

## Level 0 Master - Chapter 1

[Wow.]

[What a close game! So great!]

MOBA is a genre of games in which players compete against one another by making teams and controlling their heroes. Among the several top games in the world, one game has attracted the attention of thousands of people.

Knowing the members of the Blue Team was only natural: Blue Star, Dark Wolf, Loney, Ishia, and Rebellion.

That was why they were the members of the professional team, “Virgo” competing against the best in the world beyond Korea.

In the close game that they played, the Purple Team, standing on the opposite side, also had to be famous and strong. Who was their opponent who won last year’s world championship? It was an unknown team, surprisingly. No, that was not the correct word. They were only amateurs who played games well.

They stood at the lower end of the second level in the hierarchy system of this game, which consisted of six levels in total. It was true that they played well among amateurs, but their level was that of a school representative; they were not strong, professional gamers.

Could a school baseball team match up with a major league team? No.

Could a local soccer team play in the Premier League? No.

So this match could not be seen as a game, either. That’s what they thought... but it became a close game within just 35 minutes. How could such a thing happen? Was this a miracle of God?

No, this was just the mischief of the devil—the “Devil Commander,” the only challenger in the Purple Team. He was also a master out of office, having declared that he would make his debut by winning first place at the open recruitment contest of the X Group team which would be established a week later.

That one person was making everything possible since the start of the game. Apparently, each member of the Virgo team overwhelmed the members of the Purple Team.

However, that one person, the Devil Commander, suppressed Dark Wolf at the same jungle position and further matched the game balance by shaking all the battlefields in the rest of the map.

He was the only genius who suppressed the power of the five talented people.

[Wow! So great! Too fantastic!]

[Devil Commander's team is going to win the championship this year if he takes out those four professional guys, won't they?]

This was the comment of a person who was watching the game online. He was attacking the pride of the leader of team Virgo, Ishia, whose name was Jung Keunsuk.

"Damn. Against just amateurs, I lowered my guard too much."

Keunsuk ground his teeth and then leaped up from his seat suddenly. He sat down after he shook his head once and straightened his posture.

The other four members were relieved at that sight.

All right, Keunsuk blew his top.

Just when his excitement reached the extreme, he became terribly cool after having taken such an action. That was the habit of Jung Keunsuk, the captain of their team, the so-called "Order." His judgment and command power after such an action became twice as strong as usual.

Devil Commander, you're a monster too, but let's have a real match between pros.

The world's strongest team could not lose in this kind of place, even though they messed up by lowering their guard in the beginning.

Keunsuk's eyes shone sharply. Upon watching the opponent's movements and calculating the entire situation of the map, he shouted, "Everyone run to Duke!"

“Duke” was a giant monster with the title of a duke that existed north of the center of the battlefield. It was hard to catch it, but, once a member finished it off, they would gain a powerful buff and plenty of money and experience points. It was prey that could change the tides of a close match in an instant.

Both sides could not intend to hunt it in the midst of a bitter confrontation.

The enemy team installed a ward item that illuminates the area around Duke for 2 minutes and 52 seconds. The remaining duration is 8 seconds... The arrival time is about 10 seconds if we run there right now. Keunsuk’s brain was spinning fast.

The time it took to leave the enemy’s field of vision after their ward ran out... The enemy team’s moving route for organizing a small buff mob at the bottom and the minions below it... The time it took for the enemy to rush back to the center immediately after feeling that something was wrong... The time needed to hunt with their items and their level... These were all variables that were assumed in an instant, and conclusions were drawn within a few seconds. This was the true strength of the commander of the strongest team in the world.

“We can hunt first and then get out in a few seconds. The path to victory is clear.”

“Okay.”

All members of Virgo ran with certainty under his command after discarding their arrogance and laxity.

Their opponent, who aimed for small gains, went to the lower side of the map. Of course, the strongest in the world was the strongest. At the moment they got serious, team Virgo was a totally different level from those amateurs.

They are strong, but they also made mistakes as they lost concentration. At this time, it’s standard procedure for the field of vision around Duke to be maintained all the time.

This standard procedure was born with reason. However, many things are overlooked in that moment.

And...

They thought they saw the road to victory. The demon behind the monitor was just calculating back to the original thought of Keunsuk... Once the Devil Commander calmed down, all variables on the battlefield had to be considered.

