

Gourmet Gaming

Chapter 3: Game Start

Minhyuk woke up to the hushed voices of his father and Lee Jinhwan coming through the ajar door.

“His complications have become too severe. High blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis... there are even more that we haven't accounted for. His body can't tolerate any more than this.”

“...How about liposuction? We did that before, right?”

“We can't do that. Liposuction is just a temporary fix. The last time we did that, he just ate back whatever we took out after.”

“What did I do wrong...” Minhyuk murmured to himself as he stared blankly at the ceiling.

He had tried his best, working hard on his exercise regime, and keeping his appetite in check as best as he could. But he had not gotten better. His ever-growing appetite forced him to eat more which ended up making his body grow bigger and bigger. However, despite all the hardships, he wanted to live longer.

Creak—

The door opened as his father greeted him, "Awake?"

"Yes."

His father sat on the chair beside Minhyuk's bed, a bitter smile on his face.

"They said that your body went into momentary shock from too much exercise."

Minhyuk laughed bitterly at his father's words.

The man sitting in front of him was Kang Minhoo, the Chairman of Ilhwa Group and the subject of everyone's admiration. Minhyuk felt very grateful to have this man as his father. His father had all the right to be embarrassed and ashamed of having a son like him but he never did. He had always treasured and loved Minhyuk.

His father coughed lightly at his son's response.

Cough—

'He must have heard us talk.'

'What should I do? I can feel the tension in the air... Maybe I should just speak.' Minhyuk thought.

"Sweet and sour pork."

"Kebab."

"Beef steak."

"Kidney pie."

"Eggnog."

"G? G..."

The gears in Minhyuk's head turned quickly, as he tried to think of the next word that started with the letter 'g', but, no words came to mind. His father burst out in laughter, which eventually caused Minhyuk to break out in laughter too.

Although he was not allowed to taste or eat food after it had become his poison, he could still use their names and play shiritori with his father. After all, the shiritori that they played only involved food.

And this simple game slowly resolved the dark and heavy atmosphere in the room.

"Father."

"Yeah?"

"Would you hate me if I played games?"

"...I would never hate you even if the only thing that you do is eat and play games."

Kang Minhoo had heard about the new treatment and therapy that Lee Jinhwan proposed to Minhyuk. However, it did not matter whatever choice Minhyuk took. Kang Minhoo would always respect his son's decision.

"However, there's one thing that you have to remember if you're going to play games..."

The expression on Kang Minhoo's face grew stern. It seemed like the words that he would utter were of the utmost importance.

"Have fun. I'll be happy if you enjoy the game and find it interesting."

The reason why people played games was because they wanted to have fun. However, Minhyuk had no choice but to play this game just so he could live and survive.

Minhyuk smiled brightly at his father.

"I'll try it then. ?Athenae."

He had made his decision.

Minhyuk entered his room to find that an ?Athenae? access capsule had already been installed inside. The capsule was much larger than the regular capsules that Minhyuk was aware of. It seemed like they had prepared a custom-made capsule to cater to his unusually large body.

"We've prepared an extra-large sized capsule for you." Changwook joked around to try and lighten the mood and release the tension from his body.

The existing regular-sized access capsule for ?Athenae? was worth at least seven million won and this custom-made extra-large sized capsule was worth around thirteen million won.

Several medical personnel stood in front of the capsule, waiting on standby just in case something unexpected happened. They were there to make sure that nothing would go wrong once Minhyuk stepped out of the game. After all, he would stop eating for a long time in reality once he started playing the game, and they did not know what would happen after he logged out.

Changwook hooked his arms on Minhyuk's shoulders as he gave him some advice about the game.

"The novice zone is off-limits to high level users, make sure to clear it as soon as possible so that we can meet up inside the game."

"Yes. ?Ah, that's right. Hyung, what's your in-game nickname?"

"...Uhm."

Oh Changwook sneakily looked around before leaning in and whispering in Minhyuk's ears.

