

Gourmet 391

Chapter 391: Dragon's Lair

.

Team Leader Park Minggyu reclined on a chair after looking at the departure screen. He held his passport in one hand and closed his eyes in thought, while waiting for his flight back to Korea.

Just like what the branch managers said, the entire world was discussing how Korea would rank at the lowest. They based this conjecture on the fact that Ali had regressed back to Level 1, and how the Korean players were overall at a lower level compared to other rankers from all over the globe. Even the discussions at community sites discussed similar topics.

Of course, there were also those that wrote about their appreciation for the Food God and how he hunted Vormon. So, it was safe to say that Park Minggyu did not declare that he believed in them without any 'rhyme or reason'.

Then, at that moment, Park Minggyu's mobile phone rang. The caller was none other than Lee Minhwa.

"Yes, what's the matter?"

[Team Leader. Just like you said, Let's Eat Sect has started the raid on Vormon's Lair.]

"Yes, that's to be expected. Ah, what about Mage Ali?"

[He went with them.]

Team Leader Park grinned.

The truth was Mage Ali's level has fallen to the point where his level could be considered to be far weaker than any other novice player. However, Team Leader Park was sure that Ali would be able to easily take off and soar through the skies once again as long as he went to that place. After all, Black Dragon Vormon's Lair was a place filled with rewards that could easily surpass any of the player's expectations.

Black Dragon Vormon's Lair was located in Apocalypso. The guild members of the Let's Eat Sect were currently on their way to Black Dragon Vormon's Lair.

Minhyuk, who was leading his guild, felt guilty and sorry for Ali. Feeling his gaze, Ali said, "You don't have to feel sorry for me. I have actually become much stronger."

"But..."

Minhyuk was aware that Ali's level had dropped back to Level 1. People had mocked and sneered at Ali saying that he was now 'playing poorly' and that they 'would PK him if they crossed paths'.

But just like what Ali had said, he had grown far stronger than he was before. Although he had dropped back to Level 1, he had awakened to a new God class. The class was none other than 'Magic God, and it currently had one passive skill that was of great use to him.

Passive Skill

? Your Magical Damage will double.

? Your Magic Cooldown will decrease by 50%.

? Your Magical Penetration will increase by 50%.

? All of your attacks against the undead will have a 1.5x increase in attack power.

The power that he was wielding now was truly beyond anyone's imagination. His magical damage doubling, as well as the 50% decrease in cooldown and 50% increase in magical penetration literally went against all common sense.

As for Black Dragon Vormon's Magic Book, it was a skill book that could allow him to learn even Eight Tier Magic. That was on top of the fact that Black Dragon Vormon's magic was more powerful than ordinary mages' magic.

And there was also the power of the 'Mana Heart'. All this together made Ali, a novice level player, possess power that was far beyond his level. And it did not even end there.

? Your total MP reserve will double.

? Your Magic Cooldown will decrease by 20%.

? Your Magical Attack will increase by 20%.

? Passive Skill: Triple Target

? Active Skill: Staff's Owner

? Active Skill: Vormon's Breath

The Staff of Despair held enormous power. It was even an artifact that was on the same level as Minhyuk's Devil Judge's Sword, at the Absolute Demigod rank. The artifact's rank was truly shocking. However, the problem was that it required Ali to be at Level 350 or higher.

The passive skill attached to the staff, Triple Target, was another amazing skill. It had a 1.5% chance of tripling the damage of the attack magic that the staff wielder could send out. The Staff's Owner skill was a skill that gave the mage buffs. On the other hand, Vormon's Breath was a skill that would allow the wielder to cast a magic that was a tier above the level of the wielder's class. However, this skill could only be used once.

In fact, with this much power available, it did not matter who even if they regressed back to Level 1, they would still be able to easily increase their levels. Ali was originally at Level 561, but with

his current state, if he reached that level again, he would undoubtedly be several times stronger than he was before.

But there was also another fact that they could not deny.

“It’s alright. We can always try and aim for the next world war,” Ali said with a smile. The truth was Ali’s participation in Athenae: World War was already confirmed.

Originally, he did not participate in Athenae: Korean War, so he did not receive the title ‘MVP’ and was not eligible to participate. However, the rules for Athenae: World War were still not yet made public during the Athenae: Korean War. Simply put, the branch managers, as well as Joy Co. Ltd., were looking for ways to continuously attract the viewers attention.

Just two months ago, Joy Co. Ltd. announced that each country could elect two players that could participate and qualify for the competition without the MVP title. Athenae: World War was a very important event for each country, and not just anyone could participate. After receiving a call from Joy Co. Ltd. Ali’s participation was already confirmed. With Ali’s participation, it was a foregone conclusion that they would receive at least one ‘gold medal’ in the Magic Field.

But what would happen if he participated in his current state? He would just perform poorly. It did not matter if his attack power was high, he was still just a player below Level 100. Seeing Minhyuk’s stiff expression, Ali could not help but say, “Minhyuk.”

“What is it?”

“We’re friends.”

They did not know this, but Ali’s sacrifice had allowed him to soar higher and break out of his old shell.

The guild members of Let’s Eat Sect followed the map to Black Dragon Vormon’s Lair. The place that was originally the Continent Cloud had transformed and changed into an unexplored land after it became the new continent, Apocalypto. That meant new hunting grounds, new artifacts, new cooking ingredients, new races. It was a new update. Everything was unfamiliar and terrifying.

However, Vormon’s Lair was definitely filled with rare and never before seen rewards. After all, the notifications before told them so.

The members of the Let’s Eat Sect traversed the path between two canyons, until a cave appeared in front of them. They immediately rushed to the depths of the cave, before a light greeted them.

“Woow...”

“Wow...”

Everyone present gasped in awe.

“Kiyeeeeeee~”

“Kyaaaaaaack~”

There were gigantic beings that looked completely different from ordinary wyverns flying in the sky. On one side, a gushing waterfall poured down on a gigantic river that stretched out below. There was also a huge nest hanging on the precipice of the cliff. However, the location of the nest was around 20 kilometers away from them. It was like another world. Considering Black Dragon Vormon’s gigantic size, it was only natural that his lair would look like another world. Then, at that moment...

[To the ones that stepped foot in Black Dragon Vormon’s Lair, those that hunted and those that accompanied in Black Dragon Vormon’s hunt will receive rewards.]

[Your EXP Acquisition Rate and Item Drop Rate will quadruple in Vormon’s Lair.]

[Special rewards will be distributed to the ones that have contributed greatly during Black Dragon Vormon’s hunt.]

[You will personally experience the special reward.]

[Unexpected quests will appear all throughout Vormon’s Lair. Please clear these quests to receive the rewards.]

[Every time you clear a quest, you will get a fragment of the Lair’s Map.]

“...!”

“...!”

All of them were shocked. The quadruple increase in EXP Acquisition and Item Drop rates were double that of a hidden dungeon’s increase. With the upcoming Athenae: World War and server integration, this was a blessing for the Let’s Eat Sect.

But the blessings did not end there. Two people were chosen among those with the highest contribution during Vormon’s hunt. These two people were none other than Minhyuk and Mage Ali.

[You are one of the two that have made the greatest contribution during Vormon’s hunt.]

[You can go to the Lair’s Bonus Stage.]

[If you don’t accept it immediately, you will not be able to access the Bonus Stage.]

“...?”

“...?”

Minhyuk and Ali made eye contact. The guild members nodded in understanding after hearing a quick explanation of their situation.

“We’ll take a look around here by ourselves first.”

The two agreed as a bright light swirled and engulfed their bodies.

Ali and Minhyuk appeared at the same time inside a dark cave.

[You have to personally check the rewards for the Bonus Stage.]

[You can choose to give up on the Bonus Stage at any time. In case you give up the Bonus Stage, you will not receive any logging out penalty.]

‘We can choose to give up?’

The two looked at each other. It seemed like the two of them had the same hunch.

‘An existence that’s far stronger than what we expected will appear.’

At the very least, they were the ones that hunted Black Dragon Vormon. The fact that they could give up at any time meant that the monsters that would appear would be incredibly strong. Then, at that moment...

Clunk, clunk—

A huge monster appeared. The monster was none other than a golem that was covered in black scales.

[Vormon’s Golem]

[Level 596]

“...!”

“...!”

The giant golem’s level was so high at Level 596. Its level was far beyond Minhyuk or Ali’s level.

“Damn...”

Ali bit his lips in frustration. He followed in the Dragon Lair, thinking that he would be able to level up more easily. But what could he do if they were suddenly up against such a high-leveled monster? Instead of being helpful, he would just drag Minhyuk down.

Vormon’s Golem slowly approached them. Minhyuk looked at the golem vigilantly, as he prepared for battle.

‘Golems have high defense. The worst part is its level is at Level 596...’

Perhaps he could only deal damage if he used his strongest skills. The golem slowly, ever so slowly, approached them. However, just when they were about to start their hunt, something unexpected happened.

Badump—

Ali’s heart thumped and then...

Thud!

The gigantic six-meter high golem suddenly collapsed on its knees. Then, a set of notifications rang for Ali.

[Vormon's Mana Heart is protecting you.]

[Vormon's Golem will not be able to fight back in the presence of the Mana Heart.]

[The power of Vormon's Golem will significantly decrease depending on the power of the Mana Heart.]

[Vormon, the original owner of the Mana Heart, does not wish for a weak existence to inherit his Mana Heart.]

[Vormon's Mana Heart will protect you until you reach a certain level.]

“Keuaaaaaaack!”

That was right. Vormon's Golem was kneeling and lowering its head in front of Ali. At that time, the two of them could tell that this was the perfect time for them to hunt this monster. Ali immediately sent out an energy bolt.

Crackle, crackle, crackle—

But surprisingly enough...

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud—

[Vormon's Mana Heart has completely subdued Vormon's Golem.]

Baaaaaaang—

Vormon's Golem collapsed in a single shot. But the surprise did not end there, as the notifications came in.

[Bonus Stage. EXP Acquisition Rate is twenty times more than the usual.]

[Sub Class. His Companion's effect has been triggered. You and your companion will have a 1.5x additional increase in EXP acquired.]

[You have gained 32,314,721 EXP.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

[...leveled up.]

“...”

Minhyuk heard the same set of notifications. He looked at Ali in both disbelief and astonishment before asking, “How many level ups...?”

Ali smiled awkwardly before replying, “Thirty seven level ups...”

“...”

Minhyuk was left speechless.

Chapter 392: Farmer’s Kingdom

Employee Lee Minhwa was smiling proudly at the monitor. The monitor was displaying Ali and Minhyuk’s puzzled faces. Yes, that was right. She knew about Black Dragon Vormon’s ‘Bonus Stage’. The Bonus Stage was literally only for those that raided the dragon, the greatest existence in the world. It was a reward for those that contributed greatly during the hunt of such a being.

This stage had a 20x EXP buff effect, but it was not something that could easily be triggered. In the first place, the monsters lurking in the Bonus Stage all had very high levels.

As an example, the ‘Vormon’s Golem’ that they had easily knocked down had a total defense that exceeded 30,000. As for Minhyuk? He might only be able to kill one if he used his Sword of Frenzy. However, as with any other situation, there would always be variables. And these variables had perfectly coincided to create this situation right now.

The first variable was Ali being chosen by Vormon’s ‘Mana Heart’. Originally, this Mana Heart should have been received by a completely different mage player through a completely different linked quest. In the case of Vormon’s death, the Mana Heart would roam around until it met with the greatest mage, and would then proceed to transplant itself into the said mage.

But when Vormon died, the only mage that could be considered to be the greatest mage was Ali, who had regressed back to Level 1.

There was also a second variable. The owner of the Mana Heart should originally be a mage of Level 700 or higher. However, Ali was back to Level 1 when the Mana Heart chose him. And it just so happened that this very same Mana Heart had a system where it would protect its master, until he had the capability to protect himself.

‘Team Leader Park Minggyu expected all of this to happen.’ Lee Minhwa thought.

The second variable then created a synergy with the third variable and created this situation. The Mana Heart was something that belonged to Vormon, and the monsters on this stage were Vormon’s subordinates.

Who was Vormon? He was the supreme ruler of the continent. The being that could not be hunted so easily and the owner of this lair. With the power of the ‘Mana Heart’ that belonged to their master, the owner of the purest and strongest source of power, they would never dare to attack.

Then, Lee Minhwa said, “I’m looking forward to how you use these variables unbeknown to the world from this point forward.”

There was no longer the aura of a new and naive employee. Lee Minhwa, now a seasoned and veteran employee, grinned brightly at her monitor.

In the game, *Athenae*, there was a mage recognized by everyone to be the greatest mage of all time. This mage was none other than 'Black Mage Ali'. But, there was also a player that had not shown his brilliance to the world.

That was Alex, the global number one official mage in the rankings. Alex was chosen and taught by Corden, the man hailed as the Magic King. Right now, he was in his hotel suite and talking on the phone.

"Oh. Smith. Right, congratulations on the gold medal? The World War has not started yet, what do you mean by congratulating me? Haha!"

Calls that congratulated him flooded his phone. This was all because they had judged Mage Alex would win a gold medal in the magic category. As soon as he hung up, another call would come in.

"Haha. We're not even sure that Ali's back to Level 1, what do you mean? I don't have the gold medal yet, Rochan."

Then, he turned off his phone to take a rest. When he turned around, he saw his reflection on the glass of the window. He was holding a wine glass filled almost to the brim with wine. However, his fists were clenched tightly.

"Hahahahaha! I can't believe Black Mage Ali jumped into the abyss himself!"

Up until this point, everyone expected that no other country, whether it was America or another country, would win the gold medal as long as Black Mage Ali was present. But, to think that Ali had dug his own grave and jumped in it himself.

Alex had always been called second! He might be the global official number one mage ranker, but he had always been behind Ali. He was even comparable to America's most favorite to win in power. But right now, he would be able to make a huge contribution in making America the greatest winner. He would be the nation's hero!

As of now, Alex's current level was at around Level 570.

'Perhaps Ali is around Level 15 now? Eeek! What do you mean by Great Mage? He hasn't even mastered the energy bolt yet! Keuhahahahaha!'

[You have completely mastered all of the Fifth Tier Magic in Black Dragon Vormon's Magic Book.]

[Magic recorded in Black Dragon Vormon's Magic Book will exert more power than ordinary magic.]

[Ordinary Immobilizing Magic: Stops two of the skills or magic that the players surrounding you have casted to attack you.]

[Black Dragon Vormon's Immobilizing Magic: Stops all of the magic and skills casted to attack you.]

Ali felt a thrill surface from the bottom of his heart. Black Dragon Vormon's Magic Book, together with the Magic God's special effects, had created a great synergy. He was now already at Level 200.