They intentionally installed the ward illuminating the field of vision to show the decreasing time and did not refill it. Moreover, they went to the opposite side of the map as if they were aiming for something else.

People who followed this stereotyped standard procedure were the prey of free creativity.

“Everyone run! No hunt buff! Don’t clear the minions!”

They went right away without finishing what they meant to do. But the Purple Team arrived a little faster than the Virgo team predicted. The Purple Team attacked the Virgo team who had already consumed considerable physical strength and skill due to their fierce battle with Duke.

It was Sungjin’s idea to guide the enemy by using Duke as bait.

This principle was explained in the book, the Art of War by Sun Tzu, “The art of war is deceit. If you want to guide your enemy according to your will, then let them come by themselves by using something else as bait.”

“How?”

There was no way this rear attack should have happened at the time. Keunsuk screamed at the surprise attack as if a hacking program were stealing things from his computer.

This was not possible. They couldn’t have come at this time even if they ran back immediately after cleaning up the buff mob and minions at the bottom of the map.

Was this guy really a demon?

“Calm down! Keunsuk. Duke hasn’t been killed yet. As it’s come to this, let’s just grab it and aim for a double-suicide with the power of the buff. Then the initiative after the resurrection will be in our hands due to the difference of gold and experience points between our teams.”

Loney's words revived the team at once. That was just another power of the strongest team in the world. Loney, whose real name was Gyuhyun, was silent at times but also showed a temper. He suggested a secret scheme to turn the tides even when the cool-headed order, Keunsuk, didn't know what to do.

"Okay. I will hold off until the last attack."

It was the jungler, "Dark Wolf," Jisung, who had the animal senses to actually carry it out.

Attacking and defending each other under a surprise attack was a complex situation where someone would hit the opponent, hit Duke, and hit both at the same time with an AOE. In that situation, Dark Wolf looked at the decreasing health bar of Duke with a ferocious look.

Two more seconds...

He would deal the last hit if he used a spell to drain Duke's health after 2 seconds.

The attack power of ten people... Penetration power... Spell power... Order penetration power... Speed of attack... Skill damage... Skill figures... Fatal blows... Resistance power... Defense power... Regenerative power... Passive skills...

In a situation where all kinds of variables were tangled up, Dark Wolf's intuition read the timing of the spells like second nature. This was a 6th sense beyond calculation, an insight given to those who continuously competed with numerous strong teams on a global stage.

Even in a situation where they were strategically challenged, they claimed victory through their tactical capacity. Team Virgo was the strongest in the world because such a thing was possible. Their name, "Virgo," referred to the constellation of protection and good luck. The goddess of victory protected Virgo by countervailing the devil's maneuvers.

But...

1.85 seconds... No, 1.78 seconds...

After considering the fatal blow that had just been dealt to Duke, the devil readjusted the time. By calculating all the variables again, the devil attacked the goddess who had given Team Virgo their intuition. The devil's teeth bit into and swallowed the shining star that was born to win.

The time when the devil launched his attack was 0.22 seconds earlier than Dark Wolf's.

"Game over!"

[Wowaaaaaaaa, the steal was a success!]

[Purple got it!]

While the crowd cheered, the Purple Team surrounded team Virgo and used the buffs gained from killing Duke to finish them off. The game ended there.

The members of Virgo were blankly looking at their monitors that showed the defeat message.

"We lost..."

"Devil Commander... Let's meet again... after your debut."

"They are so intriguing! Damn. Today's game was a practice match anyway. I'll give you a taste on the real stage."

Devil Commander. What was his real name, and what did he look like? The members of team Virgo all ground their teeth while imagining someone who was probably celebrating behind their computer screen.

Cho~~op.

Everyone's guess that the victorious leader would be cheering was incorrect. The owner of the ID, "Devil Commander," was licking his lips in regret.

If this were a formal event, their real talent would have come out.

His name was Cha Sungjin. He was a sophomore in high school who was 185cm tall and in pretty good shape. He was slightly rebellious and had a rough, wolfish hairstyle. His baritone voice contained sharp charisma, and he had strong muscles that were gained through martial arts rather than

bodybuilding. He was indeed a nice guy who would stir up the hearts of all girls with both intellect and wildness.

