouth water. Then, he immediately stabbed the tonkatsu with his fork as he held the knife in his other hand. However, he did not use the knife on the tonkatsu. That was because...

‘This knife will not be used to cut the tonkatsu, it will be used to protect it from others!’

Usually, whenever friends hang out together to eat tonkatsu, one of the friends would say,?‘Just give me one bite.’. However, that one bite would become two, before it would become three and in the end, become the entire tonkatsu.

"I..." Brock began.

"No way!" Minhyuk answered loudly, without any hesitation! He even raised his knife ever so slightly the moment Brock spoke out.

"...am sad."

"Hehe... This is my first ever tonkatsu so I wanted to eat it alone. Once I finish this, I'll make you one," Minhyuk quickly said. He had to make up for what he said so as not to lose Brock's favor. That was how meticulous Minhyuk was. Then, he took a huge bite of the tonkatsu that was dripping with sauce.

Crunch, crunch—

The well-fried, golden-brown tonkatsu was crispy on the outside but soft and juicy on the inside. It even boasted a perfect harmony with the warm sauce that coated it. Minhyuk's every bite was also accompanied by the tonkatsu's crispy crunch. The strong meaty flavor brought a smile to his lips. When Minhyuk felt his mouth go dry, he immediately sipped a mouthful of soup. The slight hint of soy sauce in the udon served as a perfect booster to the flavors exploding in his mouth.

Then, Minhyuk grabbed his fork and mixed the thinly sliced cabbage covered with kiwi dressing. The salad was boasting a vibrant green color, with a faint watery sheen, which showed how fresh the vegetables were. As Minhyuk took a bite of the salad, the fresh and crispy texture of the salad brought a slightly tart and refreshing flavor to his mouth, completely washing away the greasy flavor of the tonkatsu.

The next thing Minhyuk ate was the corn sitting perfectly beside the salad. It was simply corn from a can, but one mouthful of it brought a sweet and savory flavor to his mouth. A tonkatsu meal might look very ordinary and common, but each part of the meal played their respective roles faithfully.

Minhyuk smiled blissfully as he ate his tonkatsu. He was able to clean up the tonkatsu in no time at all.

"He didn't even leave a drop of sauce at all... I won't even need to wash that plate with how clean it is right now."

"Heh...?"

Then, Len said, "Boy."

"Yes, Master!"

"You fry the rest of the tonkatsu and distribute it to the soldiers. You're almost done, right?"

"Yes, that's right," Brock answered swiftly.

"Good. Go ahead and fry it, I'll watch on the side."

Runie was a woman that was pleasing to look at. Right now, she was taking a break among the players and NPCs in the subjugation troops. They had just finished dealing with the goblins' recent attack on their way to Bordy Plains, so they were taking a break. That was also the reason why they were having dinner pretty late at night. Recently, Runie's attention was drawn to a man.

'I'm sure that man's a chef.'

There was an extremely popular male player among the subjugation troops. The man was around 185 centimeters tall and had a very handsome face. He was kind, amiable, and could strike up a conversation with anyone about anything.

In fact, all of the players believed one thing...?That player was a chef.?However, Runie knew about the drawbacks of being a chef. One of her friends had chosen the chef class and ended up deleting her character to start anew.

‘The higher the chef’s level becomes, the harder it is for them to level up...’?Runie thought. Then, she shook her head.

‘Why should I even worry about others?’

However, strangely enough, she felt calm and at ease whenever she looked at the man.

‘Does he have a Calmness stat or something?’

Just as that thought crossed her mind, the man came out carrying food containers.

“Everyone, the meal is ready! Today’s tonkatsu is specially made by myself, Minhyuk!”

"Oh. You made the tonkatsu?!"

"Don’t give us some kind of charcoal, alright!"

“Not at all! Don’t get surprised the moment you eat it!” The man answered, his expression one of disdain as a response to the man.

Then, the food distribution finally started. Runie also stood in line to get her meal.

‘Maybe he doesn’t know about it?’

Perhaps that was really the case. After all, some players chose their class without researching any accurate and concrete information beforehand. No, in fact, there were quite a lot of them. Then, Runie’s turn finally came.

"Enjoy your meal!"

"Ah, yes!" Runie answered, her cheeks turning a bright red upon seeing Minhyuk’s face. The man really looked really handsome up close. Even his smile was nice to look at.

‘That’s right, I should tell him,’?Runie thought. She thought that it would help him right now. He could delete his character since he was still a novice, and start over to raise his power with a new class. Of course, it was also because Runie had a bit of?‘interest’?in the man. Perhaps her?‘help’?was also just an excuse.

"E...excuse me."

"Yes?"

"...The higher the level of the chef, the harder it is for them to level up."

"Ah. Yes," the man answered, nodding calmly with a smile.

"An... and even if you do get close to these NPC soldiers... You really wouldn't get anything from them at all."

"That's not true," The man refuted as he laughed, it seemed like he was not that interested in Runie or what she had to say.

"It may look like I'm being nosy but..."

"Ah, thank you for your care. But it's fine. I'm doing it because I want to eat delicious food."

"...Eh?"

"I only want to eat delicious food. By the way, the people behind you are already glaring daggers at you. They might kill you if you linger anymore..."

"Ah!" Runie shouted, immediately leaving the line after feeling the prickly glares at her back.

'Tsk... He wasn't interested in me at all,' Runie thought, looking at the tonkatsu in her hands. The tonkatsu was golden brown and enticing, so she immediately sat down at a nearby table.

'He said that he only wanted to eat something delicious? Does that even make sense? He might as well just say that he's not interested in me.'

Runie sliced her tonkatsu as she grumbled to herself. Then, she placed it in her mouth.

'Huh?'

She curiously placed another bite in her mouth and said, "De...delicious...!"

Runie was very surprised and in awe. She had never had tonkatsu like this ever in her life. She even believed that Minhyuk would be a very successful chef if he ever opened a shop of his own!

'The meat is quite thick, so how did he cook it so well? It's so crispy that it seems like it just came out of the frying pan.'

Runie would never know that the secret to the crispiness of the tonkatsu was Minhyuk's Food Storage Inventory. The surprise did not end there...

[You have eaten a tonkatsu.]

[Your attack power will increase by 3% and your defensive power will increase by 3% for 5 hours.]

Runie looked at the notifications curiously.

'What's this? Wasn't he just a novice?'

This was the chef's buff ability. She overheard this from some players before. It seemed like the man was much better than a chef with a beginner's cooking skill.

'Didn't they say that they could only make one or two of these in a day?'

She tried to recall her friend's words, but she stopped when she started to hear the people around her making a ruckus.

"Huh...?"

"Gasp?!"

"Hey, hey!! This is amazing!"

The shocked and astonished voices of the players suddenly sprang out from all directions.

Chapter 35: A Billion? How much is that?

The commotion did not end there. The captain of the subjugation troops, Vald, was shocked after trying the food as well. He exclaimed, "O...oh my goodness!"

The other soldiers also started shouting one after the other.

"Huh, what's this!"

"It's absolutely delicious!"

"This is the most delicious tonkatsu that I've ever had in my life!! It's not just the taste, m... my abilities have also increased!"

The soldiers had a better understanding of the concept of increasing abilities and leveling, compared to the players.

'This...'

Runie saw that there were easily more than thirty people who had the same reaction as her.

'Is he really just a beginner chef?'

She could not hide her shock and curiosity. From the reaction of the people around her, she even doubted if her friend had been truthful with her, about chefs receiving contempt because of their incompetence.

'Even priests?can't?cast this many buffs....'?Runie thought. However, perhaps it was because she was clueless about the class itself, that she could not understand the situation.

'Ah, that's right. Ravel, from our guild... he should be one of the few advanced-level chefs in the country, right?'

There were only about 100 advanced-level chefs in the country. Runie had heard that the dishes cooked by chef Ravel were the best. Even his buffed dishes were considered to be pretty good. Of course, it still could not be compared to the buffs from priests with a similar ranking.

[Guild Chat | Runie: Ravel~ Are you there~?]

[Guild Chat | Ravel: Oh, Runie. Hi.]

[Guild Chat | Runie: Ah, Hi. Can I ask you about something?]

[Guild Chat | Ravel: Yes, ask away.]

[Guild Chat | Runie: I'm here with the goblin subjugation troops, and I'm eating a tonkatsu right now that is made by a player chef... ?and it has a buff ability.]

[Guild Chat | Ravel:...? Are you sure? If it's a player in the goblin subjugation troops, then they shouldn't have the buff ability yet.]

[Guild Chat | Runie: But, it's true...]

[Guild Chat | Ravel: You can only have the cooking buff once you reach the intermediate level. And the average level of an intermediate-level chef is Level 80~100.]

[Guild Chat | Runie: But... my abilities have really increased because of the buff.]

[Guild Chat | Ravel: Could you maybe send me a screenshot of your buff window?]

[Guild Chat | Runie: Yes, please wait a moment.]

Once a player received any buffs, the buffs would be displayed on the right hand corner of their status view. Right now, there was a translucent figure of a fork and knife crossed together, floating at the upper right corner of Runie's vision.

"This guy does not believe me," Runie thought, wondering if the situation was truly unbelievable. Was it the chef she was talking to, or was it her that did not know anything? Runie clicked on her stats window and made sure to click on the + to clearly display the additional effects before taking a screenshot and sending it to their guild chat (GC).

[Guild Chat | Runie: (photo)]

[Guild Chat | Ravel: This, are you sure it's not edited?]

[Guild Chat | Runie: It's not!]

Runie felt very frustrated.

'This guy said that he liked me but he's doubting my words!'

Not long after, messages from the other guild members started to flood the guild chat.

[Guild Master Allen: Runie, what's this?! Is this really a dish made by a novice chef?! Take a screenshot of the dish window and send us a screenshot so we can be sure!]

Runie was a member of Varest Guild, a mid-tier guild with players averaging Level 150~200. In fact, the only reason why a novice like her was able to join the guild was because she was friends with the Guild Master (GM) Allen in reality.

[Iamthebesthand: Omg, that's impossible! A novice chef can have such a good buff ability?!]

[BeanieKissKiss: That's really crazy... Is it not edited? Wow, even our Beanie is surprised.]

Runie read the messy messages from the Guild Chat and took a screenshot of her normal tonkatsu. However, the tonkatsu was anything but normal. Then, at that moment...

