

Level 0 Master - Chapter 41

In the forest, Sungjin felt a threat and twisted his body to look around.

A flying sword cut through the air sharply with full power, hitting Sungjin.

He was able to return the blow with his sword, but the flying sword made a turn and attacked him again.

His head. His shoulder.

His waist. His back.

His legs. His arms.

The flying sword was aiming for every part of his body without a break.

“Ugh.”

The sword was flying freely and making 360-degree degrees.

If Sungjin blocked it from the front, it would go for his back, and when he blocked the sword from behind, it would come from above. It was an attack that was free from the regular swordsmanship limited by human physics.

Every blow was a death blow.

But the owner of the sword was way too far from him to counterattack.

This was an unfair fight between a level 7 and level 0.

Once, twice.

Ten times, twenty times.

He was fighting back and avoiding the sword, but it was clear that eventually, the pattern of the sword would change and hit him. Whereas the enemy was hiding behind the absolute form of protection: distance.

“Huh.”

Sungjin started to breathe heavily.

Although he was well trained, he was still at level 0.

He was focusing and moving beyond this limit, but he didn't have any power given by the gods. It was almost impossible to keep fighting against a remotely controlled sword.

It was natural that he was getting exhausted.

He was sweating more and more.

His muscles became tired.

His brain became weary.

It was amazing that a level 0 was still fighting against such a sword. But it was nothing more than that. It was clearly a good fight but was not enough to upset the result of this entire battle.

That was the limit of level 0. That was the fight from a normal person's point of view.

But Sungjin was not a normal person.

He was waiting.

He was waiting for the perfect timing.

I have a secret plan to win. There will be a perfect time to fight back.

All he had to do was hold on until that moment.

His eyes were still shining sharply, and it was the same for Eustasia's eyes.

You think if you hold out long enough, you will get a chance?

Sungjin was hiding a secret trap in the tower.

I'm sorry, but it's all gone.

She had already inspected the tower before she got here. There was a hidden device in the wall of the basement. It had a fuse slowly burning to blow up the tower at the end of the fuse.

It was a brilliant device to attack me, but I've already stopped it.

She was not about to be fooled again by his same trick. Although she was not able to come up with such brilliant plans, she was still ready to stop them all.

Then she would slay him with her dominant strength.

It was the same for the other battlefields—she already had a plan to cancel Sungjin’s tricks.

...

King Leoric and Jenna were fighting on the east battlefield with a high mountain in the middle of it. It was similar to the observation tower, providing a bird’s eye view over the battlefield, but there was one more important thing on the mountain.

There was a magic square called the Power of Wizard. It augmented the attack distance and power of wizards.

Since both were wizards, taking over the mountain was critical for the victory. And King Leoric recognized a new dense forest on the way up to the mountain.

So General Eustasia was right.

After the early stage where both sides were collecting crystals, the heroes gathered for a frontal breakthrough. He remembered Eustasia’s advice, and King Leoric decided not to go through the newly formed forest.

“Go and check the forest. There might be some traps.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

Soon, the scout reported to him.

“In the forest, the tree roots are soaked in oil, and there was suspicious powder in the bushes.”

“As Eustasia expected. If we walk into the forest, the enemy will use fire to attack us. We will go around the forest.”

“But what if we lose the Power of Wizard?”

“That’s okay. It was all expected.”

“If you see a suspicious landscape on your way to the Power of Wizard, avoid it.”

Eustasia answered with a smile full of confidence.

“It is a defensive war for them. That should be fine. Although the Power of Wizard has strong buffs, you have a much higher level compared to the enemy.”

“Haha. You are trying to please me.”

“No, that is a clear judgment.”

Sungjin was using the landscape and magic to his advantage, but for that, he had to get the buffs from the Power of Wizard.

If he failed to use any of them, Eustasia was sure that King Leoric would be the winner. She was not able to predict the traps using the landscape, but she made sure that the king would be careful.

“Listen. We will overpower the magic square. Let’s show them that the buff from the magic square can’t change this fight.”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

He was okay giving Sungjin an advantage of landscape because he was much stronger.

He was about to show Sungjin that even the Power of Wizard wouldn’t overcome their difference in level.

It was clear that Sungjin underestimated the power of heroes, and the moment of truth was coming.

Jenna cast a spell using the buff from the Power of Wizard. She and other three wizards activated their ultimate skills at the same time, and their magic was stronger than usual thanks to the buff.

Thor’s power swirled, the power of the ground was condensed, blazing fire filled the air, but all this didn’t intimidate King Leoric at all.

“Stand back!”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

He started to cast a spell with two wizards next to him. The royal knights were protecting them from the potential attacks of any enemy knights.

The buff from the Power of Wizard was incredible, but the king was sure that the king of the Kingdom of Rufidi, the kingdom of wizards, was much stronger than the inexperienced, baby wizard. He trusted Eustasia’s prediction.

Five layers of magic squares appeared around him.

“I will show you what real magic looks like!”

Both sides activated their ultimate skills at almost the same time.

“Mjolnir!” Jenna’s voice echoed in the sky.

Burning white thunderbolts hit the ground, and the sound of thunder was like a glorious declaration. The beloved weapon of the god of war, who was praised to be the strongest in Pantheon, appeared.

The shaking ground became an earthquake.

A gigantic hammer covered the sun, and its shadow loomed over its enemies.

A gigantic, fiery serpent with burning fire on every scale started to attack the enemy. The fire spread to the forest. Where the serpent passed, there were only ashes.

As if there were landmines, the ground blew up, shooting up rocks and soil everywhere. Every single piece of the dirt became a weapon to attack the enemy.

But King Leoric was not just standing there, taking the attack.

“The power of the giants who fought against the gods! The infinite power that separated the sky and the ground. Destroy my enemies with your glorious power! Atlas Fist!”

A shape of a glorious giant, who ruled before the gods, appeared beside Thor’s hammer. His fist was the size of a huge building. It could smash a tower easily.

It was clearly stronger than Jenna’s Mjolnir. It was closer to the original source of the power of thunder.

They brought the power from the origin, but King Leoric’s higher level made his power stronger than Jenna’s.

A glamorous phoenix and a wolf deformed by thunder appeared on his sides.

The burning phoenix flew gracefully into the air. When a feather dropped, it melted the rocks.

The gigantic, fiery serpent was big, but it was not fear-inducing. When the phoenix passed the serpent, the serpent’s head was cut off.

A greater power shrunk the smaller power.

The phoenix melted the ground with its wings and made new paths. It was a mythical animal revived from the legends.

At the same time, the wolf from earlier started to run rapidly. The wolf was running and making another path. The thunderous sounds it made, caused the ground to erupt in

commotion. It was breaking up the rocks and tearing up the trees. The chaos threw the pieces of rocks and trees around.

This was the power of a legendary beast.

Six different powers crossed each other to reach their goals. The immense power combined into a dense cloud of energy, and the bright light it emitted blinded the people.

After the storm of chaos, the air slowly calmed down, and then people were able to see the results.

When everything was gone, Jenna was there, covered all over with wounds.

She was barely alive, and the other heroes who were fighting with her were gone. Even their bodies were not able to be found.

On the other hand...

All four heroes on King Leoric's side were still there.

Two wizards were a bit wounded, but the knight was not hurt, and King Leoric didn't have any wounds.

It was clear who was the winner without explanation.

"Hahaha. You're not bad for a kid. And it was a good plan to take the Power of Wizard. But you were arrogant to think that you could defeat me with that; that's what caused your defeat!"

He laughed with satisfaction.

"That is so true!"

His servants agree with him with joy.

Now, all they had to do was to kill Jenna, who was almost dead, to gain land, power and a lot of money. It was a joyful moment for all of them.

* * *

King Ilkandi on the central battlefield was able to see the changes around the battlefield and detected the trick, that was warned by Eustasia.

Hmm, the temple with the northern late is the trick.

If one did not look carefully, it would seem that there was a temple for the god of water built in the middle of a man-made lake.

But that was a trap. King Ilkandi recognized that it was not just a simple decoration.

The outer walls of the temple are embankments. When he breaks it, the flood will bury us here.

And in the middle of the lane, there was a critical spot that rapidly recovered your Heroic Power.

So you want to pretend that you are aiming for that spot and when we chase you, you will run as if you have no choice. And then, when we chase you, you will break the temple walls to wipe us out with the flood.

You are quite smart.

Trying to create a water attack on the battlefield, he didn't think of such a tactic. But he already knew that Sungjin was good with creative plans.

Eustasia had already told him what to be careful of and what he had to avoid. King Ilkandi was smart enough to be prepared.

Then let me channel this attack onto you.

He called Gapelt, the head of knights, who was standing next to him.

"Sir Gapelt."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"I will pretend I took the bait and head towards the center. You make a detour to destroy the temple before them."

He was planning to attack the enemy with their own trick when the enemy made a fake recall.

"Yes, Your Highness. I will follow your order."

"Good. I will give you the order through the Wind Spirit Stone. Although the enemy allocated a hero there was well..."

"Trust me. I will defeat the enemy's hero," Sir Gapelt promised him.

He was able to promise victory because Ereka's side had no high-level heroes.

“Sure.”

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But it was King Ilkandi who was smiling.

Now! Hahaha.

Ereka was planning to start a flood, but King Ilkandi seized the moment to wipe out his enemies.

“Gapelt! Now!”

“Yes, Your Highness!”

Not long after Sir Gapelt’s answer, a huge torrent came from the north, sweeping up everything in its way.

Kaboom!

The biblical torrent was more powerful than a human hero’s ultimate skill. The natural disaster didn’t care about your level or status and swept everyone away. Ereka’s army wasn’t fast enough and got caught in the middle of it.

Hmph. You were fooled by your own trick.

King Ilkandi laughed at Ereka’s poor judgement.

That’s what you get when you listen to a useless extra.

Sir Todam, a self-acclaimed historian, was writing his manuscript with real-time information from the battlefield.

“But his overconfidence caused his destruction. The demidevil from the other world was not able to claim victory with his lame tricks. Finally, the rule of level destroyed him miserably. His evil rulership was punished by the gods...”

He finally knew which one out of his two manuscripts to publish.

I need to move fast.

He ordered for one of his manuscripts to be published.

* * *

Chapter 11

He must be confused by now because the timing he was waiting for will not be coming. It will be the same for the other battlefields.

Eustasia had prepared for his predictable plans, and she was sure that since he wouldn't be able to be on every battlefield, he would not be able to come up with a new plan for this situation.

Maybe it would be easier for you if you had a stronger force on your side, equaling ours.

She operated her forces simply because it was obvious she had the upper hand. Her plans were conservative because Sungjin's side was much weaker. If they had equal power, maybe Sungjin's plan would be a threat, but that was not the case in this battle.

This was the reality for an extra who tried to fight against the heroes.

It was not a fair fight, but she had no plan to make it fair and help him.

"Judgement!"

When she activated her second skill, the cutting power of her sword maximized.

It's time to finish this.

Sungjin's movements became slower; she was certain it was time for her to finish him. Without their commander, Sungjin, his army wouldn't be difficult to destroy.

Eustasia's sword started to shine in the sky.

The device he planted didn't work, and he couldn't destroy the tower.

Eustasia sentenced Sungjin to death, and him with her sword. That was the final judgment to finish the fight.