"It's Ge, General..."

"What?" Minhyuk let out a chuckle when he heard the nickname.

The mood inside the room was heavy and he did not like such an oppressive atmosphere. So, he laughed out loud, "Hyuuung! Your nickname is General?!"

"Pfft, General..."

"Oh my... Changwook... That name..."

"Hey, you punk! You weren't supposed to say that out loud."

"Hyung, perhaps..."

"...?"

"You also have a black dragon somewhere?"

"Just get in already!"

"Yessir!" Minhyuk saluted as he finally entered the capsule, smiling at everyone's nervous yet smiling faces.

Well then, shall we start?

Fwooosh—

The capsule's door slowly closed as countless wires stretched out and covered Minhyuk's body. Everything plunged into darkness as he closed his eyes to start the game.

Suddenly, a mechanical voice echoed in the darkness.

[Welcome to Athenae. Do you want to get started?]

"Yes." Upstodatee from n(0)/ve/lbln/.(co/m

Flash!

Light flashed from behind his closed lids.

Minhyuk opened his eyes and saw a completely naked copy of his body complete with sagging skin, blobs of fat and fleshy face that covered his features standing in front of him.

This is me. This is Minhyuk.

[This is your first log-in. You may only change the hair, weight and skin tone of your character.]

'...This can't even be done in Versal.'

Versal?was uselessly realistic to the point that no one could change the features that they were blessed with. Because of that, he couldn't change his weight inside the game. But seeing this feature, there was one thing that Minhyuk wanted to change. Just this one thing.

"Change the weight to 73kg."

A bright light appeared and covered his body, prompted by his words.

When the light faded, the fat and fleshy Minhyuk had disappeared. What was standing in front of him right now was the slim and handsome Minhyuk. This was Minhyuk from five years ago, his figure when he was still not afflicted with eating addiction.

Tears welled up in his eyes when he saw the figure that he wanted to see the most.

"Ar... aren't you handsome..."

With Minhyuk's height reaching 185cm and good looks—sharp nose, big doe eyes, and sharp jawline—he could definitely pass off as a model. He was quite literally a very handsome man.

Minhyuk slowly reached out to caress the figure in front of him, the very figure that he had longed to achieve again. He wanted to touch it so badly. However, it was just a virtual image that he could not feel. Nevertheless, Minhyuk could not stop himself from smiling.

"This is me..."

He thought that his fat and fleshy self was like a scratch lottery ticket where scratching his fat away would result in this slim and handsome figure.

'I can do it!'

A notification popped out as this thought flashed in his head.

[Do you wish to make any more changes?]

"No."

Minhyuk already liked what he looked like. After all, he looked so much like?Kang Dongwonbin.

[Please name your character.]

"Minhyuk."

He had already decided to use his own name as his in-game name even before he decided to play.

[Would you like to connect?]

"Yes."

A bright light soon covered the scenery and filled Minhyuk's vision.

Tweet, tweet!

Minhyuk slowly opened his eyes to the oddly realistic and cheerful twittering of birds ringing in his ears. The moment his vision cleared, he saw a middle-aged man donned in leather armor, with a sword hanging on his waist.

"Welcome. Your game will start here in Ardo. I'm Valen, your basic training instructor."

Athenae was an exceptionally large game with plenty of novice zones spread all over the continent. Minhyuk was one among the many beginners that appeared in one of Athenae's novice zones.

'An NPC?'

Minhyuk was amazed at how realistic the NPC in front of him looked. This was especially true when comparing the man to the NPCs in Versal.

The NPC sternly gave the dazed Minhyuk a wooden sword, which Minhyuk quietly accepted.

"Your basic training quest will begin right now."

Ding!

The ring of the notification was accompanied by the appearance of a system window.

[Quest: Hit the Scarecrow 50 times]

Rank: Tutorial

Requirements: None

Rewards: +1 Bonus point, 10x Hard Bread, 10x Bottled Water

Penalty for Failure: None

Description: You have just started playing Athenae. Learn how to attack by hitting the scarecrow fifty times.