[Guild Chat | Ravel: Which village did the subjugation troops come from?]

Ravel suddenly asked her.

Ravel was called Soohyun in reality. He was an employee working in the kitchen at Shinra Hotel. Right now, he was taking a break in the chef's break room. He had accidentally dropped his phone after reading the messages in the guild chat. It was open and could be seen from the screen of his fallen phone.

"...Hey, your hands are shaking? Why did your phone fall?"

"Hey, hey. Look at this."

"???"

"It's a dish that came out of?Athenae's?goblin subjugation troops. There were at least 30 people who received buffs."

"What kind of bullshit is that?! Thirty people received buffs from a dish? The subjugation troops have a level limit you know? Only those at Level 15-20 can join the quest."

The chefs playing?Athenae?crowded together.

"Ack?!"

"Hey, fu... what the hell is that!"

"Hey, the dish used grade E ingredients! The ingredients are grade E! They used E-grade ingredients but there's still a buff! That means that the buff was?actually?reduced!"

The people surrounding the phone were all shocked. They had once tried to become chefs in?Athenae,?but ended up deleting their characters to start again. The most shocking part to them was the fact that the dish only used E-grade ingredients. After all, even an intermediate chef would find it hard to make a dish of the magic rank by only using E-grade ingredients. The dish could be considered to be rare for them.

Ingredients played a very important role in a dish. Usually, rare or unique-ranked dishes would need at least grade-B ingredients. It was the same concept of making good steak, where the chef required the use of meat from a free-range cow that grazed in a wide meadow. In fact, the garlic and onions that they used would have to be harvested from the land of Runeth.

However, these ingredients were not easy to harvest and were quite expensive. Right now, there was a dish with a buff that was comparable to a magic-ranked dish. To top it all, the dish was made from E-grade ingredients.

"If the buff was increased, then it would be a completely OP dish!!"

That was completely impossible. At that moment...

"Why are you all being so loud?!" A man shouted harshly as he entered the break room. The man was tall with a well-sculpted face like a sculpture. His charisma was also overflowing, especially after he took off his apron. This man was none other than Kim Seokhyun, the disciple of Alex, the best chef in the world.

Kim Seokhyun had won first place for three consecutive years in the World Cooking Grand Prix, and was one of the ten chefs in the world, recognized as genius chefs with an absolute palate. The reason why he was working in Shinra Hotel as a chef was to become the best chef in Korean cuisine, his own country's cuisine.

"H... head chef. You're also playing?Athenae, right?"

"Athenae? Why are you talking about the game during work hours?" Kim Seokhyun asked, brows furrowing deeply. It was said that Kim Seokhyun was the only person in?Athenae?to become a master-ranked chef among the domestic players. His name inside the game was Twilight Chef Black.

"What on earth are you guys talking about, making such a fuss..." Kim Seokhyun trailed off as he looked at the screenshot that Soohyun had shown him.

"W... what the hell?! Is this from a master chef?!"

The dish was just tonkatsu, a normal-ranked dish that had used only E-grade ingredients. But then, Soohyun said, "I'm not sure if he's truly a master chef... but it's safe to assume that his level is around Level 15~20. We also know for sure that this buff was distributed to thirty people."

"What?!" Kim Seokhyun asked, looking at him incredulously. After all, his words were completely absurd. However, this was the reality in front of them.

Kim Seokhyun chose the chef class in the early days of *Athenae*. He went ahead and defeated countless NPC chefs and surprised plenty of people with his dishes. Because of that, he was able to build his own reputation. It was also because of his reputation that his dishes became special. However, when he became a master chef at Level 70, he realized that the best buff could only be obtained with better ingredient grades, compared to using a lot of lower-grade ingredients and stacking buffs.

Right now, the appearance of an absurd dish with a small buff had appeared in front of him. It was even made with E-grade ingredients. What was more surprising was the fact that the buff increased the stats in percentage and not an absolute value. An increase in percentage meant that the higher the level of the person that ate the dish, the greater the effect of the buff.

'Maybe he's the disciple of that military kitchen's captain.'

Aside from Kim Seokhyun, there was another master-class chef in the country. However, he was not sure if this other chef was playing *Athenae*. At this point, he could only assume that this player might be this person.

"Where is this?"

"It's in Isbin Village."

"...!"

Kim Seokhyun suddenly became anxious. Right now, as Twilight Chef Black, he was working on a linked quest. The quest had listed rewards.

'They will give an epic artifact.'

That was the reward. There were not many epic artifacts that had been released yet, with only an estimated twenty epic artifacts in the country right now. And Kim Seokhyun was hoping that he could climb to the ranks of a Master Craftsman once he received that artifact.

"Where in Isbin Village is he located?"

"In the Bordy Plains' Subjugation Troops."

He could feel a deep sense of foreboding creeping up his back. But then, his thoughts changed, "What if I hire this person..."

No matter how good the player's skill was, he was still a novice. However, looking at the shelf life and preservation time of the food...

'Players who hunt alone will usually purchase large quantities of food before going to the hunting grounds.'

So, what would happen if that player used A-grade ingredients?

'He might get a ridiculously high buff effect. Most importantly, it's very easy to target high-leveled players. If they have a lot of gold, they will definitely buy dishes with a long shelf life, even if they are at a high price.'

Given the chance to become just a bit stronger, high-leveled players would willingly take the risk, pay the price, just so they could break their limits. If Kim Seokhyun managed to hire this player, he could sell his dishes for a high price, further securing his position in Athenae. The player, with his incredible cooking skills, would definitely give him even more power, which in turn would help him build a huge brand image for himself.

"How did you come to know of this?"

"A female player from my guild sent it to me."

"Is that so? Then, can you do me a favor?"

"Yes?"

"Ask her to pass a message to that chef."

Runie could see that her guild chatting window was a mess.

'Is, is this really that great?' Runie thought. Then, a whisper from Ravel came in.

[Ravel: ?Runie.]

[Runie: Yes?]

[Ravel: Could you please help me relay a message to that player?]

[Runie: Huh... Please wait.]

Runie turned to look at the player. She saw that he was finished with the meal distribution, and was busy gobbling up his own tonkatsu.

[Runie: What do you want to say to him?]

[Ravel: ?You know about Chef Kim Seokhyun, right? Can you tell the player that Chef Kim wants to sign a contract with him, with one billion won as payment.]

"...Eh?" Runie said, tilting her head in confusion.

'What kind of bullshit?'

One billion won payment for a contract just because of a single buffed dish? And it was even an offer from Chef Kim Seokhyun, a world-renowned chef?

[Runie: You actually know Kim Seokhyun?]

[Ravel: ?(photo)]

Ravel immediately sent her a picture from reality. Runie could see the words 'Shinra Hotel' written on a name tag on Ravel's clothes. There was also another person standing next to him. That person was truly Kim Seokhyun.

'Huh?!'

That was when she realized that Ravel was not lying. Kim Seokhyun was really making that proposal. Runie had heard before that Ravel was working at a famous hotel, but she did not know the exact name of the hotel.

'I... it's real?'

[Runie: He's really offering one billion won for payment?]

[Ravel: Yes. If he agrees to join Kim Seokhyun's Louvert Guild, then he would get one billion won. If he could prove that the buff ability that he has shown this time was for real, then there will be even more revisions to the contract.]

[Runie: I understand!]

Runie's body trembled. One billion was a very large sum of money. Even if others saved all their money in their lifetime, they still would not be able to save that much money. However, Kim Seokhyun was willing to offer that much money to that man. And that man was just a novice player! She could not understand what they were thinking. However, one thing was for sure, the man was worth more than what she thought.

'Maybe... This is an opportunity?' was what she thought.

Runie hurriedly approached him and said, "Hey, hey!"

Chew?

Minhyuk looked at her strangely. He was busy eating the leftover tonkatsu.

Runie urgently said, "Do you know Chef Kim Seokhyun?"

The man just glanced at her briefly before continuing to eat his tonkatsu.

Runie continued to speak excitedly, "He's offering you one billion won if you join his Louvert guild. Do you know Louvert? It's not only a world-renowned brand, but it's also a famous guild in? Athenae!"

Chew, chew, chew—

However, the man did not seem to be interested in her words. Runie thought, 'Ah... Was it too unrealistic?'

Then, she thought of using the whisper function. If she knew the name of the person, she could send a whisper without using the code, as long as they were still a part of the same subjugation troops. Runie pulled up her whisper with Ravel that showed his picture with Kim Seokhyun. She took a screenshot and sent the whisper over.

"You can check it from my whisper!"

"Oh, it's really delicious!"

"Did... did you check it?"

"Kyaa, it's really tonkatsu. This is too much, why did no one tell me that it was this delicious?! Huh?! I'll definitely scold hyung! I'll keep on scolding him!" The man continued to talk to himself, scolding the air while stabbing the tonkatsu with his fork. He did not even pay any attention to Runie, nor her shocking words.

1. OP: Overpowered

2. ~826k USD

Chapter 36: A Billion? How Much Is That?

Runie frowned. She finally realized that the guy in front of her did not have the slightest interest in her, or whatever she was saying. She called out again, "Excuse me. Did you hear what I said?"

"Kghhk. I think it would be good to make some sauce with pineapples and cherries... Ah, I should try and make it later~"

However, the man was simply oblivious. In the end, Runie could not take it anymore. She grabbed the man's shoulders and said, "Hey!! Kim Seokhyun is offering you one billion won as payment right now..."

Slap!

The atmosphere suddenly changed, as the man slapped her hand away from his shoulders. His voice was fierce as he spoke, "No! I have told you earlier... I'm doing this because I just want to eat something delicious. Why do you keep on bothering me?!"

"N, no... one billi..."

"One or ten, I don't care. I don't care how much his offer is, or whatever. Eating this tonkatsu in front of me is more important!" Minhyuk said. After all, he currently had ninety billion won in assets to his name.

"B, but it's that much... And Kim Seokhyun himself..."

"Touch me one more time and I'll stab you to death with my fork!" The man said as he glared at her, picking up the fork as if it was a weapon. Killing intent flowed fiercely from his eyes.

Swoosh!

Minhyu swung his fork menacingly.

"Kyack! I'm sorry!" Runie shouted, escaping away quickly. Then she sent a whisper to Ravel.