This was all thanks to the effects of ‘His Companion’ class’ effect, which allowed him to get a 1.5x EXP buff as long as he was with Minhyuk.

Only a day has passed since they had entered the Bonus Stage. All of the monsters that they had encountered all surrendered in front of Ali. Sometimes, Minhyuk would be the one hunting, while other times, Ali would be the one hunting. All of the monsters that they had encountered had lost their will to fight, so it was easy for them to hunt.

Minhyuk had already leveled up four times. Of course, the shocking 37 consecutive level ups that Ali had experienced earlier was no longer replicable. But even if that was the case, Ali’s EXP acquisition rate was still incredibly ridiculous. If he killed one, he would level up at least two or three times in a row. If things continued at this rate...

“Ali! You can go to the World War now!!! Woowooow!” Minhyuk shouted, jumping happily as he grabbed Ali’s hands. Ali was all smiles too.

“Minhyuk, why do you look happier than me, huh?”

“Of course it’s because I’m very happy to see my friend doing so well!”

Ali was now reaping the fruits of his ‘sacrifice’. He awakened as a Magic God, received Vormon’s Mana Heart, and even entered the Bonus Stage. After all, hunting Vormon was not possible if he did not make such huge sacrifices in the first place, so it was only natural that he received huge benefits too.

“Thanks, Minhyuk.”

Ali was of course the happiest. He wanted to participate in the World War because he wanted to win a gold medal and show it to someone. Then, the notifications rang.

[You have 24 hours left in the Bonus Stage.]

The two of them remained connected to the game and did not take any breaks all day long. Of course, it was not just them that were getting benefits. The members of the Let’s Eat Sect were also happily reaping EXP from the monsters that they had encountered. They were also trying to find the path to the ‘Ingredient Heaven’ that Minhyuk had mentioned to them before.

“Let’s first take a bit of sleep before logging back in.”

Their remaining access time in the Bonus Stage would not be affected the moment they logged out, so Ali readily agreed with Minhyuk’s suggestion.

“You’ve worked hard today.”

“Alright. Ali also worked really hard today.”

The two then logged out of the game.

Black Mage Ali, or Yoon Ji-Hoo, left his capsule. His room was covered by dozens of One Diss posters. Ali looked out of the living room and saw a young man watching One Diss on the TV while being surrounded by countless One Diss figurines. The young man chuckled blankly while wearing the signature straw hat that the main character of the One Diss comic wore.

This young man was Yoon Ji-Seok, Yoon Ji-Hoo's older brother. Due to an accident a few years ago, Ali's older brother's mindset had regressed to that of a young child.

Ali had lost his parents at the young age of seven. Back then, the only person that took care of Ali was his older brother. Yoon Ji-Seok back then was smarter and more mature than his peers. He was only a year older than Ali, but he became like his father and friend. But now, his brother's mindset had regressed to that of a young child. He even lost his voice.

Ali suddenly felt frustrated. He stood up and left his capsule. When Yoon Ji-Seok saw Yoon Ji-Hoo come out of the capsule, he clapped happily. Ali smiled as he wiped the drool dripping down his brother's chin.

"Hyung, I can go to the World War now."

"Uwoooo! Uwoooo!"

Seeing Ali's smile, his brother, Yoon Ji-Seok also smiled happily. It seemed like Ali's hyung remembered him.

Ali, in fact, was suffering from a disorder. He had social anxiety disorder. Yes, he had a social anxiety disorder. This was the reason why he had been alone for the longest time. But, he was now doing a whole lot better.

"Uwoooo?"

Ali could tell what his hyung was trying to tell him just by how he opened his mouth.

'Are you happy with your friends?'

Ali nodded as he answered his hyung's question, "I'm happy."

Yoon Ji-Seok laughed happily when he heard Yoon Ji-Hoo's words. Ali wanted to win the gold medal so he could show his brother that he was no longer the loner with social anxiety disorder that could not do anything anymore. He wanted to show him that he did not need to worry about him anymore. Ali wanted to show that he, Yoon Ji-Seok's younger brother, had already become an adult and was now standing on top of the world. He wanted to show him that he loved him.

The Let's Eat Sect heard that both Minhyuk and Ali were acquiring a lot of EXP in the Bonus Stage. But none of them were complaining. They were also receiving rewards that were set by the system. None of them would deny that Minhyuk and Ali were the highest contributors in Vormon's hunt. Besides, their EXP was also increasing rapidly.

They were now collecting the fragments of the map of Vormon's Lair. They were sure that this map would be the map that would guide them to the 'Ingredient Heaven'. They had also found a hint.

? STR +2

? Magical Defense +2

High grade cooking ingredients usually had similar powers. Still, that was not the most important point. The main point was the potatoes lying around in the garden in front of them. There were so many that each of the 20 members of the Let's Eat Sect Guild could eat one by themselves.

Usually, ingredients with special abilities were very rare. But these potatoes were just laid around like this. This meant that there was an open path that led to the Ingredient Heaven out here. After searching high and low, they finally found a way down. The moment they went down, they were met with the undead.

[Skeleton Knight]

These mobs were very powerful, and there were hundreds of them blocking the path in front of them. It was obvious that they were guarding something. They were only able to hunt a few of the skeleton knights before they retreated.

"Ah. What should we do? I really think they're guarding something over there?"

"But we won't be able to go there unless we pass through this place..."

Haze told them that they could probably gain a lot of income if they could find a way to grow those ingredients. That was why the Let's Eat Sect Guild had to do their best to clear that path. Then, Ali and Minhyuk finally came out of the Bonus Stage.

"I wonder what Ali's level is right now?"

"He's probably around 100 now, right? They should also have a 4x EXP acquisition rate like us, right?"

"Right? But will Ali be able to go with us there?"

They were at another dead end once again. Ali's level was very low. Although they heard that Ali and Minhyuk entered the Bonus Stage, they were oblivious about the 20x EXP acquisition rate. This was also the reason why they were very worried about Ali, to the point that they even wanted to tell him to go back.

Of course, they were very grateful for Ali's sacrifice, but they had to put all of their attention into breaking through this place.

"Then, who's going to tell him?"

"I'll do it," Genie answered Khan's question. This was what she had to do as the vice guild leader. Ali would be in danger so he had to go back now. Just in time, Ali and Minhyuk arrived. They quickly explained that there were a lot of undead inside there and that they would be able to go to the place that Minhyuk had mentioned before, only after passing through that path.

"So, why aren't you going there?" Minhyuk tilted his head in confusion.

"The Skeleton Knights are very strong."

"Ah. Is that so?"

Genie glanced at Ali, who was rubbing his chin, and tried to be blunt with him. But before she could do so, Ali made the first move.

“Then, shall I take care of it?”

“Huh? What?! N...no! That... Ali!” Genie tried to speak, but Ali had already moved before she could stop him.

“Wait, Ali! I’m sorry but...”

Hundreds of skeleton knights rushed towards Ali the moment he stepped foot on the path. Just when Khan and Locke hurriedly tried to block him so he could hear Genie’s explanation...

“Turn Undead.”

...Ali casted Turn Undead with Black Dragon Vormon’s power using his Staff of Despair.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—

The hundreds of skeleton knights exploded and turned into ash before disappearing in the wind.

“...?”

“...?”

“...?”

The guild members could not understand what just happened for a moment. Their faces were the epitome of this expression: (?0?)

Chapter 393: Farmer’s Kingdom

Stuttering and stammering.

These were the words that perfectly described what the guild members of Let’s Eat Sect’s current state was. All of them stuttered as they looked at Ali. They recognized the Staff of Despair that Ali had equipped right now. They knew that the level requirement for the Staff of Despair was at Level 350. The fact that Ali had the item equipped right now was something that they could easily interpret.

“You’re already over Level 350?!”

“Yes,” Ali nodded with an abashed smile on his face. He was actually at Level 404. The moment his level reached 400, the Mana Heart stopped protecting him, which meant that the monsters were now attacking Ali. Vormon’s Mana Heart had acknowledged and recognized Ali’s strength. It had judged that Ali was now able to protect himself with his own power. However, there was something more surprising.

“It looks like you’ve grown even stronger than before...”

The power of the magic that he used was far stronger than the magic that he used when he awakened his power in the Continent Cloud. This was only natural. After all, he had Black Dragon Vormon's Magic Book, the Magic God's power, the Mana Heart, and the Staff of Despair. That was not all. Ali also had the God of Magic passive skill.

'All of my attacks against the undead will have a 1.5x increase in attack power.'

The Magic God was a great and noble existence. An existence like him could exert a stronger power against the undead. In other words, even if the skeleton knights' defense was beyond 500, the fact that they were the undead had allowed Ali and his attacks to have a higher power that could ignore such defense. On top of that, Vormon's 'Turn Undead' was on a completely different level than the ordinary Turn Undead.

Ali and Minhyuk explained what they had experienced in the Bonus Stage. After listening to their experience, the guild members of the Let's Eat Sect were very happy, as if it were them that had experienced it.

"I'm sure Ali will shock the world!"

"Don't let go of those that are laughing and mocking you now!" Locke declared as if he wanted to immediately tell this to the world. However, Minhyuk, Genie, Khan, and Ali shook their heads.

"Why?"

Right now, they have received countless ridicule and criticisms from all over the world. Even the Koreans cursed at them asking why Ali did such a foolish thing despite knowing that Ali was the reason why Vormon's hunt was successful. So, what was the point of hiding this at this point in time?

"Everyone is mocking and ridiculing me for participating in the World War. This will be our greatest variable. I'm pretty sure that they have excluded me in all of the strategies that they are making right now."

"Ah..."

That was right. All of the strategies that excluded and ignored Ali would definitely crumble and fall apart the moment the games started. This meant that they would not be able to execute all of their plans and tactics, which in turn would cause chaos and confusion.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to give them a good beating."

Locke could see that Ali had his own ulterior motive, so he did not pry anymore. Ali was not a fool. He knew himself well and he knew that he would do well on his own.

Farmer's Kingdom.?

This was the place hailed as the 'Ingredient Heaven' and even though it occupied a huge area enough to be called a kingdom, it still remained hidden to foreigners. To be exact, the Farmer's

Kingdom was a place that was not only hidden to foreigners, but also to the locals from both Cairon and Asgan Continents. To put it simply, it was a hidden and unexplored gem of a land.

The Farmer's Kingdom was hidden in the depths of Black Dragon Vormon's lair. Eating delicious food was one of Black Dragon Vormon's joys in life. After getting a taste, he fell in love with the incredibly splendid crops that this kingdom produced. Vormon had created his lair to protect these farmers with mysterious powers.

Even if he was a powerful dragon, Vormon knew that he would not be able to receive good crops and amazing ingredients if he threatened and coerced the farmers to do his bidding. Instead of coercion, he decided to give the Hybrid Race his protection.

The Hybrid Race had a similar appearance to humans, but had significantly different powers. They were farmers that lived in small villages, secluded from the rest of the world. With their outstanding agricultural and farming skills, they have caught the interest of many, to the point that plenty of their kin had died from raids and battles that were a result of people's greed.

But thanks to Vormon's protection, this race was able to build a new home for themselves, plow a small land of their own, which grew into a small village, then a large territory, and eventually into a small kingdom. This kingdom was named 'Rocard'. And shrill screams were currently ringing inside this very same Rocard Kingdom.

"Keuhaaaack!"

"Verd!!!"

The Hybrid Race looked completely like humans. The only difference was that they were born with completely different characteristics and power. One of the Hybridmen, a farmer, vomited a mouthful of blood after being pierced through the chest by an arrow.

"Stop them!!! We must do all we can to stop them!!! We have to protect the Rocard Kingdom!!!"

"Uwaaaaaa!"

The difference between the Hybrid Men and humans was their power to control nature and make it obey their whims. This incredible power allowed them to always produce better crops and gain good harvest every year. On the other hand, the ones that were attacking the Hybrid Race were the Undead Corps that Black Dragon Vormon originally created to conquer the continent.

Ping, ping, ping, ping, ping, ping—

Hundreds of arrows flew in an arc and poured down on the walls that the Hybrid Race created. Seeing this, the Farmer Mages poured out their powers and controlled nature. Their stretched hands controlled the tree trunks, stretching them and making them expand, until a shield was created.

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump—

The arrows failed to pierce through and only ended up being stuck on the wooden shield. Meanwhile, the Farmer Knights fought valiantly with their pickaxes on the ground.

Slash—

Thuuuuud—

Crack!

The Farmer Knights, whose moves were comparable to that of an Imperial Knight, swung their pickaxes swiftly and skillfully. No, it was far more than that. The Ingredient Heaven had the power of immortality and everlasting youth, for the Hybrid Race that were born and raised in this place while eating the crops that they produced here had made them inherently stronger than any other races. Their numbers were only a fifth of that of the Undead Corps, but they remained steadfast as they endured the onslaught of attacks for days on end.

To put it simply, if ordinary human soldiers were at Level 350, the level of their ordinary soldiers was at Level 450! This just showed how powerful they were compared to other races. In fact, the Farmer's Kingdom did not have any concept of 'civilians and ordinary people', they were all farmers, and they were all warriors.

Vwooooooooooooooooooom—

Even if that was the case, it seemed that they still could not escape from despair and hopelessness. With the sound of the trumpet ringing loudly in the area, hundreds of drakes made from bones rushed straight towards the walls. There was also the Death Knight wearing a black armor made of bones standing tall, as he rode a drake that hovered on top of the huge walls.

Even though the Death Knight was an undead, its existence was something that could not be overlooked. It stood at the pinnacle of the undead. Their powers might be weaker than when they were alive, but the problem was that Vormon had used the souls of heroes that brought hope, as well villains that brought despair to the world, and trapped them in the bodies of these Death Knights.

The one riding on top of the drake was well-known in the entire continent for his spearmanship and commanding abilities. He was Evon. The name 'Evon' was something that all of the spear masters had heard and learned about in their books since they were young. He created the foundation of spearmanship. He was a young slave that used his own spearmanship to catch the attention of the emperor and eventually became his friend.

But was that all?

Definitely not. There was also the mage that created the Mage Tower, the first ever Mage Tower Master, Verite. The woman hailed as the most beautiful woman of her time had also become a Death Knight and brought despair with her catastrophic magic attacks. And that was not the end of it. Arford, the Summoner of Despair, summoned a creature that was only known in legends, the Hydra.

Deputy Commander Beth, who watched everything, stood on top of the walls and thought, *'Hydra is known to be the second most powerful monster. It's a monster that's only next to Cerberus, a demonic beast.'*

Beth realized that their doom was already right around the corner. He might also be powerful, but he knew that he would never be able to fight against those Death Knights even with the help of all of the powerful men with him.

'However, as long as we can endure for a few more days and maintain the walls...'

But just as this thought crossed his head...

"These are Queen Iris' orders! Open the gates and destroy the enemies!!!"

