

## Gourmet 51

### Chapter 51: A Dangerous Companion

The weather in Athenae was still very cold. Minhyuk, Lucia, and the coachman were all sitting in front of the carriage, around a pot of boiling water that Minhyuk had taken out of his inventory.

"Ack?! I think you've added too much water? There's too much water!" Lucia shouted urgently.

Minhyuk and Lucia had finished introducing themselves and were now a bit closer. They could even be considered acquaintances. When Minhyuk heard her words, he looked at her seriously and said, "You know that there's a much easier and simpler way to deal with this, right?"

"I know, just simply take out some water..."

"Just add another bag of ramyeon!"

Lucia was both shocked and amazed. She rubbed her chin in thought, pondering deeply and seriously about the proposal. She said, "It really is easier."

Lucia suddenly scratched her head and thought, "Why am I convinced by this logic?" For some reason, it seemed like she could easily relate with Minhyuk.

Minhyuk opened another bag of ramyeon noodles. Lucia had quite a lot of ramyeon with her. She had received this as a reward for the hidden quest that she did before and found it to be ridiculous. From what Minhyuk heard, the ramyeon came from Isbin Village, so he had high expectations for it. In fact, Minhyuk saw that it was made from Sun's Wheat when he checked it earlier. Hidden quests would usually give out absurd rewards like that. This might just be an insignificant reward for Lucia, but for Minhyuk, receiving such a reward would have definitely made him happy.

'I also thought of making ramyeon out of Sun's Wheat before!'

Minhyuk wanted to taste real instant ramyeon, not the 'healthy ramyeon', or the 'I added onions for the calories~' type of ramyeon. The noodles of this one were made out of Sun's Wheat, and was labeled as instant. It even had 'Spicy Jin Ramen' as its name on the bag.

When Lucia looked at Minhyuk humming happily, she also seemed to feel better. She thought, 'It's strangely relaxing...'. For some reason, she also felt that she had received some sort of notification.

[You have received Minhyuk's favor.]

That was just how much Minhyuk had become friendly with Lucia! Minhyuk quickly placed the noodles inside the boiling pot, before stirring skillfully to cook the ramyeon well. He then brought out some cold rice and kimchi from his Food Storage Inventory.

"We should definitely put cold rice in the hot soup...!"

"We'll never know if one of us will die while eating!"

"Hehehe!"

"Hohohoho!"

"Didn't the two of you just meet in the carriage today?"

"Yeah."

"That's correct."

"It seems like the two of you are very close," the coachman said, smiling at them.

After a while, the ramyeon was finally cooked perfectly. Minhyuk quickly turned off the fire. Ramyeon was a delicious meal that was best eaten when one was hungry. It was the perfect thing to eat at one in the morning, whenever one was at the beach, or in the valley to play in the water.

Minhyuk had heard plenty of stories from General during his stay in the army. He had told him that he always brought a thermos filled with ramyeon whenever he was assigned to guard duty, telling his juniors, 'Hey, watch over that side well!'. From what he shared, ramyeon still tasted delicious despite being soggy and a bit cold.

Right now, the weather was cold enough that anyone would feel their exposed hands start to freeze from the wind. Furthermore, Minhyuk was very hungry. Of course, he had finished eating his rest-area potatoes and potato pancakes, but then again, he was someone who was always hungry. Minhyuk quickly stretched his chopsticks towards the steaming hot pot of ramyeon and grabbed a bunch of noodles to transfer to his own bowl. Then, he quickly grabbed a mouthful of the noodles, blew on it to cool it down a bit, and then put it in his mouth.

"Sluuuuuuuuuuurp!"

...Minhyuk inhaled the noodles. He exclaimed, "Kyaa! It's delicious...!"

In awe, he lifted the entire pot to pour some soup in his bowl. Then, he slurped another mouthful of noodles, before lifting his bowl and gulping some soup down.

"Kgghk!" Minhyuk shouted as the chill in his body started to melt away. Just as he expected, warm and spicy ramyeon was more delicious when eaten outside. After Minhyuk ate the noodles and drank the soup, he picked up some kimchi and placed it in his mouth.

Crunch, crunch—

Lucia saw him eat and truly thought that kimchi and ramyeon was the perfect match. Watching him eat suddenly gave rise to a competitive desire in her!

'I cannot lose to him!'

"Sluuuuuuuuuuurp!"

So, Lucia used the lid of the pot and grabbed a mouthful of noodles, before eating it just like that. She said, "When I was a kid, I used to eat cup noodles with the lid half-folded."

"Nice! You already know how to eat it since you were a kid!"

"I'm just that kind of girl," Lucia said with a grin. Then, she looked at Minhyuk in curiosity before asking, "You're Level 79, right? Why are you headed to Emperor's City?"

"Because of the tournament."

"The tournament?" Lucia asked in surprise. It seemed like the two of them had the same purpose for going there. Then, a bit more carefully, she asked him again, "Do you not know who I am?"

"Aren't you Lucia?"

"...No, not like that."

Her face can be seen on every newspapers these days. It was the reason why she kept on wearing a mask, so she could continue to be discreet. However, Minhyuk smiled as if that was not related to what they were doing. He said, "It will taste better if you set aside some noodles before adding in the rice."

'H... he's not the least bit interested...'

Lucia was a bit embarrassed. After all, people have been paying a huge amount of attention to her right now! Then, she said, "I'm going to participate in the tournament too."

"Ah. Is that so? Uh-huh," Minhyuk answered. His words sounded a bit perfunctory as he took a huge mouthful of the rice that he mixed with his soup.

"Crunch, crunch!"

Minhyuk even added some kimchi in his bowl. Then, he suddenly exclaimed, "Lu, Lucia...!"

"Why?" Lucia asked. She was a little disappointed since he did not recognize her.

"It's really really delicious, what should I do...? I want to run away with this pot!"

"P... please eat well!" Lucia answered. Then, she laughed. Lucia did not know him so she did not need to hide herself. In fact, she felt more comfortable and relaxed right now. Then she asked, "Ah, that's right, what's your class?"

Minhyuk thought a while before answering her. He thought, 'I think I'm more of a chef, right?' before answering, "I'm a chef."

"Ah. So, that's why you're going to the tournament. I'm a thief, by the way."

The tournament that would be held in the Imperial Palace was divided into combat class competitions and production class competitions.

'I thought he had a combat class because of the sword on his waist,' Lucia thought, believing that she did not need to fight him in the tournament.

"Ack, leave some for me too!" Lucia shouted as she hurriedly stretched out her spoon towards the pot. It seemed like the bottom could be seen already.

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[Ack, leave some for me too!]

"Sluuuuuuuuuurp!"

Lee Minhwa slurped the noodles of her Shrimp Tantanmen Cup Ramen as she continued to concentrate on her monitor. She even took a sip of the spicy soup and said, "Hehe... I feel alive."

Then, Lee Minhwa looked back at the monitor and glared at Lucia, feeling a bit sad for Minhyuk. She thought, 'Don't laugh!'. However, she suddenly paused and caught herself, 'Lee Minhwa. What's wrong with you?'

Lee Minhwa was, after all, an employee working under the Special Players Management Team, tasked to monitor these special players. However, for some reason, she felt uncomfortable watching the two people on her screen having a pleasant conversation. She quickly inhaled the last of her cup

ramyeon?and mumbled, "Let's focus on our work, work!" This was the most important thing right now.

"Player Minhyuk will also participate in the tournament... And he's going with the best candidate for the champion, Lucia."

Whether it was through SNS or the TV, Lucia's name was widely known. It was not that long ago when a video clip circulated on Ztube, of her hunting a Level 120 Zanhak monster when she was just Level 70. The video spread widely both domestically and globally, garnering millions of views and favorable responses. Almost everyone believed that Lucia would emerge as the champion of this tournament. They were all looking forward to this competition because of her. However, Lee Minhwa was different. She did not believe that to be the case.

'I didn't expect that Player Minhyuk would participate in the tournament... What's his reason? Is it because... he just wants to eat the food in the convenience store?' Lee Minhwa thought, giggling to herself.

'Hey! No way, right? No matter how much he likes to eat, he will not participate in the tournament purely because of that, right?' Lee Minhwa said, shaking the silly thoughts away from her head.

After waiting for a while, Lee Minhwa realized that Team Leader Park had not yet arrived. She thought, 'The meeting must have dragged on longer than we thought.'

Team Leader Park was currently attending an important meeting regarding the tournament. In fact, the meeting was held so they could discuss matters related to the tournament, including various stories and lore. Then...

Click—

The door opened to reveal a grimacing Team Leader Park. Seeing the scene on Lee Minhwa's monitor, he said, "Is it really just a coincidence?"

"Why, what's wrong?"

"You know about the monsters that will appear in this tournament, right?"

"Ah, yes. I know. A Level 90 Velto, a Level 100 Brackan, as well as a Level 110 Seductive Siren. Oh, and there's also a named monster for this event, right?"

"Yes. The event's named monster."

Today was actually the day when the event-specific named monster would be revealed to the operators of the game. Everyone was quite interested to know what monster would come out. They had placed stronger monsters in the tournament to find which among the players were talented. The really talented players would definitely be able to hunt monsters that were higher level than them. This was something that could be done individually, or as a team. And the final named monster...

"The final named monster this time was added to the roster, but it's not for the players to hunt."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. However, I'm pretty sure that any player that dares to challenge it will be well-received by the public. Besides, did you know?"

Lee Minhwa nodded along and asked, "Was it set by the God of?Athenae?"

Team Leader Park nodded. The God of?Athenae?was not just a simple god inside the world of?Athenae. It was also the supercomputer AI that controlled and oversaw the entire?Athenae?worldview. The God of Athenae was involved in most things, including game settings and setting up stories and quests.

"But, why do you look so anxious if that's the case?"

"The boss monster that the God of?Athenae?set this time is one of the two guardian deities of the Eivelis Empire."

Lee Minhwa recalled the facts about the guardian deities of the Eivelis Empire. One of them was the Phoenix. It was a Level 350 named monster that could easily wipe out the players just by using its wide-range, fire-magic 'Fire Feather'. In other words, the monster was ridiculously powerful.

Then, there was the second guardian deity. Lee Minhwa closed her eyes as she tried to remember the information about the second deity. What she recalled made her eyes widen in shock. She said, "I, Impossible...!"

"Yeah, that impossible thing you're thinking of is correct."

"I, it's the?Minotaurus?!"

Team Leader Park nodded.

"But, isn't the Minotaurus at around Level 140?!"

"That's what I told you. A monster with a huge level gap with the players."

"But, that huge gap means that the players will be easily slaughtered. I can already tell that half of them will be wiped out..."

"From what I heard, the Minotaurus would not be set up as a field mob inside the tournament."

"Ah..."

"The people will love it if a Level 80 player decides to challenge a monster that's almost twice as powerful as they are. They will go wild. Though, I personally believe that Lucia won't challenge it," Team Leader Park said, and Lee Minhwa nodded in agreement.

The two of them had observed Lucia for a long time, and found out that she was a calm player. She would always remain cool in her fights and would only fight opponents that she was confident in winning against. Lucia was the type of person who would never fight a losing battle. That was the main reason why they both agreed that she would not challenge the Minotaurus.

"However, I'm sure that a different player will definitely challenge it," Team Leader Park said, causing Lee Minhwa to feel a bad premonition as she jerked her head back towards the monitor.

"Food God..."

"Yeah. Probably, this competition..." Team Leader Park said, eyes suddenly narrowing as he watched Minhyuk patting his stomach with a happy smile on his face after eating all of his food. He continued to say, "...will probably be in the hands of that player alone."

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The carriage continued on its way towards the Imperial Palace. Whenever the carriage stopped for a break, Minhyuk would always jump up and go out in the field. This time was no different. He said, "I'll be back!"

"Don't go too far!" The coachman shouted a reminder.

As for Lucia, she had logged out of the game to finish some work in reality. If the player logged out while riding on a paid carriage, their character would continue 'moving' with the carriage even if they logged out. Minhyuk found a mushroom on a tree not too far away from them.

(Brad Mushroom)

Ingredient Grade: E

Special Abilities: None

Description: A commonly grown Brad Mushroom. It has a similar taste to shiitake mushrooms.

Minhyuk chuckled as he reached his hands out to pick the mushrooms. It would be extremely difficult to pick these mushrooms if the player did not have a high DEX, and if they did not learn the Novice Farming Skill. Just like when he tried digging the sweet potatoes for the first time, his hoe was not able to dig in the ground. However, Minhyuk was now someone who could easily get these mushrooms.

[You have acquired a Brad Mushroom.]

[Due to the effects of Novice Farming, you have acquired a Well-grown Brad Mushroom.]

Minhyuk was a bit surprised. Currently, his Novice Farming skill was at Level 9 and he would soon reach mastery at Level 10. Once he reached the level of mastery, he could immediately achieve the next level.

(Well-grown Brad Mushroom)

Ingredient Grade: D

Special Abilities: It's good for your STM.

Description: A well-grown Brad Mushroom that grew up out of a hundred mushrooms. Maybe it will take effect as soon as you eat it?

Nothing important was really written but Minhyuk still laughed happily. He said, "It definitely tastes better!" before laughing happily. Just then...

"Ugh, aaaaaaaack!" The coachman shrieked not too far away from him.

## Chapter 52: A Dangerous Companion

Baran, the coachman, trembled in fear as he watched the incoming monsters narrow the distance between them. The monsters that appeared wore shabby armor, carrying a shield in one hand, a rusted and chipped sword on the other, their long, snake-like tongue slithering from their mouths. These monsters were none other than the Level 90 Lizard Men.

"Kikikik!"

"Kikikik!"

"O, of all the times to appear, they chose to appear today..."

The cases of Lizard Men appearing in this area were usually infrequent. It was so rare that the people in town compared them to a bolt out of the blue. However, they just happened to appear now of all times...!

'That woman named Lucia is not here right now, and that young man...'

'Wasn't he just a chef?'

"Hihihing!" The white horse that pulled their carriage neighed loudly in fear, feet stomping the ground to hint anyone close by that there was danger. Then, the young man suddenly came out of the thicket. Baran quickly gestured to the young man.

'Run away, now!'

Baran was very fond of this young man. Most of the foreigners that rode his carriage were either rude, or thoughtless. Although he was a part of the game setting, in this world, Baran had lost his wife and child a few years ago. That was also the reason why Baran had always felt like he was seeing his son whenever he came across young men out from the streets.

The same could be said for the young man that rode his carriage. There was also the fact that the young man always smiled brightly and happily at him. Although he knew that the foreigners would come back to life after dying in this world, Baran still hoped that no harm would come to the boy. Besides, no foreigner would willingly sacrifice themselves for him. However, contrary to his expectations, the young man pulled the sword out from his waist.