[Runie: Ravel... ??]

"H... he answered!" Soohyun shouted hurriedly. Hearing his words, Kim Seokhyun immediately came in front of him. His face was filled with interest as a smile crept along his lips.

'One billion is enough money to make anyone bend. You know? However, I will make sure to squeeze every bit of your value to exceed one billion. Besides...'

With this, Kim Seokhyun would be able to eliminate his competition. His title of the best was not for nothing. If he could not make a potential competitor one of his own, then he would go all out to trample on him. This was Kim Seokhyun, a person who made his dish special through his own efforts alone.

"About the offer..." Soohyun said hesitantly, abruptly cutting Kim Seokhyun's train of thought.

Kim Seokhyun smiled and said, "Of course, he will accept..."

"He refused."

"What?"

"...R... really?!"

"Gasp?!"

Everyone present in the room was shocked.

"What bullshit! Enough with the games, tell the truth!!"

"From what the female player had said, it seems like he does not know who Kim Seokhyun is. He also threatened to stab her with a fork if she disturbed him again."

"...?"

"And..." Soohyun said, a solemn look on his face.

"He didn't care if it was one billion or whatever. He said that what was important was eating the tonkatsu in front of him."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Silence hung heavily in the room. Then, Kim Seokhyun thought, '...He's just trying to counter the offer, right? Does he want me to increase the price?'

After all, anyone who heard that tonkatsu was more important than one billion won would say that it was a completely ridiculous statement. Simply put, the man must know his worth. So, he was trying to increase the price. To Kim Seokhyun, it seemed that the man was telling him, 'You can't buy me with something like that. Raise your price a bit more!'

'Interesting.' Kim Seokhyun thought, smiling lightly. By this time, he had already arrived at Isbin Village in Athenae. It was only a matter of time for him to catch up with the goblin subjugation troops. Anyway, that was his destination too. He could just deal with everything he needed, quickly.

'That's right. Since he's making a counter-offer, I'll just meet him in person and increase the price a bit more. The fact that he looked at this deal means that he's at least interested.'

Kim Seokhyun was already counting his chickens before they even hatched.

The subjugation troops continued to advance forward. At the pace that they were going, they would be able to arrive at Bordy Plains soon. Once they arrived, they would start the subjugation quickly. At this moment, Minhyuk was currently washing the dishes late at night. That was when he recalled the event that happened a few days ago.

'Kim Seokhyun...'

Of course, Minhyuk knew who he was. He was not some kind of ignorant person. He was kept up-to-date with current affairs. Minhyuk knew that Kim Seokhyun was currently the best chef in the country. He was also Alex's disciple. There was no way for him to be ignorant of that.

'Is he trying to get me with money?'

Minhyuk was furious. Although he had been preoccupied with eating his tonkatsu, he kept on hearing the word?money?back then. The reason why he offered him that much money was probably because he was?coveting?his Food God's Cooking Skill. However, Minhyuk's father had taught him this,'If you want to obtain something from someone, never offer them money first.'

Before offering money, one had to show their character first. They had to show that they were a business partner that the other party could trust and believed in, for them to work together. That was simply the case. What Kim Seokhyun did back then was something absurd in Minhyuk's eyes.

'Does he think he can get everything with money? And in the middle of my welcoming of Sir Tonkatsu at that.'

Minhyuk was really angry at him because Kim Seokhyun had tried to talk about money with him when he was busy trying to enjoy tonkatsu. However, since the incident was over, Minhyuk quickly swept it to one side. It had become something at the back of his mind.

"My favor with the NPCs has really increased by a lot."

Some of the NPCs that did not like Minhyuk before were now showing a favorable attitude towards him. He had been hearing the notifications about the increase in favor over and over again. It seemed like it was because they were able to proceed with the subjugation easily thanks to his buffed dishes. He could hear the patrolling soldiers fighting with the goblins outside.

However, a military chef's job was to prepare for tomorrow's meal. Right?

'There are people that eat my food and feel happy.... This doesn't feel bad.'?That was what Minhyuk thought,'?But, eating by myself is still the best! Wahahah!'

Just then...

[You have contributed 40% of the achievements in Bordy Plains Subjugation Troops.]

[You have received the title 'Subjugation Troops' Soldier'.]

[You have gained 3 REP.]

"Oh...?" Minhyuk said in surprise. He hurriedly checked the contents of the title.

[Subjugation Troops' Soldier]

Unique Title

Title Effects: +3 to all 5 basic stats

Twenty people had volunteered, but Minhyuk alone contributed 40% of the achievements. This was completely surprising since Minhyuk only ate and cooked. However, the reason why Minhyuk's contribution increased to this point was because...

'It was because of the buffed dishes.'

The soldiers had kept on telling Minhyuk that it had become easier for them to hunt because of his buffed dish. Although the increase was only a slight percentage, the overall strength of all seventy soldiers had still increased by a lot. Because of that, Minhyuk inadvertently influenced the smoothness of the task on behalf of the entire subjugation troops.

'I heard that this title will change once I exceed a certain number.'

Titles that changed depending on factors were called evolutionary titles. If a title could increase one's strength by an additional 20% from the initial 40%, it would change to a better title. Of course, there were some requirements, also, some titles could change while others could not.

"Ahem!" Len coughed loudly, to catch Minhyuk's attention.

Len always felt a sense of kinship whenever he looked at Minhyuk. He felt proud and happy seeing him grow tremendously, especially so under his guidance.

'Perhaps this was what it felt like to have a disciple?'

Even when he was still in the Imperial Palace, he was alone. He never took in any students or disciples of his own. After all, he was a very strict chef, only focusing on reaching the pinnacle of 'flavor'. Minhyuk happened to be someone who valued 'flavor' more than anyone else. However, Minhyuk would also leave the subjugation troops soon.

Len was walking around the campsite late at night when he saw the lights in the cooking carriage were still on. He knew that it was Minhyuk. And when he entered, he truly saw him there. So, he coughed to get his attention, "Ahem!"

"Ah. Master, you're here?"

"Yeah. Sit down and get some rest."

"Yes!" Minhyuk answered, bringing some hard bread and milk along. He even offered some to Len.

"Captain, have some too. Hehe."

"Oh? You're saying that, but the look in your eyes tells me something else, huh? You look like you will tear my hands to pieces if I accept it though?"

Screech!

Minhyuk smiled awkwardly and said, "T... that's not true!"

Len's eyes narrowed as he said, "We're supposed to have enough food for the soldiers to eat for a month but... ten days' worth of food seemed to have disappeared in an instant."

Screech!

This was the second time that Minhyuk had stopped in his tracks. However, he noticed Len was smiling softly at him. After all, Len was the one who allowed him to eat all of these things, besides, Isbin Village was not lacking in food.

Minhyuk chuckled when he saw that Len was only joking around. Then, he said, "Come to think of it, I have never seen Master Len eat anything."

Minhyuk truly had not seen him eat even once.

"I usually eat my own packed lunch. There are times when I need to take medicine, so my diet has to be healthy."

"Ah... Is that so? I thought my master was also a flavor-seeker like me!"

"Flavor... I also pursue it. Unfortunately, my tongue tastes food differently than other people."

"...."

'Ah, there were people like this too,' was the thought that crossed Minhyuk's mind.

Then, Len slowly said, "I have never tasted anything in my life."

"Eh?" Minhyuk gasped, startled at the words that he heard.

But then, notifications suddenly rang in Len's ears.

[The God of Athenae is imposing sanctions on you.]

[This quest can't be given to another player. There is a player currently undertaking this quest.]

'...Damn it!'

Len bit his lips tightly. There was a quest that he could personally give and he really wanted to give it to Minhyuk. However, someone else was currently undertaking the quest. If Len was going to give away that 'item', he truly wanted Minhyuk to have it.

However, the God of Athenae was imposing a sanction on him. Even if he wanted to speak, he would not be able to say a word about the quest at all because of the sanction.

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"But... How did you become a master if you can't taste the food...?" Minhyuk asked. This was really a surprising achievement.

Len grinned proudly as he said, "Dexterity."

"..."

"I placed everything on my DEX."

"Ah...!" Minhyuk exclaimed in enlightenment. He knew that NPCs also had the concept of stats. It seemed like Len had continued to raise his DEX.

'If one's DEX reaches twenty, the flavor will go up by +1. DEX can also influence how one handles food, helping the person move expertly. But, reaching that level without even tasting anything...?'

How much DEX would be needed for that? Was that even possible at all?

"I've done everything to raise my DEX. I even followed blacksmiths, painters, carpenters, miners, and even fishermen."

"...!"

This was an amazing piece of information. This also meant that Len cooked not for himself, but truly for others. However, Minhyuk also thought, 'I... it's a pity...'

He was obviously just an NPC. But Minhyuk felt pity for him. He knew, more than anyone else, just how important taste was. After all, he was already sick and tired of eating 5,000 tasteless cherry tomatoes every day. He did not like to eat them but he could not stop his addiction. It had not been just once when he ran to the bathroom to throw his food away.

Food was a vital part of daily life, and flavor, taste, smell, they all played a huge part in food.

"I did everything I could to increase my DEX. After doing everything to the best of my abilities, I was able to stand tall and be proud of my cooking, even if it was with just my DEX."

Minhyuk believed that with Len's efforts, Len would be able to reach the realms of a Master Craftsman, perhaps even beyond that, if he could just taste the food.

"Boy, what does food mean to you?"

Minhyuk pondered over the question for a moment before saying, "Food, to me, is life and discovering a new way of life, each and every day."

"Discovering a new way of life..."

"I eat three meals a day. In my lifetime, I will probably eat 100,000 meals, but, there are more than 3 million dishes in the world."

"That's right."

"If I am able to eat something new or different every day, then it will be a kind of healing, an adventure in this boring life of ours. Of course, it's only good if you know that you're eating something delicious."

"Yeah," Len said, grinning at his answer, before turning to stare blankly at the sky without saying anything for some time. Then, he spoke up softly, "Me too... I also want to be able to taste."

"..."

Minhyuk could not respond. Len stood up to leave as he said, "Get some rest."

"Yes."

As he left, Len felt sorry that he could not issue the quest to Minhyuk. He believed that Minhyuk was the deserving owner of this item. However, he did not have a choice. So, he walked away without saying anything anymore.