The sword of the extra was struggling from the ground, while the sword of the hero was attacking him from above.

The fight... finished with the cracking sound of a sword. Eustasia's privileged flying sword was cracked.

Just like a window hit by a hammer, a tiny crack became many, and the sword shattered into pieces on the ground.

That was the end of her attack, while Sungjin was taking his time to catch his breath, a smile on his face.

The destruction of a weapon.

Sungjin was not struggling to fight against her sword; he was attacking her sword to destroy it.

The normal magic sword Eustasia was using to attack Sungjin couldn't handle the power of the artifact, the Sword of Heaven's Will. Sungjin constantly hit the same spot to the point where Eustasia's sword couldn't take it anymore.

It was a great plan. It went against the common thought of attacking someone's body to weaken them.

When Eustasia realized it, she was shocked.

My sword... broke into pieces.

She couldn't wield it anymore.

He was hitting one spot and pretending he was struggling to fight back...

She was so sure that she was attacking him unilaterally, but she didn't damage him at all, while he was destroying her plan.

Destroying a weapon is not an easy task, especially when the weapon is flying. Did you... plant a time bomb to distract me from your plan...?

Soon, she admitted that she was tricked again by Sungjin.

I was tricked, but that won't change the results.

She was still confident that his tricks wouldn't be able to upset the overall result of the fight. Her side was so much stronger than his, so Sungjin was only able to narrow the gap by a tiny bit.

That must be what she is thinking.

Sungjin already knew what Eustasia was thinking and smiled.

Now, the real game is on.

* * *

On the east battlefield.

"Now, it's time to finish her..."

Kaboom!

A thundering noise stopped the words of King Leoric.

“How dare you make such a sound to stop me!”

But it didn't take long for King Leoric to find out who made such a thundering noise.

It was...

“The... mou... mountain...”

It was a collapsing mountain.

King Leoric's jaw dropped, and even his straight beard that was once straight curled up in fear.

He didn't have time to do anything.

A gigantic mountain was collapsing while an avalanche was wiping away everything. Compared to this power of nature, their ultimate skills were nothing more than the mere power of mortals.

They used their ultimate magic spell and had to defend against the ultimate magic spell of the enemy. Naturally, they had no power left to resist and were swept into the avalanche.

There was nothing left standing after the army of rocks and mud passed by.

Sir Linte, a knight of the Kingdom of Sevrantina, couldn't believe what was happening as he looked at the scene from afar.

When Sungjin had Sir Linte's movements recorded in order to make an Illusion Stone, Sir Linte didn't understand the use of it. Sungjin also ordered him to stay at headquarters and just send wizards to the battlefield.

He thought he had to protect the wizards or try to stall for time by fighting in close combat; there were so many things he had to do.

He couldn't imagine a victory due to an avalanche. It was an unimaginable scenario for him to win a battle because of a collapsing mountain.

Well, it's not just me... nobody else would have been able to imagine this...

It was common knowledge that taking over the mountain in the middle was critical to winning on this particular battlefield. So Sungjin compromised the ground around it to turn the mountain into a gigantic trap. And on the top of his preparation, six wizards were attacking each other using their ultimate magic spells.

When Sir Linte was told that he just had to join the battle and follow Jenna's order, he didn't expect something like this.

The most scary thing about Sungjin's plan was the forest that he fabricated to trick the enemy into the avalanche.

Sungjin made it look like he was trying to use fire to attack them.

He made it look like it was a double trick that also worked as an obstacle to stop them from taking over the Power of Wizard. But it was just a false trap. Sungjin wanted the enemy to believe they avoided his double trick. It was all just bait.

Sungjin was over and beyond anyone's imagination.

Level 0... no, Master Sungjin.

Sir Linte was happy that he served with distinction, but at the same time, he was a little worried because he didn't know what to think of this level 0 extra.

Is he a real devil from another world?

[The Blue Team has won.]

The Valkyrie's announcement echoed in the battlefield.

So the east battlefield has been cleared.

While concentrating on his own battle, Sungjin was also calculating the status of the other battlefields.

Sun Tzu referred to a trap similar to this as, "crossing the sea with a trick" but what Sungjin used was more complicated and more refined for this battle.

Multi Trap—that was the name Sungjin gave to his own plan.

And the central battlefield...

...

The flood covered everything up.

Ereka and her army looked helpless at the wild torrent. The flood was too strong for a knight to resist using their Heroic Power.

Even if they survived, they would be severely wounded and killed by King Ilkandi's army, who was left unharmed.

But then Ereka held her shield up in the air.

Her golden shield was given to her by the goddess of wisdom and protection. It was a blessing from the goddess to Ereka, who gave up her dream to be a normal girl to become a protector of her people.

She shouted out the true name of the shield, "Aegis!"

She was slender but stronger than anyone else, and she decided to put the happiness of her people over hers. And the goddess blessed her with the promise of protection.

Even nature bowed down to the light from her shield.

The flood found its humble self reflected by the shield and turned away. The light changed the direction of the flood.

The torrent rapidly changed its direction to wipe up the army of King Ilkandi in a second.

"Wh... what!"

That was it.

They didn't even have time to think of doing something about it.

The flood wiped them up.

When the flood was gone, King Ilkandi was the only one who was still barely standing. It was easy for Ereka and the other knights to finish him. He was not even able to stand properly.

Then Ereka caught Sir Gapelt, who was hiding around the temple, waiting for his king's victory.

[The Blue Team has won.]

The Valkyrie's announcement echoed again.

Ereka praised Sungjin, who was fighting on the west battlefield.

You are truly amazing, Sungjin. Everything worked out as you told me it would.

"Looking at the records of King Ilkandi, he is experienced and also quite smart. I'm sure Eustasia will give him her advice as well, so he will try to predict or read my plan to use it against us."

"So what is your plan?"

“When he thinks that he is about to use my plan against us, we will catch him off-guard. I will use that to attack him.”

“Can you explain?”

“Your artifact, the mystic shield, Aegis, the “Shield of all People” is not only for protecting your team, correct?”

“What do you mean?”

“I saw it at the fire last time, that you can cover a much broader area if you want to.”

“That is correct...”

“People think skills are used to attack a hero or defend themselves. So let’s use that common sense for a surprise attack.”

Now, all you need to do is to win on the west battlefield.

And he had to.

He didn’t think that it would be okay for them to win on two battlefields and lose on one. When Ereka asked Sungjin to concentrate on only two battlefields, he refused.

“No. We need to finish this war as quickly as possible. We need to finish it before Eldorado and Rupellion try to get involved.”

To secure their future, they had to win all three battles.

“Moreover, Eustasia approved of my abilities.”

He had to win all three battles as the basis for the unification of the continent.

Eustasia’s approval...

That hurt Ereka a bit. Sungjin really wanted to make her join his team.

I envy her...

But still...

Sungjin. I pray for your victory on the west battlefield so that you can create a world where the weak can have the right to live without being abused by the strong.

She prayed in silence.

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Her bright eyes looked like shining stars.

Her voice echoed to show her determination.

“I don’t mind being naked!”

She almost looked like she would take off her undies too. Sungjin had no choice but to fight against her.

“Excuse me. I will just ignore it,” Sungjin answered as his eyes became calm again.

Now his eyes were looking at her as a warrior, not as a naked beauty.

Sungjin’s sword started to attack Eustasia again, but the fight became very different.

He hit her with his sword, but she avoided it with her next-level speed.

He kicked her, but she quickly moved away and avoided his kick.

He calculated her next move and attack, but she would react to his attack faster. He was able to calculate quickly, but Eustasia moved even faster.

She kept an inch difference to avoid his attacks, but that didn’t mean she was leading this fight. She was barely avoiding the attacks and was not able to counterattack. All she was able to do was to avoid his fierce attacks with her fluid movements.

If they had to keep going like this, Sungjin clearly had the upper hand.

His sharp eyes were analyzing and categorizing her movements.

Her flawless moves looked like there were infinite possibilities, but Sungjin was sure that since Eustasia was also a human, she would unconsciously show a pattern.

Cut, slice, kick and hit with a fist.

Eustasia was still avoiding all his attacks, but suddenly, she lost her balance when she stepped back to avoid Sungjin’s attack and tripped over a stone on the ground behind her.

Is this the stone he kicked right before?

It looked like he accidentally kicked the stone, but the stone was right where she had to step in order to avoid Sungjin’s attack.

Sungjin was able to hit her for the first time after she took off her armor. She tried to avoid it and got a one-centimeter cut on her left hand.

Maybe next time, he would hit a vital point. But she was sure of her victory at that moment.

Now I can use Sword in Mind again. I did well. My skill is back. Now it's time to finish Sungjin who was not able to finish me in time.

She pointed her hand toward Sungjin without hesitation.

This is my victory for my king!

She was determined to finish him with this final blow.

“Sword in Mind!”

A supersonic invisible sword came from her palm to pierce the air and then Sungjin's body. The sound came after everything was done.

Her sword ripped his flesh and muscles and broke his bones.

It was a fatal blow.

Sungjin lost his shoulder and his arm scattered into tiny pieces. The fatal blow also broke the tower and made a crater in the ground.

They were standing in a pool of blood.

“So that's it,” said Eustasia looking at Sungjin.

“Yes. I won,” Sungjin answered.

“How did you do it?”

She slowly fell down to her knees.

Sungjin lost his left hand in order to take her heart.

“I couldn't stop your level 7 speed.”

That was the limit of being level 0. He trained himself but he didn't have super speed, so he knew what to do but he couldn't.

But when she tried to use her skill, she had to stop for a second, not to react to his attack but to activate her skill.

That was the tiny moment that Sungjin was waiting for.

“But the moment you tried to use your skill, you needed to stop for a second.”

“The moment to activate... my skill... was the reason of my defeat.”

Eustasia’s body slowly scattered.

She looked at Sungjin once more. The guy who had defeated her twice was embedded in her mind

Haha. He is truly a great guy.

She tried to make him accept the reality, but he showed her a possibility beyond that.

Maybe it was me who was tied up in “reality” and did not try to find something beyond it.

Sungjin pushed his sword deeper into her heart and held her in his arms and whispered, “I won on the other two battlefields as well. Will you admit that if you work with me, we can get over this reality together?”

“I will admit that,” she answered.

“Will you come with me? I will treat you as a great general.”

Sungjin had three times more land than the Kingdom of Cariana, so he was offering three times more land to her.

It was an excellent offer to a defeated general.

But...

“No thanks.”

“Why?”

“I made an oath to my king...”

“You talked about reality, but that was it?”

Sungjin laughed, thinking she had a long way to go. He had his doubts. Her ideas of realism were not to remain in this reality but to gradually change it. It was a “methodology,” and a methodology needed an end goal.

He wished that her end goal was to protect the people, but she wanted to help her king to pursue Merciful Rulership.

It sounded very similar but was actually very different.

It seemed like that he still had a long way to go to make her join his team.

“Sure, I will consider this as a second stage. I will make you join me.”

“You are a great guy, but give up. All I am planning to offer you is my revenge.”

That was her last word before he exited the battlefield.

...

[The Blue Team has won.]

Light shone on Sungjin.

His wounded body recovered fully in the light, and the Valkyrie slowly landed in front of him.