"You can open the quest window by thinking of the word quest or muttering it under your breath," Valen explained the basic rules of the game to Minhyuk. However, Minhyuk's attention was only focused on one thing.

And that was...

'B, bread...?'

Bread. Flour. Diet's number one enemy. And yet... it was still considered one of the most delicious foods in the world.

He could already feel the pangs of hunger as his stomach growled loudly. He was so hungry that he felt like he would become anxious and start getting sick if he did not eat anything soon.

"Heh... Uhhh, is it possible for you to give me those ten loaves of hard bread in advance?"

"No," Valen refused him firmly and without any hesitation.

Hearing his straight refusal, Minhyuk could not help but feel sullen. However, he bounced right up and grabbed his wooden sword tightly.

'I... want to eat bread!'

Anyone who ate 5,000 cherry tomatoes every day would probably want to eat bread right away too.

Minhyuk quickly approached the area where the scarecrow was located. Simply walking around made him realize how his body moved and felt.

'M... My body feels as light as a feather!'

It was as though he had finally let go of that one hundred kilograms of weight that he had always carried around, especially with how light he was feeling right now.

Sensing the changes, Minhyuk immediately tightened his grip on his sword as he struck the scarecrow strongly.

Slash!

Minhyuk's strikes were neat and precise, without any wasted movements. He had tried all sorts of exercises just so he could lose weight and swinging a wooden sword like this was not that different from all the other exercises and sports that he tried.

This time however, his body felt different. He could move quickly and lightly without getting breathless. And for Minhyuk, who had been weighed down both literally and figuratively, something like this could also be counted as a source of joy.

"M... my body is really as light as a feather!"

Minhyuk shouted happily as he kept on slashing and striking at the scarecrow.

Slash!

Slash!

He gained familiarity with this virtual body with every strike of his sword, which in turn made his control of the sword more precise and swift.

Slash!

Slash!

As time went by, he started to get used to this body.

"T... too fast!"

"Does he do kendo outside?"

The other novices that were in the area looked at Minhyuk's speed and tenacity in amazement. The other users had already collapsed after just doing thirty strikes. Some were even gasping for air while lying down in exhaustion. But Minhyuk just continued to swing his sword.

Slash!

Slash!

His body and mind was used to doing high-intensity exercises since he was exercising for four hours every single day. The exercises were so hard that he even wanted to puke after completing them. So, for him, doing fifty strikes was a piece of cake.

Slash!

Slash!

He only stopped the moment he completed the 50 strikes needed for the quest.

[You have completed the?Quest: Hit the Scarecrow 50 times.]

[You have acquired 1 bonus point.]

[You can receive additional rewards from Instructor Valen.]

Instructor Valen quietly approached him.

"Good job. Your movements were neat and precise, I can't wait to see what you would become in the future. You have probably been notified about the bonus point too."

Minhyuk nodded.

"You can access your?stats window?by thinking or saying the words out loud. You can add your bonus points to whichever stat you wish to. If you add them to your strength (STR), your physical attack power will increase by three points. Doing this will also increase the weight that you can carry as well as your HP...?chatter... chatter..."

Summarizing what Valen had told Minhyuk...

Increasing the strength (STR) would increase his physical attack power by +3 and his HP by +1.

Increasing his agility (AGI) would increase his physical defensive power by +3 and his attack speed and movement speed by +1.

Increasing his stamina (STM) would increase his HP by +10.

Increasing his wisdom (WIS) would increase his MP by +10

And increasing his intelligence (INT) would increase his magical attack power by +3.

These were the five basic stats in the game.

However, these were things that he had already researched and checked before logging into the game.

"Stats window."

As if on cue, a hologram popped out in front of him.