Shiiiiing!

"I told you to run away! I'll draw their attention, so run!" Baran shouted. Still, the man rushed forward. And...

Swoosh!

Stab!

"Kikikiik?!"

A dark figure flashed in front of one of the Lizard Men, stabbing it straight through its chest.

Flutter!

It slowly turned to ashes and disappeared as if it had not existed. Lucia had somehow already come out of the carriage and pulled up her mask, showing only her big and wide eyes.

Shiiing—

Lucia took out the other dagger that she kept on the other side of the waist, before saying, "Mr. Coachman, Minhyuk, it's better for you to stay still since it's dangerous."

"B, but... these guys are Level 90. There are three of them too..." Baran stammered. Before he could even finish his words...

Dash!

...Lucia was already up in the air. One of the Lizard Men stabbed its sword towards Lucia aiming for her chest.

Stab!

But then...

Poof!

...Lucia's body scattered in smoke. It seemed like what was struck was just a piece of wood covered with an illusion of her image. Then, Lucia's hands suddenly appeared from the Lizard Man's shadow. She swiped her dagger and cut off the Lizard Man's legs.

Flutter!

Another Lizard Man turned into ashes as Lucia disappeared into the shadows once again. Then, her dagger appeared from one of the remaining Lizard Men's shadows. She stabbed the Lizard Man's vital points that were only visible to her, which were its throat, chest, flank and thighs.

[You have dealt a critical hit.]

[You have dealt a critical hit.]

[...critical hit.]

Three out of four of her stabs were fatal, resulting in the Lizard Man's death. Lucia did not miss the opportunity as she rushed towards the last Lizard Man, stabbing it in the neck with her dagger.

Stab!

Spurt!

Lucia pulled out her dagger and let out a deep exhale.

"Phew, are you alright?"

Flop!

Baran's legs softened as he fell down on his butt. Meanwhile, Minhyuk looked at them blankly from a bit further away. Seeing his gaze, Lucia felt a bit awkward. So, she raised her fingers to her face and made a V-sign and asked, "Was I cool?"

"Ooooooh—" Minhyuk shouted as she ran towards them.

Startled, Lucia took a step back. However, it seemed like Minhyuk was not looking at her, but at something at the foot of the tree behind her. He ran straight towards it, reaching out for the



mushrooms growing at its roots. Minhyuk said, "There's a mushroom here too! Wow! This one tastes like enoki mushrooms!"

"Was I not cool?!" Lucia asked in disappointment, her shoulders dropping. She looked like she wanted to receive his praise.

"Ah~ You're really cool, I'm shocked and?totally?in awe. I will kneel down in admiration~" Minhyuk said in a completed disinterested tone.

Lucia grinned and thought, 'He's really interesting...'. Then she said, "You tried to fight even though you're a chef?"

"I can fight well," Minhyuk said. Lucia just chuckled. She knew that he was very close to the coachman, so she had assumed that Minhyuk tried to take a huge risk for the NPC. But to Lucia, it just sounded like a joke.

'It's not good to get close to NPCs like that,' She thought. Lucia felt that it was better for him to keep his distance. What would he even get for sacrificing himself for them?

'Well, that's also his charm?'

In fact, Lucia firmly believed that with the limitations of a chef, Minhyuk's power was only similar to a Level 50 warrior.

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The carriage was almost arriving at the Imperial Palace. Baran entered the carriage only to see Minhyuk mixing his bowl diligently. It was the?bibimbap that Minhyuk had made from the vegetables and mushrooms that he had picked on their way. Baran's drool dripped down from the smell of the fragrant sesame oil. Even Lucia was biting her spoon and grabbing her belly in hunger. Both of them gulped their saliva down.

"Alright. This one's for Miss Lucia, and this one's for Mister Coachman."

"Give me a bit more."

"No. You'll gain weight."

"...We don't gain weight here, right? Besides, I can afford to gain some weight, I'm skinny."

"No, no. I'm really worried about Lucia, that's why I can't give you any more," Minhyuk said. Of course it was just Minhyuk's lie.

"Then, why do you have ten fried eggs in your bowl? We should share equally!"

"It's because I'm fat. Hooray for being fat!" Minhyuk said, swaying his shoulders to a beat. Lucia shook her head in defeat.

Right next to Minhyuk's bowl of?bibimbap?was a bowl of dried radish stem. He bought this before he left the village. There was also some dried radish stem soup, made with soybean paste next to it. Dried radish stem soup with soybean paste was the perfect partner for?bibimbap.

Minhyuk quickly scooped a big spoonful of?bibimbap?and put it in his mouth. The taste was not too salty nor too bland, just perfect. The?bibimbap?looked quite good with the red chili paste and

sesame oil mixed perfectly with the rice. The savory aroma and flavor of the sesame oil greeted Minhyuk's senses, whetting his appetite.

Then, the spicy flavor of the red chili paste spread slowly in his mouth creating a beautiful harmony with the various flavors of the vegetables, eggs and rice mixed in his rice. A sip of soup beside him could easily relieve his throat of the dryness and greasiness of the food.

While they ate?bibimbap, Baran commented, "Boy, not only do you love eating, you're also really good at cooking!"

"Thank you very much!"

"By any chance, do you know about the Barras Kingdom?"

"Barras Kingdom..." Lucia mumbled when she heard Baran's words.

"What kind of place is it?"

"It's a kingdom of production classes. Places like Blacksmith Tower, Chef Tower, Farmer Tower and even Sculptor Tower are there."

"Oho."

"And..." Lucia said, grinning at Minhyuk. "...It's a place filled with delicious things."

Minhyuk was so shocked that his spoon stopped moving.

"It's a given. After all, that place is filled with chefs. From what I heard, they also give out a lot of food quests in the kingdom. So, plenty of chefs go there to get plenty of ingredients."

"Wow... That's practically heaven on earth," Minhyuk said.

Then, Baran continued, "There's this blacksmith that I used to work with living there, his name is Ron."

Baran started talking about a blacksmith. But Minhyuk just ate his?bibimbap, not interested in a blacksmith.

"I heard that Ron provides special ingredients that are otherwise very hard to get."

Lucia was shocked. She thought,?'Q, quest...!'.?The most surprising thing was that it was not a simple quest, but a quest with special rewards.

"Ooooooh!" Minhyuk shouted, showing great interest immediately.

"Why don't you go there and meet with Ron?"

[Linked Quest: Meet the Blacksmith Ron.]

Rank:~D

Requirements: Mastery of Cooking Skills, Baran's favorability.

Rewards: 5,000 EXP

Penalty for Failure: None.

Description: Baran recommended this quest to you after hearing news about his colleague, Ron, a blacksmith.

"Yes, I'll go and meet with him."

"The Barras Kingdom is not that far from the Emperor's City, so you will get there quickly."

"Yes!" Minhyuk answered. He smiled happily after receiving the quest while thinking, "What kind of ingredients will it be? Chicken? Beef? Pork? Or... don't tell me... Duck?!"

He was already picturing the various ingredients in his head. Meanwhile...

"Why don't I have a quest too? Mister Coachman, I was the one who saved you, you know?"

"He's a weak chef but he still risked his life for me."

"I'm a fragile woman too."

"...You should have some conscience."

Eventually, the carriage arrived in Emperor's City.

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Minhyuk went back to munching on sweet potatoes. Lucia looked at him and hesitated before asking, "Are we... Are we going to meet again?"

Chew, chew. "Maybe?"

"You really have no interest in me at all, even until the very end."

"Yes?" Minhyuk asked. He had not heard her well since she talked in a small voice. He tried asking her again, but Lucia just shook her head and smiled bitterly.

"It's nothing. Let's add each other as friends?"

"Sure. Let's do that."

[Lucia is asking to add you as a friend.]

[Yes?/No]

"Yes," Minhyuk said, nodding his head as he looked at Lucia's information in his Friend Window.

[Lucia]

Lucia's information did not show her class or level. There was an option where players could hide their classes and levels by disabling them in the settings. Minhyuk had also disabled this part in his settings.

"See you next time," Lucia said, turning around and walking towards the city. Minhyuk looked at her for a while, before logging out of the game. However, Lucia suddenly stopped walking and turned back to look at him.

"Tsk...!" Lucia clicked her tongue, her expression suddenly filled with regret.

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Radem was an NPC and a member of the Phoenix Knight Order. He was personally appointed by the empress to oversee and manage the tournament's preliminary rounds. Right now, his face was filled with disbelief as he said, "Lucia. This foreigner, what in the world...!"

Radem was quite shocked at the report that he received. There were three gates set up for the preliminary rounds. Anyone who could pass through all three gates within thirty minutes would pass the preliminary rounds. The preliminary round that they had set this time was intricate and difficult so they could unearth strong and talented foreigners. However, right now, Lucia was breaking through all the gates at a ridiculous pace.

"14 minutes and 31 seconds?"

Their estimated time of completion for the fastest player was only around 17 minutes. However, Lucia had surpassed that time easily. She quickly disappeared after confirming her advancement to the finals.

"Ho... it seems like that's all I can really say."

However, Radem still thought, 'Let's see if I could recommend her to the Phoenix Knight Order.'

This was also the reason why he, a member of the Phoenix Knight Order, was sent here. They wanted to scout and raise talented foreigners to join their ranks.

"Hiyaa, how can he... Wow..."

Radem was still watching Lucia's battle videos through a magic crystal ball when a sudden shout of exclamation rang in the office. Then, Hamel opened the door and rushed in. Hamel was the one in charge of escorting every single foreigner that joined the tournament. He was also in charge of observing them and giving them scores.

"A... another special foreigner has appeared!"

Radem has already told Hamel in advance to report to him if there were any special foreigners that appeared in the tournament. It was necessary so they could raise plenty of talents in the palace.

"...Is that so? What's his record?"

However, he still looked uninterested as he continued to watch Lucia's videos.

"29 minutes and 57 seconds."

Radem frowned when he heard his words. He said, "Are you kidding me?! 29 minutes and 57 seconds?! He just barely managed to get in, and you're saying he's a special foreigner?!"

"Yes, he's a special foreigner," Hamel said as he nodded furiously, before continuing, "He killed an Arcus in two hits."

"...What?!" Radem asked, standing up in shock, "What did you say? Explain it to me quickly."

Radem could not believe Halem's words. Arcus were monsters at Level 80, but their power and strength were far higher than their levels. Hamel quickly activated the magic crystal ball that he had brought.

[Next, please.]

The images in the video started to appear. A player appeared in the crystal ball, a paper cup in his hand. The player kept on sipping the cup when he suddenly screamed out.

[Aaaaack!]

[What's wrong? Are there any problems?]

Hamel asked him urgently.

[I drank all of my sweet potato latte... Hnngh!]

The man fell on his knees as if he had lost his strength. Seeing this, Radem looked at Hamel suspiciously. Hamel had no choice but to defend himself. He said, "He really is a special foreigner!"

"..."

"Sigh, this is giving me a headache," Radem said, supporting his forehead with his hand.

"He's really special that he's even making my head hurt this much, Hamel... P... please keep on watching. Do you think I would just say this just because?"

"...Hmm," Radem hummed and nodded. He knew that Hamel was not someone who would lie, so he was curious about what he had really witnessed.

#### Chapter 53: Something That Should Never Be Done

An hour ago.

Minhyuk was smiling happily. Despite the cold weather, the sweet potato latte in his hands was keeping him warm. The first thing that he did the moment he went back inside the game was to make sweet potato latte with his remaining sweet potatoes. Sweet potato lattes were warm, sweet and flavorful. Anyone could buy this delicious drink at cafes for only 4,000-5,000 won.

"Hehe, I should definitely save some for later," Minhyuk said. He had used all of his remaining sweet potatoes for the drink. He even added a bit of the golden sweet potato to make this latte, so he wanted to savor it longer.

"Hoo, hoo," Minhyuk blew into the sweet potato latte in his disposable cup as he walked towards the place where the preliminaries were being held. He easily finished his first cup before refilling. Then, his second cup. Then, his third.

"Ah, it's so delicious~"

Minhyuk hummed happily as he stood patiently in line and waited for his turn. He was content to have his sweet potato latte. One of the female players standing behind him was quite shocked to watch him drink. She thought, "My god... He kept on refilling and drinking that hot drink every 30 seconds!"

That was when she heard Minhyuk murmur, "Since I'm saving some for later, it doesn't feel as satisfying now... But, if I want to savor it longer, then I have to be thrifty."

"...!"

Hearing his words, the woman could not help but turn around and said to her friend standing behind her, "The man in front of me is so weird. He already drank around twenty cups of sweet potato latte, but he said that he has a hard time enjoying it since he's trying to save it for later."

"...!"

Minhyuk did not hear it because the distance between them had increased. Then, his turn came.

"Next, please."

Minhyuk went inside as instructed by the voice. As he walked towards where the voice was, he tried to refill his cup with sweet potato latte again but...

[Food God's True Worth.]

[You have acquired +20 STM, +1 WIS, +1 INT.]

...Minhyuk did not even care about the man's words. All he heard was the notifications, which meant that he had already finished everything. He screamed out, "Aaaaack!" and fell down on his knees in despair.

"What's wrong? Are there any problems?"

"I drank all of my sweet potato latte... Hnngh!" Minhyuk cried out, blaming himself.

'How can I be like this...'

He had been in line and only walked a total of 500 meters for twenty minutes, but he had already finished drinking all forty cups of his tasty, warm, sweet potato latte.

"I want to drink more..." Minhyuk said, slowly getting up on his knees.

"Phew..."

"Y... you're not going to cry, right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'm well in both mind and body. I just need to stop thinking about my sweet potato latte..."

"Then, shall we start the preliminaries?"

"Ah, yes."

Hamel, the NPC that would guide him inside, briefly described what was inside and what he needed to do. The preliminaries had three gates and he had to cross through all of the gates within the time limit.

Hamel entered the first gate with him and said, "What you need to do in the first gate is simple. All you have to do is hunt a Level 80 Arcus. It might be a bit hard for you to hunt it since you're on the same level, but if you take your time and move carefully, your strength should be enough to hunt it."

After listening, Minhyuk quickly stomped on the ground and dashed forward. It seemed like he was in a rush because he was hungry.

Stab!

A few seconds after Hamel finished his explanation, an Arcus was already lying dead in front of him.

Thud!

'...Gasp?!'

Hamel firmly believed that this person was a weirdo from his earlier antics, so he was shocked to see that Minhyuk had completed the first gate quickly. Despite his shock, he still opened the second gate with a smile on his face. He said, "As you can see, the second gate is a forest. All you need to do is find hints to get out of this forest."

"Oh," Minhyuk gasped in awe. After all, this was a forest and there were various things that he could collect from here!

"...?"