The nonchalant messenger of God offered him the goblet with God’s nectar.

Sungjin drank it all without much expectation.

He felt some strong power coming into his body, but the power didn’t get absorbed. It stayed somewhere inside his body instead.

The power was just like a vault that was locked inside of him.

[System Error.

Name: Cha Sungjin

Class: Undefined

Without class information, the level cannot be granted.

Without class information, skills cannot be granted.

Without class information, status adjustment cannot be granted.]

The Valkyrie repeated some words.

Sungjin shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t expect to get a level right away, but he was happy enough to save this power for the future.

I should find out the cause of the system error when I finish the war against the four kingdoms.

The Valkyrie gave him the real award.

[I grant you the registration of the territory that was staked during this battle of life and death. All the extras in this territory and all their goods belong to you. You can also exile unwanted heroes from the other forces.]

All the territories of the three kingdoms, who tried to take Sungjin's territory, was now Sungjin's... because Ereka decided to let Sungjin have all the territory that he won.

The Valkyrie continued.

[And I grant you the territories that were fought by your representatives...]

The crest of the other territories showed up on his arm and then disappeared.

He was able to see the information on his new territories, such as the population, area, GDP and tax rates.

[Status report of your land.

Population: 32,570,000

Area: 350,000 km²

GBP: 79.5423 trillion dilent

...]

“Ha. It's not the first time, but still, I can't get used to this massive amount of loot.”

Sungjin smiled.

In Valhalla, the battlefield of God, the bounty for the qualification round of the game was a country. Territory, people, power, and wealth—everything belonged to the country that became his.

Nothing on earth could compare to what he had won here.

He won all three battles. Even in the battles that he was not able to participate in, he defeated his enemies with his intelligence. It was his perfect victory.

* * *

Chapter 13

A simultaneous fight on three battlefields.

Everyone thought Sungjin would be defeated, and if he were lucky, maybe he would win on one. But the result was the opposite.

Sungjin took everything from the three kings who attacked the Kingdom of Sevrantina.

Three thirds made a whole. As a result, he had now doubled his land. Now he had the same amount of land and people compared to the alliance of the three kingdoms.

But those were just numbers.

Before, everyone was sure that the alliance of the three kingdoms would win, but now nobody knew who could win.

Of course the alliance of the three kingdoms still had the upper hand. They didn't lose anything other than their land. But having the upper hand didn't mean much when they had to fight against Sungjin.

Everyone understood that.

...

The news spread to everywhere.

The extras from the Kingdom of Sevrantina cheered with happiness.

"Hurray!"

"We won!"

"Oh, gods! Thank you."

They didn't want to go back to a miserable life under those kings, so they wished for the victory of Sungjin and Queen Ereka.

They wanted to believe Sungjin's promise to win, but the situation looked extremely bad.

But he made it in the end.

Although they couldn't trust him fully... he made it.

"Ohhh. Master Sungjin and our queen has saved us."

Some became emotional and started to cry. It was a victory that saved their lives so no one thought it was stupid to cry.

The staff and patients at the hospital were the same. As soon as Nania heard the news, she fell down on her knees.

She dropped her plate of medicine, but she didn't care.

Oh... thank god...

She would kill herself if she had to go back to that prison. She was so happy, not only for herself, but also for everyone in the hospital.

"Can I keep learning letters?" Lute asked her with his books in his arms.

"Of course, you can." Nania was able to answer him with a smile.

It was not just the extras from the Kingdom of Sevrantina who were happy. The extras from the three kingdoms, who now belonged to Sungjin, started to carefully talk about it.

"Will he really be generous to us?"

"I think people are exaggerating, that is too good to be true."

"But still, if only a small part of it is true, our lives will be better, don't you think?"

"You are right."

They didn't wish for hospitals, that simply sounded like a fantasy.

I hope he will reduce the 70% tax rate a little bit so that we don't have to starve. Maybe to 60% or... 50% when we have a bad harvest...

I hope he won't take us as his prisoners for no reason...

I heard that in his country, the heroes can't abuse the extras. The heroes cannot beat us up or use us for their means. But that must be a rumor.

I hope he won't kill or disable us whenever he is in a bad mood.

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While apologizing obsequiously on the outside, he was swearing at Sir Todam in every language on the inside.

That's why I told you to work on it when we found out who the winner was! Why did you have to be so stupid to make this mess!

Gunan promised himself that he would never let Todam print his book before he was sure of the situation.

...

The heroes of the Kingdom of Sevrantina gathered to whisper and gossip.

"I'm glad I didn't try to work for the three kingdoms."

"Those two who went there are screwed."

"Yes, the difference in force didn't really matter with that guy."

"Shhh, that guy? watch your mouth."

"Oh... yeah. Hmm."

"Do you think... he... is really... going to unify... the four kingdoms?"

If so, he would have an even higher status than Queen Ereka or any other king from the four kingdoms. Moreover, he would create a new balance of power with Rupellion and Eldorado.

They started to think that maybe they should forget about their pride in being a hero and start being nice to him.

Of course, for them, Sungjin was a merciless tyrant who took away all the rights from the heroes while helping the extras.

But it was a better idea to be nice to him and try to keep some of their rights if they couldn't get rid of him.

No, but first... Should we wait and see?

The alliance of the three kingdoms was still much stronger. And since they made a mistake once, maybe they wouldn't make the same mistake again. Anyways, the military plans could not be re-used.

If we need to kiss ass, we should start now.

It was complicated for them. They didn't want to lose their pride against an extra, but Sungjin was abusing their rights. If they could be the first ones to gain his trust, that would make their lives easier.

Sungjin was becoming something much more than an extra.

...

Sungjin's team was in a festive mood, but they didn't start a festival right away.

"Let's take care of the lives of the extras from the new territories."

"I've been working on it. We will provide food and build up more hospitals. We are also working on the legal structure to protect them and the list of officials we are appointing for each part of the territories."

Ereka's answer made Sungjin smile.

"That was fast."

"No problem. While you were busy making a plan to win the battle, I was working on what I was able to do."

"No, you did a great job." Sungjin nodded.

It was clearly Sungjin who won the battle, and he had no plans to pretend to be modest. It was his intelligence that overcame their difference of strength.

With this victory, he could expand their territory and could try to become an Arc Master, but he couldn't build up a good country through this victory.

Since Ereka was playing her part and taking care of state affairs, this was truly helpful for Sungjin.

One last thing that could make this perfect would be Eustasia... but that won't be easy.

She was a loyal servant of the enemy king. Although her king was a tyrant, she was still trying to serve him right. And Sungjin understood that his argument to take care of the people wouldn't work for Eustasia, who was loyal to her king.

I can't make her understand a democracy with a few conversations. Making her admit my ability was the first step in persuading her.

While he was deep in thought, Jenna shook her knife tail.

"Sungjin Oppa. Let's stop talking about serious things and have fun! Let's celebrate our victory! Party, party! Let's have a party!"

Just like a cute little puppy asking for a little bone, her eyes were shining bright.

I will drug him and put him in the same room with the queen...

But her thoughts were not as cute as how she looked.

“Jenna. Don’t bother Sungjin.”

“No, It’s okay. We need to celebrate a day like this,” said Sungjin, standing up.

“Let’s declare the commencement of the festival.”

“Yes, Sungjin. I will open the warehouse and get ready.”

Ereka’s smile was soft and warm.

* * *

At the party.

Drenched in wine and ambiance, Sungjin took Ereka to the terrace under the moonlight.

“We should celebrate.”

“Yes. You look greater than ever.”

Although you never looked less than great, she added silently.

“You look more beautiful tonight.”

Then he held her in her arms and kissed her.

It was strong and passionate.

A red general opened a pink door and rushed in.

Ugh...

She was shivering with embarrassment, but soon, she started to loosen up.

“Ereka?”

“Huh. Yes, we should announce the details and pick the venue... give me a minute.”

Ereka woke up from her fantasy. She knew that it was not true, but she couldn’t help herself imagining it from time to time.

Ereka blushed and ran away while Sungjin was not sure what he did.

Is she exhausted? I should have asked someone else, not Ereka.

People were so wrong to think that he could read people's minds and was only pretending to be a level 0.

* * *

Chapter 14

Where there was light, there were shadows, and just like this, the people against Sungjin's victory made their move.

It was a place where the strong light was filling up the space.

There was a golden stream flowing like water, and there were so many treasures shining like stars.

On the way, there were secret treasures with legends and mythology lining up just like a reviewing stand of knights.

The air was vibrating by an invisible force.

Count Satirus walked in carefully.

This is truly a fearful place...

He was able to sweet talk to the mad King Seyzo II, but he was terrified of this place.

And that was natural.

The king sitting at the end of the path overshadowed everything; he looked like the one true person with authority.

"Count Satirus is here to report, Your Majesty," said Count Satirus as he bowed.

All he was able to see was a stream of water and the silhouette of a person. In front of the silhouette, there were numerous chess pieces with mystical colors tangled up with each other.

"Report."

It was not a loud voice, but the voice echoed in his head, and Count Satirus felt his soul shrinking due to it.

“As you ordered, I provoked the mad king by telling him that the extra was trying to kill him and start a war. And also, I tried to lead him to kill everyone who was related or working with the extra after the war to weaken the forces of the four kingdoms.”

Count Satirus tried hard to emphasize that he was trying his best to follow the order.

“And I also encouraged the tyranny of the mad king to worsen his relationship with Eustasia.”

He did everything to follow the order.

“But... but... I didn't know that the extra would win on all three battlefields. Please show me mercy.”

“I don't need a useless man.”

Count Satirus felt a huge pressure pushing him down.

Ugh...

He was suffocated, and it was not just his feelings. It was an amplified feeling of gravity that made a 60-kg weight a 6-ton weight.

That was a miraculous act by the silhouette without a sound.

He was way too strong.

Count Satirus was just like an ant crushed by a man. He felt his bones breaking, but there was nothing he could do but ask for mercy.

“But you started a war among the four kingdoms. So I will let you live this time.”

Count Satirus was able to breathe again, and happy that he saved his life, he asked the silhouette, “Then, what should I do?”

“So he won all three battles.”

The silhouette became pensive as if that was not what he expected.

The chess pieces in front him moved by themselves to rearrange themselves. White pieces pushed away the black ones to expand the board.

“I should think differently. Now the strongest of the four kingdoms is the Kingdom of Sevrantina.”

“Then...”

“I should give a present to the weak. Take this.”

The “thing” dropped in front of Count Satirus, and it startled him.

The bad omen coming from “the thing” made him suffer just by looking at it, and knowing what that was, he didn’t dare to pick it up.

“Can I give it to them?”

“I should invest this for a bigger profit.”

“But would they... use it...?”

“Anyone with a sound mind wouldn’t, and even a mad man would not easily use it. But when a mad man is cornered, he has no choice but to use it.”

Black chess pieces started to jump madly, and they broke the chessboard made of wood. But still, they were cornered and had no choice but to keep jumping madly. They looked like they would rather go crazy than give in to the power of the white pieces.

“Ah...”

Count Satirus bowed down. Although the extra was using various gimmicks, his master had next-level insight. He thought that at the end of the day, his master had everything within his grasp.

Sungjin was able to win once or twice, but he would just be a piece on his master’s chessboard.