“What, what did you say?!”

Beth felt his heart sink into despair as he looked at their enemies outside the walls. One of the Death Knights used his spearmanship and sent spearlights that killed their army on the walls while still standing still on top of the drake. The gigantic hydra was also spewing powerful poison that engulfed their own troops until they died with no bones left. The first Mage Tower Master also used Fly Magic and accurately threw Exploding Magic at their own mages below. They were being killed one after the other. The enemy had launched an all-out attack against the Hybrid Race as if they were sure that they would see the end of this war by the end of the day.

Yet, the Queen wanted to open the gates in this situation?

‘I’m begging you. Please! Queen Iris, please come back to your senses!’

Beth begged desperately for their once wise ruler to come back to them. He knew that Vormon was the one that turned their beloved ruler into this. Vormon might not have coerced and threatened them, but he always had a back-up plan set in place. He kept them on a leash by brainwashing Queen Iris and getting control of her consciousness. However, he never delved deeper in his control. But with his death, the reaches of his control had gone awry.

“No... Even if you threaten me with a knife to my throat!!!”

Beth decided to risk his life for this. He would do everything to protect this kingdom that Queen Iris and her knight, Mercenary King Broad, had guarded before.

But what Beth did not know was that there were already a lot of nobles from their kingdoms that had been seduced and tempted by the commanders of the Undead Corps. They had received a promise, a promise for a life of luxury and not a life restricted by the walls of their small village. A life that would allow them to reach the peak of the world. Yes, there were quite a lot of farmers that felt like they had been trapped in this small place. The nobles were among those people. In fact, they felt this more severely than the others. They could easily turn their backs from their own kind, especially when their deaths were close at hand.

“Open the gates!!!”

“This is Marquis Roleid! Heed my command, the queen has given her orders. Open the gates!!!”

“What, what?!”

“N... No!!!”

The public and the soldiers all fell into deeper despair. Marquis Roleid immediately slashed their necks the moment they showed hints of hesitations.

Puhaaaa!

Fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh, fwoosh!

Marquis Roleid’s skillful display of swordsmanship brought fear to the soldiers, which forced them to open the gates. Beth tried to stop them, but he was already too late.

‘Aaaaaah! This kingdom has gone nuts!’

‘We will all be killed...!’

‘Save me, please save me!’

The enemy had coveted this Ingredient Heaven for a very long time now, as well as the shocking and ridiculous land that they had created. Back then, this was what the queen told them: *‘The Ingredient Heaven belongs to the Food God. It is all thanks to his blessings that we are able to live a very peaceful and fulfilling life. We should always remember to be grateful to him.’?*

But now, these fallen and corrupt nobles were personally trying to hand over the ‘Ingredient Heaven’ to their enemies.

“Noooooooo!”

“Stop them!!!”

“For Queen Iris!!!”

“For the queen!!!”

The soldiers squeezed the last of their strength as they moved to stop their enemies. They knew that death was just right around the corner, and although they resented their queen for this rash decision, they still loved her more than anyone in this world. And the same was true for Beth, the corrupted nobles, and Broad, the Mercenary King and the only knight that protected the mad queen. All of them loved her.

Not long after, the soldiers were swept away by the flood of enemies. They had allowed the Undead Corps to enter their kingdom. Beth surveyed his surroundings as he continued to fight desperately. He could see their soldiers both covered and vomiting in blood while the undead, with only bones left on their bodies, continued to slaughter them with their blades while stepping on them to enter their gates. Beth continued to ruthlessly cut down another undead.

“Protect the gates!!! Kill the enemies!” The nobles shouted as greedy and vicious smiles stained the corners of their mouths knowing that a new world would unfold in front of them.

‘Morons. Do they think that they will give you what they have promised you before?’

Beth’s bitter smile turned even more desolate when he saw a little girl crying over the loss of her parents. He rushed forward and cut down all of the enemies that tried to surround the crying girl. But in the end, he had reached his limits and collapsed on one knee. He quickly hugged the girl tightly to protect her and said, “Don’t be afraid.”

Beth used the last of his strength to give a warm smile to the child. Then, hundreds of undead swarmed to him with their blades raised high up in the sky. But suddenly...

“Turn Undead.”

Flash—

A flash of golden light appeared in his vision. The golden light stretched out and covered the entire kingdom, devouring and slaughtering thousands of undeads. Meanwhile, above the walls...

“Sword of Absolute Death.”

...a rain of sword lights poured down on the land of undead.

Chapter 394: Farmer’s Kingdom

The members of Let’s Eat Sect delved deeper into the passageway blocked by the skeleton knights and saw hundreds of huge yet old mansions spread out in the area. Then, the notifications rang.

[You have entered the Kingdom of the Undead.]

[The Kingdom of the Undead houses various types of undead. Starting from mansions 1, 2, and 3, you have to occupy all 57 of the Undead Mansions.]

[You will be able to acquire the treasures that the owner of the Undead Mansion had left behind the moment you successfully finish your raid.]

“Ah...!”

All of them realized that this was a new type of hunting ground. To put it simply, each Undead Mansion could be considered as one dungeon. So far, the Let’s Eat Sect had only dealt with the skeleton knights among all of the undead in existence. These skeleton knights were strong enough to be comparable to Imperial Knights. They were proficient in swordsmanship, archery, and even magic.

They could tell that this was one of the many benefits hidden in Vormon’s gigantic lair. With the appearance of the new hunting ground in the form of the Kingdom of the Undead, they would be able to grow faster than their peers. On top of that, no other notifications rang for them. This meant that the 4x EXP buff and item drop rate from before when they first entered Vormon’s lair were still effective.

“Shall we start raiding the first mansion?” Genie asked. All of them were fully aware that it would be better for them to raid the mansions one after the other.

Just then, Minhyuk paused and said, “Wait.”

His reason...

[The Key to the Farmer’s Kingdom is resonating.]

[Only the one chosen by the Farmer Kingdom, NPCs and one other companion chosen by him would be allowed to enter the Farmer Kingdom.]

A rusty key flew up on its own and appeared in front of Minhyuk. It floated up in the air and slowly guided him to another path. The members of Let’s Eat Sect tried to follow behind him but before they could do so, Minhyuk said, “...I think, only two players can enter. The rest that I can take with me are NPCs.”

“Huh?!”

“What?!”

The members of Let’s Eat Sect felt dispirited. Their initial enthusiasm and expectations of pioneering a new kingdom, and showing off the power of new cooking ingredients, had been

dashed. However, Genie looked around the mansions that surrounded them. She thought, *'It would be both fun and interesting for us to raid these mansions too...'*

Of course, not being able to participate in discovering a new kingdom was a shame, but Genie had a hunch, "This is a trial."

"A trial?"

"Yeah. The one that hunted Vormon had eaten the ingredients that the black dragon had left behind and obtained the keys to this kingdom. This is a trial to see if the holder of the key deserves the kingdom."

After saying her thoughts, Genie could roughly guess what it was.

"It's like they're testing your qualifications to be king. Right?" Genie concluded as everyone, including Minhyuk, nodded in agreement.

"It's a bit of a shame that we can't go with you, but we trust you. In the meantime, we will clear these mansions since the treasures left by the owners sound very tempting."

Genie rubbed her chin in thought. The undead in this place were very high in level. There would definitely be undead that are far stronger than their peers, and if they owned a mansion, then the treasure that they left behind would definitely be appealing to their guild. Besides, they had not acquired an 'artifact' during their stay in Vormon's lair so far. Anyone that heard the words 'Dragon Lair' would always think about rare, outstanding artifacts and treasures. Genie felt that there was a hint about that somewhere here.

After a bout of discussion, they decided that Ali should be the one to accompany Minhyuk. They all felt that it would be efficient for the two of them to go together, since Ali had a 1.5x increase in attack power against the undead with his God of Magic passive skill, as well as the power that he had just used before, Turn Undead.

Minhyuk and Ali turned to follow the key, while the members of Let's Eat Sect entered the first mansion. The two continued to follow the key until they arrived in front of a huge door. The key, which was still floating, entered the keyhole and turned by itself.

Clack—

Creak, creak, creak, creak—

The two walked through the open door, only to witness a farmer, both covered and vomiting in blood, collapse on the ground with his pickaxe still in hand.

"...?!"

Both Ali and Minhyuk were speechless at the shocking sight that greeted them when they entered.

"Y... you... How, how did you... Urk!"

Farmer Yvero knew that no one, other than them, could enter this place. However, he suddenly recalled a story that he had heard before. According to the story, the ones that could possibly enter this place were the ones that successfully hunted and killed Vormon.

Farmer Yvero's eyes widened when he realized this. Then, he said, "Vor... Vormon's hunters... Please, please save... our, our kingdom!"

Then, the notifications rang.

"...!"

Minhyuk was shocked to see the sudden appearance of a Kingdom Building Quest. He had heard about this kind of quest before. After all, the Let's Eat Sect was now well on its way to becoming a kingdom. However, they faced plenty of problems.

First, they lacked sufficient financial power. The amount of money that they had to burn to build a small kingdom was definitely not going to be small. Second, they did not have enough civilians and troops. The number of people that they needed for the construction of a kingdom in Athenae should be at a considerable amount. Third, they did not have a large enough territory. To house and support a small kingdom, they needed a larger territory.

Finally, he was faced with a Kingdom Building Quest. These were few and far in between in the entire world.

The Kingdom Building Quest could only be triggered and carried out by those that had the qualifications to build a kingdom. However, among all of those that tried to clear this quest, none had succeeded so far. This was because the quest had a lot of difficult and complicated conditions that they needed to fulfill.

However, there was one thing that everyone was sure of, and that was one needed to clear the Kingdom Building Quest once, for them to be able to build a kingdom. Even if they met all of the conditions from the first to the third, they would not be able to build a kingdom if they could not clear this final condition.

'Is that the reason why only NPCs can enter aside from two players?'

The Kingdom Building Quest would only recognize the player to be qualified if they clear the quest. Minhyuk believed that they put forth this limitation so that the system could assess how

many outstanding people were serving him, how he could command them, and use their abilities. Ali was also very surprised when he heard Minhyuk's thoughts about it.

"We will definitely save and protect this kingdom."

After letting the collapsed farmer, Yvero, drink some potion, Ali and Minhyuk did not delay any further. They rushed deeper into Rocard Kingdom and soon saw hundreds, if not thousands, of undead flocking inside and entering through the wide open gates. The kingdom was engulfed in chaos and pandemonium. Screams rang loudly as the undead slaughtered everyone, including the children, the women, and the elderly.

Minhyuk and Ali briefly glanced at each other after seeing the deputy commander's soldier get cut down by one of the undead while he protected and hugged a young girl. Ali could roughly tell that the number of the undead that entered the kingdom was around 1,000. With this number in mind, he released the power that he had gained after entering Level 400.

[God of Magic.]

[You have opened the power of the Magic God for 20 minutes.]

[Your HP has temporarily increased by 1.3x while your MP has temporarily doubled.]

[Your Magical Attack has increased by 40%.]

[Your Magical Penetration has increased by 40%.]

[Your Magic Success Hit Rate has increased by 50%.]

Ali's body became wrapped in a golden light, his features turning gold. Then, he brandished his Staff of Despair and chanted, "Turn Undead."

A flashing and blinding golden light stretched out from the tip of his staff and devoured the Undead Corps in the area.

Crack, crack, crack, crack—

Fine cracks started to appear on the undead's bodies. And then...

Thud, thud, thud—

...they fell apart. While everyone was in a daze, wondering what happened, Minhyuk had already climbed on top of the walls.

"Who are you?"

"A sword? You're not from our kingdom!"

Meanwhile, Minhyuk looked at the situation and was able to analyze everything in that split second.

'The kingdom's nobles have already given up and turned against their kingdom. They have fallen for their enemies' tricks and abandoned everything, even to the point that they willingly sent their own men and kin for slaughter.'

The gears in Minhyuk's head turned quickly as he casted his Sword of Absolute Death.

‘We first have to kill those nobles. However, I can’t let the fact that I will be the one killing them be known to these people.’

Even though they were in the middle of a war, they would still be considered enemies as long as they, the foreigners, killed those nobles. As he waited for the casting time of Sword of Absolute Death to end, Minhyuk’s eyes wandered around. That was when he caught sight of a huge cage. The cage housed around ten thousand pigs, ranging from small piglets to huge, fully grown pigs. The corners of Minhyuk’s mouth curled into a devious smile.

“Sword of Absolute Death.”

Minhyuk pointed his sword towards the most prominent Death Knight. This was the most rational move. After all, their first attack should always target the strongest among their enemies to gain momentum. That existence was none other than Duke Amanthi, the person that was once hailed as the Sword Duke. However, he was nothing but a Death Knight now.

Slaaaaaash—

Sword Duke Amanthi tried to block Minhyuk’s first sword strike by swinging his black sword, but it was completely useless.

Crack, crack, crack, crack—

Amanthi’s body started to crack. Then, hundreds of long, sharp sword lights fell down in the middle of the undead camp before exploding.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

Clang—

Sword Duke Amanthi, a Death Knight, fell down on the ground as his black armor cracked and fell apart. Thousands of the undead that flocked to the walls disappeared with him. It was a tremendous show of force.

“Y... you...?”

“We came here to save you!” Minhyuk said as he hurriedly left the place. He disappeared for a moment before coming back again. During his disappearance, he had summoned Beanie and gave him instructions.

Marquis Roleid frowned at the sudden appearance of an unknown man and a golden mage. Their appearance had pushed back the enemies that flocked to the walls.

“Hmph... What kind of variable is this?” Marquis Roleid snorted, his brows furrowing deeper as he sat on top of his white horse. He saw the stranger try to close the gates again with the remaining troops.

“What the hell are you doing?! Don’t close the gates!!! Slaughter our enemies!!!”

Although Roleid shouted for the destruction of their enemies, deep inside he wanted the ‘death of everyone’ here.

“B... but if we don’t close the gates now...”

Stab—

Roleid stabbed the soldier that cried out in protest without any hesitation.

‘He’s gone crazy...’

‘The nobles have sold us out.’

‘Even if we try to protect it, this kingdom will eventually meet its end.’

‘I can’t believe that they switched sides like this the moment Vormon died...’

While Vormon was alive, they all tried to avoid conflict amongst themselves somehow. After all, they would all die if Vormon saw a conflict break out among them. However, the moment Vormon died, the faces of these greedy nobles immediately changed.

‘What a pest! Just hurry up and die!!!’

All of them must die for this kingdom to fall into the hands of their enemies. Once that happened, he would become the king.

Roleid had grown sick of this Farmer’s Kingdom. He would make sure that his kingdom would be fancy, wonderful, and showy, something that would be completely different from this mundane and ordinary kingdom! Under the current rule, even the nobles of this kingdom were no exceptions to the rule, they also had to farm. He had long grown sick of that kind of life. That was right. Roleid would make use of the other nobles and subjects. He would make them his limbs and use them to make a fortune.