Hamel was once again shocked to see the man pull out a hoe to dig. He thought, "H... how did he know?!"

Hamel was truly shocked. The method to get out of this maze-like forest was simple. The materials and plants growing in this forest were different from ordinary plants. The path to the next gate would open once they touched one of those special things.

'He did it as soon as he entered?! Does he have some search skills or something?!

However, Minhyuk did not care about Hamel at all, he just dug for his herbs and wild vegetables.

Thud!

Thud!

Thud!

After a while, he was able to dig up a strange-looking leaf. The moment Minhyuk's hands touched it...

[You have cleared the Second Gate. You may now proceed to the Third Gate.]

"Then, shall we move forward now?"

"Let me dig some more of these!"

"..."

Hamel scratched his head. The man only turned to go to the next gate after digging everything up. In the final gate...

'Monks will appear.'

Monks were Level 90 monkey-type monsters and were by no means easy opponents. In addition, these monsters were around ten levels higher than the contestant. A few moments after they entered the third gate, Hamel felt the presence of a Monk moving through the trees. Monks were extremely fast creatures. They were so fast that no one would be able to see their figures clearly among the trees.

"You don't have to hunt all the monsters that appear in the third gate. If you survive and reach the gate, you'll be considered to have passed."

At that moment, a Monk threw a banana towards Minhyuk.

Swoosh!

The banana was speeding straight towards Minhyuk. One hit from this banana would definitely result in an instant death.

Grab!

"...?"

Hamel was left dumbstruck, and he could not process what he just witnessed. He saw Minhyuk lightly and nimbly catching one of the flying bananas. Hamel looked at the banana in Minhyuk's hand, then at the Monks on the trees.

"Wow, did you see that?! That monkey gave me a banana as a present!"

"N, no. That's not a present, that's an attack..."

"Monkeys! You're very good boys!"

"Ookiikii...?"

Minhyuk grabbed the banana tightly and checked the information.

(Monk's Banana)

Ingredient Grade: E

Special Abilities:

?Once eaten, you will be poisoned with the fatal Monk's poison.

?The Monk's bananas are more delicious than regular bananas.

‘Monks usually live in the harsh and unyielding environment of the Amazon. Nothing can be eaten in that place so people who usually go on an expedition there always fall prey and die after eating the bananas that the Monks deliberately placed in the area,’ Hamel thought. He believed that the man would definitely know about it since he checked the information. However, to his shock, the man peeled the banana and ate the white and plump flesh.

[The skill, Eccentric Food God has been triggered. The poison effect has been nullified and ignored.]

The sweet flavor of the banana, along with its soft texture, spread in Minhyuk's mouth.

"D, delicious...!"

'What the hell?! This guy's a madman!'

Then, another of the Monk's bananas flew towards Minhyuk.

Swoosh!

Grab!

"Thanks, I will eat it well!"

"Ookiikii!"

Swoosh!



Grab!

"Thank you very much. Chew, chew~?Ah, it's really delicious!"

Swoosh—

Catch!

"Oh, it's starting to get a bit threatening now. But, isn't it better for you to throw more at me?"

"This?banana crazy?bas..."

"Yes? What did you say?"

"N, nothing," Hamel said as he tried his hardest to maintain an expression of indifference. However, there was one thing that Hamel was certain of.

'He can see the trajectory of the bananas. He must also have at least 100 in both STR and AGI for him to catch those bananas that easily.'

Then, the bananas started to fly from all directions. The Monks even used their special skill, throwing three bananas at the same time, but Minhyuk just caught everything without breaking a sweat.

"Good, you should throw at least that much! Alrighty then, look at how hyung does it. You should be more aggressive, throw it with strength..." Minhyuk said as he picked up a stone from the ground and threw it towards the trees.

Fwoosh! Thump!

The stone that he threw was embedded deep in the tree. Hamel turned speechless once again. Minhyuk continued to diligently catch and eat the bananas that were thrown at him. As time went on, Minhyuk finally decided that he had caught enough and began to keep them in his inventory.

"You have to leave now. Time is running out," Hamel said. He thought very hard about ways to make him leave the third gate but in the end, all he could do was tell Minhyuk that the time was almost up.

"Ah, I want to eat more... Bananas..." Minhyuk said dejectedly as he walked towards the gate. Then, he suddenly saw a Monk running towards him with some bananas.

"Ookiikii!"

'...If a long range attack won't work, then the Monks would hold their banana and attack their enemies. They're as excellent as any warrior.'?This was what Hamel thought. However, Minhyuk just grabbed the banana that the Monk was wielding and patted it on its head.

"What a good boy, you even gave this hyung bananas as a parting gift. Thanks. I'll eat it well."

"Ookiikii..." The Monk cried as it made eye contact with Minhyuk's soft and warm eyes.

"You're a really good boy, and you're also handsome."

"Kii? Kiikii!" The Monk cried, waving its hands before stretching it towards its chest and tapping on it.

"Ah, you're a female? You're really pretty, so cute."

"Kiii..." The Monk cried shyly.

Even Hamel could see that Minhyuk was an extremely handsome man. Besides, the female Monks were extremely active compared to male Monks. Then...

"Ookiikii!"

The Monk suddenly ran off somewhere, before coming back with more bananas in its arms. The Monk then placed the bananas in Minhyuk's arms.

"Is this for oppa?"

"Kiiikii...." The Monk cried, sweeping its toes shyly on the ground. Minhyuk stroked its head before finally going outside. The Monk watched him leave as it twirled in its place and cried shyly once again.

Minhyuk came out smiling happily with a bunch of bananas in his arms. He asked, "But, why did it give me a lot of bananas? I can't believe that it gave me this much. I feel a bit sorry now."

"There's a meaning when a Monk gives an armful of bananas to someone."

"What does it mean?"

"It means? 'I want to mate with you tonight. If you accept the bananas, then it means it's a yes.'"

\*\*\*

Radem scratched his head in confusion.

"Uhm..."

"Hmm."

Hamel had experienced it firsthand, while Radem only saw it on the video. Regardless, it did not change the fact that...

"H... he's strong... You're right about him being a special foreigner."

By the gods. It took the man almost thirty minutes because he took his time digging up wild vegetables and herbs and even catching bananas. Just watching the video was enough for Radem to verify Minhyuk's overwhelming strength. However, even if he was strong, Radem did not dare to consider him for the Order.

"He's strong, but I wouldn't want to recommend him to the Knight Order."

"I understand."

"He will most likely try and eat the Phoenix."

"Yes..."

Radem suddenly remembered something. He asked, "Ah, how long do you think it will take him to clear all of the gates if he had not done all of those unnecessary things?"

"This is my personal opinion but..." Hamel spoke very carefully, "He seems to be much stronger than Lucia."

\*\*\*

The Monk recalled what happened earlier. The male monkey was so handsome that her heart trembled when he stroked her head and smiled at her. Monks were originally docile and gentle creatures. They only became aggressive because the humans tried to kill them.

The Monk went to the riverside and washed herself clean. She cleaned every nook and cranny. Then, she applied some grass leaves on her body and dried her fur well. She was now a fragrant Monk. After that, she climbed up the tree and watched the place where the man had left. Just imagining about the steamy night that they would have tonight, was enough to make her blush red.

"Kiikiikii!" The Monk cried shyly.

At that moment, Hamel came through the third gate with other qualifiers. He tilted his head in puzzlement and asked, "...Where did the Monks go?"

The Monks should have attacked them the moment they entered the gate but no Monk, except for one staring at the gate, was in sight. Hamel's eyes met with the eyes of the female Monk. Then, he saw the Monk pointing towards the door.

"Ookiikii!"

'Don't interrupt me. Just get out of here. I don't know when he'll come back!'

Hamel was at a loss for words. Then, his jaw dropped to the ground when he saw the flower on the Monk's ear. His hands helplessly supported his forehead as he said, "...I'm really going to go crazy."

The Monk was unaware of the chaos running rampant in Hamel's mind. The Monk just stood there staring at the gate and shyly putting her fur behind her ear, much like a teenage girl waiting for her first love.

## Chapter 54: Something That Should Never Be Done

### Tournament Day.

A gigantic Wyvern King flew up in the sky carrying the Taming Master, Jan. She was the emcee of this tournament in the game, and a member of the popular girl group Blue Velvet in reality. Jan cheerfully greeted everyone saying, "Hello, our dearly beloved tournament viewers! I'm Jan and I will be your emcee for today. Nice to meet you!"

"Waaaaaaaaaah!"

"Waaaaaaaaaah!"

The tournament was being held on a small island named Cork. Tens of thousands of players and viewers cheered loudly in the stands.

"Unlike the previous 1:1 competition format before, the tournament this time would feature battles all over the island."

A huge map suddenly floated up. It was big enough for both the TV viewers and the live spectators to see.

"Around 200 players that qualified for this tournament would battle and force the other participants to log out of the game. Of course, dying in this tournament will not result in any penalties for the players. The tournament duration is twelve hours. If

there are more than one player remaining at the end of the 12 hours, the winner will be determined by the overall score."

Flutter!

The gigantic Wyvern King folded its wings as it shot towards the large building located in the center of Cork Island.

"This convenience store located in the center of the island will be the designated rest area. All participating players can eat, or take a rest here. Since this is a rest area, it is set as a safe zone, so PK-ing is not allowed inside the building. One thing to note, even though this place is a safe area, players will not be able to score points if they continue to stay here. Not scoring enough points will also result in their elimination. Ah! Now, let me tell you about the players that have started to log in!"

The image on the screen changed, showing the scene inside the convenience store. Players were starting to log in one after the other.

"Wow! Can you see that? It's so quiet inside that you can definitely hear a pin drop. Everyone looks tense! Oh, Bennet has logged in! He's a player with the hidden class Mad Warrior, and he's a popular BJ on Paprika TV!"

"Kyaaaaaaaaa!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Shouts and cheers erupted from the stands. Bennett was a popular figure and had a lot of female fans. One of the reasons for his popularity was his cool, dashing playing style as a Warrior, and the other was his good-looking face. In fact, the people found it a bit surprising that he was still a novice.

"I will now go back up in the air to start broadcasting live."

\*\*\*

VVIP seats.

Countless rankers were sitting in this section. Among all of them, the most outstanding of them were two people: Cain, the most outstanding player among the Warrior classes and Alicia, the most outstanding player among the Mage classes. Sitting behind them were countless guild masters. These people were here to win over the strong in advance and try to recruit them into their guilds. This was the reason for their attendance. However, they knew that Lucia was someone that they could not take in. The reason was because her brother was leading one of the nation's top four guilds.

"What do you think about this tournament?"

Alicia chuckled at Cain's question and answered, "You're asking when you know how it's going to end?"

"Is that so?" Cain said, smiling bitterly.

"Are you not happy that your younger sister will win the finals?"

"No, I'm glad... But..." Cain said. Cain knew that his sister, Lucia, joined this tournament because of him. It was an encouragement to see her working so hard, to chase after him, but it also made his heart hurt for her. All he wanted was for her to live a life that was normal, like any other ordinary girl. However, Lucia wanted to reach the peak so she chased after him, not knowing that all Cain wanted for her was to wear make-up, go to cafés with her friends, and live a normal life.

"It's because she's young. That's why she wants to be recognized. Your father is such a great man too, so it's natural that your sister thinks that she will only deserve that place if she does this."

"...Yeah."

Cain's family had a secret. While Cain was the son of the chairman of a famous company, Lucia's mother, the person his father remarried, was just an ordinary office worker. That was why Lucia was under a lot of pressure. She wanted recognition from Cain and their father.

"Look at the faces of the participants. Ah, they look like they aren't breathing."

"Yeah."

The video was showing the scene in the convenience store. All of the players inside were tense, holding their breaths, while checking each other out. Although it was a place reserved for resting and eating, none of them were eating. Just then, the video caught a man rushing over to the convenience store counter.

"Huh...?" Alicia said dumbly, tilting her head in thought. For some reason, she found the man's back to be strangely familiar. However, she could not see who he was since he was wearing a white mask.

[Is it true that everything here is free?]

[Yes, all of the food provided by the tournament's convenience store is free. You don't need to pay for it. You can just take it.]

[Oh, oh my god...!]

The man smiled broadly. Then, one of the guild leaders from behind them spoke, "That person, isn't he Isbin Village's pro mukbang BJ?"

Alicia turned towards where the voice came from and asked, "Pro mukbang BJ?"

The man looked astonished when Alicia's attention was on him. However, he quickly coughed awkwardly then started to explain politely, "Yes, it wasn't that long ago. He won an eating competition against Binz and caused an uproar."

"Is that so?" Alicia said, smiling lightly.

Cain grinned and said, "I can't believe that he's eating in that tense atmosphere."

Alicia's shoulders shook in laughter. She said, "Do you think he'll be shy just because of the tense atmosphere? For that person, eating is his greatest happiness."

"You know that person?" Cain asked her curiously.

Alicia nodded her head and turned her attention back to the screen, "I know him. He's a pure and kind man that loves eating more than anything else. He actually refused me when I asked him to join our guild. I had to beg him just so I could add him as a friend."

"Pfft!" A man drinking coffee from the back suddenly spat out his drink. He apologized quickly. "Ah, sorry. Sorry."

'The country's number one beauty, Alicia, had to beg an unknown player to add him as a friend?'

Cain was also quite surprised with this information.

"Ah, I take back what I said earlier."

"What do you mean?"

"The one where I said that you already know how it's going to end. A huge variable has suddenly appeared. That person is strong enough to save me. Thanks to that player named Minhyuk, I learned something and became stronger."

"Pfft!"

This time, someone from the other side spewed their coffee out. Cain's expression was unreadable as he sat up straight, watching that player who was wearing an excited expression while looking at the microwave.

\*\*\*

Bennett smiled lightly as he scanned all of the contestants. He thought, 'I knew this would happen. Sigh, these bastards are all scared.'

Then, as he continued to look at the players surrounding him, he thought, 'The fans will like it better if I try to ease their tension.'

Building an image was very important. To be honest, he was more of a broadcaster than a player. As someone that worked as a BJ on Paprika in reality, he had to maintain his image and watch his words, manners, and face. Even his hidden class Mad Warrior helped him gain more fans. However, the truth was, he was a wicked man. He was just someone who could hide his inner thoughts well.

"Hello, hello," Bennet said. He started to greet the other players, bowing politely. Even if the others only glanced at him, he would still bow.

"Aren't you being too stiff? Others might think that we're in the middle of a war if you're like that."

However, the expressions of the people inside the room remained tense. Some were even gathered at one side and were looking over at him coldly.

'It's those bastards from Bacallo Guild.'