“Understood, master.”

* * *

The heroes of the three kingdoms were in a panic. There was no other word to describe the situation.

They lost a war that they never thought they would. That also meant that they might lose again. They were thinking of dividing up the Kingdom of Sevrantina, but now, they were living in fear of being conquered by the extra.

In the castle of the kingdom of Carania, Seyzo II, who lost one-third of its territory, threw his glass at Eustasia who was kneeling in front of him.

The glass shattered into pieces, and red wine covered her face. It looked like blood.

“You brought shame to me! It’s all your fault!”

“Forgive me.”

Eustasia didn't even try to clean her face up.

Frankly speaking, it was clear that they would have won if Seyzo II followed Eustasia's advice.

She was the only one who defeated Rittier and fought against Sungjin. If Seyzo II didn't jump into the trap, it would have been possible for them to win.

It was the king who ignored her advice and failed, but yet it was Eustasia who was apologizing.

Knowing the king, I should have taken care of him rather than just concentrate on defeating Rittier. Or I should have known that Sungjin was trying to destroy my sword.

She thought it was her fault for not being able to read through Sungjin's plan.

“What will you do!?” the king roared.

“I don't want to make an excuse as a defeated general, but we still have two-thirds of our land. I will find a way to keep it.”

“How can I trust you!?”

“I understand that you can't trust a defeated general. But Sungjin is not really that strong; he just has plans to defend by creating traps. I will find a plan to stop him when we are on the defensive side. Please give me a chance.”

“Shut up! Leave now!”

“I will come back with a plan for victory.”

After taking all the anger from the king, Eustasia went back to her place.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 45

She didn't know if Sungjin also had enough power and capacity to fight against the Holy Nation, Rupellion, and the Golden Nation, Eldorado.

Objectively speaking, it was possible that the short, bloody glory from the unification of the four kingdoms would lead him to miserable destruction. But at least, her initial thought that the alliance of the three kingdoms had the upper hand against him was completely wrong.

He is a strong man...

He was not just someone who would talk about his idea but was someone who had the potential to break through the walls of reality.

But we still have a stronger force; we just lost our spirit to fight.

And Sungjin was able to be strong because he was on the defensive.

Sungjin was not the first one to use his knowledge on his own terrain. His traps and plans were just the next level of intelligence.

I need to concentrate on defense, and later, I can recover our land.

She thought that if Sungjin took his time, she could try to maintain the front lines of her army, and if Sungjin rushed to take over, she could defend and maybe recover her land as well.

All I need is one thing—I need to study and prepare the battlefield thoroughly to give him no chance to use his tactics.

She opened the maps of the battlefields.

But I must admit that his intelligence is superior. I need to start by admitting that.

She had to admit that he would find an unimaginable way of using any given situation to his advantage. So she tried to prepare the battlefield where he couldn't use his plans so that she could utilize her superior number of military forces.

I still have enough of a chance. When he defeated the Blood Ruler, Riad, his victory was not a flawless one.

She concentrated on trying to find the best way to achieve her goal.

...

On the third day, her adjutant general tried to make her take a break.

“General. Even if you have a lot of Heroic Power, I think you need to take it easy. Please take a break.”

“Our country is in danger. The king must be restless as well. I will take a break after I set up a clear plan.”

“But what if you end up losing your health...”

“If I need to rest, I will rest after setting up a plan. Now stop distracting me and leave.”

“Take care of yourself, General.”

* * *

Fifteen days later, she finally left her mansion.

The sun was almost violently shining, and she was holding a few maps in her hands. Fifteen days of no sleep and no food was exhausting even for her, who was level 7. But she was walking fast.

I can protect my country with this.

She couldn't wait to report the plan to the king and help him to stop worrying.

Even though Sungjin is strong, if we are fully prepared and ready to defend, it won't be easy for him to attack us.

She was quite sure this time.

Concentrate on defending on a battlefield that was thoroughly prepared. She was sure this plan would stop Sungjin who had a superior level of intelligence.

Now I need to report this to my king.

She had to think about their lost land, but she was certain she would be able to defend for now.

It hurts to think about the lost land and people belong... huh...

When she thought of that, she couldn't help but make a bitter smile.

Sungjin's land was not like Eldorado or Rupellion. The people who were now ruled by Sungjin must be overly happy by now.

What they feared was to be ruled by Seyzo II again.

To limit the privilege of the heroes and protect the people, his idea of a Merciful Rulership is... a great cause.

The heroes would hate it and stand against it, but the people would support him for his great cause.

Since he would never be able to have the legitimacy as a hero, that was the best path he had chosen to become an Arc Master.

But still... I'm a loyal servant of Seyzo II.

It was her job to make the people feel that life under Seyzo II's ruling was good, not hand over the country to a better king.

First, I should protect my country, and then I will lead my king to do better.

Now, I will only think of my king.

She promised herself and rushed to the castle, but the scene in front of the castle stopped her.

There was a huge pit, and there were human beings crawling around inside.

If they were little babies in a living room, that would be something cute to look at. But they were all grown-ups and had cracks all over their bodies. They were bleeding, and there were some black and wet, unknown creatures wriggling in their wounds. It was a miserable scene that was not easy to look at.

“Ugh.”

“Ughhhhh.”

Their eyes were begging her to kill them, but they couldn't even speak.

When they opened their mouths, their tongues were gone. Some dark-colored maggots were replacing their tongues and eating them from the inside.

But soon, they couldn't even beg for mercy with their eyes.

“UGHHHHH.”

Suddenly a maggot cracked their eyeball and crawled out.

Eustasia tried not to fall down. She was a general who had been to numerous battles, but this was upsetting.

This... this...

If killing innocent people was a great sin, she didn't know what to call this.

The people became the host of a strangely shaped monster and were slowly dying in pain.

Being killed by a sword or beaten by a monster would be a merciful death compared to this.

Even the guards around the pit were shaking around it.

“What is going on?”

When she asked, a soldier answered in a trembling voice.

“The king...”

“The king?”

“To get rid of that ruthless extra, sacrificing the other extras would be seen as a loyal act and...”

“That doesn’t have anything to do with this.”

“We don’t really know. We were ordered to throw these extras into the pit and to throw something on them that looked like black seeds. And then this is happening.”

“Okay...”

She didn’t ask more. It was an order from the king, the soldiers wouldn’t know anything.

Although she didn’t know much about magic, it was clear to her that this was some kind of a sacrificing ritual.

What is... Going on in the king’s mind?

Now she had to run to the castle. She couldn’t leave the extras dying like that.

When she entered the castle, she was able to hear some cheerful music.

“Where’s the king?”

“He is enjoying a party in the back garden,” a servant answered her quickly.

“At this time?”

“He... said... he had to get over this depressing situation...”

“Take me there!”

“Yes, General...”

The servant tried not to upset her and led her to the back garden. And it was exactly as the servant had said.

There was a glamorous party in the back garden. In the middle, Seyzo II was drunk between two beautiful girls who were not wearing much. And next to him, there were ten

bottles of wine called “Dragon Tears” imported from a faraway land. They were worth three years’ salary for an extra family.

“Your Highness.”

“Eustasia, you want a drink?”

Seyzo II seemed to be in a good drunken mood; he was smiling, unlike when he was kicking her out earlier.

“This is not the time for this! We need to take care of the aftermath. Especially now since we’ve been defeated, and there are so many things that we should take care of. How come you are enjoying a party!”

That was what she wanted to scream, but she didn’t. Anyways, the king was not one who could understand the situation or stop even if she told him that.

If he was a king who could understand the gravity of the situation, he wouldn’t have started the party in the first place.

Eustasia knew all that and still served him.

But...

But...

The party alone was not what was bothering her the most.

These were not the appropriate actions of a great king, but it could be seen as a human act to get drunk to forget about the defeat for a short amount of time.

But there was something that she couldn’t stand...

She tried not to shake or raise her voice.

“Thank you, Your Highness. But before I try the wine, I have one question.”

“What is that?”

“On my way here, I saw some strangely shaped creatures. What are they?”

“Ohhhh, those!”

Seyzo II held out his hand to show her his ring.

He was supposed to be wearing a ring with the crest of the kingdom, but he was wearing something completely different.

There were two snakes twisting around each other, and there was a black pearl in the middle instead of the crest. The black pearl contained some kind of darkness, and the darkness was moving with strange evil power.

“While you were gone, I checked the secret warehouse of the castle, and I found this secret treasure that my ancestors left for me.”

“The relationship between that and... the creatures...?” Eustasia asked.

“This seal calls upon the strong monsters among the outer beings. Now I feel better about our situation,” said Seyzo II with a big smile on his face, but Eustasia looked shocked.

Outer beings...

Among the gods who created Valhalla, there were holy gods, evil gods and neutral gods.

So heroes in this world were free to use the power of light or the power of darkness, whatever suited them.

At the same time, those powers were restricted by the rules of the battlefield. But there was also a power that didn't adhere to the rules.

It was different from the evil power from the evil god and was called the “evil from elsewhere.” The creatures who were made up of this power were called “aberrants from elsewhere” or “outer beings.” They were a forbidden power, even for heroes.

And the rules of the battlefield didn't apply to those beings. As long as they were on land, they would destroy everything in their path. Ereka's father was killed by some creatures like that.

Eustasia finally understood why there were so many extras in the pit.

Unlike the evil from the evil god, outer beings were forbidden things, and they had to be constantly fed to be used.

They offered a power that wasn't bound by the rules, one that was beyond the power of your level, but the people had to be sacrificed. So if one kept using the outer beings, all the people would have to be sacrificed, and the country would diminish.

The ring was called the “Forbidden Evil,” and it had such evil power.

I need to stop this.

She wouldn't expect Seyzo II to follow a Merciful Rulership. But there was a line even a king shouldn't cross.

She had to stop this.

She wanted to tell him to throw that ring away, but she couldn't.

"Your Highness. Here is the defense plan that I've promised."

First, she handed over the present to make the king feel better.

"Oh. This is it? Okay. Good."

Seyzo II took the scroll with a smile.

"Is there anything you want as a reward?"

"I serve my king with loyalty, I never expect a reward. If I can protect you from the enemy with my plan, that would be the best reward for me."

"I know your loyalty. But I want to grant you a reward. So tell me."

"Then, I don't really want anything, but I'm worried about your well-being."

"A few glasses of wine won't harm me."

"Not the wine... but the ring with a bad omen... You should take care of yourself and rule for a long time, but through history, the users of the Forbidden Evil have all had bad ends."

"Are you saying that this ring will do harm to me?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Eustasia bowed down and sighed silently.

Actually, it was not about the well-being of the king; it was a forbidden power that no one should touch. She couldn't understand why the king lost his mind and used it.

Is your madness getting worse even after being defeated by Sungjin?

She planned to lead the king down a better path when the situation settled down.

“Your Highness. The other generals and I will protect the country with our lives. Please don’t use such a plan that could harm you. You are too important.”

She was not trying to tell him to stop his tyranny, because that wouldn’t work now. But if she could stop him from using this ring, that would bring the same result.

This can help clean up the mess a little bit.

She planned to think of what to do later.

Looking at Eustasia, who was manipulating the king as usual, the nobles around them agreed with her. They didn’t have the guts to say anything to the king, but she was good at it and was loved by the king. That was natural because she was the most loyal servant of the king who protected the country and saved them when Eldorado attacked.