“Open the gates!!!”

“Open the gates!!!”

“Who the hell are you?! Get out of here!”

“Kill them!!! They must be spies sent by the enemies!!! They’re after the queen!!!!”

The nobles worked in tandem, shouting loudly to cause chaos. Since the war started, the nobles that did not share the same ideals with them had already been cut off. Right now, they were the center of command in this battlefield. They were the rulers, the leaders, the commanders. In the end, the soldiers slowly opened the gates again. But then...

Crack—

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump—

The ground began to shake after a strange sound rang out. Marquis Roleid turned to look at the direction from where the sound came from.

“...!”

His eyes widened in shock. It seemed like the undead had broken the cage that surrounded the pigsty.

Since this was the Farmer's Kingdom, it was generally different from ordinary kingdoms. The kingdom was in fact formed with the huge pigsty at the center. With the cage surrounding this pigsty broken, more than ten thousand fully grown pigs and piglets rushed out. But...

"Wh... what?! Why are the pigs coming this way?!"

...the pigs might be domesticated animals, but they were still animals nonetheless. Besides, pigs were also known for their intelligence that far surpassed that of dogs. They headed to where they were, disregarding the dangerous situation that they were in. What they did not know was that there was a baby piggy, that usually walked on two feet, but was currently running on all fours in the middle of the herd.

"Oiiiiink!"

"Oink, oink, oink!!!"

"Hwiiiiiiik!"

"Oink, oink, oink, oink, oink!"

All of the pigs obeyed the orders of this mysterious baby piggy.

"Oiiiiiiink! (*You don't want to run head on?!! Huh?! Then, I'm going to tell my master that we should go eat some samgyeopsal, jokbal, and barbeque! Oink!!!*)"

Yes. That was right. The Pig King Beanie had appeared, make way!

Chapter 395: The Dignity of the Food God's Knight Order

A herd of ten thousand pigs dashed forward under Beanie's command. He deliberately hid his golden crown, armor, and weapon, blending among the pigs and looking exactly like he was one among the thousands of pigs rushing forward.

"Aaaaaaaaah...! The pigs are going to fight(?) with us to protect our kingdom!!!"

"Pi...pigsssss!!! Thank you! *Sob, sob, sob!*"

The farmers of Rocard Kingdom were moved to tears by the pigs' sudden appearance, not knowing that the pigs were moving just because they were being threatened by Beanie.

Even Marquis Roleid felt his heart shake after hearing the people's cries. He thought, '*Even the pigs... are trying to protect this kingdom?!*'

However, his dumbfounded expression was soon replaced with a layer of frost. This was the reason why Roleid hated this kingdom. He hated that he was given the fate of raising pigs in the capital and having to farm every single day.

'Pigs won't have that much strength anyway!'

In a blink of an eye, the 10,000-strong herd of pigs arrived near the soldiers and clashed against the undead, effectively pushing them out of the gates.

"Hwiiiiiiik!"

“Hwiiiiik!”

“Hweeeeeeeek!”

The shrill and loud cries of the pigs covered the entire battlefield. And then...

“...?! ”

“Oiiink...”

Marquis Roleid watched the situation and judged that the pigs would be of no help at all. However, right below him was a small baby piggy. The baby piggy looked up at him with moist and sparkling eyes. The pig then climbed up his white horse and sat in front of Roleid. The baby piggy looked strangely similar to a puppy, as it stared at Roleid with sparkling eyes once again.

“What, what the hell?”

The baby piggy was very strange. What kind of a pig could climb up on a horse and sit in front of him like some kind of human? But, even though Roleid thought that the pig was strange...

‘*So, so cute...!*’

...it was so cute to the point that Roleid wanted to poke and play with its plump and chubby belly all day. The most shocking part was the reason why the baby piggy was sullen!

“Oink, oink...”

Roleid’s body was littered with injuries and the baby piggy showed a heartbroken look as it looked at his wounds. Seeing this, Roleid felt his heart flutter.

“P... piggy, are you worried about me?”

“Oink...!” The baby piggy nodded furiously.

Right then and there, Marquis Roleid thought, ‘*Right, everyone might curse at me. But they will still come to cherish and respect me as much as this pig.*’

This baby piggy in front of him might just be a pig, but Roleid vowed that he would let this pig survive and let it enjoy wealth and glory with him!

“Come here,” Roleid said as he reached out to the pig to try and pet it. But at that moment...

“Oiiink! (*It’s all fake! Oink!*)”

Stab—

Beanie swiftly stole the dagger hanging on Marquis Roleid’s body and used ‘Sword of Frenzy’ on him. The powerful blow threw Roleid off of his seat. His eyes even started to close slowly! Then, the horse shrieked and threw off Beanie. However, the place where Beanie landed was none other than Marquis Roleid. In fact, Beanie’s butt landed straight on Roleid’s face!

Fwoot, fwoot, fwoot—

Beanie's fart was both strong and smelly.

"Keuhoooooooook!"

The foul stench permeated deeply in Marquis Roleid's nose. In fact, Roleid felt that the terrible stench brought far greater anguish than the injuries that littered his body. The terrible smell was something that he had never experienced in his entire life!

Then, the baby piggy, Beanie, stood up with twitching hips!

Grin—

Beanie looked back as he smiled viciously at Marquis Roleid, before running on all fours again to hunt the other nobles. And Marquis Roleid, who was on the brink of death, thought, '*I, I can't believe that I died at the hands of a pig...!*'

It was a disgrace! The worst part was that there was a chance that this would go down in history as: '*Rocard Kingdom's Marquis Roleid, brought to eternal rest by a pig.*'

Minhyuk stood in front of the gates as he fought and pushed back the undead with the citizens and the soldiers.

"I don't know who you are but I'm very grateful to you!"

"Who the hell are you?!"

"I'm just someone that doesn't want this beautiful kingdom to be destroyed!"

"...!"

"...!"

"...!"

The citizens of Rocard Kingdom were thrilled as they looked back at him. This was the truth. According to Minhyuk's standards, Rocard Kingdom was truly a very beautiful and amazing place. The kingdom raised delicious and excellent pigs. The greatest part about this was that they were all farmers that could breed and harvest great crops. Simply put, this kingdom was a paradise of ingredients in and of itself.

"Hwiiiiik!"

"Oink, oink, oink, oink, oink, oink!"

"Pigs!!!"

"*Sob, sob, sob, sob, sob!*?Thank you, pigs!"

The 10,000-strong herd of pigs jumped through the gaps bravely and would occasionally make the undead stumble and fall from the impact of their attacks! The pigs were covered in blood as they died one after the other! The Rocard Kingdom troops were deeply moved as they watched the pigs jump up to stop the undead. The moment this war ended, they would make sure to build statues for them.

At this point, Minhyuk could tell that his plans were working smoothly. He could see Beanie through the gaps of the ten thousand pigs. From what he could see, Beanie was using the honey trap tactic to lure and hunt the nobles that had been clamoring for the gates to remain open.

Beanie had awakened and became the Supreme Divine Beast. This meant that he was not weak. In fact, he was strong enough to rival a decent high ranker in terms of strength and power. None of them would be able to beat Beanie, especially if Beanie caught them by surprise. And just like Minhyuk expected, Beanie had finished hunting all of the remaining nobles that had turned to the other side. No one was clamoring to keep the gates open anymore. And then...

“Mar... Marquis Roleid!”

“Count Cainos!”

“Count Arnai!”

“Did they get attacked by the undead? They took advantage of our distraction and killed these nobles!!!”

The people started to shout one after the other! The troops of Rocard Kingdom once again grieved for the loss of their people.

“I... I can't believe that you're laid to rest with such a bitter look on your face...!”

“Tears? Did you die crying for our collapsing kingdom?!! *Sob, sob, sob!*”

“What, what's this... Why do the bodies of our nobles reek?!”

The people that grieved for the death of their nobles did not know that they died under the hands of a baby piggy.

“Close the gates!!!”

Finally, the huge and magnificent gates began to close.

Thuuuuuud—

The troops began to work to dispose of the remaining undead from inside the walls the moment the gates closed. Minhyuk also secretly sent Beanie back to the summoning room amidst the chaos. Meanwhile, Deputy Commander Beth hurriedly approached Ali and Minhyuk.

“I'm very grateful for your help. But you...”

Beth looked at them warily. It was only natural since they were a very different race from the people of Rocard Kingdom. In fact, their interactions with humans could only be counted with one hand. Minhyuk and Ali were both at a loss. They did not know how to explain their identities. They did not want to tell them that they were helping them because of a quest and for the Ingredient Heaven.

Minhyuk could tell that Beth was very skilled and talented. He thought, *‘I think he wouldn't lose against Grandpa Ben.’*

But not long after, Yvero, the farmer that Minhyuk and Ali gave potion near the entrance, approached Beth and whispered in his ears. It seemed like the farmer had already recovered to some extent.

“What, what did you say?! They’re the heroes that hunted Vormon?!”

“...?!”

“...?!”

“...?!”

His words brought a huge impact to everyone present. It was to the point that all the remaining troops in the kingdom roared. It was only natural since they knew what kind of existence Vormon was after seeing him all this time. Beth believed Yvero’s words completely. He did not have any doubts. After all, that was the only requirement for these humans to enter this place.

“Ho... Did the two of you come to save us after hunting Vormon after knowing the fact that we were being persecuted?!”

“That...”

That was not the case either. Minhyuk came to Vormon’s Lair to find valuable rewards and more delicious ingredients! But Beth...

“*Sob, sob, sob, sob, sob.* Thank you. Thank you for coming to our rescue even though we’re from different races.”

“That’s...”

Beth grabbed Minhyuk’s hand and declared, “We will remember you forever!”

“That’s right!”

“Thank you for fighting together with us!!!”

“Uwaaaaaaaah!”

“...”

“...”

Ali and Minhyuk made eye contact.

Since this was already the case, then...

“After learning about the race that the vicious and cruel Black Dragon Vormon had persecuted, we came running as fast as we could to save you!!!”

And Ali...

“Aaaaaaah! Meeting you has made me feel deeply regretful! I’m very sorry. We came too late!!!”

...was so deep into his play that tears started to well up in his eyes!

“Don’t cry, dear friend. We’re grateful that you came here even if you were late!”

“B... but... *Sob, sob, sob!*”

Minhyuk gently hugged Ali, who finally shed a tear, and patted him on his back. Ali's acting was perfect! It was the best! The two of them truly had the perfect chemistry! It was to the point that some of the troops shed tears with them. However, it was only for a moment. They still needed to deal with the undead outside of their walls.

"Can you explain to us your exact situation?"

"Of course."

Beth started explaining, "The ones leading the undead are the 'Death Guides'. They're foreigners."

Ali and Minhyuk were very shocked. However, they both quickly came to a conclusion.

'Those people must have received some sort of quest after Vormon's death.'

'But there is no information about someone that can control the undead on that scale?'

'Are they unofficial rankers?'

Minhyuk and Ali were both certain that they were a group of unofficial rankers.

"As you can see, the undead could wield the same power that they had when they were alive. They are still proficient in swordsmanship, archery, and even magic."

This was a problem. The undead were originally beings that had gone into a frenzy after losing their reasoning. It was very easy to deal with these beings, since they were not capable of thought. But, the problem now was that their enemies could now use their heads.

"The biggest problem is the Death Knights that they have summoned. They were once beings that have led and commanded in their past lives. There's the first Mage Tower Master, the man hailed as the founder of spearmanship, and even a summoner that could summon a being like the hydra."

Minhyuk could not help but shake his head after hearing Beth's words. Sometimes it was better to have one powerful knight than to have a hundred soldiers. The worst part was that the Death Knights on the other side were doing the work of 10,000 soldiers.

"I'll call for my troops first. But I don't know how long it would take for them to get here."

"Troops?"

"Yes. I'm also someone that holds a title. I'm a lord of my own territory."

"Y... you're a noble!" Beth shouted in surprise. However, he quickly calmed down and said, "You don't have to worry about your troops."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"One of our kingdom's specialties is the 'Almond of Subordinates'. It has the power that can allow you to call and bring in your subordinates the moment you eat it."

“...!”

“...!”

Minhyuk and Ali were both shocked. Could crops really exert a power like that? To put it simply, the almond could temporarily help them teleport their troops.

‘We must protect this kingdom and take the opportunity to have Let’s Eat Sect engage in diplomatic discussions with them.’

The benefits that they would reap if they could gain diplomatic ties with the Rocard Kingdom would be beyond their imagination. They should definitely discuss diplomacy with this kingdom that had a very special power.

Meanwhile, Minhyuk said, “Almonds are delicious.”

“Ah, yes. Of course...” Beth answered in doubt as he sent his orders to his own troops. Not long after, the troops rushed back with almonds in hand.

The almonds had a slight golden sheen on its skin, something that was completely different from ordinary almonds.

“This Almond of Subordinates does not give us much harvest.”

However, they still brought more than 200 pieces of almonds in front of Minhyuk and Ali. When they checked the information, they saw that the almonds truly had the power to summon their allies.

Crunch—

A savory flavor spread out in Minhyuk’s mouth the moment he bit on it. The Almond of Subordinates was quite hard compared to its ordinary peers, but the more he chewed on it, the more he could taste the savory flavor in his mouth.

Crunch, crunch, crunch—

“Pl... please take your time and eat it slowly.”

Crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch—

But Minhyuk’s mouth moved even faster. The almonds tasted very delicious! He even forgot that he was eating the Almonds of Subordinates to call for his troops for a moment, completely entranced by the taste of these almonds!

Beth and the people of Rocard Kingdom had high expectations for the people that hunted Black Dragon Vormon! They wondered what kind of subordinates he would summon? Were they the best and strongest existences in the entire continent?

‘That must definitely be the case!’

After all, they were the ones that hunted Vormon. Just when a strange sense of excitement had started to bubble in them, a presence started to walk out from the huge light created by the Almonds of Subordinates. The person that walked out of the light was none other than the Ramyeon Boy, Conir.

"Sluuurp, nyam nyam. Sluuurp, nyam nyam. Delicious ramyeon!"

Conir appeared while eating ramyeon from the lid of a nickel silver ramyeon pot! Even though he suddenly appeared in a strange place, all he said was, "Mister farmers! Have some ramyeon!"

"...?"

"...?"

"...?"

All of them tilted their heads in confusion. Beth even had a small smile on his lips.

'He's a very kind and generous man. He must have taken in this kid that has become a war orphan.'

That was what he thought. When his anticipation rose again, an old man appeared. It was Old Man Ben with a head full of black hair, just like Terrius! Grandpa Ben appeared just when he was about to check underneath the cat's tail for Luwak coffee. Unexpectedly, the cat was teleported with him.