Bacallo was a guild that was composed of incumbent Special Forces officers and non-commissioned officers. Even though the members of Bacallo Guild were of quite low levels, every single one of them could be considered as elites, especially the top thirty within the guild. It was estimated that they would reach the top 5,000 once they progressed further inside the game. In fact, the reason why they joined this tournament was so they could raise their reputation even further.

'Those bastards. Look at their faces, they're terribly ugly.'

"Hello," Bennet greeted. His smiling eyes met with the frigid and cold eyes of the members of Bacallo Guild. All they did was ignore him.

"Huh, what's this? Wow, your item is so great!"

"Ah, yes."

Bennet tried to talk to the other participants in the room, but even if he was famous, he still failed to resolve the thick tension hanging in the air. Then...

Ding!

The sound of the microwave was heard by everyone.

\*\*\*

Ding!

"Hehe..." Minhyuk chuckled as he excitedly opened the microwave. A variety of food came out, including vegetables dumplings and hot bars.

"Fwoo, fwoo!" Minhyuk quickly put down the food in front of him. On the table, there was already food that was placed earlier, ready to be eaten. One could see a variety of cup noodles, like chapagetti, dried spicy seafood noodles, Food God ramyeon, anjeong tanmen, shrimp tantanmen and mupama.

Rip!

Minhyuk tore off the lid of the shrimp tantanmen and stirred the contents with his chopsticks. He always ate the yellow shrimp tantanmen with a bunch of eggs as garnish.

'Wasn't this something that can stir your appetite?'

After munching on the garnish, Minhyuk picked up some noodles from the shrimp tantanmen cup and slurped on it.

"Kgghk!"

Then, Minhyuk picked up some stir-fried kimchi and placed it in his mouth. Stir-fried kimchi might not be crunchy like regular kimchi, but it had a deeper, sweeter taste. Minhyuk also peeled off the wrapping paper on the Jeonju Bibim Triangular Kimbap, considered as one of the big shots in the triangular kimbap's world. Then, Minhyuk bit off almost half of the kimbap in a single mouth.

Chomp—

Minhyuk personally believed that the best way to eat a triangular kimbap was to chomp down on it. It was the only way that he could maintain the crispiness of the seaweed, and let him taste the cold rice, as well as the slightly spicy flavor.

"Keok."

Minhyuk immediately gulped down some spicy soup to ease the triangular kimbap that threatened to block his throat. Then, he picked up the steaming hot bar and took a bite. The hot bar sold in convenience stores had a chewy texture and a rich, meaty flavor. The more he chewed, the more juicy it was.

‘So appetizing!’

Then, he turned his attention towards the vegetable dumplings. He picked just one piece of it to try. The dumpling was chewy. He could also taste the meat, glass noodles, and vegetables like scallions and carrots that filled the dumpling wrapper. All of those ingredients blended together and created a pleasant taste. Minhyuk looked at the dumplings with a smile as he chewed on one.

"You're really..." Minhyuk cried and continued to say, "...really delicious!?Chomp!"

Minhyuk put another piece of dumpling in his cup noodles before placing another piece in his mouth.

Chew, chew.

"Wow... It really looks delicious..."

"L... look at him eat that hot bar, amazing."

Everyone's attention had been captured by the loud ding of the microwave. People even started exclaiming when they watch Minhyuk eat like that. Then, a woman suddenly stood up and walked to where Minhyuk was. She placed a grape-flavored Welch's drink in front of him.

"You'll choke like that. Please drink some."

"Wow. Thank you! I'll drink it well!" Minhyuk answered. He bowed politely.

The woman smiled gently and said, "Thanks to you, I feel a bit relieved. I felt like I was going to die from my legs trembling non-stop a while ago, so thanks."

Chew?—

Minhyuk looked at her in confusion. Of course, still with a hot bar in his mouth. Even though he listened to her words, Minhyuk was still eating his food. The others also looked gratefully towards Minhyuk.

'Ah, I feel a bit relaxed.'

'He's really enjoying it well.'

Some players even covered their mouths with the back of their hand as they gazed at Minhyuk with a gentle smile on their faces.

"This won't do. Now, I also have to eat at least one hot bar."

"Me too. We have to eat well if we want to last longer in this tournament."

The players started to stand up one after the other.

"Thanks."

"I feel relaxed. Thanks."

Minhyuk did not understand why they suddenly started to thank him. However, he still continued to eat. Just then, Bennett approached Minhyuk.

1. Common instant noodle brands, or parody of instant noodle brands.
2. Hot fishcake bar



## Chapter 55: Something that Should Never Be Done

[Sluuuuuuuuuuuuuurp.]

"Wow, he's really eating so well."

"I also want to eat some ramyeon..."

"L...look at him eating that hot bar, Amazing...!"

Everyone in the audience was watching the man eating inside the convenience store. Even the emcee, Jan, was in a daze after seeing the video.

[Jan, are you not going to do your speech?]

The voice that spoke in her in-ear piece stirred Jan from her daze.

"Slurp!" Jan hurriedly sipped and wiped the drool off of her chin. She was currently on a diet, so she almost made a mistake from watching someone eat in such an enjoyable manner. She quickly said, "Wow, everyone. Don't you think that he is eating so well? Even I felt a little hungry!"

"Kiheeeeek!" The Wyvern King cried loudly as if to answer her question. It seemed like the both of them were truly hungry.

[Jan. He's the famous pro mukbang BJ from Isbin Village.]

'Ah, him?' Jan thought, recalling the video that she saw not too long ago. Then, she said, "That player is the pro mukbang BJ who caused an uproar just recently!"

"Wow... Somehow, I feel like I already knew it."

"He's really the pro mukbang BJ."

"No, what's the name of that pro mukbang BJ's broadcast?"

"But, he really eats well. Is he going to eat all of the food in the convenience store today?"

This time, the audience watched as the man placed some dumplings in his beef bone ramyeon, before pulling out the hot noodles and dumplings, while chuckling.

[This is the convenience store's dumpling soup!]

Strangely enough, the audience felt warm when they saw the man smiling brightly. That was when the player named Bennett approached the man. The camera in the convenience store was installed behind Bennett, so the audience could not see their expressions as of the moment. The audience frowned, even Jan was feeling dissatisfied with Bennett's sudden behavior. Then, Bennett sat in front of the man.

[You're really eating well. Can I talk to you...]

[No. I have to eat this!]

[Hey, don't say that, let's talk for a bit. Just a word...]

"Boo!"

"Ah! What an attention-seeking bastard!"

"Bennett? Wasn't he the one who hit a girl some time ago because he got drunk?"

“Wow! He’s really disgusting! Is he trying to save his image or something?”

“Boo!”

The audience booed loudly whenever there was a gap in the comments.

[He's eating. Please don't disturb him.]

[Even a dog should not be provoked when it's eating, what more a person! Why are you so focused on someone that you don't even like? If you want some attention, then go outside, take off your clothes and dance.]

The people in the audience cheered when they heard the people inside the convenience store talk back to Bennett. Because of their tenacity, Bennett had no choice but to take a step back. Right at that moment, a bright light flashed, signaling the entrance of another person.

"Finally. Our strongest contender for the title of champion in this tournament, Miss Lucia, has arrived!" Jan cried loudly, drawing everyone’s attention towards Lucia. They watched Lucia enter the convenience store right after logging in. The convenience store went quiet the moment this black-masked woman entered. Suddenly, Lucia stopped walking. Her gaze was currently fixed on one person..

"Ah, Miss Lucia also can't help but stop in front of the pro mukbang BJ. Maybe she can't walk away!"

"Wahahahaha!"

"Hahahahaha!"

But contrary to what they said, Lucia ignored the man and trudged towards an empty seat.

"Thirty minutes left before the start of the tournament!"

\*\*\*

Lucia was completely confused. She thought,?'Why did Minhyuk...'

She was sure that he was going to participate in the production class competition. So, why was he here? However, the fact that he was here meant that he had passed the preliminaries. Regardless of her confusion, Lucia did not sit near Minhyuk nor talk to him.

'My enemies will target Minhyuk if I do that.'

If it was revealed to Lucia’s enemies that Minhyuk was close to her, those who were present in this tournament would definitely go after him. That was why Lucia pretended not to know him. However, contrary to her beliefs and despite her careful actions, a group of players were already eyeing both her and Minhyuk.

They were none other than the people from Bacallo Guild.

"Is that true? Those two came to Emperor's City together in a carriage?" Vlan asked, eyes narrowing sharply. He was currently the one leading the Bacallo Guild in this tournament.

"Yes. It's true. I definitely saw the two of them riding the same carriage and arriving together. I even saw that man waving goodbye to Lucia."

"Hmm, I see."

Bacallo Guild participated in this tournament to kill Lucia. Lucia was a rising power and rumor had it that she would gather aces and create a guild, after she won the competition and learned Ellie's Swordsmanship. Everyone expected that guild to become famous. However, what would happen if Bacallo killed Lucia?

'We can become even more famous if we kill her.'

Of course, they would attack her with their group. That did not mean that they were not strong. In fact, Vlan had a secret class.

'Should we take a hostage? But this is just a game, can it really be considered a hostage?' Vlan thought. However, even if he could not take any hostages, he could still do something different.

'Should we break Lucia's composure by killing that person? Is he her lover? I think he's her lover.'

The man that they were watching had covered half of his face but Vlan could still see his handsomeness through that. From what he heard, Lucia also kept on looking back the moment that man disappeared after they said their goodbyes.

[The tournament will begin in ten minutes. Participants will be randomly teleported to different parts of Cork Island within ten minutes after leaving the convenience store! You can also come back to the convenience store to rest.]

After hearing Jan's words, the members of the Bacallo Guild began to prepare. With three minutes left in the countdown, almost all of the players had already left the convenience store. Well, except for one.

Chomp—

That player looked quite indifferent to the tournament and was busy just eating the convenience store's warm red bean bread.

[The tournament has begun!]

[Waaaaaaaaaah!]

\*\*\*

Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa were both on Cork Island in transparent mode. They entered the convenience store the moment the start of the tournament was announced. When they entered, Lee Minhwa saw Minhyuk eating ramyeon, without any shred of interest in the tournament.

Slurp—

'Wow... Look at his proportions.'

However, in reality, Minhyuk's proportions were unimaginable.

All of the operators could roam around Cork Island in transparent mode. As long as they marked a coordinate, they would be able to teleport straight to where the coordinate was.

"Looks like one of our important characters is still busy eating in the convenience store."

"Yeah. He really doesn't seem like he has any interest in the tournament."

"I know, right?"

The two of them grinned at each other.

"32-A. Log the coordinates."

"Yes, logging it."

Then, Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa disappeared in a flash of light. Once the bright light that covered them faded, they saw Lucia.

Flash!

Thwack!

[You have dealt a critical hit.]

They watched Lucia easily dispose of some of the players before quickly blending in with the trees in the forest. Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa both saw her go inside the forest but soon, they could not see her figure any more. There was a look of admiration on their faces.

"As expected of Lucia."

"Well, it was within expectations. Teleport to K-31."

The two of them disappeared again in a flash. They were now looking at a man who was covered in a black robe from head to toe.

"Another key figure. Jackal."

"Yeah."

Both of them nodded. There were a lot of important figures in this competition, and one of them was Jackal, a legendary class holder.

'The Black Wizard's Descendant.'

The Black Wizard's Descendant was a class with great magic attacks. However, the most problematic skill that this class had was its Mental Magic. They did not know what would happen if he used that magic.

"He's not going to use that, is he?"

"He's probably not going to use it. His level will drop back to Level 1 if he uses it."

Would anyone be crazy enough to do that? The answer was probably no. Then, light flashed again as the two disappeared.

\*\*\*

"Damn it."

The members of the Bacallo guild moved towards the convenience store to organize an operational meeting. Lucia had already forced out three of their members. They were trying to move to their agreed spot when they got attacked. Lucia already had six kills. Her track record was overwhelming. No matter how good a player was, they would be useless once they were logged out.

Just then, Vlan hesitated. He noticed Lucia and the masked man inside.

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Lucia quickly subdued and overwhelmed the players before heading back towards the convenience store. A lot of people would definitely be gathered in the convenience store since it was a safe zone. People would usually deliberately induce a fight, but run away the moment they shed blood. That was why there were a lot of people here. Lucia immediately saw Minhyuk the moment she entered the convenience store. She stealthily looked around before approaching him.

Grin—

Lucia grinned and asked, "Is it delicious?"

Chew, chew—

Just like usual, Minhyuk did not answer her. After all, he would not respond to anyone as long as he was eating.

"What are you doing here when you're a chef? I was surprised when I saw you," Lucia asked as she stared at the monitor. Thankfully, the monitor would not show their traces when they were inside the convenience store.

"Did you do a good job during the preliminaries? How long did it take you to clear the gates?"

"29 minutes and 57 seconds? Don't talk to me!"

"You barely managed to get in," Lucia said, grabbing a can of soda to moisten her throat.

'Those Bacallo bastards are much more malicious than I thought.'

Since they were special force soldiers, their tactics and strategies were unusual. Lucia realized that it would not be easy for her to narrow down their area of operation and stop them from doing a siege. At that moment, Lucia felt the presence of other players. She hurriedly distanced herself away from Minhyuk.

Creeaaak—

The door opened and the members of the Bacallo Guild came inside.

"Oh, so you're here. Lucia."

"..."

Lucia did not answer them and just continued to finish her drink. Then, Vlan approached Minhyuk. He checked his monitor and quickly inspected the pile of cup ramyeon on the table.

Slap—

The cups of ramen fell down on the ground.

Splash—

Ramen soup splashed on the floor of the convenience store.

"..."

For the first time in a long while, Minhyuk turned to look at the people around him.

"Oops, my mistake. But you should be ashamed of yourself. Is it fun to eat and get the attention of others?" Vlan said, throwing Lucia a side glance in provocation. However, she ignored them. 'No', Vlan thought, 'she's just pretending that she doesn't care.'

'If she stops me, then it means that they know each other...'

Minhyuk hurriedly drank the soup in his cup noodles while Vlan stepped on the ramyeon that he slapped on the ground.

Splash!

"Kukuku!"

"Hahahahaha!"

Vlan and the rest of his members laughed. Vlan said, "Let's go out and have a chat."

Just as they were about to go out...

"Oi, war freaks."

...a cold and frigid voice stopped them. Vlan turned his head and saw Minhyuk.

"Clean this up before you go."

"...You clean it up, you f\*cker," Vlan said as he ushered his group outside.

Lucia was shocked to see what happened. However, she was more shocked to see Minhyuk's reaction. She thought, 'His, his eyes...'

Minhyuk quietly stood up with a hot bar in his mouth.

Crack—

Crack—

He cracked his neck and loosened up his stiff muscles, before moving to leave. Seeing this, Lucia hurriedly asked, "W... where are you going?"