There were countless books about fighting and combat in his room. There were books on martial arts, such as Textbook of Kendo, Textbook of Judo, Martial Arts for Grappling & Self-Defense as well as books about military and war history, such as The Art of War by Sun Tzu, Six Secret Teachings, Three Strategies of Huang Shigong, The War Theory and The Second World War History.

Next to the bookcase, there was a wooden sword showing many traces of use, and there were also a lot of books that seemed to have nothing to do with fighting: National Theory, Capital theory, World Geography Encyclopedia, Earth Science and so on.

It was true.

His enthusiasm for gaming allowed him to dig into the basic principles of other subjects as well. Beyond military strategies, the real game encompassed geography, politics, economy, culture, and so on.

Traces of use could be found on all of the books in the living room and in the other rooms.

Just then, someone sent him a private message.

[There is one thing that guarantees a lot of money... Would you be willing to play with a surrogate rank?

A surrogate rank was a method of match-fixing done by a master who would raise the rank of another person's account for pay. The income was not bad.

Sungjin's response to the message was to immediately close it.

"Don't spoil the game. These bastards," he swore out loud at the opponent beyond the monitor.

There are seven days left?

He looked at the picture of him and his parents on one side with a faint look in his eyes.

In the picture, his father held a champion belt, and his mother and he as a child were proudly standing by his side. Both of them died, and the past was the past, but this was a memory that remained precious in his heart.

\* \* \*

Jab. Straight. Hook.

The sandbag shook.

The man stretched out his fist. His muscles gained through endless training moved without stopping, and sweat flowed down continuously.

Nevertheless, the man moved without stopping. His lower body, which was trained through jogging, also moved around continuously, and his muscles showed how impressive the man's body was.

But the truly impressive thing was in the other point.

In order to accomplish what he pursued without any distracting thoughts, his concentration was unwavering. The man who had a goal to be a champion had the same tenacity of a man with a dream.

Young Sungjin looked at his father with pride.

So cool... he thought.

He looked at his father's back and thought that that's what a man with a dream should look like. It was from his father that Sungjin learned about concentration and effort.

Sungjin's father was a boxer.

As the popularity of boxing in Korea was not very high at that time, his father's life was never easy even though he was a top-ranked fighter.

Nevertheless, his father continued boxing.

And...

The brush moved slowly over the hwasun-paper. It moved as smoothly as a stream of water; there were no breaks in the action. The soft and unstoppable



momentum was hard to do and needed more concentration rather than brute force.

“Well.”

His father laid down the brush and nodded.

He was good at both literature and martial arts. The words that his father wrote on the hwasun-paper meant that both literature and martial arts were mastered at the same time. This was also the motto of his family that produced many military attaches during the Chosun Dynasty.

His father was a boxer but also a “calligrapher.” The level that he learned under his grandfather, who had collapsed but was a strict Confucian scholar, far exceeded the level of ordinary amateurs.

That feral body with solid muscles in the ring created an atmosphere similar to that of an old classical scholar when he held a brush and wrote serenely.

Although boxing was his real dream and calligraphy was done only for spiritual training between exercises, his father still concentrated on it.

Others said it was a strange combination, but Sungjin thought it was really cool. When he was exercising and writing, his father, who was focusing on his mind and working seriously, was wonderful.

His mother used to nag his father occasionally.

“Oh, pity me! I, who was married to your face, was deceived. I heard you would have me live in luxury, but I can’t buy even a bean sprout now.”

This was usually said on the day that the bills were due.

“I am sorry. Please wait a little more.”

His father was always gentle at home, even though he was fierce in the game. No, he was even old-fashioned beyond that.

Under the influence of his grandfather, a Confucian scholar, his father always used honorifics to his mother. He believed that a husband and wife should be honored with respect. As he did calligraphy during his breaks, he said, “A real matchmaker should be trained in spirit and body.”

“I’ve heard that more than a thousand times!”

Whenever she did that, his father tried to appease her, but his mother snapped, and the atmosphere became so bad that Sungjin worried for them.

His father was cool when he was engrossed in training. But his mother, who was pressed by money, looked tired. There was always the question in his mind, whether it was okay for his dad to just to be cool if he made his mother suffer.