"Sniff, sniff. I can smell the coffee's aroma wafting from underneath your tail. Teehee~"

"...?"

"...?"

"...?"

Beth tried very hard to remain calm and composed. Then, another man appeared.

"Everyone can grow their hair again! Do you trust me?! Put your faith in me and I will help you grow each and every strand of your hair!!! You can avail my service for a cheap price of five million gold!!! Ah! It's very cheap and affordable!!!" The strange knight shouted as he raised his hands high up in the skies.

"...?"

"...?"

"...?"

Then, a black-skinned member of the demon race appeared.

'N... no... there's a member of the demon race among the people that he summoned?!'

'My goodness! As expected, he won't let us down!!!'

However, the member of the demon race that appeared was trying to write his new work these days. The title of his book was 'The Prince's Magic Tool'.

A whip suddenly appeared in his hands.

"So it sounds like this! If I write it down like this, then..."

The man sat down on the ground, whip in one hand and pen in the other, as he began to write.

“Waaaaah! My inspiration has bloomed! Inspiration!!! Erden, the maid, fell in love with the prince’s magic tools and ended up stealing them!!!”

“...?”

“...?”

“...?”

And finally...

“Hek, hek, hek!”

“Grrrr, grrr.”

“Hek, hek—”

A gigantic three-headed dog suddenly appeared. The dog appeared lying on the ground. They looked confused after suddenly being transported while still being petted by Locke. However, their tails were still wagging vigorously.

“...?”

“...?”

“...?”

“...?”

Everyone from Rocard Kingdom looked at the scene in silence as Beth murmured to himself, “We’re doomed...”

Chapter 396: The Dignity of the Food God’s Knight Order

The people of Rocard Kingdom had similar expressions. When Ramyeon Boy Conir appeared, this was what they all thought: *‘Ah, of course it’s possible that someone like him will come here. The next one will definitely be a great person!’*

However, what appeared next was an old man that was checking the area below a cat’s tail. At that point, their burning expectations had already started to cool down. Nevertheless, they still looked forward to the next one. Then, a strange knight appeared, with his hands raised high up in the sky. From what they could see, the knight was pretending to be a pseudo-religious leader.

Their expressions turned stiff at the sight of these men. Who would appear next? Why did a strange man from the demon race appear while making strange sounds like *‘Haa~ haa~’*?

And that was not all!

A three-headed demonic beast from hell, Cerberus, also appeared! Although Cerberus looked just like their description, they were lying down and showing their belly while panting happily, like a cute puppy asking for a belly rub! The strangest part was the fact that they suddenly sat down obediently while wagging their tail gently when they saw Minhyuk in front of them!

“Oh my. How is my Love, Happiness and Hope? Did you miss hyung, huh?”

“Grrr!”

“Grrrrr!”

“Grrrr...!”

‘Even, even their names are strange! What do you mean by Love, Happiness and Hope...?!’

Minhyuk patted this strange pet dog on the head, while Beth desperately hoped that they could really protect their kingdom. After all, they were the ones that hunted Black Dragon Vormon! However, after witnessing these shocking scenes one after the other, Beth finally realized, *‘Ah, I see. Black Dragon Vormon has been sealed for quite a long time.’*

Black Dragon Vormon had basically ruled and dominated the entire Rocard Kingdom. Even if he was sealed, he still had enough power to control and rule over Queen Iris. But it seemed like things were completely different from his tyrannical reputation. From what Beth could see, Vormon definitely had to be a lot weaker if these weird people could hunt him.

‘I think that Cerberus-like creature is just something that they made up. They probably just made a claim that the dog is a demonic beast from hell.’

Rocard Kingdom was completely cut off from the rest of the world. Although they were not sure, they were very open to the idea that a creature molded after the appearance of Cerberus, a great demonic beast from hell, was really being raised like a pet dog in the outside world. All of them sighed lightly as they watched Minhyuk call for his troops.

The Death Corps that he has nurtured so far! Their total number was at 1,500, and unlike those that have appeared before them, they looked completely normal.

Beth did not express any disappointment nor dissatisfaction. He said, “You’re really reliable.”

Although Beth felt that they were not as powerful as they expected them to be, it did not change the fact that they came here to help them.

“Thank you.”

Minhyuk nodded in return. He was now the master of a guild, he should never bow his head easily to others. Then, the notifications began to ring one after the other.

[If Ben wins against the Founder of Spearmanship, Evon, he will be able to grow a step further.]

[Every time Conir cuts down 10,000 undead, he will be able to grow a step further.]

[If Love, Hope and Happiness hunt Hydra, they will be able to grow a step further.]

[If Best Selling Author Aruvel successfully confuses his enemies using his brilliant and amazing tactics, he will gain inspiration from the undead.]

[If Paladin Corr cleans up the undead, he will be able to grow a step further.]

[The general troops’ EXP acquisition rate will increase by 5x.]

“...!”

The notifications were quite a blessing. They were already taking on a Kingdom Building Quest, but they were able to get some windfall and acquire additional rewards! Minhyuk roughly estimated the number of the undead to be around 50,000. On the other hand, the total number of their troops and allies was only around 10,000.

“How many farmer knights and mages do you have with you?”

“Around 500 people.”

Minhyuk nodded as he hurriedly looked around again. That was when he saw an NPC store.

‘*Lily’s Grocery Store.*’

Minhyuk hurriedly went to Lily’s store. He knew that Beth and the people of Rocard Kingdom were bound to doubt them and their powers. However, he had a plan. Soon, he was able to find the ingredient that he was looking for among the groceries sold in Lily’s Grocery Store, ‘*Special Ramyeon Noodles*’. He hurriedly clicked on the item to check its information.

? Can increase the attack and defense. However, it will be entirely dependent on the chef’s skills.

? Can increase the skill level. However, it will be entirely dependent on the chef’s skills.

? Buff Ingredient.

? There will be no special effects or abilities if the dish fails.

There was only one reason why Minhyuk chose to check the grocery store first. Whenever a new kingdom was opened, the first thing that players would check were their stores. This was mainly because kingdoms would sell their own specialties in these stores. And Minhyuk had a strong hunch that the ingredients sold in the Farmer’s Kingdom would be completely different from ordinary ingredients.

Sure enough, his hunch was proven to be true by just a single ingredient. This was actually the first time that Minhyuk had seen a ‘Buff Ingredient’. There was only one question...

“All of you receive buffs from your dishes?”

“Yes, we do. We can increase our attack and defense by 1% through these buff ingredients.”

“...?”

Minhyuk tilted his head in confusion. He could tell that something was strange here. Those were S-grade ramyeon noodles. And there was also that note in the special abilities section that said: ‘It will be entirely dependent on the chef’s skills.’.

This line meant that the ingredient could be reborn and made into a dish that could exert tremendous power. So, how come it only increased their power by 1%?

“By any chance, can you tell me how do you usually eat?”

“We either dip it in chocolate soup, or eat it raw. That’s what we do most of the time.”

Minhyuk could tell that this was the reason why Rocard Kingdom did not gain much benefit even though they have this many ingredients on hand. These farmers, the Hybrid Race, were really

powerful and amazing especially with growing crops. Just one look around Lily's Grocery Store was enough to tell how amazing their agricultural skills were.

However, it seemed like God Athenae was fair, in order to maintain balance, he gave their race lousy hands that could not cook. According to them, they eat most of their crops raw, and even if they cooked their crops, the methods that they used were too much for Minhyuk to bear.

"Although it's quite something else to eat some broccoli soup with chocolate used as seasoning."

Minhyuk felt emotional for a second. He felt that these people in front of him were too pitiful. They had such heavenly farming hands and excellent ingredients but they were so bad at cooking! No, perhaps it was because they did not feel a need to cook. Even if they just eat apples, the apples that they grew here already tasted a lot better than ordinary apples.

"What do you want to do? We're running out of time. They'll probably start launching an all-out attack soon."

Hearing the question, Minhyuk sighed and said, "Please gather all of the elite soldiers that you have mentioned earlier."

"Are you talking about the knights and mages?"

"Yes, that's right."

Beth nodded. There were currently no more nobles left with them. Beth, as the deputy commander, had no choice but to put his trust on Minhyuk for now. After gathering their men, Beth turned to Minhyuk and asked, "Did you think of a strategy?"

"Yes."

"What strategy are you thinking of?"

"We're going to eat."

"...?"

"...?"

"...?"

"...?"

Today was the day that the people of Rocard Kingdom questioned almost everything that they have seen or heard. All of them tilted their heads in confusion.

"We... we're going to eat?"

Beth could not understand what was going through Minhyuk's head. They were already in a very desperate situation. Their enemies might launch an all-out attack any time soon. But Minhyuk wanted them to eat at this point in time?

Beth tried to calm himself down and tried to explain their situation to him. He said, "If we eat, who will stop the enemy troops? The gates would not be able to hold out. It would only take them half an hour to breach the gates and take over our kingdom."

But, Minhyuk answered, "My knights and soldiers will stop the enemies."

"...?"

Beth frowned. He knew that when Minhyuk said *knights and soldiers* he was referring to the boy eating ramyeon, the member of the demon race with a whip, and the dog that imitated Cerberus, as well as the 1,500 troops that he called for.

'Is his 1,500 strong troops that strong?'

Just as the thought passed Beth's mind...

"Uwaaaaaah!"

"What accuracy! That's some deadly accuracy you got there!!!"

"You're really strong!"

...cheers erupted from above the walls. Beth immediately led his men to climb the walls. There, he saw the Atlas Soldiers under Minhyuk's command shooting their arrows or using magic. The shocking thing was that whenever they shot their arrows, their accuracy rate was 100%. Even their magic had unbelievable destructive power. There were also five priests among them! These priests were using their holy power to destroy the undead coming near the walls.

"...!"

Beth was very shocked.

"They were originally Athenae Religion's priests but they have converted now and have become Talmor priests."

"Talmor?"

Beth looked around until he caught sight of the Talmor Cult Leader, Corr, standing beside the priests. Beth knew about Athenae Religion, it was the religion with the greatest and most outstanding priests! But no matter how he looked at it, those priests that originally served the Athenae Religion were now serving the sect leader next to them.

'Ho?'

Beth could not help but burst out in admiration. However, this much power was not enough to stop their enemies.

"But..."

But before Beth could finish his sentence, Minhyuk had already turned to his Cerberus, who was rubbing its heads on his body, and said, "Love, Happiness, Hope. If you teach a lesson to that ugly

guy with nine heads for hyung, hyung will give you some nice beef jerkys for your snacks. Can you do it for me? Huh?”

“Grrrrr!”

“Keuhaaaa!”

“Graaaaaaaaaa!”

The pet dog, which they thought to be a demonic beast, suddenly roared before leaping off of the walls. It leapt to where the hydra was.

“W... wait...! Y... you! Why would you put your pet dog in danger?!!!” Beth shouted hurriedly.

However, Minhyuk just looked at the battlefield with his arms folded in front of his chest while his knights stood on both his sides.

“Conir! Conir will teach a lesson to the ugly guys!”

“Hoho. My son... no, my lord. I will finish it soon so I can make coffee for you.”

“Tsk, tsk. Look at all those undead. All of them are bald! I’ll make sure to make hair bloom on that bald head of theirs!”

“Oho? How about a story about a hot and blazing love between an undead and a human? Huh? But there’s no such concept for the undead...?”

All of them were looking at the situation on the battlefield. Then, Minhyuk said, “Knights.”

“Yes, my lord!”

They replied loudly with a distinctly different momentum from before. Ghost Spear Ben slowly held his spear, while Conir raised his sword. Corr also wore his horned helmet, while Aruvel picked up his black spear.

‘Their, their aura and momentum changed...?!’

The aura and dignity that they were showing was that of a legend. And at that moment...

Baaaaaaaang—

“Kiheeeeeeeeeek!”

“Kyahaaaaack!”

“Keuhaaaaaaaack!”

A shrill scream broke out from somewhere. Beth and the rest of the troops on the walls turned to look at the direction where the sound came from. There, they saw the pet dog, Love, Hope, and Happiness, tearing the necks of the hydra that was five times bigger than it.

“...!”

Beth's breath was caught in his throat. Then, Minhyuk gave his orders to the legends that were standing beside him, "Destroy them."

Chapter 397: The Dignity of the Food God's Knight Order

Special Players Management Team.

Team Leader Park Minggyu, who had returned from Washington D.C., was watching the monitor with Employee Lee Minhwa. The two looked at the screen with blazing eyes.

"Compared to the World War, Player Minhyuk will definitely give his all for the Rocard Kingdom in this Dragon Lair."

"You're absolutely right," Lee Minhwa nodded furiously.

Dragons were the greatest existence in this worldview! And those that hunted an existence like that would definitely be rewarded greatly! Especially for players that were undertaking the Kingdom Building Quest, they were likely to receive special rewards. The problem was that the rewards had to be obtained from Queen Iris.

"He might obtain the King's Authority."

The King's Authority was a special power that could only be obtained by kings, or those that would become kings! However, the only one that could grant this power was none other than Queen Iris, the mad queen.

But since this was Food God Minhyuk, there was a way for him to restore Queen Iris' sanity. The key was whether he would notice it or not.

Then, Lee Minhwa said, "There's also Mercenary King Brod, he's one of the candidates for the Absolute Supreme NPCs, right?"

Team Leader Park nodded. There were only eight Absolute Supreme NPCs that existed in the entire world. Six of them had been confirmed, while the other two were NPCs that still had to grow further to obtain this status. One of the candidates was Mercenary King Brod.

Mercenary King Brod was a Supreme NPC. He had fought around and played an active role in a place called 'God's Empire'. Legend has it that he was a man that took on 70,000 strong men by himself. This very same Brod served and followed the command of Queen Iris. It was impossible for him to move, unless he received the orders from Queen Iris.

Suddenly, Team Leader Park thought, '*Ah, come to think of it...*'

There was another important reward hidden in the Rocard Kingdom. No, rather than saying that there was a hidden important reward, it would be safer to say that for Minhyuk to obtain the reward, he had to do his very best. The reward was none other than the residents.

Rocard Kingdom was bound to leave this territory after this war. If they remained there, plenty of people would continue to attack them. Simply put, if Minhyuk did his best, they might become a part of his power. However, this was something that Minhyuk had to figure out and solve by himself.

“How will he win the hearts of the people?” Team Leader Park mumbled curiously as he watched Minhyuk through the screen.

Beth’s pupils were shaking wildly. He watched as Rameon Boy Conir kicked the wall and flew away! Conir took the opportunity to cast his skill and let it loose towards the hundreds of undead below him.

“Child’s Tempest!”