"The tournament. I've finished eating so it's now time for me to start moving," Minhyuk said as he grabbed an armful of chocolate bars from the counter.

"I thought you weren't interested?"

"I didn't care as much before. But Lucia, do you know what's the worst thing in the world?"

"...?"

"Bastards who mess around with food," Minhyuk's voice dropped coldly, before he dashed out of the convenience store.

"Why don't you come with me...!" Lucia called out, but before she could even finish, Minhyuk had already disappeared. The first time that any player went out of the store, they would disappear and be summoned randomly on the island.

Lucia was worried.

'29 minutes and 57 seconds... He just barely got in...'

It was already very surprising for a chef to pass the preliminaries. However, a chef would still be far below in level to the others in this tournament. Lucia's eyes suddenly gleamed coldly. "Those damn bastards."

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Vlan exchanged a cold look with the members of the Bacallo guild. He said, "She's alone. Once she is in a certain range within the tactical field, we will spread out and lock her in!"

"Yes!"

Dash, dash, dash, dash!

Dash, dash, dash, dash!

Bacallo Guild had found Lucia running around in the forest. She had attacked them fiercely the moment she caught sight of them. Vlan immediately signaled his team the moment she entered his tactical field. Vlan had the secret class 'Iron Blooded Commander'. He could command and create a tactical field together with the people that had the class 'Brave Warrior'. Once the tactical field was deployed, Vlan would be able to control the entire area and stop their prey from going out. In addition, he and the Brave Warriors would have a 20% increase in abilities within the field.

Shwaaaa—

"Aaaaargh!"

"Kill her! Now's the best time!"

Another member of the Bacallo Guild was forced to log out. Fortunately, the members of the Bacallo Guild were already on their way to their respective positions. This meant that the tactical field was already on its way to completion.

'Good, this time...'

Pooof!

Lucia disappeared in a cloud of white smoke.

"This damn...!" Vlan shouted, his face crumpling in anger.

'No, she won't be able to use that very often.'

.

Lucia had disappeared from their tactical field. The tactical field covered an area of 500 meters, and teleportation of that range would definitely be limited at Lucia's level.

At that moment...

Step, step, step, step—

A man walked right inside their tactical field.

"...You little bastard," Vlan said, smiling viciously. He was thinking that they met at the perfect time. He was boiling with rage from Lucia's disappearance, but this was practically a godsend. He was very certain that Lucia and this man knew each other, it was just that Lucia did not respond to his provocation. The man right in front of him was none other than... Minhyuk.

## Chapter 56: Something that Should Never Be Done

Shiiiiing—

Vlan watched Minhyuk pull the sword out of its sheath.

"Ha!" Vlan laughed incredulously. They might be incumbent non-commissioned officers right now, but they were once a part of the nation's Special Forces. Not long ago, they even participated in a real-time, mock survival battle against the US Special Naval Forces. Although they had lost, they were still veterans who had trained for a long time. Yet, there was some bastard who they did not even know of, who suddenly entered their tactical field fearlessly.

"You have done something that should never be done," the man said.

Vlan thought carefully about what he was talking about. He thought, 'Did Lucia tell him something?'

If they truly were lovers, then this man would definitely be angry. That was enough reason for him to move like this. However, his bravery would rather make Lucia feel sorry for him.

The man grabbed his sword tightly as he dashed towards Vlan and roared out, "I mixed that dry spicy seafood noodles with tuna and sausages!"

"...?"

The man's momentum was fierce as he dashed towards Vlan. However, one of the members of Bacallo Guild blocked his path and drew his dagger.

Vlan clicked his tongue, "Tsk!"

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"Tsk!" Alicia clicked her tongue.

'I can't believe they dared to stop Minhyuk from eating his fill. Wow. They even went all the way.'

The scene enlarged in the monitor was that of a man wearing a white mask and the Bacallo Guild's confrontation. Meanwhile, the guild masters were grouped together and talking.

"Bacallo Guild's squad is really strong."

"Did you fight with them?"

"Our guild fought with those guys before. Back then, four of my kids were at Level 120."

"???"

"They couldn't break through their tactical field. The four of them were even killed by three Level 70 players and were robbed clean. I heard that they were really no joke..."

"Wow... how in the world can a Level 120 be defeated by a Level 70?"

"Their tactical field is quite amazing. They would hit you then disappear like a ghost. Since they were soldiers, they can easily use the terrain to their advantage. Besides, you need to break through



their formation to get away from their transparent encirclement. It's like being caught in a spiderweb. Lucia wouldn't even be able to get out once she's trapped in their tactical field. You'll only get out once you're dead..."

Alicia nodded at their explanation. She thought, 'Interesting.'

When she had met Minhyuk before, she could not tell how strong he would become. However, he was someone who constantly trained himself, without external stimulus. At that moment, when the guild masters finished talking, Alicia heard Cain murmur something. He said, "...That person's movements are strange..."

Alicia turned her head to look closely at the monitor. Cain's father might be a CEO, but he was also someone who had won gold medals in both kendo and judo.

"A black belt? No, probably more than that.."

\*\*\*

The player that blocked Minhyuk's path was named Ben. He might be a Warrior class player, but he specialized in daggers. He was also a 3-dan in kendo, 3-dan in judo and a 4-dan in taekwondo. Ben was proud to say that he would not bring shame to the name 'Special Forces'. Even his skills in the martial arts were among the best. He was thinking of stabbing Minhyuk in the neck and waist in one breath.

Dash!

The moment he reached Minhyuk...

Fwoom!

Grab!

...Minhyuk easily grabbed his wrist that aimed for Minhyuk's neck.

"...!"

Ben and Vlan's eyes grew wide at the same time. Ben tried to kick Minhyuk's knees, but Minhyuk was faster.

Bang!

"Ugh!" Ben cried as Minhyuk stepped on his foot. Enraged and in pain, Ben tried to slam his elbow into Minhyuk's chin.

Swish!

However, Minhyuk tilted his head slightly, just avoiding the attack, and clenched his hand holding Ben's wrist with even more strength.

Clench!

"Ugh...!" Ben cried out as the grip on his wrist tightened. It felt like his wrist was going to break. Ben might not be able to feel much pain since this was a game, but he could feel the intention. He was forced to kneel down with Minhyuk's strength.

Slash!

Minhyuk easily slashed Ben's throat with his Sword of Rebellion and walked towards Vlan. Vlan was left in a daze after seeing Ben forced out that easily. He thought, 'W, what the hell... B, Ben's one of the best in my unit... How can that bastard manage that!'

Vlan quickly sent a signal.

Daaaaash!

Daaaaash!

Three of the guild members who were in the vicinity appeared and surrounded Minhyuk.

Dash!

Slash!

Swiiish!

Fwooom!

Slash!

It was quick and clean. Minhyuk calmly brought them under control within two minutes. After all, his stats were overwhelming. Even if they had the same stats as him, they would not be able to match him in skills. Furthermore, before he came to challenge them, he already buffed himself up by eating. Witnessing the sudden turn of events, Vlan quickly hid himself in the woods. Then, he pressed down on a button on his left wrist.

[You can now give orders to your troops.]

This was the special ability of the Iron Blooded Commander. As soon as the tactical field was activated, he would be able to give orders to his troops, and see a map that would help him assess the status of his troops and their tactical field.

"This is the company commander. Listen to my orders. From now on, we will activate the tactical field!"

[The tactical field will begin to unfold and cover a 500m radius.]

[With the effects of the tactical field, all Brave Warriors will have a 20% increase in all abilities.]

Swooooooosh!

A transparent blue wall started to form. This was a sign that the tactical field was activated. Then, a map suddenly appeared in front of Vlan. There were red dots that appeared on the map indicating the positions of his troops. If the target fights with his troops, then the enemy's position would be marked in blue. But the blue dot kept on appearing and disappearing.

'Damn it, he's more powerful than I thought.'

There were many hidden masters in Athenae. There were even rumors that there was a 100-level difference between the number one top ranker and the number one unofficial ranker.

However, Vlan still had a smirk on his face. He said, "Right now, you're just a rat trapped in my trap...!"

He laughed sinisterly. No enemy had ever escaped their tactical field.

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A blue barrier suddenly appeared in the forest. A woman approached the barrier and pressed her hands on it. The woman realized that she could not break through the barrier. It felt like a solid and sturdy wall to her.

'I heard a scream coming from around here?'

The woman, Lou, was the same woman that had given Minhyuk the Welch's drink earlier. She was considered a big shot too, but in this tournament, she was just like a normal archer. Lou quickly jumped up on a tree to scout the situation inside the barrier.

'It's the Bacallo Guild?'

Lou saw the members of Bacallo Guild camouflaged in various places within the barrier. Some players were setting up tricks and traps, some were aiming with their crossbows while others were hiding behind trees.

Daaaaaash!

Lou climbed up higher to see the situation inside better. When she looked down...

'Wow...'

...she saw a spectacular and shocking sight. Inside the barrier, the Bacallo Guild members maintained their position. For Lou, who was not familiar with it, it looked like their positions were very stable. Then, she saw a man walking out of the forest.

'Huh...? That man...'

It was the person who made her feel relaxed and eased the tension in the convenience store earlier.

'Don't tell me that he's the one the Bacallo Guild was after?'

Lou thought, tilting her head in confusion. That player did not look strong, but it was very nice to see him smile and eat happily. At that moment...

Fwooooooosh!

A crossbow was shot.

Twaaaang!

Then, someone pressed a button and exploded one of the installed traps, triggering a cloud of dust. Lou watched with bated breath. The Bacallo Guild members slowly narrowed the distance with the man. One of the members stopped and raised his hand.

'That's a signal to stop.'

Then...

Slaaaaaash!

The man suddenly tore through the cloud of dust and slashed a Bacallo member's chest. Then, he kicked on the tree and attacked the man who had just sent a signal out. The man's sword suddenly flashed with a white light.

[Vital Strike]

[Additional 28% attack power for each successful attack.]

Slash!

"Gasp...!" The member that was stabbed on the chest shrieked loudly, while the man continued his attacks mercilessly.

Slaash!

Slaaaaaash!

'F, fast...'

Lou was very astonished. The man cut down two men in a single breath, before quickly dealing with the remaining two. Then, Lou met the man's eyes.

Step—

"Ah, hello," The man said, greeting Lou politely. Lou unconsciously bowed her head in return.

\*\*\*

"..."

Jan was left speechless. Everything happened so quickly. Even the audience sitting in the stands were silent. Then, the man's voice and actions towards the woman broke the silence.

[Ah, hello.]

"W...woooooooooow!"

"C..cool!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"A...an incredible scene just happened, Pro Mukbang BJ! He wasn't just someone who eats well!"

"Wow... He's unexpectedly attractive..."

"He's quite polite. He even said hello to the person who gave him a drink earlier, right?"

The audience broke out in cheers. Jan's Wyvern King flew up and stopped right above the tactical field.

"Kiheeeeeeee!"

The Wyvern King hovered around the tactical field, allowing Jan to clearly see the situation within the barrier.

"Ah! Player Minhyuk completes his eighth kill, ninth, and tenth! Eleventh kill!"

They could see Minhyuk roaming around the tactical field to hunt down the members of the Bacallo Guild.

"Waaaaaaaaah!"

The shouts and cheers grew louder and louder.

\*\*\*

Sword Emperor Ellie was the woman hailed as the greatest empress in history. She inherited her father, the former emperor's name and reputation. Right now, Empress Ellie was sitting on her throne with a frigid and cold expression as she held a sword in her hands. Her figure was the embodiment of the name Sword Emperor. Anyone who saw her sitting lazily with her long hair draped behind her shoulders would admit that she was a great beauty.

"Looks like the competition is reaching its climax."

"Yes, Your Majesty. There's also a foreigner who eats very well in the competition."

"A foreigner who eats well?" Ellie asked curiously.

'The people were cheering him on just because he ate well?'

In fact, Ellie really did not care a bit about the competition. She was just following the orders of the God of Athena to find a successor and pass on her sword technique. However, the truth was that she did not have the slightest bit of interest to find a future successor. She was just fulfilling the mission that God had given her. The person that would succeed her did not need to be that special, so she was not very interested in this tournament.

'Eating well... Well, that's a good thing.'

There was a time when eating was considered to be a joy in her life. Did having everything in the world mean that she was happy? And yet, even with everything, she had been happy when it came to food. It was a different feeling of happiness to have three meals a day. And Ellie missed that happiness.

It seemed like her interest had been piqued. So, she said, "Bring me the magic crystal ball."

The servants moved quickly. They had already prepared the magic crystal ball earlier, but they did not activate it because Ellie did not want to watch. The servants quickly placed the huge magic crystal ball in front of Ellie and turned it on. The image in the crystal ball showed a foreigner wearing a white mask surrounded by other foreigners hiding deep within the forest.

Fwoooooom!

The man raised his sword covered in white light and swung it thrice in succession.

Slash!

Slash!

Slash!

[Aaaack!]

[C, crazy... he's crazy strong!]

Ellie was just lazily squinting at the video, but her eyes soon went wide in shock. Ellie even jumped up from her seat the moment she saw the sword in the man's hands. The pattern of the phoenix engraved on the hilt of the man's sword was something that she would not mistake for something else. Only one man, and one man alone had that. It was the blade that she had bestowed upon the man that she loved and cared for the most in this world.

"Ellie's Kitchen Knife...!"

And the sword was shining brightly in the hands of an unknown foreigner.

## Chapter 57: Beef is Always the Best

'The tactical field is breaking!?' Oren thought in shock. He was in charge of eight members of the Bacallo Guild. All of them were members of two-team squads in reality. The tactical field could only be maintained if each squad were on standby at certain intervals. If a soldier died, another one from the troop would hurry to fill in the gap. If that soldier also died, the gap would again be filled by another. This was so the tactical field could be maintained, and as long as it was maintained, it would remain to be an impregnable barrier. However, right now, the tactical field was starting to crumble. This could only mean one thing...

'We're being killed at such an incredibly fast rate that the guild members cannot fill the gaps.'

Oren opened his eyes wide to observe their opponent. The man was swift for a player at Level 80. According to what one soldier reported before he died, a single attack from the man could reduce as much as 50% of their HP.

'That guy's HP will definitely bottom out too.'

There were still 13 members of the Bacallo Guild, hence Oren believed that the enemy's HP would be depleted soon enough. Although the strength of this enemy had been unexpected, he would still die sooner or later. Oren could see that the man's body was already covered with wounds of varying degrees.

'As expected...!'

With how battered he looked, Oren could tell that the man's HP was below 50%. He quickly made eye contact with the other members, signaling for an ambush. Even if they died, Oren was sure that they would be able to kill the man with just a few strikes.

Just then, they saw the man take out a chocolate bar. The man peeled the wrapper and ate it.