“Is that what you think?”

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“Hmm, so that is what you think.”

“That power is strong, but it will harm you, so please trust me and keep it away from you.”

Eustasia tried to nail it.

“Shut up!”

The king suddenly shouted with anger.

“Your Highness?”

“An evil force is trying to kill me! How dare you say that the power I’ve got to fight against this evil force is something bad!”

The king’s anger sent a chill down Eustasia’s spine.

Something... is... wrong.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 46

Eustasia paled.

She didn’t expect the king to rage so strongly compared to the submissive acceptance he had shown to her in the past. Was he that deeply entrenched in the Forbidden Evil? Or?

The mocking smile of Count Satirus flew her way.

Could it be... He?

Ha. It seems I've done well to have swayed the king's mind beforehand.

While Eustasia was holed up, he had reported to the king that he had received a spy's information that Eustasia was guaranteed a position with the enemy if she were to purposely fail in the next fight against Sungjin.

The king shook off the accusation saying he did not believe the report, yet...

"Your Highness. I am also saddened. But as your secret treasure will be his obstacle, as was mentioned in the secret pact, I am worried."

"There would be no such thing. Stop."

His report had simply ended as such, but the effects were setting in at that moment.

Ha ha ha. Even if he may not believe in such types of report, it does make one suspicious.

It was applicable especially for people who had persecutory delusions like Seyzo II. If he was advised to throw away his Forbidden Evil that he relied upon, his would be thrown into a rage.

It would have been better if he had ordered for her death, but I suppose his favor makes it difficult to go to such extremes.

The situation was unfortunate, but even this small amount of progress was fulfilling enough. If Seyzo II used his Forbidden Evil and got out of control, therefore destroying both himself and Sungjin, that would have granted his wish anyways.

Eustasia narrowed her eyes at the count and bit her lip.

This is his work.

She could see what he had laid out beforehand.

But what angered her... was that she could only back down into the trap he had set even though she knew of its existence.

This was her limit. It was her limit of advising the king.

At this point, where she had bought on the king's anger, if she spoke any further, not only would the king's stubbornness grow but she would also be hurt from it. And there was no one but her who cared for the well-being of this country.

She could only promise a later date and retreat. It would only be after the defeat of the enemy country that her position would be made clear.

"Your Highness. Please reconsider."

But what came out of her mouth was a different story.

"Please get rid of the ring for the sake of your people."

"What did you say? Are you prioritizing the extra's lives above mine?"

"Your Highness may be the owner of this country, but it is only because of the people that taxes and slavery are possible."

"I order you to be silent!"

The king threw his jug of wine at her face. Glass shattered and scattered all around.

"I've favored you for so long... It is an obvious fact of loyalty that the extras should sacrifice their lives for my crisis! How dare you turn your back on my life for them!"

"It is for you that I speak as such. There exists a line that not even kings may cross!"

Due to the circumstances, she knew she should retreat, but she could not do so.

If he were to use the people as sacrifices, he would remain a tyrant forever.

It wouldn't end there. Even if he was to borrow that vile power and stop Sungjin's path, he would keep relying on the power. In the end, he would rule as a tyrant until all the people had been sacrificed and therefore remain an evil king consumed by his own power.

She had to stop this.

She had to stop this no matter the cost.

This would be a situation where the king would attack the enemy's ambush with but a few of his guards. A similar situation would have been where the king attacked an ambush with only a few accompanying guards. There would be no tomorrow. He would certainly die.

“Your Highness! Who will you be the king of if you throw away all of your people!? Please throw that ring away!”

“Silence! Leave! Drag her out!”

“Your Highness!” Eustasia called out in sorrow, but the guards dragged her out.

Seyzo II ignored her.

Your Highness...

Seeing her buy into the king’s wrath of her own violation, Count Satirus inwardly celebrated.

Ha ha ha. This is a grand success. To think that that wretch would force herself out. This is beyond expectations.

After being dragged out of the castle grounds, Eustasia sighed continuously at the sight of the people crying in despair within the large pit in the ground.

Your Highness... has your sense of judgment blurred to the point where you cannot judge even this?

Where did this all go wrong?

Even if she were to speak softly, it would be impossible to change the king’s mind. The way to reassure the king and convince him was blocked. She could only admit that she had been brought to the brink of failure by Count Satirus.

...

The soldiers were not happy at all when carting the caged people. They were carrying out orders in order to live themselves, but no one could tell whether that would be their awaiting future.

To think that people would be massacred and fed to a monster.

“Die, you worthless king!”

“We’ve already given you our harvest of blood, sweat and tears; how dare you order us to be fed to this monster! Just die by the hands of the neighboring king, you madman!”

The people screamed enraged and now uncaring of their fate.

“Watch your words. Be quiet!”

The soldier beat the people in fear of being overheard. He did not want to, but if they did not, he did not know how the supervisors above him would react.

“Let them go.”

“What stupid being dares to... Huh?”

The glaring soldier shut his mouth at the natural gleam of silver in front of him. The offender’s clothes were colorless and old, but her threatening presence had not changed.

“Grand Commander? But this...”

“There is no need for words. Let them all go.”

The sword left Eustasia’s hand willingly and cleaved the cart. The people, albeit momentarily confused, cheered.

“We... we’re saved!”

“My lord! Have you come to save us!”

“Flee, all of you. I will report to the king myself.”

As soon as she had finished her words, Eustasia kneeled.

“Your Highness. I plead to you with my life on the line. There is no country without its people. To kill them would mean that you, Your Highness will be killing yourself. Take my life instead.”

Her voice, amplified by her Heroic Power, carried throughout the kingdom. The soldiers hesitated before leaving to report to their higher-ups.

Soon after, Seyzo II appeared before her with a sick complexion.

“What do you, a Grand Commander, think you are doing!?”

“Your Majesty. I plead to you knowing that I have bought on your wrath. The owner of this country may be Your Majesty, but a country only exists due to its people. Please acknowledge that.”

She pled with her head pressed into the ground.

It was the type of respectful gesture that a Grand Commander would not have shown towards a king.

“Are you seriously intending to rebel? Why do you keep advising me to abandon this sacred object that will protect me! What do you plan to do after I throw it away!?”

“I will protect your life until my end. I have never spent another thought after swearing myself to you.”

“Silence! If you truly cared about me, you would think of how to draw out the full extent of its power!”

“Your Highness. This is a power that should not be used.”

“I do not want to hear you any longer! Leave!”

“I cannot leave. If you truly wish to throw the people inside that pit, please throw me in there first.”

“Ugh.”

She shed tears before the king, who was throwing a tantrum.

Her plan was weak, as it was only to change someone’s decision by sacrificing her own life.

She knew it would be hard to change his mind with truthful and straightforward advice, and that instead, it would send him further into a rage.

Yet...

Only this time, she could not move back for the sake of tomorrow.

Even if it was the smallest opportunity she had to take action in order to change the king’s mind.

This was a line that the king could not cross.

“Shut up! Simply leave immediately!”

“Unless you throw away that evil ring I cannot move a step from here.”

She had no choice but to force the king to choose between the ring and her life.

It was the last act of loyalty she could show.

“If you do not move away, I will charge you with treason!”

Treason meant execution.

“Do so. I will show my honesty through death.”

Unresisting to death, she would prove that she had no secret pact with Sungjin. That would show that she was serious about her advice. She would therefore die then and there to sway the king’s mind.

“Three days! If you do not move within three days, I will execute you!” Seyzo II proclaimed to the entire people and turned away.

However, Eustasia herself had no intention of turning back even if she were given 300 days.

* * *

The next day, rain poured. Cold rain thrashed her body thoroughly. The rags she wore to show her inadequacy in righting her king’s mind beforehand gave no warmth.

There was no reply from the king. She, too, did not move.

The adjutant general approached her.

“Please cease. Any more, and you will be executed.”

“I believe in My Highness.”

“Even after witnessing that scene?”

The adjutant general pointed towards the pit. There were already decomposing bodies and maggots crawled about.

She could not reply.

“The king has already gone mad.”

“Yes... he’s not normal... but... I still wish to wager on the fact that there is righteousness somewhere within the depths of his mind.”

That was not a belief but a wish. Even if she felt despair within her heart, it was still a prayer for the one she cared about.

Perhaps it was a mother’s heart that could not give up hope on a disappointing child.

The adjutant general shook his head.

“Why do you do so? Loyalty is only given if the other deserves it.”

“I swore to him. By that, he deserves my loyalty.”

“That has a limit. You’ve already done ten times more than what he could have possibly offered you. Even now, you’re trying so hard for him, yet he has thrown you away.”

“Stop your nonsense.”

“Instead... instead... pledge allegiance to Master Sungjin.”

“He is our motherland’s main enemy. Do not speak rashly.”

“No. He will receive you gladly.”

“With what evidence do you speak such rash words?” Eustasia shouted in anger.

“Because what he sent you was not treasures or gold, but a cake with his sincerity.”

“Wha... what... what do you...”

At that unexpected fact, she stammered.

“It was not a present of bribery but a present of sincerity. He is not simply ambitious, and I heard he has the same political views as you. Because you both share the same will, I am sure he will not treat you poorly.”

“Sha... Shame on you!”

“Did I say anything wrong?”

Unlike her usual self where she would have demanded silence, Eustasia could not refute.

The adjutant general’s words were true.

He was more observant than she had thought after having served her closely for long.

Yes... I remember... he offered for us to work together several times.

If she could not handle the overstepping of the king today and asked to work alongside her, Sungjin was sure to greet her warmly.

“Let’s work together, not for the king but for the people.”

Those words were honest.

And if she were under his rule, she was sure she could achieve her goals.

He was someone who aimed for the level of an Arc Master while spreading the large ideal of a country for the people. Compared to the current king, he was bound to hold better politics.

Yes...

How many times did she wish for her king to hold at least one-tenth of Sungjin's likeness? And at the same time, she could have achieved so much more in her life under Sungjin's command.

Was that not the ideal life she wished for as she swore in as Seyzo's knight?

The path the current king had given up on was open before her.

Eustasia closed her eyes.

"Yes. He is truly a wonderful king. I understand why people would want him. Still... I will die as His Highness' servant."

At that time...

Before Seyzo was a mad king, the day she was sworn in as a knight, the light that shone through the colored glass spilled across her shoulders.

The pipe organs were solemn and majestic.

It was a magical realm so different from the Pantheon's reality.

The gods were watching through the light.

She went forth and kneeled before the king.

She swore before him.

"I swear to serve you as my king.

May my fate reside in your Kingdom.

To you, I give my glory.

May all troubles be mine.

May the last drop of my blood be for your undertakings.

I, as your sword, as your knight, swear to destroy all evil which stands before our kingdom."

She had spoken in honesty. Even as she watched the king become twisted, her mind did not waver. Even if the king wavered, no, because he became unstable, she decided she would still stand firm.

Loyalty was not something given when convenient and thrown away when inconvenient.

To serve more fiercely when the times were harder—that was loyalty.

She gave her all, not because the person being served was amazing, or smart, or gave her many things, but simply because she swore to serve them.

She gave her all even while covering up all the negative parts of that person.