"Hmmm..." Minhyuk hummed as he fell silent, thinking about Len who was living a life that seemed far worse than his own.

He chewed on his bread as he thought, 'How does it feel to have no sense of taste?'

Perhaps food might taste like an eraser in their mouth? He would never know.

'Maybe this is...'

Minhyuk thought of a possibility.

‘Perhaps this was a quest? It was possible.’

The quest would likely be titled the ‘Chef with No Taste.’ However, if that was the case, then why did Len turn around without giving him his quest? He did not know the reason. Len did teach him how to cook, so Minhyuk wanted to help him. Then, he recalled something.

‘Ah... Maybe that can help!’

What came to mind was none other than his Ingredient Tracking skill.

‘I can choose the buff that I want with this!’

In fact, he had been thinking about testing the skill. It seemed like the right opportunity to test it.

"Use the Ingredient Tracking skill once," Minhyuk said as a hologram appeared in front of him with various cuisines listed on it. Korean cuisine, Western cuisine, Japanese cuisine, Chinese cuisine, etc.

"Hmm... Chinese cuisine."

The moment he heard about Sun’s Wheat, Minhyuk was already planning on making some Chinese cuisine.

[You have selected?Chinese cuisine.]

[What is your desired buff effect?]

"Reviving someone’s lack of sense of taste."

[Searching for the ingredients in a 1-km radius.]

Minhyuk was excited about the results. It was not just for Len. He had an intuition that it could also be of help to his DEX. It was clear that something was hidden from him. Minhyuk had this great ambition to improve his cooking skills. If this was successful, perhaps he could kill two birds with one stone.

Then, the notifications rang.

[The search has failed.]

[The search will continue for 3 days and will depend on the player's movement and travel range.]

[You have 2 more times to use your ingredient tracking skill.]

[As a penalty, Food God's True Worth can't be used for one day.]

Chapter 37: A Billion? How Much Is That?

[The search has failed.]

[The search will continue for 3 days and will depend on the player's movement and travel range.]

Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa looked at each other after watching the scene from the monitor.

"That's a relief..." Lee Minhwa mumbled to herself, while Team Leader Park breathed a sigh of relief.

"Player Minhyuk is truly someone who would do anything to make his food become more delicious."

So, this was their problem. The artifact that Len would give as a reward would give the player a tremendous boost in power. In fact, the Twilight Chef would be able to develop one step further the moment he received that power. He might even go a step further beyond the realms of a Master Craftsman.

"The Orc Village is one kilometer away from them..." Team Leader Park said. It seemed like he was still very concerned about the Ingredient Tracking skill. After all, the fact that Len even mentioned his 'taste' story to Minhyuk meant that Len's favor towards Minhyuk had reached an extremely high level. That was an incredible feat, since Len was an NPC that was originally set up to hate foreigners.

"If all goes as expected, the item will be taken by Twilight Chef Black," Team Leader mumbled.

Just then, Lee Minhwa said, "It's not entirely impossible though, what if there were other variables?"

"There are no other variables. They would be more than a kilometer away from the Orc Village once they reached Bordy Plains. That event would be impossible unless Player Minhyuk decides to visit the place on purpose."

"I see."

But then, Lee Minhwa suddenly thought of something, 'But, what if someone intentionally drags the orcs to the camp?'

However, Lee Minhwa realized that it was a completely absurd notion.

'That's too bad then.'

Lee Minhwa liked watching Payer Minhyuk go on a roll. She felt like she was wishing for her favorite baseball team to win the championship right now.

'Sigh...' Lee Minhwa sighed quietly.

Minhyuk was a bit disappointed after hearing the notification to the point that he let out a long, deep exhale, "Hoo..."

He was wondering if it was impossible for him.

'Maybe it had something to do with the quest itself?'

Since it was a reward from Len, Minhyuk was sure that it would be something extremely delicious. If not, then it might probably be something related to DEX, since Len was someone who specialized in cooking through DEX. However, even though he was disappointed, he already expected this result to some extent. After all, there seemed to be nothing in the vicinity that could save Len's taste.

'There's nothing we can do about it,' Minhyuk thought, sighing in disappointment once again, as he went back to cleaning up the remaining dishes.

It was late at night but Belo and the members of Connection Guild were still having a heated discussion.

"Belo, what's happening right now? How can that damn chef be the top player in the contributions board? His contribution is extremely high!"

Everyone knew that they would never be able to get the hidden dungeon rewards if this went on. It would definitely go to the hands of that player and that was something that must not happen at all. They had spent a huge amount of time to get to this point.

They did not even know what was inside the hidden dungeon.

"How the hell did that little rascal...?phew... There's no answer to this question. I don't get it. No matter how much effort we put in, it's definitely impossible to get 40% of the contributions by ourselves. That's just impossible!"

The members of the guild were already working hard to give Belo the contributions. They would deliberately gather the goblins that they saw on their way to Bordy Plains and let Belo kill them. This way, his contributions would definitely increase.

"Sigh... This is annoying. That guy's a real pain in the ass. He must be a pig in real life," Belo cursed loudly.

Everyone suddenly went mute at his words. In fact, Belo's parents were quite rich in reality. His guild members and friends helped him only because he was considered to be the 'wallet' in their circle. He was the son of a rich family, and his parents had more than three billion won in assets.

"However, there's nothing we can do about this... B.. by any chance, will we still get the money that you promised..." One of the guild members asked timidly.

Belo had promised to give them 400,000 won each once they finished the job safely. Belo looked at him and said, "Why, do you think there's no other way for us?"

"Huh?"

"That bastard is a chef, you know."

"Yeah, he's a chef. What about it?"

"He's a chef. And he's a Level 15 low-leveled player at most."

What would come to mind at the mention of a chef? Most people thought chefs to be ruined characters that were bound to be at the bottom of the food chain: sloppy and weak.

"...Are you talking about PK?"

Belo grinned at them and said, "Yeah. Besides, didn't you notice?"

"What?"

"The sword and leather armor equipped by that player is either special or rare. If he drops at least one of those, you will definitely get more than what I promised. But, if you fail to do so, I won't pay the 400,000 won."

Hearing those words, the other members of the guild began to think twice about their lives.

‘We’ve used two days of our time in reality to do this, and yet...’

‘Wow... Aren’t you too much...?’

Their brows furrowed deeply.

“I’ll give another one million won to the person that kills that guy. I hate that bastard’s smiling mug when all he does is wag his tail and suck up to the NPCs.”

"One million?"

"OMG?!"

Belo’s words brought a smile to the faces of his guild members. Then, he continued to say, "Also, the one who kills that bastard will get the item if any is dropped."

"Kyaa..."

A million won was equivalent to most people’s salary for ten days. In all honesty, not everyone could make that much money in that short amount of time. It was obviously hard to get that much money.

"Who's in?"

"Me! Me! Me!"

"Ah, me!"

"Relax. He's just a low-leveled player so he would die if I hit him once," Belo said, giggling at the thought. However, one person's face was wrinkled in annoyance.

"Shit... XXXX..."

"Why?"

"My mom said that if I don't disconnect right now, she will kick me out of the house."

The Athena capsule was equipped with a call button on its exterior. The player could hear the voice in their ears when a person pressed the button outside and made a call.

"Then, you're out."

"Shit, ah. For real. I wanted to join," The player said, logging out in frustration. That meant that there were only four people left.

"Hiyaa. Now," Belo grinned as he continued to say, “Aren’t we going to beat him to a pulp?”

His smile was ferocious, thick with killing intent.

"But... if we PK that person, we will be forced out of the subjugation troops..."

"That's right. The NPCs might even kill us."

Killing a player whom NPCs have high favor with could result in the NPCs retaliating and killing them for revenge. What they needed to do was to kill him without anyone in the subjugation troops knowing about their deed. If they killed him and kept it under wraps, they could just spread rumors that he died, or that he logged out of the game.

"Don't worry about that," Belo grinned. He opened his mouth again and said, "That bastard will go somewhere dark on his own."

"Huh? On his own?"

Belo nodded in answer to his guild member's question.

"Heave-ho!" Minhyuk shouted as he threw the food waste in the garbage can. He always made it a point to throw the waste before he logged out. Then, he started to drag the garbage cans to a more secluded area.

Len always told him that waste should always be left slightly further away from the camp. There were two reasons for this. The first reason was because of the garbage's horrendous smell. The second reason was because wild animals and beasts tend to gather around the garbage can to scavenge.

If they left the food waste inside the cooking carriage, the bad smell would eventually fill the entire carriage. Wouldn't it be good if he could throw it away in the nearby forest before that could happen? Therefore, Minhyuk dragged the container towards the entrance of the forest and threw it there. No one would care either way. After all, the monsters in the vicinity were just goblins and the smell would not bother them.

Minhyuk even thought, 'Maybe the smell of the food waste can act as bait and gather these monsters?' or something along those lines. That was when four people appeared and stood in front of him.

'These people...' Minhyuk thought, his eyes narrowing sharply.

They were Belo and his gang. Minhyuk did not like them because of how they carried themselves. They always argued with the other players, bullying them while saying, 'Wow. Look at these novices getting carried away.'

Minhyuk did not know why they were acting like that when they were all novices themselves. However, it was rare for a group to join the subjugation troops so most players just ignored them and avoided them in order to dodge their bullying. This group always mocked and cursed the NPCs too.

'Wow, our soldiers are doing well too, amazing~'

'Won't they die once Athenae gets shut down?'

'They're just artificial intelligence anyway.'

Athenae might be a game, but Minhyuk believed that it was a tool that could determine and categorize people. Plenty of people wore masks in reality. They would smile deliberately and act a certain way to get close with others, but curse and mock them the moment their back was turned against them. What would happen when these people played Athenae?

'Their true nature will come out.'

People behaving this way in Athenae would most definitely not be good people in reality. However, Minhyuk could not fathom why they were here in front of him, when he had not done anything to them at all.

"What's wrong?" Minhyuk asked, gripping the hilt of his sword silently.

Len had always told him, "We are military chefs. Our most important job is to prepare the best meal for the troops. However, there are times when we will need to take arms and fight. That's why you need to carry a weapon at all times."

In reality, military chefs on active duty would always carry guns while cooking. This was also the case even if they were just training. What Len had told him was similar.

"We just wanted to ask you something," The player named Belo said as he stepped forward.

"What is it?"