'He's eating right now?!'

Oren signaled with his eyes. The Bacallo members immediately moved to ambush the man. However, they suddenly stopped in their tracks. That was because the small wounds all over the man's body were regenerating right in front of their eyes!

"W, wait... His body...!" Oren said. Before he could even finish his words, the man had already narrowed the distance and started to take them out one by one after recovering his HP. Then...

Bang!

One of their guild members smashed into the tree right next to where Oren was.

Sliiiiide—

The guild member slowly slid down from the tree and was forced to log out.

"H, how did his HP..." Oren stuttered. No matter what he thought, he could not deny the insane recovery that he had just witnessed.

'Is there any skill in existence that had a recovery rate like that?!'

No, Oren had never heard of any skill like that at all. Right at that moment, the man narrowed the distance between them, forcing Oren to log out.

"Damn it!" Oren cursed as he came out of the capsule. Oren, or Lee Sungdong, spat out curses one after the other.

'D, don't tell me...!'

Lee Sungdong recalled an article about the recovery ability in the past. He quickly searched? Athenae's?official website and was able to confirm what he remembered.

'I heard that it hasn't been released in the country yet though...'?Oren thought. He suspected that the player had the blood of the Twin-Headed Troll. Once combined with other expensive materials, it would allow the player to gain an outstanding recovery ability. However, this cost a fortune. Besides, from what he heard, only five players in the entire world had the blood of the Twin-Headed Troll in their hands. And this item was worth around 400 million won.

'...What in the world did that bastard do?' Lee Sungdong wondered, not knowing that he was completely and utterly mistaken. After all, Minhyuk's recovery ability was something related to eating.

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[The Tactical Field has been broken.]

[As a penalty, all Brave Warriors will have a 30% drop in all of their stats.]

"...!"

Vlan was completely shocked. No matter how he looked at the notifications, he could not believe that the tactical field had been broken. After all, it had never been broken before! As if trying to prove to him that this was the reality, the red dots on his map continuously decreased. This meant that the Bacallo members were being forced to log out one after the other. The worst part of it all was the fact that the blue dot continuously flickered. It seemed like the enemy moved from one place to another at a ridiculously high speed.

'This is crazy...! Does he not get tired at all?!'?Vlan thought. Even though his enemy had killed a lot by himself, he still did not get tired at all. He wondered how high his HP was for him to be able to do that. Then...

[Guild Chat | Oren: Company Commander Vlan, that punk ate the blood of the Twin-headed Troll!]

"...?!"

Vlan's eyes widened in disbelief. He thought,?'The blood of the Twin-headed Troll...?'

As far as Vlan could remember, it was an extremely expensive, consumable artifact. Furthermore, consumable artifacts like that were usually eaten by players at Level 250. The reason was simple. It was because players tend to delete and raise new characters before reaching Level 250. Yet, Oren was telling him that the punk consumed an item like that at Level 80?

'I-is he swimming in money?!'

This item had a limited number released in the entire world. In other words, he would be the only person in the country that had consumed the blood of the Twin-Headed Troll, an item estimated to be worth around 500 million won in cold hard cash.

[Guild Chat | Vlan: Is this true?]

[Guild Chat | Oren: Yes, that punk... I saw him recover his HP just by eating a choco bar. But, I'm pretty sure that it was no damn choco bar.]

[Guild Chat | Yamuyamu: I saw it too. To be honest, his recovery rate is much higher compared to the currently released unique recovery skills in the store. So, I believe Oren is right.]

[Guild Chat | Blue: I saw it too. That bastard is a complete monster.]

Vlan grabbed his hair in despair. He thought, 'Damn it, this person connected to Lucia is not some average nobody. I can't believe that I did not take any precaution against him.'

He bit his lips in frustration as the number of red dots on the map continued to decrease. At some point, the only one left was him. He quickly tried to escape but the man appeared, with a choco bar in his mouth, and started to chase him down relentlessly.

"Are...are you kidding me?!"

Chew, chew?—

The man's eyebrows creased in annoyance.

"I mean, are you going to deal with me while you're eating?!" Vlan asked. Vlan's abilities were down by 30%, however, he was still confident. Vlan smirked as he continued to say, "You damn bastard. Who are you?! Are you a mercenary raised by Hanhwa Corporation? Or are you a member of the Legend Guild? Oho, that's right! You're definitely someone from Legend Guild."

Vlan made conjectures and came to the wrong conclusion all by himself. There were rumors that the Legend Guild gathered almost all of the unofficial rankers in the country. However, they were still keeping a low profile.

"You're definitely taking this opportunity to promote the name of Legend Guild. And the blood of the Twin-headed Troll! That's what you ate, right?! That's how you're recovering your HP!"

However, the man remained silent. He just approached Vlan quickly. Vlan quickly took out his short sword and clashed against the man's sword. Unfortunately, Vlan's stats had dropped by 30%. He was definitely no match for Minhyuk.

Slash!

"Cough!? Damn you, your goal was our Bacallo guild, right?! You deliberately baited us and made us spill our blood!"

"Do you want to know the reason?"

"That's right, you're finally revealing your true colors!"

"You guys messed around and wasted food."

Vlan believed that this man was lying until the very end. His reason did not make sense at all! Vlan shouted, "I won't believe such a lie...!"



Stab!

Vlan was forced to log out.

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Minhyuk checked his kill count after he forced Vlan to log out. He had accumulated a total of 25 kills.

'What was he talking about earlier? Blood of the Twin-headed Troll? Legend Guild?'

Minhyuk's HP had recovered because he ate some choco bar. This was all thanks to the effect of the skill, Absorption Conversion. Minhyuk thought, 'I really like this Absorption Conversion skill.'

His HP would immediately begin to recover the moment he ate. It was obvious how enormous the effect of a 30-40% recovery rate was. The best thing about it was that Minhyuk could also eat while recovering. This was truly the perfect skill for Minhyuk.

"Ah, I'm hungry. I should go back to the convenience store~" Minhyuk hummed as he moved towards the convenience store.

\*\*\*

Nine hours have already passed since the tournament has begun. Jan looked at the players on the monitor. Every one of them looked tired and exhausted from the prolonged tension and lengthy battles. However, Lucia still managed to get 60 kills all by herself. Jan thought, 'What's the relationship between those two? Do they know each other? That man is really strong.'

Once the game began, the voices of both the host and the spectators could not be heard by any of the contestants. They could not verify their current scores and could only base them on their kill counts and their current situation. Furthermore, the range of their movements on Cork Island started to get limited since the circle was slowly getting smaller. Eventually, they would be gathered at a distance of 300 meters around the convenience store. Everyone would not be able to enter the convenience store and those inside would be thrown out in the field. This meant that all the players would be gathered together and fight each other near the convenience store.

[The Brackan has been summoned to Cork Island.]

[The player fighting the Brackan cannot be attacked.]

"This is the charm of the competition this time. The named monster, Brackan is being summoned right now! The Velto that appeared before this was easily beaten by the players. Will the contestants work together to hunt the Brackan?"

"Waaaaaaaaaah!"

Loud cheers broke out of the stands. It was a common occurrence for players to team up and fight together to kill named monsters with a much higher level than them. That was not all.

'If they successfully kill the monster, then they will be able to get the best items that it can give.'

Each monster had a different item drop, for example, non-ogre monsters would definitely not drop Ogre Gauntlets. However, out in the field, the successful hunting of a monster would not guarantee that they would drop good items. In this tournament, on the other hand, all the monsters would give

a 100% drop rate. This meant that they would be able to get the best artifact from each monster. That was the reason why the audience was looking at the players with envy.

'That player...'

Jan tilted her head as she looked at the constantly flickering scenes on the monitor. She was looking at a player who was wearing a black robe. This player continuously ran all over the island and focused only on hiding himself. Jan saw the operators gathered around. She was one of the few people who could see them in their transparent mode. Taking advantage of this, she quietly eavesdropped on their conversation.

"That Black Wizard's Descendant. Why doesn't that guy brainwash the other players?"

As far as Jan knew, this was Park Minggyu. He was the leader of the Special Players Management Team. He was talking to a woman beside him.

"I, is he really trying to use that skill? That's the only reason that I can think of as to why he's saving his MP and mental power."

"No, it won't make sense at all. If he used that skill, he would drop back to Level 1, and he won't be able to level up for three months, you know? So why will he use that?"

The development team leader in front of them was the one who answered. He said, "In fact, if you disregard that skill, then the Black Wizard's Descendant is not a threat at all..."

The operators nodded their heads in sympathy.

"When will the Minotaurus appear?"

"It will appear twenty minutes before the game ends."

"At that time, the players will only be limited to a 300-meter range, right?"

"Yes..."

The 300-meter range was small. If the players went outside of that range, their HP would decrease by itself. That was why the operators were sure that everyone would be there.

"If the Black Wizard's Descendant really used his skill 'Absolute Domination' to control the Minotaurus, then it would really turn into a massacre..."

'What...?!'

Jan was caught by surprise when she heard their words. That player would be able to control a Minotaurus? A Level 140 monster? Does that even make sense? Can a Level 80 player really do something like that? Was that even possible?

Jan thought, 'I heard that the Minotaurus does not come out as a field mob. But if it gets mind-controlled, and is together with all of the remaining players in a 300-meter range then...'

Once that happened, it would only be natural that the Minotaurus would no longer be under the operators' control. That very same Minotaurus would also become that player's weapon. If that really happened then...

'Then... all of the players will die, right?'

Chapter 58: Beef is Always the Best

Of course, the players were given the freedom to find any means necessary to win the tournament. However, the problem was that the monster would definitely massacre the other players. In the first place, the Minotaurus was a monster that the Athena God decided on and placed in the tournament. There was no way that the players could have known that. Some might even say that the organizers of the tournament were crazy and reckless. They would even say that the final highlight of the competition was ruined by the appearance of the Minotaurus.

Team Leader Park Minggyu suddenly quipped, "If it really happens then..."

The woman nodded as she continued his words, "There are only two people who can stop it."

\*\*\*

Jackal, the Black Wizard's Descendant, was hiding in the bushes. He watched several players work together to fight the named monster, Brackan.

"Hey. f\*ck. Shoot the arrows straight at the monster!"

"Ah, noisy, if you're so good then you do it!"

"Guys, it's not the time for us to fight each other. We have to focus on killing the Brackan!"

The players needed to be united, although they were not doing a very good job. However, they had no other choice but to work together. They were doing it for one reason and one reason alone. Every player that participated in killing the monster would get the right to acquire the artifacts that the monster would drop upon death. In fact, the biggest reason that they wanted to kill the Brackan was the artifacts. The problem was that they were all strangers. All of them participated in the tournament, but they were not familiar with each other. After all, it was strange for groups of friends like the Bacallo Guild to pass the preliminaries together.

'Not yet. There's still a stronger monster.' Jackal thought. The operators had shared information about the named monsters that would appear in the tournament beforehand. Seeing the information made Jackal happy and delighted. This was all because of his Absolute Domination skill.

'I may not be able to level up for three months, and my current level will drop down to Level 1. However, I will be able to control a monster with a level that's twice as high as my own level for one hour!'

Jackal's skill could allow him to mind-control the players to make them fight among each other. However, he wanted to save his MP and mental power to use Absolute Domination. Mental power was similar to the amount of buff that a chef could use in a day. The more the Black Wizard's Descendant used their skill, the more mental power it drained.

'The Brackan is definitely not the final monster.'

Jackal believed that there was a monster at a much higher level than this. A monster that could show the greatest beauty and charm of this tournament. A monster that would allow him to take the lead in the competition the moment he used Absolute Domination on it.

'Keuhahahahaha!'

The mere thought of it sent a thrill down Jackal's spine. There was only one reason why he wanted to use Absolute Domination despite the huge penalty, and it was...

'I would let the whole of Athena learn of the name Kang Hyeonsoo before I enlist in the military!'

...because he was joining the army starting tomorrow. He wanted to make his name known in a splendid manner on his last day!

Thud!

At that moment...

[The players have successfully hunted the Brackan.]

The Brackan had fallen.

[Please proceed to the indicated area on the map.]

[If you go beyond the area indicated, your HP will continue to decrease by itself.]

Jackal opened his map. He could see that the range where they could move in the game was getting smaller. He ran in the direction of the convenience store then he continued to hide within the indicated area. That was how he bided his time.

[There is only one hour remaining in the tournament.]

[The number of players currently alive is 42.]

He then heard another notification...

[The Siren is being summoned.]

'Siren? A siren uses its charming skills to lure and seduce the players before killing them, but its fighting power is too weak. It's not the siren.'

Sirens were special because of their charming skills however, aside from that there was nothing that could be said to be extraordinary. Jackal shook his head.

'Are there no other special mobs that will come out?!'

If that was the case, then he would be in big trouble. If the tournament ended without him having a single kill, then he would join the army with nothing but regrets. Jackal waited with bated breath. He silently pleaded, 'Please, please, please, please.'

At 20 minutes before the end of the tournament, the siren has not yet been successfully hunted yet. Right at that moment...

[The Minotaurus is being summoned.]

[The Minotaurus is not a field mob.]

[Only players who want to fight against the Minotaurus are free to take up the challenge.]

"Oh...!" Jackal shouted in shock and delight.

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Go Eun-Ah, a reporter, was sitting in the stands with her junior and watching the tournament.

"Senior. It seems like Lucia will really take the number one spot, just like we predicted."

"Yeah. That person who killed the Bacallo guild is still eating in the convenience store. Ah, it's not fun if it goes too well."

A variable. Go Eun-Ah thought that it would be good if a variable would appear. They were not here to enjoy and watch the fun. They were here to get a scoop, and an unexpected variable would make their articles more interesting and catchy.

[Mooooooooooooo!]

That was when a loud roar shook the entire stand. Along with the roar, Jan began to explain, "With only twenty minutes left in the competition, a Minotaurus is being summoned! As per what the notifications announced, only those who want to challenge the Minotaurus can fight it. It's a monster that you don't have to fight if you don't want to!"

"Wow, a Minotaurus... What Level 80 tournament will place a Level 150 monster in it? This is a complete balance-breaker."

Go Eun-Ah shook her head when she heard those words. Then, she said, "Yeah. It's also a unique-ranked named monster, that Minotaurus..."

A Minotaurus was a monster equipped with skills and attributes. It was not just a Level 150 monster, it was also considered to be extremely threatening since it could cast fourth-tier magic. At that moment, the Minotaurus on the monitor was just standing there and roaring.

"Look at this. No one wants to challenge it."

"It feels like it's just standing there like a mascot for the Eivelis Empire's tournament."

Go Eun-Ah laughed at what her junior said. But then, a man suddenly appeared and pounced on the Minotaurus. Then...

Slam!