Just like that poem which likened the loyalty to a king to a heartfelt crush, she was to step in for all the parts that the king lacked.

Did she not swear so, after all?

She would give every part of her mind just like the words she spoke when sworn.

Her eyes shone more firmly within the downpour.

“Do you think that mad king will recognize you for this?!”

“I can only hope.”

“Commander... how could someone so smart be so stupidly stubborn!”

The adjutant general kicked the ground as he ran from the place. Eustasia slowly hung her head.

I'm sorry.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 47

There were no heroes who asked for her pardon. The party she formed at court ignored her to save themselves.

Only the extras silently wept, watching Eustasia being dragged to the executioner's platform. But even they feared their king's wrath and could not speak a word.

They inwardly pitied her.

In this country... she was the only pillar that stood for the people.

Now that Commander Eustasia is gone, we're done for.

Who can we trust at this stage where the king offers us as food?

To think that a grand commander would be thrown away so easily.

There was no one the king would not kill at the moment.

Ah... Commander Eustasia...

As they cried silent tears of despair, the cart that carried Eustasia reached the pit.

Seyzo II had constructed a large patio before it to watch the procession. Beside him lay bottles of wine which could feed several families of extras for one year.

“Your sin for committing treason against me is grace! Earn your forgiveness by death!”

“Your Majesty. I advise you for the last time.”

Although she was chained, she could break through them easily. Yet she did not escape and simply advised.

“Please look after your people, at the very least. What reason would I have to speak falsities to you? Please accept my advice.

“Silence! Investigations have already proven your treasonous mind you wretch!”

At Seyzo II's wave of the hand, the adjutant general was brought before her. The traces of torture were evident upon his body. His arms and legs flopped about, and it seemed that his spine had been broken as he could not stand.

“Speak.”

“Yes. Your Highness... Eustasia... Usually... spoke highly... of the neighboring king's potency as a king unlike Your Highness... and... gave him... the holy sword... and promised defeat in this upcoming battle...”

As his eyes met Eustasia's, he halted his speech and lowered his head. It was the last apology of a man who had a broken spirit.

“Do you still deny this claim!”

At the king's rage, Eustasia silently cried.

You've suffered because of me.

Not only her adjutant general, but there were also many more citizens to be thrown in the pit before her due to her inability to protect them.

“If I were to betray you, I would have done so long ago.”

“It has already been revealed! You’ve played your part as a spy. I need no excuses. Throw her in!”

The soldiers silently raised her and threw her into the pit, and the awaiting black beings raised themselves towards her.

They abandoned the people they were eating and zeroed in on her at once.

This was a special type of food.

The endless greed gathered around her at once.

This purity was delicious.

Curse her.

Violate her.

Eat her.

From head to toe.

Let’s finish her without a trace.

Leave nothing behind.

Their endless greed was filled with hunger.

Eustasia closed her eyes, thinking that this was her end.

If only Your Highness regrets this day in the future...

But that was not going to happen.

She was swallowed by the black sea.

The people finally shed tears at the disappearing hero.

They knew their fate was not going to differ greatly.

There was only despair and darkness.

At that moment, a beam of light shone from within the black sea. It was a pure and brilliant light that let no depraved masses of greed near it.

“Shield of All People!”

Ereka slowly stood between the crowd with a golden shield in her hand.

A hooded man threw himself into the pit and received Eustasia to be surrounded by the holy light.

He proudly carried her bridal style.

The beasts were bound to the darkness and could not approach her. Everyone’s eyes fell upon he who walked from the parted black sea.

Who is he?

It was a question everyone but Eustasia asked.

Because she could tell who it was.

He came.

How could it be that fate would allow her to fall into his arms right after being abandoned by the king that she served?

Was her life of servitude all for naught?

Still in the end, she was but a woman in front of this man, despite her title of being the strongest general in all the four kingdoms.

To think that her heart would race like this even after completely rejecting him before... This was just like his path of conquering what he wanted through strength and perseverance.

“What!?”

At the show of this unexpected person, Seyzo II stood from his seat.

“What act is this!”

“I came to proclaim war.”

The man who stood before the two threw away his cloak.

A confident and manly structure.

A straightforward and vigorous voice.

Who could call him an extra upon seeing him in the midst of enemies?

His name was Cha Sungjin.

The man who currently stood at the center of scrutiny.

He raised his fist towards Seyzo II and shouted.

To be honest, he had practiced all this before a mirror before the rescue.

It was not his style to put on a dramatic act, but at this point, he was calculating the impact his words and actions would have. He was trying to utilize them to the maximum.

“I, Sungjin, hereby announce the war proclamation with my ally, Queen Ereka, at the cost of all lands upon victory!”

His shout tore the stale air, and it resounded clearly.

“I will willingly enter the warfield during the next march of war! All three kingdoms may stand against me at once. I will hold a satisfactory reward for all your lands!”

A preemptive attack was always disadvantageous, especially since his power was that of a strategist.

As he was in enemy lands, putting his abilities to use was against the rules, and therefore, a penalty of a forced preemptive attack was applied to him.

But he ignored the penalty and continued his announcement.

“And as a compensation, I hereby rescue Eustasia!”

As obvious as it was that he was the enemy nation’s king, the extras instead looked towards him with reverence.

He was a hero that had appeared before them when they were about to fall to their deaths.

He...

He’s the next country’s king who said he’d make a country where we extras could live in peace?

It’s said he has the same level as us...

I thought it was all some propaganda...

But one fact was true: his ferocity that they witnessed was truly amazing.

He was more confident and noble than all the other heroes they had seen.

“You... You dare!”

Sungjin ignored Seyzo’s madness and shouted louder.

“And listen, heroes of this land.”

What he was about to say was important. If saving Eustasia was not important, he would not have practiced so earnestly.

From here, he had to use strong charisma to enrapture and therefore convince the others to take action.

“Right now, your king may be Seyzo II, but when I conquer this land, think of what the extras will think of you when you capture them and throw them to their deaths! If you wish to continue saying that you had no choice, then think twice of what act you are committing before committing it!”

“You lowly thing!”

Seyzo II threw the wine bottle in his hand at Sungjin, but Sungjin caught it accurately.

“The next day after the war has ended, let’s see whose wine you will be drinking then.”

He set down the wine bottle, and then he turned towards the people.

“I apologize for not being able to save you all sooner. But I will come to your aid soon. Until then, do not give up. Flee and hide. Remain strong! Tell everyone of this news!”

This was what he had aimed for before the rescue mission.

Saving Eustasia, obviously, making the people flee so as to prevent them from becoming sacrifices, and making the heroes and soldiers who were after them band together.

That was his strategy to decrease the numbers of sacrifices to be made.

And Seyzo II, who realized this plan, became more enraged.

“You, you, you bastard! I will kill you!”

Black monsters appeared by his side, and they all poured towards Sungjin.

Sungjin avoided them by a hair's breadth.

"Dieeee!" Seyzo II shouted in madness, and even more dark creatures arose.

But Sungjin, not losing his calm facade, had already moved back to a safe distance.

And behind him, a Portal Stone was activated.

"I suggest you prepare yourself. When I come back, I will be charging you for your crimes."

Disappearing into the portal, Sungjin returned home.

"You, you bastard!"

Only the rage-induced voice of Seyzo II filled the skies.

Sungjin's appearance was short but strong.

The people immediately took to the wild mountains.

The heroes and soldiers who had to capture them and offer them to King Seyzo II as sacrifices thought once more at their actions before coming to a decision.

And ultimately, they divided into two factions.

One was the loyal party.

It's going to be a defensive war for King Seyzo II. The king could win.

A land conquered by an extra would cause all of our awarded lands to be confiscated. Even if the ratio may be 50-50, the king is better.

It is in times like this that my position may strengthen by showing loyalty.

On the opposite side, some started to change their minds.

He's a king who tried to execute Eustasia, the very person who saved his country from Eldorado...

Even if we did continue to be loyal...

The oppositions also acknowledged Eustasia's feats. There was nothing more to be said of her followers.

And if the Sevrantina Kingdom won the next war...

We need to save ourselves in these times...

The days ahead are dark even if that person wins, but a mad king won't be any better, so I should just wait and see how it turns out.

We're not heroes, we should do just enough according to our rank as soldiers.

If it was just Sungjin's, words they would not have been as shaken.

If it was just the abandonment of Eustasia, then they would not have been as shaken.

But when the two events came together, the order began to break.

The mad King Seyzo II's political power slowly weakened.

And on top of that, as Sungjin had orchestrated, the number of citizens captured slowly decreased.

"Those... those bastards..."

But that did not mean Seyzo II himself had been weakened.

"I will kill everyone... I will kill every last one of them..."

His burning gaze had descended from madness into the loss of reason.

"I will punish every last one of you... I will not forgive you..."

"Your Highness. Dinner has been prepared."

A maidservant brought him his meal.

Seyzo II brought the food to his mouth then suddenly threw the spoon.

"Why is the food so foul! You have turned treasonous against me, have you not!"

"No, Your Highness. Your Highness, it is the same as always..."

The black otherworldly beings covered her body before she could even finish her explanation.

"Kuh... kuk."

A moment of protest.

In a flash, she disappeared within those black things.

“Hah! Hahaha! Hahahaha!”

Seyzo II laughed madly at the sight and whirled around.

“And who else has turned their backs on me? Who dares to go against me! It’s you all!”

The black creatures started attacking more and more people. The servants all started to run and scream.

But it was no use. One by one, they were captured and dead within the black creatures’ embrace.

A few servants who found no escape kneeled before the king with tears.

“Please, save us.”

“Your Highness. We truly have no treasonous intentions.”

“It’s the truth. Please, think of us with pity.”

Looking at the servants kneeling and begging on the floor, Seyzo II stopped his madness.

“You have no intentions to turn your back on me?”

“Sincerely.”

King Seyzo II showed a benignant smile.

“Very well. If you all truly have no intentions of treason, then the Gods must help you, and therefore, the first person to leave this hall will live.”

At the word of only one of them surviving, their faces hardened.

“The ones who cannot escape means that their sins have been proven!”

At the same time, the monsters moved.

“Aah... Ahh!”

The hesitant ones were immediately swallowed by the monsters, while the others ran as fast as they could. There was a commotion as they pushed and pulled at each other, trying to get to the door first.

The last one to the door became the victor. The others were killed immediately.

I lived...

The survivor breathed in relief.

She was far too happy to be held by guilt for surviving by sacrificing the others. She could not think much of anything other than that she had lived.

But she could not move forward.

Huh?

She looked down and saw black impurities sprouting from her legs. They started crawling up her body, and the intolerable pain spread a moment later.

“Ahhhck!”

Did he not say she would live?

Was she not alive?

Her relief turned to fear, and hope turned to dread.

Crunch. Crunch.

Very slowly, the impurities starting eating from her legs up.

“If you were truly loyal, you would have sacrificed your life for me! Did you think I was fooled!”

Seyzo II had no intentions of saving anyone from the start. He was simply trying to administer a grand punishment.

“You thought you had me fooled!? I will give you the slowest death!”

Feet. Ankles. Thighs. Knees. Waist. Stomach. Chest. Shoulders. Neck.

The impurities ate the servant’s body in this order to give despair and make her watch her own body die slowly.

Seyzo II knew how to cause more torment and pain in death.