"Ah. It's just that you're very close to the NPCs, so I was wondering if you have any secrets on how to get close to them," Belo answered while his party started to get into position,

The first one to move was the mage named Bron. He activated a Silence Magic. Silence Magic was a spell that would restrict the opponent's speech. It was often used to silence an enemy mage and stop them from reciting spells.

Bron was originally a Level 40 mage that had mastered second tier magic. Naturally, his stats had gone down to match his current level, Level 20. Since second tier magic could only be mastered at Level 40 or higher, the spell's restrictions would increase. However, he was not worried.

'There's definitely no way that a chef would increase his WIS or INT. Besides, a player needs a high REP to have a sufficiently high magical defensive power that could nullify the Silence Magic. Something like that is completely impossible for a mere chef.'

Reputation (REP) was a stat that carried a lot of power. Although it was a bit small, it could still increase the magical defensive power of the player. However, for that to happen, the player needed to have at least 20 REP. And to Bron, Minhyuk was a complete novice, and he would definitely not have a high REP. That was the reason why Bron believed that his Silence Magic was enough to shut Minhyuk's mouth and stop him from calling for help from the NPCs.

"The method? Is that what you really need from me? You just have to be on your best manners and be polite. If you respect them, they would also naturally respect you."

"Wow... But from what I heard, it was? 'You have to be rude' or something along those lines?" Belo jeered sarcastically as Bron shouted the spell to cast the Silence Magic.

"Silence!"

[Silence has failed.]

[Player Bron committed an act of poor etiquette.]

[Player Bron is in a Temporary Chaotic State.]

[If the other party initiates an attack, the other party will not receive any penalty.]

"...Huh?" Bron asked dumbly, 'Why did it not work?' Flustered, he cast it once again.

"Silence!"

[Silence has failed.]

"W.. what the hell?!"

"Shit, what are you doing?"

"H.. he can't be silenced!"

Seeing them do that, Minhyuk calmly stepped back and cracked his neck to warm himself up. He thought, 'So, they want to PK...'

Minhyuk already knew that these guys were probably like that. However, at this moment, only one of them was under the Half-Chaotic State.

'I don't want to become Chaotic just because of these bastards.'

Minhyuk did not want to be penalized with the Chaotic state just because of them. What should he do? Right now, the four of them were thinking that he was just a weak chef. In fact, even the NPCs in the subjugation troops thought the same.

That was when he suddenly thought of something.

"N... no way. Are you going to PK me?! Ack! P...please don't do that!" Minhyuk shouted.

His solution? Acting.

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"Hey bastard! We're just going to force you to log out first. Don't worry, this hyung will make sure that it won't hurt," Belo snarled, pulling his sword out and slashing it down towards Minhyuk. In contrast, Minhyuk looked sloppy as he grabbed his own sword with both hands, but he somehow stopped Belo's sword.

Clang—

[Player Belo committed an act of poor etiquette.]

[Player Belo is in a Temporary Chaotic State.]

[If you initiate an attack, you will not receive any penalty.]

'One man down,' Minhyuk thought. Still, he faked his fall and showed a terrified expression as he cried out, "This, this f*cker... w... why is this game so scary?!"

"These hyungs are trying to kill you painlessly so stop moving around," another player said as he shot an arrow towards Minhyuk.

"Hiiiiiiiiik!" Minhyuk shrieked. He might look terrified, but his eyes were actually following the trajectory of the arrow. Once again, he made a huge show out of parrying the attack in a sloppy manner.

[Player Dooms committed an act of poor etiquette.]

[Player Dooms is in a Temporary Chaotic State.]

[If you initiate an attack, you will not receive any penalty.]

"Lucky Bastard!"

"Bwahahaha! Look at him trying to run away."

Then, another player, a warrior, tried to slam his ax down on Minhyuk as he snarled, "I'll split your head in two!"

Woosh!

And the final parry...

Clang!

[Player Aras committed an act of poor etiquette.]

[Player Aras is in a Temporary Chaotic State.]

[If you initiate an attack, you will not receive any penalty.]

After he confirmed the notifications, Minhyuk's grip on his sword changed. He removed one of his hands from the sword, slowly pushing the ax away as he stood up confidently.

"Huh...?" Aras asked dumbly. He was a warrior player that focused on raising his STR. Aras could not help but stare at his ax being pushed away easily in confusion.

'What? Wasn't this guy shaking like a scared puppy just a few moments ago?'

The sudden change in Minhyuk's stance and disposition made him distracted. Because of this, he failed to understand the situation that he was in. Then...

Clang!

Minhyuk used his strength to push the ax away, forcing Aras to take three steps back. Then, clenching his fist tightly, he dashed forward and narrowed the distance between him and Aras. He then executed a clean and strong uppercut!

Punch!

Aras' body floated in the air temporarily before falling down with a loud thud.

Thud!

"Ah. See, I told you f*ckers to stop. For real."

"Ugh, aaack..." Aras groaned. He had received a direct hit to his jaw that made his body paralyzed. That was when he realized...

'W... what kind of hit was that?! I, it was just one punch, but my HP...'

More than 40% of his HP had disappeared from Minhyuk's punch. Could a chef's punch be that strong? No. This much power would still be absurd even for a warrior class at Minhyuk's level.

"T... this is ridiculous..." Belo stuttered, his eyes widening in disbelief.

"Hey, you, that big head Maplestory character. Come over here," Minhyuk said, gesturing towards Belo.

[Bardy Swordsmanship]

[All 5 basic stats have a +12 increase for 6 minutes.]

[Haste]

[Your movement speed and attack speed have increased 1.3x for 10 seconds.]

Minhyuk had been practicing diligently and his skills proficiency increased steadily. In the end, he was able to level up his Bardy Swordsmanship, resulting in an additional +3 stats increase, as well as an additional one minute duration for the skill.

Bang!

Minhyuk dug his feet on the ground and dashed forward.

"What?!" Belo shrieked, eyes widening even further at Minhyuk's speed. He could see that Minhyuk was faster than him, a Level 40 player.

[Warrior's Fury]

[There will be a +10 increase in your STR and STM for 1 minute.]

Belo activated his warrior skill in haste. In the blink of an eye, their swords collided.

Clash!

Fwoosh!

Flames suddenly shot out of Belo's sword.

[Salamander's Blaze]

[The attack will inflict continuous damage to the enemy.]

However, the flames did not help with the pressure on Belo at all. In the end, Belo was left helpless as his sword got pushed down to the ground. Then...

Slash!

Minhyuk slashed Belo's waist.

"Ugh!"

[Three Consecutive Quick Assault]

[Your attack will strike three times.]

One of the sword's afterimages cut Belo's flank deeply.

Slash!

[Your HP has dropped below 20%]

"N, no..." Belo said, but before he could even finish his words, the last afterimage of the sword arrived and slashed further through his flank.

Slash!

A bag of gold and a ring artifact dropped upon Belo's death.

Dash, dash, dash, dash!

Minhyuk easily handled the mage and the warrior that collapsed earlier, forcing them both to log out. He also dealt with the remaining player neatly and quickly. After dealing with the players, Minhyuk turned his attention towards the drops, picking them up quickly.

[You have acquired 7,580,000 gold.]

[You have acquired Owl Bear's Warrior Armor.]

[You have acquired Salamander's Double Ring.]

[You have acquired Werewolf's Mane.]

[You have acquired Map of the Golden Land.]

Minhyuk was a bit surprised when he saw the items that the four players had dropped. The guy before that had tried to PK him, Roy, did not even drop any gold, but this Belo guy today dropped a lot of gold. There was a 1-80% rate of gold drop from killing players.

If the player's REP was high, then the probability of items and gold dropping would decrease. However, if the player was in a Half Chaotic State or a Temporary Complete Chaotic State, the probability of items and gold dropping would significantly increase.

Among the items that dropped, Minhyuk was drawn towards the Salamander's Double Ring. Ring artifacts in?Athenae?were divided into several categories within their rankings. The most ordinary was the normal ring. Then, there was the double ring, a ring that was better than the normal. And the triple ring, the best among all of the rings within that rank. From what Minhyuk had heard, a double ring was worth around 1.5 million won in cash, something that should not even be possible for a novice. This meant that the item was worth around 30 million gold if the price was calculated in gold. Minhyuk checked the artifact's information.

(Salamander's Double Ring)

Class: Unique

Requirement: STR 60

Durability: 1,625 / 3,000

Defensive Power: 78

Special Abilities: Salamander's Blaze

Minhyuk read the description of the skill, Salamander's Blaze. From what he read, a small flame would burst out whenever the player attacked or defended. It also said that the flame would inflict continuous damage on enemies. This skill was the reason why a flame suddenly burst out of Belo's sword when their swords clashed earlier. In a way, Salamander's Blaze could be considered as a magic attack. Because of this skill, the artifact could be considered useful, especially since novice players did not have any magical defensive power yet. Besides, the fact that it was a double ring made it worthy enough.

Minhyuk decided to equip it himself. Then, he also quickly checked the Owl Bear's Warrior Armor, a rare item that was worth around two million gold, before turning his attention towards the map.

"The Golden Land?" Minhyuk asked, tilting his head in curiosity as he clicked on the map.

(The Map of the Golden Land)

Requirement: Level 130

Description: Currently in a sealed state.

The Map of the Golden Land was still sealed because Minhyuk had not reached the required level yet. After checking the items, Minhyuk looked up and saw the four other players turn into a gray light before disappearing. He patted the ground happily and decided to log out.

"I'm going to sell the things that I don't need, then I'm going to buy something delicious~" Minhyuk hummed as he logged out of the game.

Ahn Seoktae was a member of the Connection Guild that was participating in the subjugation quest. He was the player that had no other choice but to log out earlier.

"Playing games all day! If that's the only thing that you can do, then just get out of the house!"

"Shit. What's the problem with you?!"

Seoktae was a third-time exam taker and was once again embroiled in a huge quarrel with his mother. He sighed as he picked up his mobile phone.

"Every day it's?bastard?this,?bastard?that.?Get out of the house!?Why don't you get out?!" Seoktae grumbled. However, he did not have the courage to do that. All he could do was endure. So, he just looked at his phone. But what he saw made him confused.

"Huh?"

The group chat of the guild members that joined the Goblin Subjugation Troops was going wild. There were even more than twenty missed calls and messages from Belo, aka Lee Sungmin.