But the time came for his efforts to bear fruit finally—he finally earned the qualification a world champion challenger.

It happened when Sungjin was in the second grade of elementary school.

“You’ve had a hard time really. I will give you the champion belt, so please wait a little more,” his father said.

“Yes. You’ve gone through so much trouble up till now, so it is about time that you succeed...” his mother replied.

On this day, his mother laughed without any nagging and treated his father brightly.

“It is you who has suffered from all these hard times, so much so that your pretty hands have become like this...”

His father stroked his mother’s wrinkled hand.

“If I get the championship prize, let’s eat your favorite grilled beef ribs and get a pretty dress. Is there anything else you want to do?”

“Just win, that’s all.”

Even though she said it like that, she was also laughing.

Three days before the game, a stranger came to the house. With his black suit and sunglasses on, he opened up a box full of money in front of his father. There was another box beside it.

“Mister, how much money do you make being a champion in this country? Moreover, is there any assurance of winning against the champion? We’ll give you a much better offer.”

“What’s the offer?”

“Please lose the match in the 3rd round of tomorrow’s game. Then this box is yours.”

Sungjin on the side opened his eyes upon seeing the huge amount of money. He was young but smart. Many things that could be done with that money were immediately calculated. They could pay off all of their debts, and his mother’s worries would disappear at once. He could also buy many products that he could only look at through the store windows, and his father would be able to do everything he promised to his mother.

He already knew how much that money could change their lives.

“What you’ve said, I will pretend that I didn’t hear it. So go back.”

His father got angry quietly.

“If you refuse our offer, you will regret it.”

“You should be ashamed of yourself to try to bribe a sacred game with money. Go back immediately.”

“Don’t you know how much this is?”

“I told that I do not need it. Or would you rather go back after calling the police?”

His father’s eyes were on fire. Even though his words were courteous, behind them was the dignity of a tiger crouching down quietly. The man shivered and packed up his bag.

Sungjin knew the weight of what his father rejected. It would be a comfortable and rich life indeed. Nevertheless, he refused. he refused without any hesitation. He had been suffering, but he still refused.

He did not sell out his dreams to money. He did not shake in front of the offer of a peaceful life. Sungjin was heartbroken at that amount of pride.

A man should be like that, Sungjin thought.

“I am sorry... to hear that.”

The man put away the money box and left quickly.

His mother muttered in a low voice at the side, "But with that money... I could repay all our loans... I could also save up money for school tuition of our child..."

"Honey. Please quit. They are swindlers gambling illegally..."

"Who said that? It's just, with all that money..."

"Stop it!" his father said sharply and strongly. This was so rare that his mother immediately closed her mouth.

"Dad. Mom. Don't fight. There will be a championship game soon."

The relationship between the two, which seemed to get better for a change, had gone sour again, and Sungjin had become depressed.

His father, who was proud even in front of money, was wonderful. But his mother, who suffered from money, understood and felt sorry. Neither side was comfortable. He just wanted his father to be a champion so that both of them would be happy.

But the really bad thing happened later. The day before the game, his father was attacked by unknown mobsters.

"Dad! Dad!"

"Honey!"

Sungjin shouted beside his father who had a cast at the hospital.

"They did it, Dad!"

There was no evidence. He could not find out who was in the mask. There were no such things as CCTV. There was only a confident belief.

"The ribs were broken, and the left-hand joint was broken. You have to take a break."

The doctor said that participating in the game was absolutely not possible.

“I can’t do that, Sir. Is there anything else that can be done? Tomorrow’s game is my lifelong dream. I’ve been living on that till now.”

“I understand, but it’s too much for your body.”

“But—!”

“This can’t be cured in a day even with modern medicine,” the doctor declared indomitably.

His father dropped his head. Sungjin was felt so bad seeing him this way. His father, who always seemed magnificent, seemed to be tiny and pathetic today.

Even though he pursued his dream earnestly, and he was confident in winning, he still ended up broken in the face of violence. What were all his father’s efforts for? Was this the outcome of not accepting dirty money?

He was upset... but he still had to forfeit the game.

His father hit the floor as he left through the doors of the hospital.

“F\*ck it! Damn it! You f\*cking f\*ckers! I’ll... how can I do it!”