The man was killed and forced to log out in an instant.

"Puhahahaha!"

"Ah, what was that."

Laughter broke out in the stands when they saw the man killed in one strike.

"Now, no one will challenge it anymore after seeing that player die."

"Right. He was logged out in a blink of an eye. Huh? Is that Lucia? Where did she come from?"

"Oh, she's probably going to take a break after killing the siren."

"Shoot it well. Even if Lucia picks her nose, it will still be a good article."

"Yes."

The two were talking like that when they suddenly heard the others exclaiming while looking at the monitor.

"What's that person doing? He looks so gloomy?"

"What the... He's approaching the Minotaurus?"

"Suicide?"

The audience was murmuring when they saw a black mist suddenly explode from the man's body.

[Puhaaaa!]

The black mist reached out towards the Minotaurus and soon seeped through its body.

[Moooooooooooo!]

The Minotaurus roared loudly as the audience began to stir in agitation. Then, it approached a player that was resting nearby...

[W, what! Why are you coming towards me? Cow, you bastard. Stop! Don't go scaring me...!]

...and swung its ax towards the player before he could even finish his words.

Slash!

"...!"

"...!"

Silence enveloped the audience.

[Moooo!]

[Keuhahahahaha! It's a success, a success!!]

With the Minotaurus' attack, the Black Wizard went crazy. Go Eun-Ah hurriedly tapped the man beside her. She said, "Hey, hey, hey. Shoot it, it's a scoop! A scoop!"

"Ah, yes!"

"Write an article right now.?A mysterious robed man tamed the Minotaurus!?!And..."

Go Eun-Ah has high expectations for the future. She said, "Sweeps the competition."

\*\*\*

"Kyaaaaaak!"

Lucia picked up the dropped items after she finished off the female-type monster, Siren.

'Seduction Ring?'

It was an item that was associated with the lower ranks of the double ring system. It was very valuable, but she was not happy with it.

"Kyaaaaaa!"

"Eeeeeeeck!"

Lucia dodged the sword of the man who suddenly attacked her and quickly logged him out. Then...

"Aaaaaack!"

"Run away!"

"Those f\*ckers. They said that the Minotaurus wasn't a field mob!"

She could hear the screams of the other players. Lucia frowned lightly and thought,?'The Minotaurus?'

She also heard the notification about its summoning, but she felt that there was no need to hunt it. Lucia was well aware that she could not kill it. So, she decided not to hunt it. In the first place, Lucia was not a reckless person. Even if she tried her best to fight against an enemy that she could not kill, the outcome would remain the same. However, she finally realized the situation that they were in.

"Mooo!"

The Minotaurus was running around like crazy, slaughtering the players. It was just one attack, but the area was easily thrown into chaos as the players started to get logged out one after the other.

"W...what the hell..." Lucia said in confusion. The Minotaurus was not supposed to be a field mob. This meant that it would not attack others as long as they did not attack it. The notification was clear proof. However, contrary to what they have heard, the Minotaurus was running amok. Then, Lucia heard another set of notifications.

[Please proceed to the indicated area on the map.]

[If you go beyond the area indicated, your HP will continue to decrease by itself.]

Lucia's face turned dark when she heard the notifications. She thought, "This is crazy...!"

The area where they could move in was suddenly narrowed down, but the problem was that the area where they were supposed to go was the area where the Minotaurus was running amok in. However, if she did not move right now, then she would face absurd consequences and get killed by something completely ridiculous. Lucia tried as hard as she could to avoid its sight but...

"Moooo?!"

...the Minotaurus turned around and caught sight of Lucia.

"...Damn," Lucia cursed as she bit her lip. She was currently caught between a rock and a hard place. Behind her was the edge of the indicated area and in front of her was the Minotaurus.

'Is it a forced challenge, or what?' She thought as she tightened her grip on her daggers.

"Hiic! Run away. Right now!"

"You crazy shit, I can't run away, this is the edge of the indicated area!"

The players started to scream while the Minotaurus took a step forward.

Thud—

Lucia noticed that the Minotaurus' target had changed to her so she started to run away. However, the Minotaurus chased after her relentlessly.

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud—

"Hooo..."

She took a deep breath to calm herself down. She tried to assess herself. How much MP did she have left? What skills could she currently use? Lucia calmly analyzed her odds. And the moment the Minotaurus reached her...

Shiiiiing!

...she threw her dagger toward the monster.

[Shadow's Throwing Technique.]

[The dozens of shadows can only deal 60% damage.]

Her dagger flew away and created dozens of shadows. However, since they were only shadows, they could only inflict 60% of the original dagger's damage.

Stab!

Clang—

Clang—

Clang—

Clang—

Except for the original dagger, the rest of the shadows were deflected.

'Crazy...! Its level is too high for my attacks to be effective!'

Slam!

The Minotaurus struck down with its ax while Lucia nimbly dodged the attack and counter-attacked with a slash on its leg.

Slash!

"Moouoooo!"

The Minotaurus swung its arms like crazy trying to catch Lucia.

Poof!

Lucia quickly threw a smokescreen. She hid in the white smoke and quickly jumped behind the Minotaurus. She swung out her dagger to stab at the back of the Minotaurus.

Stab!

However, instead of stabbing through the skin, her dagger slid on its skin. It was not the effect that she wanted to achieve.

'It... it did not go through...!'

She tried to stab its throat but her dagger would not even get past its thick skin. The Minotaurus turned around and punched Lucia away.

Bang!

"Kyaak!"

Lucia flew backward and rolled around a few times until she crashed into a tree. Her HP was reduced by 50% in an instant.

[You're in a temporarily stunned state.]

'N, no...!'



Even a real person would not be able to get up temporarily if they suddenly suffered a great impact. Athena was realistic like that. Lucia could not feel her body even if she tried to move. Left without a choice, she stared at the Minotaurus running towards her. Right at that moment, a man suddenly stood in front of her. She was very familiar with this wide back.

"Mi... Minhyuk...?"

Minhyuk was standing in front of Lucia with a very solemn look on his face. She could even see his body trembling.

"Minhyuk, why are you here... No, look here! You have to run away! Just one strike from that monster will log you out!"

However, Minhyuk did not budge one bit. As Lucia looked at his trembling back, she thought, 'D, don't tell me...!'

Lucia's pupils shook as she asked, "Are you trying to protect me?!"

"???"

## Chapter 59: Beef is Always the Best

Minhyuk did not answer Lucia, but she felt that she knew what he would say. She thought, 'Yeah, I definitely got it right.'

Lucia recalled their journey together, and remembered how much joy there was on Minhyuk's face when she gave him ramyeon. However, she was sure that Minhyuk was just pretending to be indifferent and apathetic towards her. He even looked like he was only interested in ramyeon, but Lucia was sure that he was trying to use that excuse to get close to her. His trembling body as he blocked the Minotaurus was proof that he cared for her deeply.

"Don't be so reckless! Don't sacrifice yourself just so you could protect me!" Lucia shouted loudly.

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Minhyuk blocked the Minotaurus' path. His attention was solely focused on the black light glowing from its body. This black light meant only one thing... The monster in front of him was something that he could eat. That was not all. Compared to the time when he fought against the Sweet Potato Warrior, the Eccentric Food God's skill was in full effect right now. He could see the different ingredients and materials that he could harvest from the Minotaurus, causing him to lick his lips in anticipation. He even imagined how he would eat it.

'I'm going to put the charcoal in. It's hot.' The waiter, a middle-age man, would bring the fiery charcoal embers from the back of the restaurant to the top of the square grilling pan in front of Minhyuk. The moment that was in place, Minhyuk would grab the tongs and pick up some beefy bones, or marinated ribs, and place it over the grill.

Sizzle!

Yes, what an irresistible sound! The sound of the meat sizzling on a grill! Once the meat was cooked well, Minhyuk would flip it once. Once, just once! Then he would cut the meat into pieces. Marinated beef ribs were best served with pickled onion, which always came on a small plate along with the meal! He would then wrap the meat and pickled onion in a lettuce leaf, before putting it in his mouth.

Chew, chew.

The sour taste of the pickled onions and the savory flavor of the well-seasoned ribs would spread out in his mouth. The marinated ribs that had been prepared for a long time would make Minhyuk feel like the meat in the bones was melting with every bite. The more he chewed on the beef, the more savory the flavor, the more tender the meat. After eating a piece of meat, Minhyuk would grab a glass of iced cola and gulp it down.

Gulp, gulp—

This was the perfect combo! The refreshing and sizzling iced cola would definitely wash away the greasiness of the beef.

In fact, this was not the only dish that used beef. There were a lot of recipes that needed beef: Ribeye steak, bulgogi hotpot, braised beef in soy sauce with quail eggs, beef and radish soup, beef and seaweed soup and spicy beef stew. The recipes and dishes were endless. Minhyuk's body trembled at the thought of eating this delicious guy!

"Are you trying to protect me?!"

"???"

Lucia was mumbling something behind him, but Minhyuk was not hearing her at all. His entire attention was solely on one guy alone and that was the Minotaurus.

"I'm going to eat it. Marinated beef ribs..."

Clench—

Minhyuk gripped Ellie's Sword tightly.

[The Battlefield's Ruler.]

[+10 to all 5 basic stats and +10% increase in critical hit damage.]

[Bardy Swordsmanship]

[+20 to all 5 basic stats for 10 minutes.]

[Haste]

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

"Moooooooo!"

Minhyuk slammed his foot on the ground and used the force to dash forward, as he came to a clash with the rushing Minotaurus.

"Uwoooooooo!"

Dash!

"...?"

Lucia's eyes widened in shock. She thought, 'H, he's fast!' She was shocked to see that Minhyuk was so fast that she could not follow him with her eyes.

The Minotaurus hacked Minhyuk with its ax.

Vwoooooom!

The air sounded as if it was being ripped apart by the ax, but Minhyuk was able to block it perfectly.

Clang!

"...Impossible!" Lucia exclaimed as more players from behind her gasped in shock.

"D, did you see that?!"

"Wow. Real xxx... isn't that the player who was doing a mukbang earlier!"

"He stopped the Minotaurus with his sword...? That Level 140 monster...?"

The players had stopped earlier to watch Lucia fight against the Minotaurus, but they were dealt a bigger shock right now. Then...

Clang!

Minhyuk slammed the Minotaurus' ax away.

"Moo?" The Minotaurus moo-ed in confusion after seeing that its ax had been pushed away. Then, it swung its fist in retaliation.

Fwoosh!

Swoosh!

Despite the monster's quick punches, Minhyuk was able to easily dodge its strikes.

[Vital Strike]

[Additional 28% attack power for each successful strike.]

Then, Minhyuk quickly took the opportunity to stab the Minotaurus on its thigh the moment he found a gap in its defense.

Stab!

Minhyuk's sword was able to pierce the Minotaurus' thigh deeply. He tried to pull it out, but failed, no matter how hard he tugged at it.

"Moooooooo!" The Minotaurus shrieked loudly, its body shaking as it swung its fist. Minhyuk quickly let go of his sword, before widening the distance between him and the Minotaurus.

At that moment, the Minotaurus used a skill as a bright red light flashed and covered its ax. Then, it struck the ground with its ax, causing cracks to appear on the ground, as a ten-meter wide radius began to undulate.

[Earth Quake!]

[A violent earthquake is triggered within a ten-meter radius.]

However, instead of leaving the radius of the skill, Minhyuk dashed forward and went deeper into the Earth Quake's radius.

"....?!"

Lucia's eyes widened when she saw him dash forward. She knew that Minhyuk would definitely get stuck and devoured by the ground if he got caught in one of the cracks. However, as soon as Minhyuk entered the range of the skill, the ring on his hands glowed a bright red light.

[Absorption.]

[You have a 50% probability of successfully absorbing the skill.]

[Earth Quake has been successfully absorbed.]

[You can only use the absorbed skill once and only within ten minutes of absorption.]

Fwoosh!

The Earth Quake that the Minotaurus activated suddenly stopped working, and the undulating ground went back to its original state. Minhyuk took the opportunity to quickly pull out his sword from the Minotaurus' thigh.

"Mooooo!" The Minotaurus cried loudly.

Minhyuk took one, two, three steps back. After creating some distance, he gripped the handle of his sword tightly with both of his hands and struck it down on the ground.

Stab!

[Earth Quake!]

[A violent earthquake is triggered within a ten meter radius.]

Rumble!

The ground started to shake. Seeing this, the Minotaurus was suddenly brought into a fluster.

"M, Mooooooooo!"

This was a sudden turn of events. The wild and violent earthquake caused the Minotaurus to lose its balance, its legs getting trapped in one of the cracks in the ground.

Rumble!

The cracks in the ground swallowed the Minotaurus' legs, and its body started to receive damage from the shaking ground. Minhyuk quickly stepped on the undulating ground and shot off towards the trapped Minotaurus without missing a breath. In response, the Minotaurus hurriedly lifted its ax to fend off Minhyuk, but Minhyuk was one step faster.

Slash!

Minhyuk successfully slashed at the monster's chest. He then swiftly routed to the back of the Minotaurus for another attack.

[Dauntless Strike]

[Each attack inflicts additional 20% damage.]

The power in the sword was so strong that it made the Minotaurus cry loudly.

"Mooooooooo!"

Just then, Minhyuk leaned into its ears and whispered quietly, causing the Minotaurus to feel a creeping sense of danger, "You look so yummy~."

"M, Moo?" The Minotaurus moo-ed in fear, shrinking at Minhyuk's words. Then, it cried loudly, "M, Mooooooooo!"

Strangely enough, everyone was struck by a feeling that the Minotaurus was screaming, 'S...save me!'. At that moment, Minhyuk slashed with his sword, cutting off the head of the Minotaurus.

Slash!

[You have successfully hunted the Minotaurus.]

[You have gained 40 REP.]

[You have gained 1 AP.]

[You have gained 120 Tournament Points.]

Just in time, another notification rang.

[Thirty seconds left until the end of the tournament.]

Minhyuk hurriedly reached out to the Minotaurus' body and muttered, "Ingredients Acquisition."

After getting all of the ingredients, he hurriedly picked up the rest of the drops. He had no time to check them so he just grabbed everything. Then, a series of notifications rang loudly once again.

[The tournament is finally over.]

[The scores will be combined and announced shortly.]

[According to the combined scores: 1st - Minhyuk, 2nd - Lucia, 3rd - Wrath, 4th - .... omitted.]

[All surviving players on Cork Island will be warped to Eivelis Empire.]

Flash!

Minhyuk was suddenly wrapped in bright light.

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[Based on the total scores, the first place is Minhyuk.]

"Waaaaaaaaah!"

"Uoooooooooooo!"