[Sungmin: Ah, f*ck. I'm so pissed off. My double ring dropped.]

"T, this...?" Seoktae asked dumbly, letting out a gasp in surprise. Judging from the messages in the group chat, it seemed like the members were all forced to log out after trying to PK the chef player. It seemed like Sungmin had also dropped the expensive artifact that he always bragged about every day, the Salamander's Double Ring.

The Salamander's Double Ring was an artifact with low requirements and had a fire-attribute attached to it. That was why it was more expensive than other double rings. From what Seoktae had heard, it was worth around four million won in cash.

"This f*cking bastard. You bragged about it every day. Serves you right." Seoktae thought, giggling at Sungmin's misfortune. However, his brows furrowed after seeing the contents of the chat. The members that took part in the subjugation quest were all currently logged out and could not access the game. They were all busy discussing about this matter.

[Sungmin: Ha, f*ck. Whatever we do, we should beat that bastard up. We should clear his level down to zero.]

[KimHyeseok: (emoticon)]

Hyeseok, one of his friends, only sent a green duck emoticon that was turning over in the group chat. He did not know what to say to make them feel better. And then...

[Sungmin: Seoktae, you bxtch. Why are you not saying anything when you're checking the group chat, don't you know that the one who doesn't reply with even one letter is a scumbag?]

[Seoktae: Ah, Sorry. I was doing something.]

[Sungmin: I see that you're still alive. No, I'm going to make a call.]

Not long after, Seoktae saw his phone ringing. The caller ID was listed as 'The Greatest B*tch.'

'Ah, what the hell is wrong with this bastard?' Seoktae thought, clicking his tongue in annoyance. If it were not for Sungmin's money, he would not even get along with such an arrogant prick. He answered the phone reluctantly, "Hello?"

[Oh, hey. Do you want to hear about the amazing plan that I have in mind?]

'Ye, yeah. Sure,' Seoktae thought as he roughly agreed with Sungmin's words.

"An amazing plan?"

[Uh-huh. You know that there's an Orc Village two kilometers away from the camp, right?]

There really was an Orc Village nearby. It was a hunting ground for players at the same level as Seoktae.

[And you're a thief player, so go and kite those bastards and make them attack the subjugation bastards.]

"Huh...? What are you talking about?"

[Eyy. You're a frustrating rascal. We've lost our hidden dungeon anyway. So let's just raid the subjugation force so we can beat that chef bastard to death along the way. Ah, no. Won't the orcs kill them?]

'Wow, look at this sneaky little shit...'

The plan was not that bad. Seoktae was a quick and light-footed thief. Besides, orcs were mob monsters that usually attacked first, so it would be easy for him to kite them and lead them to where the subjugation troops were. A single haste skill was enough for him to take those orcs to the subjugation troops' camp.

'But what about the other players...'

But before Seoktae could even wonder about the welfare of the other players, he heard Sungmin say...

[If you succeed, you will get the original promised money, including the share of the others. I will also add an additional 200,000 for you.]

"R... really?!"

[This hyung is a man, you punk. I will naturally not take back what I said. Will you do it or not?!]

"Oh. I'll do it!" Seoktae answered enthusiastically as he nodded in agreement. It was not a difficult job. He quickly threw his conscience to the gutter and turned a blind eye to the guilt of potentially causing the deaths of the other players, just because of his greed. The call ended there.

"Bwahahahaha, I can get around four million won!" Seoktae shouted in joy.

"Are you still not sleeping?!" His mom's angry voice rang loudly.

Caught off-guard by his mother's intimidating shout, he answered back in a small voice, "I, I will go to sleep now..."

Of course, Seoktae had to obey and go to sleep right away.

Oh Changwook woke up early and came out to get some water. He and a few other staff were living together in Minhyuk's 500 square meters house. He was checking the Athenae's official website as he went to the fridge. This was a smartphone addiction! Changwook had the habit of checking the trending posts in the Athenae's official website the moment he woke up. Then, Changwook saw Minhyuk come out of his room.

"You're awake?"

"Why did you get up this early?"

"Hohohoho," Minhyuk chuckled, his smile meaningful. He planned to eat something inside the game early this morning since he finished off Belo and his backstabbing friends last night.

"You'll be offended if you know. Hoho..."

"I'm getting offended just by looking at your face," Changwook snapped back in annoyance. Then, he paused at one of the articles posted under the trending posts.

'What's this?'

This was what was written...

[A low-leveled chef's normal tonkatsu.]

"Normal tonkatsu?"

Minhyuk's expression turned strange when he heard Changwook's words. Oh Changwook laughed after checking the post. He said, "This must be fake, it is probably made by a Master Craftsman. Sigh. What bullshit...?"

"Normal tonkatsu?" Minhyuk asked as he approached Changwook, who held out his smartphone to him.

"Hey, look at this. Did you see? They said that this was made by a Level 20 Chef. The attack and defensive power increased? Sigh. Seriously, these guys are just attention-seekers."

Minhyuk looked at his smartphone and saw the third trending post. There were over a thousand comments under the post, which had an attachment of a screenshot, showing the buff notification that appeared after they ate Minhyuk's normal tonkatsu.

"Is this really unbelievable?"

"Look at the comments."

Minhyuk turned his attention towards the comments section.

[sfkkf62: It's clearly fake. It's annoying and I'm tired, so let's have a calm and quiet night.]

[MemilkunsLove: Hahahahahahahahaha. Why? Why don't you just say that you're the colonel? Or? are?you?a cancer? Is your father the president that when you fart the doctor will come running to you and diagnose you with just the smell alone?]

[gsffdf13: This isn't real, right?]

[jvfgncvml1: I'm currently a chef player. I can tell you that that's impossible. Even the number one chef player in the country, Kim Seokhyun, said that the number of buffs is too high, and that it's completely fake.]

1. Minhyuk is referring to Big Headward

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Minhyuk grinned when he saw the comments saying that it was fake. He said, "I made that."

When he heard that, Changwook did not believe him at all. He even replied in a perfunctory manner, "Yep, yep. I'm sure it's you. No one can stop our King of Lies, Minhyuk."

"Hyung, it's true."

"Ah, sure. Our Minhyuk, who's at Level 15, will also be able to slap the number one ranker in the face."

"Hmph," Minhyuk harrumphed as he sipped his water.

Changwook continued to scroll down the site as he said, "If it's really you, I will open doors for you, call you hyung, and even ask about your wellbeing."

As Changwook continued to scroll down, he saw another post. He exclaimed in excitement, "Hey, this person posted a picture?" He scrolled down the comments, "Wow, everyone is saying it's fake but he's posting the other player's picture and insisting that it's not fake. What bull..."

That was when Changwook saw the picture of a man serving the food.

"..."

"..."

"H...Hyung, have you eaten yet?" Changwook called out meekly.

It was truly a quick change of attitude!

"Not yet, you rascal."

"...Yes. Please go ahead."

"Right."

"B... but?Hyung..."

"???"

"Is this for real?"

Minhyuk nodded in answer. Changwook was left speechless when he admitted it. He thought, 'An extremely amazing buff ability that even caught Kim Seokhyun's attention...'

Suddenly, "Ahem," Minhyuk coughed loudly while on his way to his room, "Hey, male servant."

Oh Changwook quickly ran and opened the door for him. Minhyuk looked at him and said, "Thank you for going through the trouble." Then, he patted Changwook's shoulders and went inside his room to connect to Athena.

Logging into Athena, Minhyuk took advantage of the time when all of the troops were still asleep to start cooking. The weather had already turned cold to the point that white mist would come out of his mouth every time he took a breath. His planned dish might be a bit heavy for breakfast, but Minhyuk wanted to give it a try since the weather was cold.

'Should I make this for the soldiers to eat?'

What Minhyuk wanted to eat right now was different from the soldiers' breakfast menu. He made this purely because he wanted to eat it.

Bubble, bubble, bubble—

The earthen pot was filled with boiling, bright red soup, coupled with thick slabs of meat and plenty of greens. It was none other than ox bone hangover soup. This was a cheap dish around 7,000-8,000 won and was something that office workers and groups of friends often gather to eat. In fact, when asked, "What do you want to eat for lunch?" the most likely was ox bone hangover soup. After all, this dish could let you enjoy meat at a low price and even allow you to savor the spicy soup with rice.

'Wasn't this simply the best?'

"Hehe..." Minhyuk chuckled, dipping his spoon into the finished ox bone hangover soup. He quickly sprinkled a lot of sesame seeds on top of the meat of the bones and ladled out some soup in a bowl, which he sprinkled with perilla powder too. The perilla powder could make the soup taste more soft and mellow.

"Well then, shall we try it now?" Minhyuk said loudly as he clamped a piece of meat and transferred it onto his plate.

"Hot, hot, hot," Minhyuk said, blowing on his fingers. The part that he grabbed was fresh out of the soup inside the earthen pot so it was still hot. Then, he dipped the bones in the seasonings that he prepared before pulling the bones away from each other.

"Wow."

Steam rose from the bones as the appetizing meat appeared between them. Minhyuk quickly grabbed a piece of the meat and placed it in his mouth.

Chew, chew—

The meat inside the bones was stewed perfectly, its texture tender and soft. Usually, meat in lousy restaurants would be tough and dry, but this was different.

"This... this is equivalent to ox bone hangover soup from a good restaurant!" Minhyuk exclaimed with gusto, smiling brightly as he scooped up some bright red soup. He blew on the soup happily before taking a sip to taste it.

"Kgghk!"

The soup was just the right amount of spicy that could make one feel warm. Finally, it was time for Minhyuk to get serious. He brought out a small bowl of soy sauce with wasabi sticking to the side. Pinching as much wasabi as he wanted, he began to stir it. An enticing glow appeared once the soy sauce and the wasabi met. Minhyuk quickly picked another piece of meaty bone and dipped it in the soy sauce and wasabi mix before bringing it to his mouth.

Chomp—

The wasabi was slightly pungent and stinging, but its sweet aftertaste worked in perfect harmony with the tender and spicy meat. Minhyuk smiled happily at the combination of flavors. He sucked every part of the bone down to the very last crack, savoring the tender and juicy flavor of the meat. He firmly believed that ox bone hangover soup tasted better if one ripped the bones and sucked the meat. After sucking the bones dry, he threw them in a large bowl and...