Feeling her life fade out, the servant cried soundlessly.

Someone... this crazy king...

She wished and begged for someone to punish him, if justice existed.

She pled for it to be stopped before her family was destroyed.

She pled and begged until her brains were eaten out, leaving only the remnants of hate and despair.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 48

Even if the ring was called the Forbidden Evil due to the ending it would bring to both the tyrant and itself, the power it held was real. And because he had turned mad, Seyzo II could bring out the power in its entirety.

Sungjin's provocation was to be his own grave.

No one could stop the king.

Those who were ignorant were weary of the Kingdom of Sevrantina's recent victory, but he was sure of the next result.

Seyzo II and the two allied countries were to claim victory. And afterwards, Seyzo II was to die by his own powers after spiraling out of control, therefore leaving the four-country alliance in ruins.

The new king of Sevrantina decided to save a young girl and some multitude of extras. As a consequence, he brought upon himself a threat that he could not handle. He overlooked the destruction that a cornered, mad king could bring.

He was a foolish man. Although others may call him noble.

But that's how a fool self-destructs.

Rightly so, his master's plan was perfect.

* * *

Chapter 16

Upon arrival back to the Kingdom of Sevrantina, Sungjin turned to stare at Eustasia.

"I'll receive you as a refugee and prepare your quarters."

Eustasia faced him without a word of gratitude.

"Why did you save me? I was prepared."

"I know."

Sungjin knew she was prepared for death.

A king spiraling to madness.

A rank of nobility out for their own gains.

A group of people defeated without any means of defense.

Within those limits, she had truly tried her best.

He could not have done any better than what she had done if he was born in her place and with her power.

He was not confident enough to say that he could have.

She had given all her loyalty, even giving her loyal advice through a close shave with death as her country abandoned her.

That would have been a death no less honorable for a person of the sword.

And just because the endeavor had failed, that did not mean one's will and work towards it was unworthy.

But...

"I found your life too valuable to give up."

Eustasia could only sigh before the person who had decided to pick her life up where she had left it.

"You're annoying."

"That's how you can overturn a game that's unfavorable."

"Undertaking the risk of defeat to save me and some extras. Is that the way you rule?"

One general, a part of the population. Throwing that much away to slowly secure the lands of the four kingdoms seemed more advantageous.

Before those silver eyes imploring the truth, Sungjin only smirked.

"Nah, that was my personal greed."

"What? The risks are much larger than what you've gained."

“Ha. If you see this as the arena of Valhalla in which the gods held, then I suppose so. Normal contestants would be in a fervor trying to win.

It was only after a win that rewards and others were given, after all.

“But I’m aiming to become an Arc Master.”

The champion of champions. The star of stars.

“If it’s not a fair victory to my liking, it won’t be satisfactory enough.”

Leaving a girl he wanted to walk with, a loyal girl to die, and ignoring the masses who would die under the reign of a madman—he was not the type to calculate the gains and losses of a victory.

To become an Arc Master in that manner, he would not be able to face himself.

“The danger of a preemptive strike? The danger of the Forbidden Evil? Ha. I’ll claim victory while crushing those underfoot. I don’t need a victory without grandeur.”

Eustasia was at a loss for words.

This man... truly...

His ambition was beyond overflowing. It was not as if she had not known, but for it to be to this extent...

“His Highness had grasped the Forbidden Evil. There may be someone working in the background. Even if there isn’t, as the situation has turned this dire, there will be an attempt at mutual decimation. I told you before, did I not? Even if you win, the higher society will rebel devastatingly. That is bound to happen. And you’re willing to shoulder all the responsibility?”

“Obviously. I’m aiming to be an Arc Master, after all.”

Sungjin’s eyes shone dangerously, and the tips of Eustasia’s fingers trembled. At the feeling of being oppressed, her entire body eventually trembled.

Even if the ruling class was to seek a destructive end, he was aiming to surpass it head-on.

He was to be ruthless until the very end.

“Rest for now and think of ways to stop Seyzo II with me for your people.”

“And if I refuse until the very end?”

“I mean it when I asked you to rest. I will not make you do anything by force and was simply offering.”

He was very interested in having her as his team-mate.

But loyalty is also the most valuable trait to her.

He had said it was for the people, but if she refused, he had no thoughts of forcing the matter. He could forcibly stop crime, but a noble will was something he could not force to his standards.

Eustasia sighed.

As a visiting general, her position was obviously not of a hostage. It was of a guest.

“I refuse. As someone who has been captured by the enemy, I cannot be in any other position than that of a hostage.”

Eustasia firmly closed her mouth.

Truthfully, she wished to be held in the man’s arms—how her heart had been beaten when they were escaping the pit of death—but she could not.

She could not abandon her loyalty to the king, who had abandoned her.

“I have no cell to hold you in.”

“Then I shall slave. I will slave at the lowest maids work there is.”

Sungjin did not force his opinion any further on the stubborn Eustasia. Even if his body rejected the idea, he knew the mind’s will had to be followed sometimes.

“Very well. Do so. Jenna, take care of her.”

“Yes, Oppa!”

Jenna agreed coyly, but her insides were twisting with jealousy.

Tch. Oppa’s still trying to help her until the very end.

It would have been wiser to leave this stubborn girl alone. To think he would leave the queen to take care of this woman.

No, well I suppose it’s obvious that Oppa will have several consorts once he becomes king but...

She did not think she could stop that. But she hoped he would at least give the queen some official title before gathering his own harem.

Yet beside him, Ereka remained smiling. It was not a forced smile and was one of relief and happiness, even though it wasn't the time to be smiling like that.

Ugh. At least I should be wary. But how? Oppa's interest seems fixated solely on her.

She couldn't show any wariness too obviously, as the smart oppa would notice.

Ah, fine. I'll give her the hardest jobs so that she will wish to flee the empire and live in the plains of her own violation!

One of the hardest jobs a newly hired maid would work. Jenna silently called for the most experienced maids.

Soon after, Eustasia was given the jobs of moving around heavy blankets and curtains and peeling onions that would make one cry.

And she was also tasked to clean the toilets.

Jenna hid far away and waited for Eustasia to scream indignant, demanding who they thought she was.

But...

Eustasia was unresponsive.

Even if the toilets were full of stench and excretions or she had to peel a bucketful of onions, she did every one determinedly.

She was not talented, but she was devoted.

What... what exactly is that heart of steel!?

Jenna could not understand.

She was a grand commander, and even before that, she was the daughter of a duke.

She may have found the lowest rung of the ladder pitiful, but she never would have tried their jobs before.

Yet, she was not disheartened at the unfamiliarity. Instead, she faithfully fulfilled each and every one of her maid duties.

Ughh.

It was to the point where Jenna lost her strength to bully her.

It is usually unnerving to have people around to help only for them to disappear, but how is she so calm? Should she not start sighing and despairing or something?

When Jenna could not help herself anymore, she asked one of the maids to go ask.

And...

The reply came.

"I am living to the utmost as my fate requires. I have long abandoned any heart of blame and pointing out wrongs."

Eustasia looked up at the skies.

Why was her king so evil, and why did her country's heroes only look after themselves?

If she had felt wronged at their actions, she would have given up a long time ago.

"It's not hard to do my best at a maid's work."

Arghhh. It's not working.

Jenna wrung her tail.

She tried to bring out the crying, tired face of a pathetic girl but failed.

She was the enemy, but was she really the type of person Sungjin would be interested in? She kept getting the uncomfortable feeling that this woman would reappear.

My Queen. I don't think it will be easy. But at least we've got time from now on.

* * *

At the same time, Ereka was talking to Sungjin.

"Sungjin. Thank you."

"Hm? For what?"

"For saving Miss Eustasia."

"It was nothing. I only did so because I was interested in her as a teammate."

"But she's also my friend."

“Are you not worried about her being made to stay as a maid?”

“I’m deeply reassured that at least she has not sacrificed herself. The future can always change if one stays alive.”

“Yes. That alone is reassuring.”

“I will try to convince her further on the idea of being teammates.”

“Please. But do not force it on her.”

“Yes. Of course.”

Ereka smiled peacefully.

It was unfortunate that Sungjin’s entire attention was on Eustasia, but she was satisfied with her friend being alive for now.

And if she changed her mind and came with us, it would be great for Sungjin and the people in all four countries.

Pushing down the tiny spark of jealousy, she simply smiled.

* * *

Chapter 17

The next day, Sungjin was eating his breakfast when Eustasia as mixed within the maids who were serving the dishes. She was not in the attire of a commander nor the attire of a lady, but simply the attire of a maid.

“Hmm.”

Sungjin’s eyes naturally slid towards her. Even if there was no special interest, it was the natural reaction of a man.

The clean and simple maid’s clothes revealed little and were efficient in the way the front apron was wrapped around her waist.

It was the type of clothing that enhanced the feeling of a servant’s position. But now that Eustasia was wearing it, he felt weird.

There was her inner strength and abilities that could not be restricted by the clothes, yet she was standing there in them in silence, mannerly submission.

It was a weird contrast that came with the rejection of having such a talented woman being lowered to such a position.

But the confidence that she could do her job with “diligence and politeness,” as required by the clothes, was there.

“I think you’re pretty in these.”

Sungjin praised innocently.

Eustasia flinched.

“Is... that surprising sir.”

It was the mannerly speech of the maids, yet her words were shaky.

Ereka dropped the spoon she was holding.

“You... you do.”

At their violent reactions, Sungjin showed confusion.

Were my words that shocking?

He was simply handing out a compliment to the new clothes a female wore.

Of course, they weren’t empty words as he was being truly honest of her beauty. But to see everyone become so shaken by what he had said was strange.

Or did neither receive such compliments before?

Both were beauties in their own right, and therefore, it would be surprising if that was the truth, but he supposed it could be possible.

“Hm hm. Let’s just continue the meal.”

Sungjin changed the subject at the awkward silence.

“Yes, Sungjin.”

Ereka answered with a low voice.

“I will prepare new food.”

Eustasia turned with shaky legs.

* * *

That night.

Sungjin opened his bedroom door after a long, leisurely bath.

If one had spent the day efficiently, it was also important to spend the night with enough rest.

But his peaceful mind was shattered upon opening the door.

Level 0 Master - Chapter 49

The one called the best commander in the four kingdoms had transformed into a shy woman before him.

A sight only he could see.

She who none could imagine on a bed like so.

A grand commander who was turning into a woman before a man.

The fact that even her proud and noble self's feminine secrets could be conquered by him ignited a deep desire within him.

A man was ready for his meal.

Sungjin grindingly found the stability of his desire to finish up that eluring forbidden fruit.

Wha...what is this?

To maintain rationality as a person who had entered their teenage years was inconsiderably difficult.

“Uh... you there.”

Sungjin wished to ask why she was on his bed in that position and in those clothes. But he could not speak.

It was only after he blanked his mind that he could see the woman, as though enjoying a fine scenery.

But in a situation where his desires were shaking...

Before a scene where the woman he thought charismatic and attractive was allowing him shyly...

He was in the end a youthful teenager.

Eustasia spoke first to him.

“I’m...ready...so do as you...no, as sir pleases.”

Her cheeks were dyed a shade brighter.

Her silver eyes closed gently as if to say she could not handle the embarrassment further.