A roaring tempest came out of Conir’s sword. Sword blades flew fiercely from the tempest and slaughtered the undead below him. Conir had the requirement to hunt 10,000 undead in order to grow further. At that moment...

Slaaaaash—

Beth turned his head again. He clearly saw the three-headed pet dog ripping apart and devouring one of the hydra’s heads.

‘Crazy...!’

Hydras were monsters that were considered to be the crystallization of poison. Just a slight touch from their bodies would melt their opponent’s body. But that pet dog ate one of the hydra’s heads! In fact, they did not stop there. One of Cerberus’ heads shot out a powerful cold breath that turned the root of the head frozen, preventing it from regenerating. Cerberus leapt away from the hydra, while another of its heads shot out a strong burst of flame.

Puhaaaaaaaaa—

“Kihyaaaaaack!”

“Kiyeeeeeeeeek!”

“Graaaaaaaaak!”

The hydra’s snake heads shrieked loudly, while the skeleton mages fired hundreds of magic towards Cerberus. But then, Cerberus’ central head opened its mouth and shot out a white light that dispelled the hundreds of magic spells that flew in the air.

“They... they’re very strong... D... don’t tell me?!”

Beth finally realized that the dog that he thought was an imitation of Cerberus, turned out to be the real deal. It was literally Cerberus, Hell’s Gatekeeper. For a moment, Beth felt chills run down his spine.

‘A... a demonic beast from hell is, is following this human?!’

Just when Beth was wondering if something like that was truly possible...

Flash—

...his eyes caught sight of the old man that was checking the place below the cat’s tail when he appeared. He was fighting against the Founder of Spearmanship, Evon!

Ghost Spear Ben clashed with Evon, who skillfully used his spear technique to stab at Ben's chest, but Ben was able to twist his body and escape his stabbing spear.

Stab! Stab, stab, stab, stab, stab, stab!

Dozens of spear strikes were exchanged in their short clash!

“...!”

Beth's breathing turned labored. Evon, the Founder of Spearmanship, truly had an outstanding spear technique. Beth had never seen anyone wield their spear so skillfully like that! But someone had appeared who could actually use the spear better than Evon! And that someone was none other than the current Ghost Spear Ben.

Evon was famous for being the 'founder' of spearmanship. However, over the course of time, the spear technique that he had created gradually evolved and developed further. The being that stood at the pinnacle of this evolved and developed spear technique was none other than Ghost Spear Ben.

Then, Evon casted his spear technique: “Ivory Spear Arts, Chapter Two. Exploding Spear.”

Beth had seen dozens of his own people die in a single go under the gruesome display of that Exploding Spear. The attack was completely unstoppable and unavoidable. Dozens of spears flew forward, but Ghost Spear Ben triggered his own power.

“Ghost's Attacking Spear.”

[Ghost's Attacking Spear]

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

Ghost Spear Ben used a similar skill! His spear shot down Evon's Exploding Spear in the air. Upon Evon's casting of his Exploding Spear, he would be left defenseless for two seconds. However, Ghost Spear Ben was completely different. Just like what was said, Evon's spearmanship was the root and foundation of spearmanship. This meant that the technique had plenty of loopholes and disadvantages. However, Ghost Spear Ben's 'Ghost Steps' complemented his skill and covered up the holes and disadvantages.

Daaaaaash—

Only Ghost Spear Ben's afterimage was left behind after he used his Ghost Steps. Just one step and he was already standing in front of Evon. Then, Ghost Spear Ben stabbed Evon in the head.

Crack—

“Keuaaaaaack!”

Evon screamed! And with a crack, Evon's body started to crumble and disappear. At the same time, a notification rang in Minhyuk's head.

[Ghost Spear Ben has won against Death Knight Evon, the Founder of Spearmanship.]

[Death Knight Evon has acknowledged Ben's strength. A portion of his power will be absorbed by Ben.]

At that moment, a black strand of soul separated from Death Knight Evon's body, before flying towards Ghost Spear Ben. The black strand of soul disappeared inside Ghost Spear Ben's body.

[Ghost Spear Ben has become more powerful.]

[His skill level has increased by +2.]

[His HP and MP reserves will increase by 1.4x.]

[Ghost Spear Ben has gotten a step closer to becoming a Supreme NPC.]

A Supreme NPC! Before Ellie awakened her latent powers, she was one of the Supreme NPCs. After she released her seal, she had established herself as an Absolute Supreme NPC. At the same time, no one would deny the fact that Supreme NPCs were NPCs that could use tremendous power.

The knights that Minhyuk had let loose were putting on a shocking display of power and skill. The member of the demon race that kept on panting while using a whip was speaking to the undead, whose ears were perked up and listening intently. There were roughly around two thousand undead listening to his majestic and captivating voice.

“Arcapel, the commander of the Imperial Knight Order, had been told that his wife had been killed from one of the undead’s raids a few years ago. Even though he was grieving, he had no choice but to make his stand and fight for his empire. One day, the emperor told him that the ‘Immortal Queen’ had appeared. With the appearance of the Immortal Queen, Arcapel marched with 20,000 troops under his command. The battlefield remained fierce and unforgiving as the never-ending war between the undead and the humans continued on! But in the end...”

The skeletons all turned to look at him as they vibrated from excitement and anticipation. Their eyes were even shining brightly!

“The Immortal Queen that Arcapel had marched forward to confront was none other than his wife that died years ago! Aaaaaah! What should he do?! Why was fate so cruel?! Why did God play a trick like this on him?!”

“Keuaaaaack!”

“Kiyeeeeeeck!”

“Keuhaaaaack!”

It seemed like the undead enjoyed this crazy drama as they shrieked while wrapping their skulls with their bony hands. All of them were dying of curiosity. What choice would Arcapel make? Why did his wife become the Immortal Queen?!

“You’re curious? Then, attack them!” Aruvel said. Hearing his words, the undead suddenly turned around and attacked their own troops.

“Keuaaaack!”

“Kiheeeeeeeck!”

Crack, crack—

The undead showed their firm determination and strong will to hear the ending of the story. This was the power of the best-selling author! He could even attract and fascinate the undead!

Meanwhile, Corr, who was wielding a sword covered in white light, slaughtered the undead, one after the other. In fact, the one that had the greatest advantage against the undead was Corr. Corr was a paladin. He was a paladin of the Athenae Religion, which meant that he would have an increase in attack and defense against the undead.

“Ho...”

Beth was really impressed. He turned around.

“Everyone is doing well. Hang in there a bit more!”

“Yes, sir!”

“Thank you, my lord!”

“Haha!”

Minhyuk encouraged his 1,500 Atlas troops that were working hard to attack the enemies. Then, not long after, Minhyuk said, “I’ll make you some delicious food after this war ends!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Minhyuk’s words brought a huge impact to the fighting troops. Each and every single one of the 1,500 troops felt excited, their faces filled with anticipation and firm determination.

“My lord, you’re the best!!!”

“My lord, you’re the coolest!!!”

“Ooooooooooh!”

The Atlas soldiers were also growing rapidly as they continued to fight.

[Centurion Park has leveled up.]

[Soldier Randolph has leveled up.]

[Soldier Hekain has leveled up.]

[Soldier...]

“We’re quickly getting stronger!”

“We can be of much greater help to our lord!”

“Hahahaha! That’s good! Ah, so great!”

The Atlas soldiers kept the undead at bay and stopped them from stepping foot inside the walls. Since they could just use their arrows and magic to hunt the undead that were clinging to the walls, the Atlas soldiers were literally riding an ‘express bus’.

Meanwhile, Beth and the people of Rocard Kingdom, who saw them smiling while fighting, finally realized something.

‘It’s because everyone believes in him.’

Beth’s thoughts about Minhyuk were finally refreshed. The same was true for the citizens of Rocard Kingdom.

‘I wonder how happy we would be if we also had a lord like that?’

‘I feel a bit jealous. How can they smile like that when we’re in this situation?’

‘That man over there is a noble but he truly cares for his people. It seems like he knows the name of each of his soldiers!’

Meanwhile, the people of Rocard Kingdom recalled their very own nobles.

‘They told us to open the gates, despite knowing that all of us would die if we did so.’

‘They cut down our path to retreat with their own hands.’

‘The worst part is that they even hide in the rear, the safest place on this battlefield.’

‘He’s different! They’re completely different from us!!! I’m so jealous!!! Very, very jealous of them!!!’

At that moment, another set of notifications rang for Minhyuk.

[You have received favor from the people of Rocard Kingdom.]

[You have received favor from the people of Rocard Kingdom.]

[A special event will be triggered if your favor with the people of Rocard Kingdom reaches a certain level.]

Minhyuk stared at the notifications in confusion and doubt.

‘A special event will be triggered once I reach a certain level?’

Chapter 398: The First God Rank Artifact

Minhyuk understood that this was a hint, although he did not know what answer the hint was leading to. If he reached a certain level of favor, would they willingly and obediently hand over the Ingredient Heaven to him? Or maybe, they would give him the best crops and produce that they have harvested? Or perhaps...

‘Will I become their king...?’

However, Minhyuk decided to put this question aside for the moment. He did not have enough time to ponder over this thing deeply. There was something else that he needed to do. He quickly descended from the walls to carry out what he had told Beth that he would do earlier.

“Now, it’s time for us to eat.”

“Ah. Uhm... Alright...”

Beth had his doubts when he first saw the strange knights that Minhyuk had summoned, but after seeing them fight, his doubts had long disappeared. Rather than doubt him, he came to believe and trust in Minhyuk more. But even if that was the case, the situation that they were in made him a little hesitant to respond positively to Minhyuk's suggestion of eating. It took much consideration for Beth to decide to place his trust in them.

"Can I have some of your ramyeon noodles here?"

"How many do you need?"

"Enough for 500 servings. It would also be good if you can provide me with some eggs and cheese."

"Alright. We'll bring it to you."

Beth immediately ordered his men to bring the ingredients. Minhyuk asking for the ingredients from them meant that he would not need to spend his personal money to buy it. Following Beth's orders, their troops brought enough ramyeon noodles, eggs, and cheese for 500 servings. Minhyuk hurriedly checked the information of the ingredients.

? Can sharply increase the defense. However, it will be entirely dependent on the chef's skills.

? Can sharply increase the natural recovery rate. However, it will be entirely dependent on the chef's skills.

? Buff Ingredient.

? There will be no special effects or abilities if the dish fails.

? Battle Qi, Bravery, and Will will increase. However, it will be entirely dependent on the chef's skills.

? Buff Ingredient

? There will be no special effects or abilities if the dish fails.

The part that surprised Minhyuk the most was the part that said 'ancient'. A species being tagged as ancient meant that there were only a few of them left. They were very great existences that had survived through the eons.

"Your chicken and cows are very special, huh?"

"Special? I don't know about that."

However, Deputy Commander Beth looked like he was not aware of this fact. It was only natural since the Rocard Kingdom had been cut off from the outside world for a very long time now.

'We must obtain the power of this kingdom no matter what!'

What Minhyuk wanted to cook was none other than 'Chapagetti'. However, the amount of chapagetti that he had to make was so large that it would be a bit difficult for him to cook. The

biggest problem was the ‘noodles’. Noodles would eventually get soggy, what more if he had to make 500 servings? So, the first thing that Minhyuk prepared was the fried eggs. Minhyuk immediately enlarged his frying pan and coated it with cooking oil.

“Mister Beth, there’s something very important that I need you to do with the knights.”

“Yes!”

The knights of Rocard Kingdom all nodded solemnly when they saw the serious expression on Minhyuk’s face. Minhyuk’s troops were doing a very exceptional job, so they wanted to do something too!

“Please crack an egg over the frying pan! This is very important. If you break the yolk then you’ll be in big trouble!”

All of them looked like they could not understand what was happening for a moment. But it did not end there.

“Also, please gather the noodles of these 500 chapagetti noodles in one place. Please make sure to place the flakes and soup powder in separate bowls too!”

Minhyuk would cook the noodles for himself and use the soup powder, flakes, and olive oil in a separate bowl. The noodles that he would use for them would be the Special Ramyeon Noodles, while the noodles in the pack would be left for himself.

The people of the kingdom were speechless and doubtful, but the urgency in Minhyuk’s voice was unmistakable.

“Do it, quick!”

“Ah. Yes!”

“Fire!”

Minhyuk casted Fire Magic underneath his gigantic frying pan. His Legendary Frying Pan had the function where it could automatically control the temperature that was most suitable for the dish that he was cooking by using magic. The oil gradually reached a high temperature from the heat of the flames that spread underneath the pan.

‘This is a new challenge.’

He had to make 500 servings of chapagetti while in the middle of a war! Minhyuk also joined in on cracking the eggs.

Crack, crack—

They held the egg with both of their hands, cracked the shells apart, and let the egg fall on the pan.

Sizzle, sizzle—

Sizzle, sizzle—

The sound of the eggs being fried rang loudly in the area. In particular, Minhyuk's skill of cracking eggs with only one hand was spectacular, especially when compared to Beth and the knights of Rocard Kingdom that cracked eggs with both of their hands.

"Aaaah! Wait! Mister Beth, you broke the yolk! Please be careful."

'I'm the deputy commander but... I'm being scolded for breaking the yolk...'

"Hey! That knight over there! There's a piece of egg shell in your fried egg! Do you know how disappointing it would be if someone ate that shell?!"

"I'm, I'm sorry. *Hic!*? I have committed a mortal sin..."

Some of the knights felt ridiculous after seeing the severity of Minhyuk's expression. The way he scolded them made them feel like they had committed a grave sin and betrayed their kingdom without realizing it! It was truly a sight to behold. Rocard Kingdom's elite troops were all cracking eggs together while Minhyuk divided the fried eggs!

Fried egg was a single dish, and yet, so much more. There were fried eggs with runny yolk and only one side cooked. There were also fried eggs with both sides cooked thoroughly and fried eggs whose yolks were fully cooked and broken. There were some people that like their yolks broken too but Minhyuk believed that there were not that many of them. So, while he was dividing, he made sure to divide it equally while keeping in mind to keep only a few of the ones with yolks that burst.

After finishing the fried eggs, he quickly fished them out of the pan and placed them on a large tray. Then, he used the frying pan's automatic cleaning function to clean the frying pan, before making it large again and pouring water inside it.

From this point on, he needed to completely focus on the task at hand. Minhyuk needed to make at least 500 servings of chapagetti, on top of the restriction: *'There will be no special effects or abilities if the dish fails.'* If he failed because he cooked the noodles the slightest bit more than necessary, they would be in trouble.

Unfortunately, the severe time constraint and the current situation forced him to take on that risk and challenge the dish.

In the blink of an eye, the knights had already added the flakes in the pan. The 500 servings of flakes swam and danced around in the boiling water. Then came the 500 servings of Special Ramyeon Noodles.