(Minhyuk)

Level: 1

Class: None

HP: 55 ?MP: 50

STR: 5 ?AGI: 5 ?STM: 5

WIS: 5 ?INT: 5

Fullness: 70%

Bonus Point: 1

From what Minhyuk heard from Changwook, it would be useful for him if he increased his STR. He quickly dragged his bonus point to STR before closing the stats window.

He saw Valen holding out a heavy bag in front of him. When he opened the bag, he saw ten loaves of dry, hard bread with ten bottles of water.

"Good job. You can put these items in your inventory by saying or thinking the word 'Keep.'."

Minhyuk nodded repeatedly, his smile growing brighter by the second.

"I've never seen someone become so happy when receiving this reward."

Valen's smile was tinged with curiosity when he saw the bright smile on Minhyuk's face; it looked like he had received the greatest gift in the world.

Then, Minhyuk heard the other users near him.

"Ack! What kind of bread is this?!"

The face of the male user that received the reward before Minhyuk was crumpled in disgust. He spat out the hard bread that he had chomped on and groaned.

"Even a roasted rock would taste better than this," The user grumbled loudly, as though he could remove the taste of the bread in his mouth by criticizing it loudly.

"Tsk. They don't even know how to appreciate these small things." Valen clicked his tongue in annoyance.

If you want to eat something nice, then go ahead and become strong.

This was the common sense that was usual in games. Wasn't hard bread enough of a reward for novices like them?

Then, at that moment...

"Oh."

Valen heard a soft gasp right beside him.

"Hmm?"

Valen turned his head and saw Minhyuk sniffing and savoring the smell of bread as if it was some kind of rare delicacy.

'How long has it been since I last smelled the scent of flour? So fragrant!'

Rice bread? Beer bread? Brown rice bread? Bread that was good for the body? All of it! Minhyuk believed that any flour-based bread was the best bread in the world!

After savoring the scent of bread, Minhyuk tore a piece and placed it in his mouth.

Crunch!

What he heard was true. The bread was truly hard and cold. Minhyuk felt like he was chewing on the crusty shell of a baguette. However, it slowly softened after he rolled it around his mouth. He quietly savored his first bite before gobbling the entire bread up quickly.

"D, delicious..."

He truly felt that it was delicious.

The reason why Minhyuk only ate fruits and vegetables was because he had to stay away from instant and salty food, so that even if he did gain weight, he would still be healthy. Because of this, he was not able to taste any sort of bread for nearly two years.

He found the taste of the bread so delicious that he couldn't stop himself from gorging down the entire bread in one go.

"Is... Is it really that delicious?"

"Yes, it's delicious. It's truly mouthwatering!"

Minhyuk nodded vigorously. It was so delicious that tears welled up in his eyes. Seeing his reaction made Valen smile unconsciously.

'The people who enter these days only know how to complain about the rewards that I give them.'

Perhaps this boy is special.

"If you strike the scarecrows fifty times again, you'll be able to receive another ten loaves of hard bread and ten bottles of water. However, there will be no more bonus points. You can also choose to exit this novice zone and start your hunting tutorial."

Minhyuk only heard that he would be given more bread.

"Are you really going to give me bread for nothing?"

"It's not for nothing, you have to hit the scarecrow another fifty times."

Receiving ten loaves of hard bread and ten bottles of water if he swung his sword another fifty times in a way could mean that the game was going to give him an infinite amount of rewards for nothing. However, no user in the world would waste their time on something as trivial as tasteless loaves of bread and bottles of water. Anyone in their right mind would definitely choose to exit the area and go out to have fun hunting.

Minhyuk dug back into his hard bread after deciding that he would continue to strike the scarecrow. Just when he was savoring his fifth...

[Your fullness has reached 100%.]

[Fullness will not increase with intake of more food.]

1. a word chain game where you use the last letter from the previous word to make another word
2. Combination of Kang Dongwon and Hyunbin, I presume.
3. traditional Japanese martial art descended from swordsmanship, they use bamboo swords and protective armor