Slurp— slurp—

...licked his fingers clean before wiping them with wet wipes. Then, Minhyuk scooped a big spoonful of rice and placed it in his mouth. That was how he devoured the soup.

"Kghhk. Ah... a bottle of soju would be really nice right now," Minhyuk sighed in disappointment. Then, he scooped out the greens and poured it on his rice before bringing another spoonful to his mouth.

Chew, chew—

The rice soaked from the ox bone hangover soup had softened, making them easy to chew. He made sure to leave a piece of meat from the ox bone hangover soup just for this. Minhyuk quickly tore the meat off of the bones and dropped it in the soup. Then, he scooped some rice and added it to the soup before pressing it down and mixing them together. Then, Minhyuk grabbed a spoonful and took a huge, savory bite.

The rice and the spicy soup met in his mouth, creating a perfect harmony. Minhyuk also tried the pickled onions, a side dish usually served with ox bone hangover soup in restaurants. The pickled onion had a sweet and sour taste, providing his mouth with a refreshing and contrasting flavor. Finally, he took a bite of the radish kimchi.

Crunch, crunch—

The crunch of the radish kimchi with every bite sounded pleasant to the ears.

"Ah. Ox bone hangover soup is really delicious," Minhyuk said in awe as he ate everything without leaving a single drop inside the bowl. He grinned after seeing his empty bowl.

"Clear."

[You have eaten Ox Bone Hangover Soup.]

[Your attack power and defensive power will increase by 7% for 8 hours.]

Minhyuk was still experimenting with his skills. Even though he loved eating, it did not mean that he would not be interested in his skills. Right now, he wanted to see how much his buff would increase with the food that he made and ate. He wanted to know his limits. Besides, he also found it fun to cook. There was also the incident with Belo and the rest yesterday.

'It's better to be strong than to be weak,' Minhyuk thought. This was so he could eat more delicious food later! After all, there were a lot of people out there that were way ahead of him.

After finishing his meal, Minhyuk started to prepare the soldiers' meals while patting his satiated tummy.

Minhyuk and the rest of the chefs had been preparing food for quite a while.

"It's quite noisy outside."

The subjugation troops had finally arrived at the Bordy Plains and were now fighting a fierce battle against the goblins the moment they arrived. The tide of the battle continued to waver between both sides.

"We have to move quickly. We're going to serve the meals soon."

"Yes," Minhyuk answered, speeding up his movements. But at that moment...

[Ingredient Tracking]

[Successfully searched for the ingredients.]

[The Orc Chieftain's Essence has the characteristics to revive the sense of taste.]

[Can be cooked with Food God's Cooking Skill Lv1.]

[Suggested Menu: Sweet and Sour Pork.]

"...?!"

Minhyuk was so surprised that his movements stopped for a moment.

"What's wrong?"

"N, nothing."

The ingredient was just within a kilometer from him! As long as he used Orc Chieftain's Essence, he would be able to make a dish that would be able to revive the sense of taste.

The subjugations troops were busy dealing with the fierce onslaught of the goblins.

Stab!

The soldier, Venetto, pierced one of the goblins' heads with his spear before looking at the surroundings.

"Phew...!" He roughly exhaled a breath of relief after seeing the other soldiers already starting to wrap up and finish their battles. Vald was also riding on horseback, checking out the overall situation.

"It's all done, I'm hungry!"

"I'm also dying of hunger! Are we eating Minhyuk's food today?!"

"Minhyuk is going to leave soon. I don't think that I will be able to eat my missus' cooking anymore."

The soldiers were all looking forward to their breakfast wondering what surprise they would receive today. However, just as they wondered about their breakfast...

Rumble!

The ground suddenly began to shake.

"Hmm?"

The troops all looked at each other in confusion.

"What?"

"It sounds like the trampling of feet..."

The players were also all looking around in confusion. Vald, the captain of the subjugation troops, hurriedly pulled out his telescope to check the situation. Then, he saw the source of the commotion in the distance.

"T... this...!" Vald shouted, eyes widening in shock. One of the foreigners was running at high speed and kiting around thirty orcs towards them. That was not the end of it. There was even a Level 50 Orc Chieftain present among the orcs.

"Gasp...!"

Vald frowned at the sight. He could even see large numbers of goblins running towards them to escape from the sudden thumps of feet. However, Vald was an NPC. They had no room for retreat. All they could do was charge forward.

"Everyone pull out your swords, we must defend the Bordy Plains!"

The soldiers stood up once again.

"Orcs!!! There are a bunch of orcs coming this way!"

"T... they're huge!"

The average level of the soldiers in the subjugation troops was only around Level 25. In fact, the main purpose of the subjugation troops quest was to attract players, since this was just a novice subjugation quest. However, right now, plenty of orcs were getting closer to them.

'At least half of us will die here.'

Vald knew that, but he was an NPC that would continue to fight, even if half of his troops had to die. After all, they had something to protect. With his orders, the soldiers began to advance.

"Chiiiiik!"

"Chwiiik, chwiiik, humans... Over there...!"

The orcs were getting closer and closer.

"Oh my lord..."

"Oh, my word."

"Ah, f*ck are we not going to log out?!"

"If we log out from this novice subjugation troops quest, then won't we be considered as f*cking cowards?!"

The players were shocked at the sudden turn of events. Just then, Venetto saw someone dash forward and stand in front of them.

"Rookie! Boy! you shouldn't be here. Go back!"

"Delicious sweet and sour pork. Pouring instead of dipping," That was the reply from Minhyuk. He sounded as though he was in a trance while staring at the orcs.

Sweet and sour pork was considered to be one of the TOP dishes of Chinese cuisine. It was a pleasure to order a set of black bean noodles with sweet and sour pork for just 18,000 won. This was the go-to food when someone just got up and had nothing to do during the weekends.

Furthermore, Minhyuk really wanted to eat sweet and sour pork to the point that his mouth was already drooling without control. In fact, he considered reviving Len's sense of taste a free service, much like those free fried dumplings served on the side!

"I want to eat!" He roared out.

[Bardy Swordsmanship]

[+12 to all 5 basic stats for 6 minutes.]

"What can a weak military chef like you do!" Some of the soldiers exclaimed.

The orcs were already in the vicinity. The fastest orc in the lead was already swinging its rusty axe towards Minhyuk.

"Chwiiiiiiiiik!"

Everyone's attention was focused on Minhyuk and the orc. Even the soldiers forgot that foreigners would be able to come back to life again. That was just how tense the situation was.

Venetto looked at Minhyuk and screamed desperately, "I... I'm supposed to introduce you to my daughter...! Nooo! You'll die!"

Just then, Minhyuk threw a punch.

Punch!

"Kuuaaack!"

The orc rolled back from the force.

"Mr. Chwik! Tell your boss to come out!" Minhyuk bellowed as he clenched his fists tightly. Then, another orc tried to run past Minhyuk to attack Venetto.

Slash!

Crackl!

Minhyuk's sword swiftly slashed down as flames suddenly appeared and covered the orc's body.

"Chwiiiiik, chwiiiiik, h, hot!"

[Salamander's Blaze]

[The attack will inflict continuous damage to the enemy.]

Minhyuk finished off the orc that was being devoured by flames. Seeing this, the soldiers started to move and fight against the orcs.

"Chwiiiiik!"

"Chwiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiik!"

Among the clashing soldiers and orcs, Minhyuk moved alone with the intention to hunt the Orc Chieftain.

Swoosh!

[Vital Strike]

[Additional 17% attack power for each successful strike.]

Stab!

[Three Consecutive Quick Assault]

[Your attacks will deal damage thrice.]

Minhyuk cut through the battlefield swiftly and smoothly, his moves sharp and clean.

Stab!

Baaaang!

Fwoooooom!

The soldiers saw Minhyuk fighting fiercely and moving through the battlefield as though he was born to fight, and were all in awe. Although Minhyuk's power was unexpected, his bravery was firmly witnessed by the soldiers. They felt their blood start to boil, as their hearts thumped wildly. Roaring as one, they advanced forward.

Chapter 40: The Battlefield's Ruler

In the midst of the chaotic battlefield.

"Roar!"

Minhyuk heard a wild, violent roar somewhere nearby. It was the roar of the Orc Chieftain, the mob boss of the orcs, standing at around 2 meters and 40 centimeters. It was wearing a necklace made out of animal bones around its neck, and wielded a rusty greatsword in its hands.

Slash!

"Chwiik!"

Crackle!

[Salamander's Blaze]

[The attack will inflict continuous damage to the enemy.]

Minhyuk finished off another orc before he rushed forward and penetrated through the orcs' ranks.

Slash!

Slam!

Minhyuk's movements were smooth and efficient, looking like a veteran as he hacked through the swarm of orcs. Before anyone else knew it, he was already in front of the Orc Chieftain.

Vwoom!

Clang!

The Orc Chieftain swung its rusty greatsword. Minhyuk quickly took a step back and avoided the incoming attack.

[Haste]

[Your movement speed and attack speed have increased by 1.3 times for 10 seconds.]

Minhyuk's movements sped up.

'There's 10 seconds before the skill is released from the cooldown,' Minhyuk thought. He was still waiting for the cooldown on both Vital Strike and the Three Consecutive Quick Attacks to finish. In the meantime, he wanted to shave down as much of the Orc Chieftain's HP as he could.

Swoosh!

Slash!

"Chwiiik!"

The Orc Chieftain's greatsword slammed into another orc and made it fly away. Seeing the opportunity, Minhyuk stabbed the Sword of Rebellion towards the sides of the Orc Chieftain.

Bang!

However, Minhyuk's stab could not penetrate through the Orc Chieftain's thick leather armor.

'My stab is too shallow, this will not work.'

Fwoom!

Slash!

The Orc Chieftain's greatsword fell down upon him. Minhyuk quickly rotated his body to avoid the blow, causing the greatsword to stab straight through the ground.

Minhyuk quickly analyzed the situation. He thought, 'The greatsword is heavy and the swings are bigger. I probably have two chances to attack with every failed attack from the Chieftain.'

Just as Minhyuk had thought, the Orc Chieftain showed a huge gap in its defense each time it executed an attack.

'Just like... now!'

Minhyuk kicked the Orc Chieftain's shins.