Surprisingly enough, the item that Minhyuk took out to cook the noodles was a shovel! To be exact, it was a cooking shovel used for mixing. Since he was cooking a huge amount of noodles, the task was extremely taxing, to the point that sweat had already started to pool on his forehead.

"Keuaaaack!"

"Kiyaaaack!"

Screams were ripped out of the mouths of Minhyuk's troops that were standing above the walls but he tried his best to concentrate on the task at hand.

'The heat is quite good.'

One of the problems when cooking large amounts of a dish was the heat. In fact, cooking 500 servings of a dish was not that uncommon. This was something that was usually done in cooking units, cafeterias, and other similar places. However, most of the dishes that these places offered were not cooked with proper heat control, so their taste tended to be less than satisfactory.

The most important part of cooking is heat and its control. Some dishes required low heat while some required a quick stir in high heat.

One of those dishes with tricky heat control was ramyeon. The best method to produce an amazing serving of ramyeon was to lift and stir the noodles while they were being boiled. But, how could one lift and stir 500 servings worth of ramyeon noodles? The answer was simple.

Ali quickly gulped some Mana Potions!

“Ali, please lift the noodles in the pan from time to time.”

“Ah. Yes...”

Mage Ali used his magic to lift the 500 servings worth of ramyeon noodles from time to time! Ali, the world’s strongest mage, was tasked to use his power to lift noodles from the pan!

But his work did not end there, Minhyuk continued to solicit Ali’s help after they had cooked the noodles. After all, it was very hard to transfer 500 servings worth of noodles. Also, they would not know when the noodles would get soggy so...

“Ali! Please use your Dehydration Magic! Make sure to leave enough water inside the noodles!”

“...”

Golden Mage Ali, the world’s strongest mage, used Dehydration Magic on noodles.

Shwaaaaaa—

The excess water from the noodles were removed, leaving only the appropriate amount.

“Nice!”

Then, Minhyuk added the soup granules and olive oil that the knights had separated earlier. Of course, mixing the noodles, the soup granules, and olive oil was something that Ali also helped with. The noodles slowly got mixed following the movements of his hands as the unique aroma of olive oil wafted through their noses. Anyone would know that chapagetti was being mixed as soon as this smell started to linger in the air. The smell alone could make anyone’s mouth water and gulp.

Once everything was done, Minhyuk scooped the noodles in a bowl before topping it with cheese and a fried egg. With that, the notifications rang for Minhyuk, which caused delight to bloom on his face.

Then, Beth approached and asked, “...Ho. What’s the name of this dish?”

Beth looked at the bowl of chapagetti that was handed to him in wonder. Rocard Kingdom was a kingdom that was populated with people that had poor cooking skills. So, what was their way of cooking ramyeon noodles?

“We just add the ramyeon noodles in boiling water and season it with salt...”

“Uhm...”

It was the worst recipe to have ever existed. If that was the case, then they would be more welcoming and delighted once they got a taste of the chapagetti.

“Do it like this. Get some chapagetti and place some on your own bowl, then add some cheese and fried egg to your liking.”

Minhyuk’s instructions were quick and easy so that the 500 servings worth of chapagetti would not get soggy. The knights hurriedly moved as they followed his instructions.

Minhyuk also got a bowl of chapagetti on his own. The fried egg that he chose was the one that was only cooked on one side with the slightly cooked yolk.

The knights continued to look at Minhyuk. They watched him take out some ponytail kimchi, well-ripened radish kimchi, pickled radish, and many more from his ‘aging jar’. Of course, the server was also Ali. He used his magic to serve these side dishes to the point that he wanted to give up on everything and wonder why he was here!

‘I’m the best and strongest mage, but I’m actually using my magic to deliver kimchi...’

Minhyuk demonstrated first. He poked the yolk of his egg on top of his chapagetti noodles and let the runny yolk cover the noodles. After that, he grabbed some cheese and chapagetti noodles, before lifting them high up and slurping them in one go.

“Sluuuuuurp!”

A sweet taste lingered in his mouth from the chapagetti noodles which was immediately followed by the special scent and flavor of olive oil. The taste of the yolk and the cheese also made an appearance, creating the perfect harmony of flavors in Minhyuk’s mouth. Minhyuk smiled happily as he grabbed a piece of ponytail kimchi and placed it in his mouth.

Crunch, crunch—

The ponytail kimchi was crunchy and brought forth a burst of spiciness in his mouth. Minhyuk lifted his chopsticks again. This time, he sliced his fried egg. Then, he grabbed some noodles with it and slurped it up. A bright and happy smile graced his lips as he munched on the noodles.

Chapagetti and jajangmyeon might have plenty of similarities, but they were also inherently different dishes. There were times when chapagetti triumphed over jajangmyeon in terms of taste and flavor.

Minhyuk once again slurped the noodles. He did not forget to eat up the remaining pieces of his fried egg together. There were also small pieces of meat in the flakes! It was always a fun and interesting activity to try and pick each meat before eating them one by one. Soon, he came to the last bit of the dish from his bowl.

When Minhyuk came back to his senses, the people around him were already in a buzz.

“My goodness! I have never tasted such a delicious dish in my life!!!”

“Hoo. I was very ignorant and naive! I can’t believe we just boiled our ramyeon noodles and seasoned them with salt!”

“How can this be... This is very delicious... Oh my god! I feel like I’m going to cry with how delicious this dish is! *Sob!*”

That was right. They just boil their ramyeon and season it with salt! So, for them, tasting this chapagetti was like opening the doors to a new world. After eating this delicious dish, the notifications rang for them.

[You have eaten a Chapagetti that has reached the Legendary Grade.]

[You can’t receive any duplicate buffs during the duration of the buff retention period.]

[Legendary Chapagetti.]

[Your farming efficiency will increase by 17%, attack and defense power by 39%, and natural recovery rate by 80% for 20 days.]

[Your skill cooldown will decrease by 15% for 20 days.]

[All of your skills’ level will increase by +1 for 20 days.]

[The Large-Serving Chapagetti has reached the legendary grade. The ‘no effects when shared’ penalty will be ignored.]

“...!”

“...!”

“...!”

“...!”

All of them were shocked. The people of Rocard Kingdom were not the only ones that heard a set of notifications.

[The favor that you have received from Deputy Commander Beth has reached the highest level. You have exceeded the set level.]

[He now dreams of becoming one of your people.]

[The favor that you have received from Knight Hayden has reached the highest level. You have exceeded the set level.]

[He now dreams of becoming one of your people.]

[The favor that you have received from Soldier Hecan has reached the highest level. You have exceeded the set level.]

[He now dreams of becoming one of your people.]

[The favor that you have received from Soldier Kaylin has reached the highest level. You have exceeded the set level.]

[He now dreams of becoming one of your people.]

The notifications rang for all 500 of them! All of them dreamt of becoming one of Minhyuk’s people! But, the notifications did not end there.

Chapter 399: The First God Rank Artifact

At that moment, another set of notifications rang for Minhyuk.

Ring!

The sudden appearance of a quest to save Queen Iris! The thing that Minhyuk was most curious about was the part that said 'King's Authority'. This was something that he had not heard of before.

However, one thing was for sure. Queen Iris' rescue was much more important than what was written on the notifications. After all, there was a high chance that Minhyuk would be able to strike a good deal with her once he released her from her brainwashing.

Minhyuk thought that it would be better for him to visit the Royal Palace first. Besides, he knew that everything would be alright, even if he left this place to Ali for a while.

The elites that had eaten the chapagetti were now burning with enthusiasm. After all, their attack had increased by 39%, while their rate of natural recovery increased by 80%. In fact, it was already safe to say that they had grown 1.5x stronger than they were before. So, he moved to his destination quickly.

Mercenary King Brod's legends were spread not only in Asgan Continent, but through all of the continents in the world. He was a man that had made plenty of achievements across plenty of continents.

Brod was a part of the Hybrid Race. To be exact, he was a half-breed. He was born between the love of a Hybrid and a human! The Hybrid Race had a longer lifespan than humans, and this year, Brod had turned 192 years old. Although he inherited the Hybrid Race's long lifespan, he did not inherit their talent for 'farming'.

Because he was a half-breed with a different nature and characteristic, this kingdom had always ignored and treated him badly. Especially when he did not have any talent for farming. This was the reason why he left the kingdom. Instead of farming, he used his sword to travel the world. He only came back after he became strong.

Even though Brod now had the power to conquer everything in the world, he came back to this kingdom for a reason. Some would say that perhaps it was for a retreat, but his main reason for returning was for 'Queen Iris'.

Mercenary King Brod and Queen Iris were born in the same year. When they were fifteen, the shabby and dirty Brod watched Princess Iris' journey through the kingdom. The people of the Hybrid Race that saw him immediately mocked and belittled him.

'How dare that half-breed look at the princess' face?!'

'Bastard?!'

'Can't he just drop dead?!'

Brod had lost his parents, he did not have the capability to support himself. That was why he was dressed so shabbily. The crowd went mad and tried to throw stones at him. But just when he was about to escape...

'What are you all doing?!' Princess Iris cried out.

That beautiful voice still rang clearly in Brod's memories.

'That child is also my subject. He is also a precious person!'

It was the first time. It was the first time that Brod had ever been called 'precious'. Even so, Brod had thought that the princess was just pretending in front of her people. But once night fell, the princess visited his barren and almost-collapsed hut with a sword in her hand.

'You don't have the talent for farming like the rest of the Hybrid Race, but you have the dexterity of a human and our long lifespan. Why don't you try to wield a sword?'

Brod was beyond thrilled. This girl was the only one that reached her hand out to a beggar like him.

'It's just because you pity me, right?'

'No.'

Princess Iris' words were firm and resolute.

'It's not just because. I heard that we were born at the same time. Besides, I knew from the moment that I saw you that we will be able to forge a deep and strong bond.'

'I don't know how to repay your grace...'

'Then, protect me with that sword. Promise me that you will become strong.'

'I promise.'

From what Brod heard, Princess Iris had the ability to see through people at a glance. So, he believed her. And from that point on, Brod held and swung a sword. To him, the princess also changed from being a princess to a friend. Eventually, Brod fell in love with her. However, he never showed it. Rumors started to circulate that the princess was Brod's woman. But it was never proven, especially since Brod left the kingdom to travel the world.

Out there, he swung his sword to the point that rumors about him cutting down an entire kingdom started spreading! As it turned out, that was a fact. There were also rumors about him cutting down 70,000-strong troops by himself! It was also true. Rumors about him becoming the king of the mercenaries all over the world also started circulating! And as usual, it was also true.

The Undefeated Mythical. The Strongest Swordsman. The Mercenary King. The God's Empire's Knight. These were a few among the countless titles that were attached to Brod's name. However, he came back one day. Back to the arms of Queen Iris.

When Brod came back, Queen Iris' was already on her slow descent to madness. Trapped by Vormon's brainwashing, she was slowly losing her sanity. Just a few days ago, they were notified of Vormon's death. However, this did not free her, instead, it eroded her sanity even more.

Back then, there was a short window where she regained her sanity. At that time, Queen Iris called, *'Sir Brod.'*

'Yes, Your Highness?'

'Please don't leave my side. And... And if I ever want to stain my Rocard Kingdom with chaos and destruction then... kill me.'

'...?!'

Brod looked at Queen Iris in shock. She continued to speak despite her trembling lips, *'You have to be the one to do it. Remember the first time we met? When I told you that we will be able to forge a deep and strong bond? When I met you, I knew that we would grow to love each other.'*

'...'

Brod had no words. All he could do was look silently at her.

'I love you... so much. And...'

Alas, her words ended there. She turned silent as she lost consciousness once again.

And now, she had gone crazy.

"Kyahahahahaha! Open the gates!!! Shouldn't we go and welcome the Undead Corps?! Huh?! My knight order commander, Brod!!! What are you doing?! Why aren't you cutting down the undead?! Hihihihhi!"

Brod knelt on one knee in front of the mad queen, Iris. He had his head bowed down, with his sword lying flat on the ground on his right side. He had maintained that posture for days on end. Queen Iris was a very powerful existence. If she went wild, then everyone inside Rocard Kingdom would die. Besides, even if she did not say it, Brod knew what she wanted to say in the end.

'Please protect the kingdom.'

Brod hated this kingdom, he only maintained civility for his lover. If Iris died, then he would disappear along with this kingdom. He glanced back for a moment. There, in a corner, was a box wrapped in cloth.

‘Brod. I heard that the outside world is filled with recipes that use our kingdom’s ingredients, as well as various delicious dishes. Is it true? I really want to try them!’

Brod had always told her tales about the outside world and she would always have a look of anticipation on her face. When she descended into madness, Brod went to the ‘God’s World’ to find a way to stop her brainwashing even for a moment. There were only a few that knew how to get to God’s World! And one of them was Brod!

And that box over there was something that he got from there. It was the ingredient for the ‘steak’ that she had been craving so much. The ingredient was very special. Imbued with God Athena’s power, this beef could exert a very shocking power. The ingredient was, in fact, so amazing that it could even clear away Vormon’s brainwashing that had devoured her sanity.

However, the ingredient was very sensitive. Brod had just arrived with the ingredient, but it was already releasing a foul and rotten stench.

‘I can’t even help you get a taste of the steak that you wanted to eat so much.’

Brod looked up at her with a bitter smile on his face. At that moment, Iris’ eyes widened in anger.

“Brod! Did you not hear what I ordered you to do?! Go and kill those undead! If you’re not going, then I’ll go there myself!”

Iris rose from her throne.

“You can’t go.”

If Iris went, then she would kill both the undead and her beloved subjects inside Rocard Kingdom. But she did not stop. So, Brod moved and blocked her path.

Shiiiiiiing—

The clear ring of the sword being pulled out of its sheath rang loudly in the room. This was the sword that cut more than a million enemies. The first sword that he owned, the sword that Iris handed to him. The sword had been stained countless times with blood as it cut down millions of his enemies, until it became a sword that held amazing power.

But this very same sword had turned into a sword that would cut her.

“Are you going to kill me?” Iris snorted. Not long after, she cackled, “Kyahahahaha! You’re going to kill me! Hihihihih! Go on, kill me. Brod!!!”

Brod only needed one move. Just a single sword strike, and he could cut her throat, but his hands could not move. He should have cut off her neck when she ordered for the gates to be opened, but he did not. He did not want to be the one to cut off her life. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he forced himself to hold his sword against her.

“I’ll be right behind you.”

Brod lifted his sword as high as he could. But at that moment...

Shwaaaaa—

...a strange scythe tied to a chain swooped in.

Claaang—

“Keheook!” A strange man groaned as he flew back from Brod’s powerful strike that slammed into the scythe.

“Please stop! I’m here to save the queen!” The man shouted loudly in between gasps after rolling on the ground.

‘Save the queen.’?