Cheers erupted out in the stands. The audience was also warped to join the awarding ceremony in the ceremonial hall. The fact that they had been sitting did not change at all after the warp. Inside the Imperial Palace, hundreds of knights wearing capes on their wide shoulders and the swords on their waists were surrounding the players. Their capes were embroidered with the Phoenix, the guardian of the Eivelis Empire.

"D, did you see...?"

"Yes... I saw."

Go Eun-Ah looked at her junior's eyes.

‘Amazing.’

The video taken for the tournament today would definitely cause a commotion. The video might also spread around the world and cause a bigger uproar. Then, her male junior reporter shouted, "S... senior! The first result on the real-time search right now is that pro mukbang BJ! And the 2nd is Minotaurus' Necklace!"

"Wow, the viewers might have seen him pick it up back then."

There was no information that had been released about the Minotaurus' Necklace. In fact, there had not been any information about a necklace drop from a Minotaurus at all. That only meant one thing: the necklace that the man picked up was something extremely valuable.

"Hiyaaa... Is it something really expensive?"

"Did you see his face though?"

"...What?"

"That player looked very disappointed when he picked up the artifact."

"Eyyy, that's impossible."

"No, it's real. But...why did that player place the Minotaurus in his inventory?"

"Ah, maybe he's trying to dismantle the Minotaurus and sell it?"

"Is that so..."

The two of them nodded. Then, Go Eun-Ah thought, "That guy's so disappointed even if he got the best artifact drop from the Minotaurus, just who the hell is he?"

Go Eun-Ah quickly focused and looked towards the front. First place, the fact that Player Minhyuk surpassed Lucia's score was probably because he successfully hunted the Minotaurus alone. In fact, the Minotaurus was a monster that was totally impossible to hunt at their level, so no one would complain about this result.

"I'm looking forward to it."

"Me too. What are you going to ask in the interview? That player must be very happy right now, right? Since he won first place. I think that player wanted to be famous since he was secretly filming a mukbang broadcast. He even fought with the Bacallo Guild."

"Yeah, so what should I ask? Maybe... are you sure that you're not a player that the Legend Guild secretly fostered?"

Everyone was interested in what that person would say.

‘What kind of person is he?’

Then, the man wearing a white mask appeared in Go Eun-Ah's view. She said, "Doesn't he look like he's in a hurry?"

"Yeah. He looks like he wants to go to the bathroom..."

The man was fidgeting as he talked to Jan about something. Since it was before the awards ceremony, the microphone was still turned off and no one could hear what they were saying.

"Ah, what are they talking about?"

"I'm dying of curiosity..."

The rest of the audience shared the same sentiment. Then, they saw the masked man's expression suddenly turn solemn and dangerous.

"That person's usually very nice though, what's wrong with him?"

"That's true."

Soon after, they saw the operators and the tournament officials flock towards the man. They had a very serious conversation. Then, the rest of the people sighed as the man wearing the white mask flashed in a blinding light and disappeared. Before he left, they could see a bright smile on his face.

"Huh? Huuuuuuuuuuh!"

"Huuuuuh?!"

"What the hell, where did he go?!"

"Gasp?!"

It was not only Go Eun-Ah, even the rest of the people sitting in the stands were looking at them in shock. Why did he leave before the ceremony started? The surprise did not end there.

[The Sword Emperor, Ellie, will be attending the ceremony.]

"...!"

Go Eun-Ah was stunned. According to the reports that they have received, Ellie was not supposed to be participating in the ceremony. However, it was just suddenly announced that she would be participating. The meaning was quite obvious. She thought, 'Even the empress is interested in that player?'. Then, another thought flashed in her mind, 'But! Where the hell did he go when something this important is going to happen?'

## Chapter 60: Beef is Always the Best

Five minutes ago.

Jan immediately unsummoned her Wyvern King the moment she got warped to the ceremonial hall for the awards ceremony. Then, she looked straight at Minhyuk, the man that won first place in the tournament among the crowd of players, and thought, 'I'm looking forward to his interview.'

Everyone was focused on him. Minhyuk's appearance had been so dashing when he hunted the Minotaurus, that even Jan could not help but look at him in admiration and interest. No, it would be weird if she was not interested in him at all. Minhyuk's appearance would be made public in today's interview. The people would also know if he was truly a player that was secretly being groomed by Legend Guild.

After today, his popularity would definitely skyrocket. There was also a high chance that he would be a part of the top ten rankers in the local rankings in the future. Just entering the list would bring Minhyuk a huge amount of profit. Maybe even become a star? Of course, that was a story that should be discussed in the future. Athenae rankers were much more famous than celebrities in reality. In addition, the man was tall and looked quite handsome even with half of his face covered.

He was also very polite. However, Jan still was not sure about the persona or image he would take on. She thought, 'A character that eats well!'

Mukbangs and cooking shows were all the rage these days. His fresh character would definitely be loved by the masses.

'I want to get his number.'

Jan felt like he was a person that was mature and well-prepared. Just as she was thinking about that, the player that she was thinking of started to pace back and forth like a puppy that needed to go potty. She heard him say, "Waaaaaaah, I can't log out! I have to eat beef so I can't go out!"

'Beef?'

Jan thought, tilting her head in curiosity. All of the microphones were still off since the ceremony had not yet started, so she was not sure she heard him well. Then, Minhyuk spotted her and approached her. Jan smiled a little.

Minhyuk said, "Miss emcee, please let me out of here."

"...What?" Jan asked dumbly, his words bringing shock to her.

'He wanted to leave? What's the meaning of this?'

It was completely incomprehensible. So, she asked again, "You want me to let you out? Where to? We are going to have the awards ceremony right here, Mr. Minhyuk."

"No, I have to eat beef! So please, let me out of here quickly."

"B..beef...?" Jan asked in disbelief. Then, she recalled seeing him place the Minotaurus' body in his inventory the moment he successfully hunted it.

'Is he really trying to eat the Minotaurus?'

Jan quickly composed herself and smiled. She said, "I think you're still a bit out of it since you suddenly won first place. It's real. Mr. Minhyuk really won first place. And, you will be rewarded during this awards ceremony."

"No, let me out!"

"H...how about the interview?"

"Why do I need to do that?" Minhyuk asked, leaving Jan speechless. He looked at her blankly, to the point of innocence, as if he did not know what she was talking about.

Jan hurriedly said, "Y...you have to do it. You also have to remove your mask. Mr. Minhyuk, once you do the interview, you will be number one on the real-time search results and you will also be in?Athenae's hot issue broadcasts. You'll become famous!"

"Will I be able to eat something if I become famous?"

"T...that's not..." Jan stuttered in embarrassment.

Most people would definitely want to be someone special and famous. They also wanted others to look at them and cheer them on. But right now, he was asking her if he would get food if he became famous. At that moment...

[Jan. This is a jackpot. Ellie is on her way to the awards ceremony!]



Jan's eyes widened when she heard the official's words. This might be a game, but everyone would still be in awe at the existence of the empress. The empress was the one who held absolute authority over the tens of millions of people in the empire. In addition, the Sword Emperor Ellie was also an empress who had caught much attention these days. And such a character was coming personally just to meet Minhyuk. This meant that Minhyuk might gain more benefits if he met with the empress. If he established a good relationship with the empress, he might even be given special treatment in the Eivelis Empire, such as being bestowed a title of nobility.

Jan, who was filled with excitement, relayed the good news over to Minhyuk. She said, "E...Ellie's on her way here right now! I'm sure it's because she wants to meet you! It's impossible to meet her at ordinary times, you won't even get acquainted with her even if you spent a billion!"

"Ah, Miss! I asked you to let me go out! Why do you keep on saying something else!" Minhyuk shouted. In the end, Minhyuk lost his cool and burst out in annoyance.

"N, no... I, it's the Sword Emperor herself..."

"Whether it's the Sword Emperor or being famous, it's not as important as beef!"

"...B...beef is more important?"

Minhyuk looked at Jan as if she was some sort of weird creature. He asked, "Wow. Miss, isn't it obvious? Beef is delicious, right?"

Nod—

Jan nodded without realizing it.

"It's a happy thing to eat something so delicious, right?"

Nod—

"Yet you're saying that?the?empress or being famous is much more important than beef?!"

"I, I guess that's what I sound like... N, no...!"

"But, it's the empress..."

"Miss, if you keep on being like this, I'll just grill the beef and eat it here."

"..."

Jan's head turned blank when she heard his threat. What would happen if Ellie appeared later during the awarding ceremony and Minhyuk was grilling the beef right here and now?

"Then, that would be delicious...." Jan blurted out, before catching herself, "T...that's not it! That can't happen!"

Thankfully, the operators and officials came to save her from this weird predicament. One of them said, "Hello, Mr. Minhyuk. My name is Park Minggyu, the team leader of the Special Players Management Team."

Team Leader Park and the rest of his team greeted Minhyuk. However, Minhyuk did not care about them. He said, "You have to quickly let me go!"

“...Mr. Minhyuk. Everyone’s attention is focused on you right now. Why don’t you tell them what you feel about winning?”

Team Leader Park and Lee Minhwa had always been monitoring him, so they seemed to understand what he was feeling right now based on his expressions. However, Minhyuk refused their request. He said, “Let me go right now. There aren’t any conditions that require me to participate in this awarding ceremony, right?”

“...There seems to be none.”

“Isn’t?Athenae?made for the players and whatever they wanted to do? I can do whatever I want here right?”

“...”

“...”

“...”

What he said was logical and reasonable, causing everyone to turn speechless. In the end, Team Leader Park sighed as he made eye contact with Lee Minhwa.

‘This player doesn’t see anything right now except for beef. He won’t listen to us at all.’

Team Leader Park recognized this fact. He looked towards Jan as he nodded his head in defeat.

“Y...you’ll really send him out?”

“This player hates it when he’s being stopped from eating, and there’s no way we could stop him. The players of?Athenae?are indeed free to do whatever they want.”

“I... I did not know that,” Jan said, sighing in defeat. When he finally heard their approval, Minhyuk could not conceal his joy, as he laughed heartily and gave them a big smile.

“Recall,” Jan said as she raised her arm and pointed towards Minhyuk. Soon after, Minhyuk disappeared in a flash of light.

“Huh? Where did he go?”

“Gasp!?Where did that player go?!”

A commotion suddenly broke out in the audience stands when they saw the sudden turn of events. Jan thought deeply before speaking to the operators. She said, “Ah, that player, don’t tell me...!”

The operators looked at her curiously. She continued to say, “I know now. That player wanted to disappear on purpose so he could draw more attention from the crowd. Wow, what?a great?vision. It doesn’t make sense for that person to say that food is more important than being famous or meeting the empress, right?”

Team Leader Park shook his head at her. He said, "Jan, you have absolutely no idea what type of person Minhyuk is, right?"

"...N...no way, did he really go out to eat beef? He really abandoned the awarding ceremony for that?"

"Yes," Team Leader Park answered her firmly and without any hesitation.

Right at that moment, they saw a woman arrive at the entrance of the hall. The woman was none other than the empress of Eivelis Empire, the Sword Emperor Ellie. The Empress had her blonde hair tied tightly behind her and a sword on her waist, marching towards them elegantly. She was surrounded and escorted by the renowned Phoenix Knight Order.

"All foreigners, show your courtesy!"

This was a formal procedure. Jan gave a silent salute towards the Empress. It was the same for the rest of the players who were attending the awards ceremony. Everyone gave a silent salute towards the Empress. The operators quickly placed themselves in their transparent mode and left Jan alone in the hall.

'The empress is already here... And all of the players are focused on her. But the actual person that the empress wanted to meet already went away. H...how should I tell her what happened?'

Jan wanted to cry. At that moment, the leader of the Phoenix Knight Order ran towards Jan. She heard before that the leader of the knights was at Level 450, and was as good as the current rankings number one. This very same person was running around carrying out errands for Ellie. He quickly asked Jan as soon as he arrived in front of her, "Where is the champion of the tournament?"

"He went back for some urgent matters."

"...Is this the truth?"

"Yes."

The leader of the knights hurriedly went back to Ellie's side to give his report.

"What?"

"How dare he leave this place...!"

"Impudent! It is only right that we order an execution for someone that is this disrespectful!"

"Don't make a fuss!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

Her vassals immediately kept quiet and organized themselves when they heard Ellie's words. Then, the leader of the knights approached Jan once more. He asked again, "Do you happen to know what his urgent matters were?"

"T, that..." Jan stuttered. She was speechless. She could not just say, "Eating is more important than meeting the empress so I left!" or something like that. However, she had no choice but to tell the truth.

"H...he said that there was something im...important... t...that he needs to e...eat... so he has to leave..."

"Do you think that something like that is believable?"

"It's the truth! Why won't you believe me?"

The leader of the knights was emitting a terrifying aura at that moment. However, he frowned when he saw Jan's tearful face, and realized that it was the truth.

"Are you really telling the truth?"

Nod.

Jan nodded her head fiercely. The leader of the knights hurriedly went back and reported to Ellie. After they finished talking, Ellie started to walk towards where Jan was.

Step, step, step, step—

The officials that were with the empress also followed her in a march. Although they were just NPCs, it still felt like she was seeing a real-life empress with the presence that she was commanding naturally. Jan was once again impressed with how realistic Athena was. The moment the empress came near, Jan unconsciously bowed her head.

"You said that he went out to eat? Didn't you tell him that I was coming?"

"I have informed him."

"He knew about my arrival, but he still left? What in the world was he trying to eat?"

Jan's mouth was stuck when she heard her words. She could not reply carelessly. She was reminded of the player who was imprisoned in the dungeon for ten years just because he shouted at Ellie to make him her disciple. This just showed that Ellie was a cold and decisive Empress. She would kill anyone if it was necessary. In the end, Jan had to open her mouth even though it was tough for her. She said, "H...he went out to... eat beef."

The vassals surrounding her were the ones who reacted violently. Their faces turned red as if they were going to explode in anger if they did not vent out any words.

'I would also think that it's unbelievable if I were in their shoes...'

Jan wondered what Ellie would say. Would she pull her sword out in anger and shout, 'Find that bastard and kill him for me!' or would she say, 'Catch that bastard and lock him up in the dungeons for 100 years!'.

Hundreds and thousands of thoughts ran through Jan's mind. However, Ellie nodded seriously and rubbed her chin in thought. She said, "That's really a good reason."

"That's right. It really was a good reason... huh?" Jan stopped in her tracks, head tilting in confusion.

'Did the empress really just say that? Is she convinced with those words alone?'

"Delicious beef is truly a good reason, hmm. That's right. That foreigner and I have something in common. But these idiots don't understand that."

"Ha, hahaha..."

"Hahahaha...!"

"Hehehehehe!"

"Hohohohoho!"

Jan, together with the rest of the vassals, had no choice but to force themselves to laugh.