"Groaaar!" The orc roared as it flinched in pain. Before it could pull its greatsword out of the ground...

Slash!

Minhyuk slashed his sword twice on the Orc Chieftain's chest, finally succeeding in cutting through its thick leather armor. Green blood started to drip from the cross-shaped wound that Minhyuk had inflicted on it.

"Roaaaar!" The orc roared viciously as it swung its greatsword with abandon in Minhyuk's general direction.

Fwoom!

Fwoosh!

'This kind of opponent relies on STR and STM. However, they will be at a disadvantage in a fight against someone with speed and techniques.'

However, those with speed and skill would usually only be able to inflict minimal damage.

Slash!

"Hyaa!" Minhyuk shouted as he kicked the flank of the Chieftain once again. The force of his kick was so strong that he was able to widen the distance between them as the Chieftain breathed roughly. Minhyuk rolled away as he checked the cooldown on his skills.

[Three Consecutive Quick Assault]

[Your attacks will strike three times.]

Seeing the end of the cooldown, Minhyuk stood up and slashed his sword towards the Chieftain's flank once again.

Swoosh!

The tip of his sword stopped after digging into the Chieftain's thick leather armor. However, the second afterimage of the sword was able to dig through the gaps in its armors and stab deeply into its body.

Stab!

"Keuhaaaaack!"

And the final afterimage...

Stab!

"Aaaaaaaack!"

[Vital Strike]

[Additional 17% attack power for each successful strike.]

Minhyuk quickly moved his sword to stab through the Chieftain's neck.

Stab!

His sword penetrated through the Orc Chieftain's neck, ending its life in one fatal blow.

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[..... leveled up.]

Counting all of the notifications he heard from earlier, his level had increased by a total of 7.

Spurt!

Blood spurted out as Minhyuk pulled his sword from the Orc Chieftain's neck. He spat out a heavy breath and looked around the battlefield, taking in the entire situation. Seeing their rookie and new chef recruit taking on the Orc Chieftain all by himself, the soldiers could not help but burst into loud cheers.

[You have successfully hunted a boss monster that is 30 levels beyond your current level.]

[You have obtained the title: The Battlefield's Ruler.]

Minhyuk discovered that an item and an artifact had dropped from the Orc Chieftain. They were a small bottle of about 200 litres in volume and the greatsword of the Orc Chieftain, respectively. A huge amount of gold of more than 100,000 had dropped as well.

[You have acquired Orc Chieftain's Essence.]

[You have acquired Orc Chieftain's greatsword.]

[You have acquired 172,313 gold.]

Minhyuk quickly moved after hearing the notifications, he could not afford the time to check on the items that he had just received. The overall morale of the soldiers might have increased and they were fighting vigorously against the orcs, but there were still one or two of them who were helpless against the enemies.

"I, is that really a chef...?" Runie asked dumbly as she watched Minhyuk move.

"...Wow!"

She couldn't help but let out a gasp of admiration. Minhyuk went all over the battlefield chasing the orcs, inflicting critical blows, or rendering them immobile by cutting their legs. Then, the soldiers would swarm towards the fallen orcs and dispose of them quickly. Finally, Venetto stabbed the last enemy orc with his spear.

"As expected of my future son-in-law, you're amazing! You definitely deserve my daughter!"

'...I wholeheartedly refuse!?' Minhyuk thought, quickly averting his gaze.

"Wow!"

"Minhyuk! Minhyuk! Minhyuk!"

Vald calmly looked at his troops. Every single soldier was gathered around Minhyuk. Minhyuk was only able to quickly check the items that he received when he managed to take a breather.

(Orc Chieftain's Essence)

Material Grade: C

Special Abilities: Has the ability to revive the sense of taste.

Description: It was said that the essence of the Orc Chieftain can maximize or revive a person's sense of taste. It is a quest item, it can also be sold in stores.

'As expected...!?'Minhyuk thought. It seemed like his guess was correct. It really was a quest item. He then proceeded to check the remaining items one by one.

(Orc Chieftain's Greatsword)

Class: Unique

Requirements: Lv40, 70 STR

Durability: 3,261 / 5,000

Attack Power: 320

Special Abilities:

?STR +7, AGI +5

?Skill:?Fighting Spirit

"Well, it's not that bad."

The item might be unique, but Valan, the Sword of Rebellion, was still leagues better than it. After all, even though the greatsword's attack power was at 320, the movements of the wielder would be limited, and its size would slow down the player. Minhyuk was a player that preferred to hone his technique and skills and use his speed in fighting. Therefore, this item was also added to the list of 'Things I will sell to buy delicious things'. Finally...

(The Battlefield's Ruler)

Unique Title

Requirements: Below Level 150

Effects: A +10 increase in all 5 basic stats and a 10% increase in critical hit damage when fighting monsters with a 25 levels difference or higher.

The title was quite good. Compared to the other titles that Minhyuk had received, this one had a restriction. This title's restriction simply meant that the title effects would disappear once the player exceeded Level 150. When he finally finished checking all his loot...

"How about the injuries?!"

"Reporting! There are four soldiers with minor injuries, and one soldier that was seriously injured."

The damage that the troops had received was certainly less than what they had expected. Had Minhyuk not take the lead, the damage that they could have incurred would definitely be greater.

At that moment...

"Ugh, aaaaack!"

A commotion suddenly broke out among the players. When Minhyuk turned around, he saw a player surrounded by other players. It was the one who led the orcs towards them.

"Ah, f*cker. You were the one who kited the orcs. You bastard! You're the reason why all of us almost got forced to log out!"

Then...

Staaab!

The player was brutally forced to log out.

'Tsk.'?Minhyuk clicked his tongue at the player. Then, he saw Len giving him a thumbs up from a distance. Minhyuk smiled brightly at him.

The Bordy Plains subjugation ended safely. After finishing the subjugation, the troops immediately began their return to Isbin Village. There was something called 'The Light of the Sun' in the Bordy Plains. It was said that 'The Light of the Sun' was not able to work properly because of the invasion of the goblins. The subjugation of these goblins was considered to be a common quest.

Now that the subjugation was over, the Sun's Wheat could be grown and harvested in Isbin Village once again. The rewards would be given four days after returning to the village. They would be receiving it in front of the military training center.

Len recalled the conversation that he had earlier with Minhyuk.

'You're telling me not to have lunch tomorrow?'

Minhyuk nodded excitedly and said, 'It would be best if you're wearing comfortable clothes, ones where you can scratch your butt in! Let's have a relaxing day!'

"Scratch my butt?" Len muttered to himself as he grinned and stared at the sky.

Len did not witness it personally, but he heard from the others that Minhyuk had killed the Orc Chieftain alone. He thought that maybe it was fate. This was definitely a way to avoid the sanctions from the God of?Athenae. Len felt that the item in his hand really wanted to find that fated person.

'My disciple will save my sense of taste.'

He wondered what he would feel like once he could taste food. Would he feel happy? Would it make him laugh? Or would he cry the moment he ate it? Nevertheless, Len was still looking forward to it.

The weekend was quiet and tranquil. Today was a day where one really did not want to go anywhere. A day where they would only lie down and breathe. It was a day where a person would sleep around until around one o'clock in the afternoon and wake up feeling a little hungry. Only food would come to mind at times like this.

Maybe a Chinese dish like black bean noodles. After eating 5,000 won worth of black bean noodles, one would definitely feel like lying down on the sofa and watching TV aimlessly.

Minhyuk loved to feel that way. He also wanted to give Len that feeling too. So, Minhyuk quickly logged in to?Athenae?and went to the cooking carriage. The soldiers' lunches were replaced with combat rations since they were preparing to return today. This was the reason why Len had a leisurely break.

Minhyuk first made black bean noodles and spicy seafood noodles. After all, the sweet flavor of the black bean noodles and the refreshing, yet stinging, taste of the spicy seafood noodles were essential for days like this.

‘Right?’

Minhyuk quickly placed the finished dishes in his Food Storage Inventory. Then, after frying the pork for the sweet and sour pork, he started making its sauce.

The sauce of the sweet and sour pork could be made from either ketchup or soy sauce. If one preferred a sweeter taste, then it was possible to use fruits like pineapple or kiwi. Right now, Minhyuk chose soy sauce. He prepared the ingredients like onions, carrots, wood ear mushrooms, water, vinegar, sugar, and starch. The starch here would act as the thickener for the sauce.

He proceeded to stir fry the onions and carrots.

Fwiiiish!

The smell of onions being cooked inside the pan was quite stimulating. The carrots made the dish more appetizing by adding a splash of color. Minhyuk was doing his best in cooking this dish. After all, it would be the first dish that Len would taste so he wanted to make it more delicious for him.

Once all of the ingredients have been stir-fried, Minhyuk added the water. Of course, the water was none other than the Orc Chieftain’s Essence. Then, he added soy sauce and sugar. This was a dish that used a lot more sugar than any other seasonings. Sugar could make the flavor penetrate deeper into the dish. After seasoning the dish properly, Minhyuk added some starch in a separate bowl of water, stirring it well before pouring it slowly into the boiling sauce. He then stirred the sauce until it gradually thickened. The sauce was finally completed after it thickened.

Minhyuk turned off the fire and wiped the sweat off of his forehead. This was his first time feeling this nervous. He was sure that he would enjoy the food himself but he wondered what Len would say after tasting his food.

‘Would he feel happy? Would he find it delicious? What would he feel after tasting something for the first time in his life?’ That was what he thought.

"Done," Minhyuk said as the notification rang in his head.

[Please choose the main dish.]

As per usual, he was asked to choose the main ingredient of the dish by the skill, ‘Food God’s True Worth’. He would also be asked to choose the main dish whenever he prepared a variety of dishes. Whenever Minhyuk was 'done' eating or 'completed' a dish, the notification would not wait, instead just popping out in front of him.

"Sweet and sour pork. Increase the buff to the max," Minhyuk said, hands moving quickly to prepare the dish. He has already accessed?Athenae?and checked all of the recipes through?Athenae's search function. His hands continued to move skillfully. At that moment, he heard the notifications ring in his head.

[You have completed a Sweet and Sour Pork.]

[Trance. It's a dish that has your 'soul' poured into it.]

[The dish is graded Rare.]

[You have acquired 1 DEX.]

[You have acquired 2 REP.]

[You have acquired 200 Achievement Points (AP).]