These words resonated with Brod’s heart. Brod quickly turned to look at the strange man and asked, “Who are you?”

The man hesitated for a moment but in the end, he replied, “I’m the Food God.”

Minhyuk looked at his hands holding Diablo’s Scythe. It was shaking badly after receiving a single hit from Brod. The impact from the powerful blow was something that Minhyuk had never experienced, ever.

There was also a reason why Minhyuk answered Brod’s question with ‘Food God’. By telling Brod that he had a ‘God’ class, he could possibly gain his trust. In fact, hearing his words put a dash of hope in Brod’s eyes.

“Did you just say that you’re going to save Her Highness?”

“Yes!”

Brod had heard somewhere that foreigners had special powers that allowed them to do things that they, locals, could not do themselves. Minhyuk’s words brought a small light of hope in Brod.

Then, another notification window appeared in front of Minhyuk.

Ring!

Final radiance of the setting sun.

This was the phenomenon when the sky would brighten imperceptibly for a brief moment of time, before the sun set completely and darkness took over. It could also mean the person's final burst of strength before dying. In other words, even if Minhyuk worked hard to cook and feed her, she would still die a few days later. She would only stand up once again to save her beloved kingdom.

‘This will be the quest’s ending...?’

Minhyuk might not be aware, but this quest was actually dependent on one's class. That was why the unexpected quest changed. It changed to suit the person taking the quest.

If he was a knight, he would be tasked to destroy the black staff hidden in the depths of Black Dragon Vormon's lair. If he was a mage, he would be tasked to enter Vormon's room and gain the recognition of Vormon's Guardian Knights and acquire a 'temporary antidote'.

The quest had a ton of variety in ways that it could be cleared. As a player whose class was related to cooking, Minhyuk was tasked to cook a dish and help Iris regain her sanity. However, even if the quest or the class changed, the result would remain the same. She would still die in the end.

“How is it?! Is there a way to save her?! Hey! Tell me if there's a way! Tell me if you can save her!!!”

Before he came here, Minhyuk had heard the whole story from Beth. Brod's continuous questions had made Minhyuk's head turn blank. Could he even tell him that he could just help her live for a short moment?

‘This is a scenario in Athenae where the queen is supposed to die.’

That might be the case but Minhyuk knew that a scenario in *Athenae* was just a scenario. In the end, the scenario could be created and altered by the players. The problem was that Minhyuk could not see an answer at this very moment. He did not have the time to solve this leisurely. Should he just take the set path and let her temporarily regain her consciousness?

Minhyuk worriedly answered Brod, “I can temporarily let her regain her consciousness.”

“Tem... porarily...?”

Brod's breath got stuck in his throat.

Perhaps he would be in much more pain than he was in now. He could tell that he would feel a much deeper and sharper pain in his heart even if he could see her, who had lost her mind to madness, come back to herself and regain her sanity to save her kingdom. But at that moment...

Thud—

“I'm begging you. Please save my lady!”

Mercenary King Brod knelt down on both knees. He even held his sword in both hands and presented it to Minhyuk.

“This, this is all I have. I will give you this, so please...”

This was Brod's sword that had cut millions of enemies. However, Minhyuk did not covet it. All he wanted to do was to help Brod. This was because he knew what a 'precious person' was. For Minhyuk, *Athenae* was not just a virtual world filled with people created with artificial intelligence.

This was a world where he could eat a lot of delicious food, build a lot of new relationships, and live a new and fulfilling life.

So for him, this place was another world.

Then, an unexpected set of notifications rang for Minhyuk.

[The power of the God of Death is embedded deeply in Mercenary King Brod's Sword.]

[Mercenary King Brod's Continent Destroyer Sword has reached the God Rank.]

[You can challenge the Fourth God Artifact Quest.]

[All of the three challengers before you have failed the quest.]

“...God Artifact?”

That was right. The sword that cut down millions of enemies, the very same sword that Brod had presented to him, was a God-rank sword. A God-rank artifact that had yet to appear in the world.

Chapter 400: The First God Rank Artifact

Kang Taehoon, Joy Co. Ltd.'s president, rushed straight to the Special Players Management Team when he saw the blinking red light on his monitor. When he arrived there, there were already several people inside. Just like what happened with President Kang Taehoon's screen, the important executives also had blinking red lights appear on their monitors.

All of them shared a single concern, that the representatives of America, China, and Russia were given the opportunity to challenge the God Artifact Quest, but none of them had succeeded. And now, Player Minhyuk from their own country had received the Fourth God Artifact Quest.

Originally, the Fourth God Artifact Quest should not have appeared at this point in time. According to the original script, after losing Queen Iris, Brod should have gone on a journey to challenge the realm of the Absolute Supreme NPCs. The scene where Brod handed his sword to someone else should not have appeared in this scenario.

Of course, it was also because saving Queen Iris was an impossible feat. In fact, it was safe to say that there was no such thing as saving her.

“There's no way that is possible.”

However, someone thought differently. Team Leader Park Minggyu turned to look at Kang Taehoon and said, “It was originally impossible. But if it's Player Minhyuk, then there's a way.”

“What?” Kang Taehoon asked in disbelief. Even the Production Team's team leader, Lee Suk-Hoon, looked at Team Leader Park in confusion.

“What are you talking about?”

“Player Minhyuk had received this power when he was still a novice. I can't believe that such a variable would play a big part here.”

“...Hmm? The power that he gained when he was still a novice? What are you talking about?”

Everyone believed that there was no way to save Iris right now. But Team Leader Park was telling them that a power that Player Minhyuk acquired when he was still a novice would be a viable method? Park Minggyu posted the skill information on the screen.

Special Benefit

“...No, no way!”

That was right. It was the Material Restoration skill. This was a ‘Special Benefit’ that Minhyuk had obtained from the Bandaging skill after his DEX had reached a high level.

Kang Taehoon was also aware that Mercenary King Brod had retrieved steak from God’s World lying around in the room. However, the following notification rang for Player Minhyuk:

[If Player Minhyuk accepts Brod’s quests and fails, the Kingdom Building Quest will be terminated and he will receive the death penalty.]

Minhyuk had to make his choice now. He could either choose the safe path where he would only need to save Queen Iris and let her live for a short while, or choose the dangerous path where he would need to challenge the first God-rank artifact.

“Please...”

Kang Taehoon desperately looked at the monitor. Did he want him to fail? Would the balance break? No, the balance being broken by the appearance of a God Artifact was not something that anyone could just easily achieve. Only those that have received recognition, awakened the Pinnacle, and won the God Artifact could do so.

The three previous challengers were also prominent figures in their own countries. The challenger from America was one of the Summit Five, and was also the country’s representative. But even so, the fact remained that he failed. However, there was a small part of Taehoon that wished that Minhyuk would succeed. If that happened then...

.

‘Player Minhyuk... You will definitely bring all the hype and craze in Athenae: World War.’

And Minhyuk, who was being shown on the monitor, looked like he was very conflicted.

A complete failure in the Kingdom Building Quest and a death penalty. For Minhyuk, who had finally reached a considerably high level, a death penalty was something that he could not ignore. If that happened, then everything that they had done here in Rocard Kingdom would all amount to nothing.

Seeing his indecision, Brod smiled bitterly and said, “I’m sorry.”

Brod found himself acting like a spoiled and selfish child. After, it did not matter who it was, anyone in his position would do the same thing. However, he knew that foreigners were different from them and would have to face a lot more risks. Brod believed that the boy in front of him would not take those risks to save her. So, even if she could survive for a short while, Brod felt like he should already be happy with that.

Just then, Minhyuk said, “Please stand up, Sir Brod.”

“...”

Brod felt the solemnity and dignity in the boy's voice. He knew that he had already made his decision. In fact, with Minhyuk's high CHA stat and the attitude that he had learned from his father, Minhyuk's dignity and aura could rival that of a country's king.

Brod slowly rose to his feet as he looked at the man in front of him. The eyes of the man in front of him were sparkling and bright, his expression filled with a sense of determination. Then, the man said, “I will do my very best to save Queen Iris.”

“...!”

The request was brought about by Brod's own selfishness. For a moment, he wondered if Minhyuk accepted him. But perhaps...

“Do you want this sword?”

“Of course,” Minhyuk grinned widely as he answered. However, Brod knew that it was not the only reason why he chose to help him.

“Besides, if I save her, I will be able to see a beautiful picture of you and Queen Iris standing together. I think that would be a very nice thing to see.”

Brod felt his heart thump at this foreigner's reckless challenge. He thought, *‘This foreigner is different from the others. He doesn't think less of this world, and is willing to take risks for me and Iris.’*

Brod's favorable impression of Minhyuk shot through the roof.

As for the reason why Minhyuk accepted the quest... First, it was because of Brod and Iris. Even if he failed, he was sure that he would not harbor any regrets. After all, he would definitely do his best. Besides, even if he did not get the rewards, he would still be able to make a favorable impression on Brod.

Minhyuk was by no means a reckless person. He had most definitely calculated his chances of success. The truth was there were no hints available in the quest and in this place. So, Minhyuk tried to use his ‘Ingredient Tracking’ skill before accepting the quest. Alas, the system notification that returned to him was like this:

[You can't use any skill before accepting or rejecting the quest.]

In other words, the system wanted him to bear the risk of the God Rank Artifact quest. That was when Minhyuk made the decision that it was alright to fail.

“But, how...?”

Brod admired Minhyuk's bravery and courage to take the risk. Still, after he accepted it, Brod could not help but worry about the boy.

‘How in the world will he do it?’

Only then did Minhyuk use his Ingredient Tracking skill.

‘This is all that I can do right now.’

Minhyuk had to try and use it, even if there was only a small chance of bringing in results. His current Ingredient Tracking skill had a ten kilometer radius of effect. And the setting that he used was ‘can overcome any brainwashing’. Then, the tracking started.

[Searching for the ingredients in a 10-km radius.]

[Successfully searched for the ingredients.]

[Athenae’s Beef Tenderloin is an ingredient known to overcome any curse.]

[Suggested Menu: Filet Mignon.]?

But then, another set of notifications rang for him.

[Ingredients that came from God’s World, especially the beef tenderloin, will spoil and get rotten the moment it leaves the realm of God’s World.]

[You will not be able to make a Filet Mignon. The current ingredient is spoiled and cannot be eaten. It will cause a stomachache, abnormal status, and plenty of other abnormalities.]

“...?!”

Minhyuk looked at the notifications in doubt before looking at the direction where the Ingredient Tracking Skill was pointing at. The arrow was pointing behind Brod at a luxurious box with intricate designs.

“No way...!”

Minhyuk rushed to open the box. What greeted him was a foul stench.

“Urk!” Minhyuk groaned as he hurriedly pinched his nose.

Brod smiled bitterly and said, “That’s already spoiled. It seems like any ingredients that came from God’s World will spoil and turn rotten the moment they are brought down to the human realm.”

Brod had also been grasping at straws previously. He wondered, ‘*Is there really no way?*’ as he looked at Iris bitterly.

But at that moment...

“There’s a way.”

...a bright smile bloomed on Minhyuk’s face.

“Material Restoration.”

Then, a bright light stretched out of Minhyuk’s fingertips and covered the black, rotten tenderloin. When the light disappeared, Brod saw that the black color that covered the ingredient had disappeared. It even looked fresh, as if the meat was just freshly procured from the cow.

“H... how...?!”

It was only natural for Brod to feel shocked at the miraculous sight. Meanwhile, the meat’s information appeared in Minhyuk’s head.

? Helps you recover from brainwashing and any other abnormal condition.

? Can allow you to overcome your limits and help you grow a step further.

? You have to choose the steak's doneness from rare, medium rare, medium, medium well-done, well-done. Grilling this beef will be much more difficult than grilling regular steaks.

If Minhyuk succeeded in cooking this ingredient, the one that would eat the dish would be able to rise above their limits and overcome their brainwashing, and other abnormal conditions. And since it was a God-grade ingredient, the one that would succeed in cooking this ingredient would receive a considerable amount of rewards.

'God's Ingredient.'

Minhyuk shuddered at the thought. Then, he began his preparations for cooking. According to the ingredient information, grilling this tenderloin would be much more difficult than grilling ordinary steaks. If he failed, then he would lose everything. But if he succeeded then...

'I will be able to get Rocard Kingdom, its queen, Brod, and a God-rank sword.'

Global community sites.

With *Athenae*: World War just around the corner, countless opinions were brewing all over the world.

[America is sure to win *Athenae*: World War, right? After all, they are the strongest candidates in the world.]

[There's no denying that. But our very own China is not a pushover either. After all, Mei Wei will be competing. Mei Wei's excellent buff abilities and stunning attacking skills will be able to catch two birds in one stone. She will definitely be able to play a huge role during the team matches.]

[The fact that China is the strongest favorite for the championship will not change.]

[What about Japan?]

[Japan has Kentaro, one of the Summit Five-level players. I think they'll be able to win at least one gold medal. But I think their performance will be a bit disappointing for a country that's a favorite to win the championship.]

[Then, how about Korea...?]

[The truth is, everyone expects Korea to be very active this time. After all, they have Food God Minhyuk with them.]

[If he shows the same power that he displayed when they hunted Vormon, then we can expect him to do a very good job. He might even be able to win at least one or two gold medals.]

[But *Athenae*: World War is not an individual competition. In the end, their overall ranking will be determined by the total number of medals that they will win.]

[From what I heard, Korea's Mage Ali's level has fallen and he was last seen working hard in the novice hunting grounds. They don't have any other players aside from the Food God.]

[And no matter how strong a player the Food God is, it doesn't make sense for him to win a gold medal in every category that he will participate in.]

Sadly, this was the truth. It was nigh impossible for an individual to win gold medals for all of the categories that they would participate in.

[Unless they have variables in hand, Korea won't be able to win this competition. And I don't think they have any huge variables on hand.]

[If we're talking about variables, I wonder what variable is huge enough to catapult Korea into winning.]

In the middle of their heated discussions, shocking notifications rang for all of them at the same time.

[A player that has created something that transcends the Human Realm has been born for the second time in Athenae.]

[This message resonates loudly throughout the entire continent.]

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

The global community sites started another bout of heated discussions.

[Who is it? Is it America's Alexander? Or maybe it's France's Jean-Paul?]

[Wow. I don't know who it is, but they're amazing for sure. Someone that has reached the God-rank has appeared for the second time, that's really amazing.]

[They're either from America or Russia. There's no way that someone from Korea will ever reach that level.]

[Nope. They'll probably reach that level once Athenae has reached the end of its service. Maybe around 50 years from now? Fufufufufu.]

However, what they did not know was that the two instances announced to the world about someone reaching the God-rank, were all achieved by a Korean. That was right, it was Minhyuk, who after cooking all by himself, was now full and satiated.

Kggghhhhk~