“Why?”

Sungjin replied.

What did she mean to do as he wished?

Was it that?

He was dizzily overwhelmed by the smell of a ripe fruit.

The sea flamed his young blood under the burning sun.

“Well, if the victor wishes...it’s the fate of the one captured to pay the price...I expected this much...when I was saved...”

Frankly, she had faced him more confidently in her imagination.

But it was not so simple in reality.

She could fight bravely before all enemies, however.

But to think her heart raced when a man was before her in bed.

“I suppose I, too, am a woman...but still...if this is my fate...”

Sungjin had saved her with the consequence of an important advantage over the war.

As her life had been extended by his desires, she had to accept her fate as she had accepted her status as a captive.

Since the beginning...

Her fate may have been as such.

It was perceived that as soon as they had met, her fate was set to be broken by his hands.

What else could she do but to pay the price?

But was this truly something negative?

Honestly, she thought to herself before that if it was this man...

Didn't she think of such thoughts several times.

Even if it was fate, it was the truth that she was not rebelling against it.

"Uh... you see."

Sungjin approached her while saying so.

At the presence of a man, she clenched her eyes shut.

His hands wrapped around her shoulders.

Sungjin's head whirled around.

Instinct went before rationality.

Stop any thoughts and savor this prey. Lure it. Such violent tendencies ran throughout his body.

His blood boiled in his body.

His rough breaths pressured her neck.

Finally...

She reaffirmed her conviction.

Yet, at the same time her expectations grew.

Fear was not the only reason her body had tensed.

At the same time, Ereka silently raised her tea.

But sour tea could not reassure her tearing heart.

Beside her, Rittier was throwing her indignation out.

“Your Majesty, why did you help dress her before sending her to his chambers?”

It was so.

Before Eustasia entered the chamber, Ereka had provided the procedures of refining the body beforehand.

“This is about Sungjin, so I must provide the most attentive care, as moral dictates.”

“This is an entirely different matter! He has not even touched Your Majesty but had done so to that woman first, which is definitely a matter you could protest against, at least once.”

Beside her, Jenna blinked her eyes as if to show her innocence regarding those matters but slowly nursed her tail within.

This grandpa is finally saying something right for once in a while.

She was also unsatisfied with Sungjin’s attitude when he ran off to save Eustasia while leaving Queen Ereka behind, only to whisk her off to his chambers as soon as he had her in his grasp.

“To remind you of the facts, Sungjin has no responsibility towards me. Should we not be happy that he finally has a woman in mind?”

“But! Your Majesty also!”

“Well that...I...do find regretful.”

A small bead of dew hung at the corner of Ereka’s eyes.

It would be a lie to say she had no feelings of jealousy.

It would be self-delusional to think her heart did not hurt.

She wished she was the one who was called to his chambers this night.

Even that...

She would have accepted it if he had called both of them to his chambers.

If he had decided to abandon his mind about distancing himself from a woman, there was no reason not to receive her as well.

It was regretful and painful.

“But...lady Eustasia suits Sungjin very well.”

“Your Majesty has nothing less than her to compare.”

“That...Sungjin decides.”

Ereka swallowed another mouthful of tea.

To turn back the first meeting between her and Sungjin was the worst. Compared to that, Eustasia and Sungjin had gone on splendidly well since their first meeting.

His expression of joy in regards to that fact that he had met a good chess player was something she had never seen ever since she was by his side.

Was it only that?

Sungjin had wanted Eustasia the entire time.

He wanted her even if she was a loyal servant to her country and his enemy.

And...

Compared to myself who would have run this country to the ground without Sungjin's help, she is truly talented herself.

She was more confident and talented than her and was knowledgeable in the matter of warfare, therefore complementing him easily.

“She...would be a great help to achieving Sungjin's wishes. And...I can tell, she honestly...also has a desire for Sungjin.”

She had only been his enemy as a loyal servant to her country; she had felt, as a fellow woman, that Eustasia's mind had already been turned to Sungjin.

To congratulate them as they finally joined together happily, that was what she should do to her savior and as a friend.

Ereka smiled with tears in her eyes.

“I'm fine if Sungjin is happy.”

“But...! Your Majesty is also a queen of a country. An undefeatable level seven knight with Aegis. If it's about nobility, you would be ahead of her and never behind!”

“It is fine. I...”

Ereka wiped her tears.

“Whether Sungjin likes me as a woman or not...”

Even if Sungjin never saw her as a woman.

“I decided I would serve him forever. Compared to that, Lady Eustasia would hold regrets over the previous king if Sungjin does not affirm his relationship with her. With such a crack in her walls, she would find it devastating. This is the best situation for everyone.”

“Your Majesty...”

“My Queen...”

Before her benevolent mind, even Rittier had no choice but to close his mouth.

Even so, he thought there was no need for her to help a man she loved to get along with another woman.

But how could he change something she firmly believed was a rightful sacrifice.

“Everyone told me so. That there was no better rest for a hero than having a beauty in his arms. Than for him, who has saved the masses after battling for the entirety of last year, that rest must surely be needed...”

Although she would have been delighted if that was her.

Although it pained her to know it was not.

“I will still be happy and bless them.”

Before her seeking heart, it was more important for him to find his love.

More so than her wish, his happiness was at the forefront, which was why she would greet him a congratulatory greeting tomorrow morning.

Sungjin grasped Eustasia’s shoulder hard.

“Um. Well... I thank you for giving yourself to me.”

“You don’t need to enunciate, sir. It’s an obvious role of the captive.”

Eustasia made excuses by claiming it was a duty.

But she had no confidence to be sure, if she was asked.

In honesty, was she doing this because she was forced?

Or, was she trying to save her own reputation by claiming she was forcibly taken against her wishes?

“You are really... mesmerizing.”

“You overpraise.”

Eustasia peeked.

Sungjin’s expression was vibrant but his eyes were calm.

Hmm...he’s the type to speak gently and slowly set the mood.

He was not the type to pounce immediately.

Or was he going to continue this slow pace?

Perhaps he would change his attitude in a moment’s notice?

Her curiosity and fear rose rapidly.

“But I can’t take you in this manner.”

“What?”

At her surprise, she forgot her resolution to speak respectfully.

To say he wouldn’t in this situation?

“I would satisfy my desires.”

He would have definitely felt jubilation.

“But would lose something else far too important.”

He should definitely keep to the rules that he would save these type of situations for someone who could truly love one another.

Sungjin suppressed his burning desires.

It would be the worst to hold a person he didn't love under the name of a prisoner after all.

That would have been desire rather than instinct.

"What... What do you mean! Why are you stopping now! Then why did you call me here in the first place!"

Eustasia shouted as rage overtook her.

She could not place the exact reason for that either.

It would have been better as he could not have done so out of duty.

It would have ended with disappointing hope.

Was it because her pride was hurt.

Or... ?

"I never called you."

Sungjin denied wondering what misunderstanding she had.

"You called for me!"

"When? And who told you so?"

"What do you mean who! You told me I was pretty earlier today?"

"Yes? Well... yeah, I did."

What's the relation between this and that?

Sungjin did not understand.

"When higher-ups call a servant pretty, it means that they want them in the night to see to their desires. Are you telling me you didn't know that?"

At Eustasia's nitpicking, Sungjin finally understood the true flow of this situation.

"That custom... exists."

It was so.

That was the true story behind this situation.

Sungjin truly did not know the roundabout way the nobility called for those nightly errands and other rituals within the court.

He definitely possessed a brain that was different from others in warfare, and therefore used that upon reaching Valhalla to collect information regarding the current stream of wars but had no time to memorize all the petty mannerisms of the court.

He was truly a stranded high school student in a different world.

“You... really didn’t know?”

“Sorry.”

Even if it was a situation that stemmed from his ignorance, Sungjin apologised for putting a woman in such an embarrassing place.

“Eeeeeek. Whatever! You’re the king here anyways!”

Eustasia threw the pillow at the king and ran from the chamber.

It was not the way a maid would have treated a king but Sungjin only scratched his cheek.

Ugh. Do I need to study court mannerisms too? I don’t have time for that.

Although he did get a nice view, thanks to his ignorance.

It was an embarrassing mistake he wouldn’t try twice.

—

Eustasia appeared before Ereka, who was wiping away her tears.

“Is it... already over?”

“It’s wrong.”

“What is?”

“He says he didn’t mean it that way.”

And she ran after leaving those words, as showing her attire in front of others was embarrassing as well.

After Eustasia disappeared, Ereka thought for awhile. And understood a moment later.

“Ah...I...I see.”

Ereka realized her mistake and rubbed her palms.

Oh dear. What to do? Sungjin must have been uncomfortable. I've made Miss Eustasia suffer an embarrassment too.

She should have thought that Sungjin was in the dark regarding palace culture.

She had simply proceeded as she had assumed, as it was a sensitive matter to inquire about.

Such a mistake...

But she did not know what to do with the relief and happiness from such an embarrassing event.

Ahh. I must be an evil woman.

To think she had placed others in such a place and rejoiced.

I should not be like this...

Rittier coughed beside her.

“Hm hm. I see...since he's all so profound, I had not realized he had been ignorant of such minor details.”

“Um, is everything alright?”

Jenna blinked around as if to emphasize her innocence.

But she was waving her tail around in joy.

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But he was not the all-knowing.

He was truly busy gaining information exclusive to war and researching and thinking on it.

He had gone with the flow on several large and obvious etiquettes but had been truly ignorant of these secretive traditions.

“So, what I'm trying to say is that even if there may be different interpretations within the customs here, I would like you to take my words literally in my case.”

“I see how it is.”

“Yes. It is like that. So please, an event like yesterday...don't let it happen again.”

Sungjin pleaded once again emphasizing his awkwardness.

“Yes. Sungjin. I will be more careful from now on.”

“Thanks.”

Sungjin left muttering how embarrassing it was to even talk of the memory.

Ereka reassured herself in the midst of feeling apologetic.

Aah. Still, it's a relief.

Even if she had brainwashed herself to be prepared, it came as a relief that the event was simply one large misunderstanding.

It was not like that.

That meant she still had a chance.

Although I do think he does not have anyone in mind...

Although he was simply trying to gain a teammate.

To become lovers from friends.

To become couples from co-workers.

She had heard several stories like those.

But those scenarios applied not only to Eustasia but also to her.

It means I still have a chance.

Watching her actions from far away, Eustasia breathed out a sigh.

She pouted while caressing her small but elegantly adorable breasts.

Even if the entire thing was a mistake, we had gone that far.

Whatever the reason, to think that she would be sent out after all that tension.

Was she that unattractive to the point that she couldn't make another lose their reason to the wild?

She was strangely upset.

Hmph. Whatever. I was only so determined as a prisoner.

She did not have any intention of declaring an initiative after all.

Still...

For him to choose his future then his immediate greed.

It is very much like him.

She was upset but had to admit his decision made him favourably respectful.

To think it would be a long-term strategy of attacking the mind before the body.

So, he ultimately wants me not as a prisoner but his teammate.

It was conflicting to have him treat her so well.

He was not the one she swore to protect after all.

But...how else was she to pay back the debt she owed him, if not with her body.

How troubling.

She smiled bitterly.

Chapter 18

After a round of events, the day of the contest came.

Under the condition of giving up all their land, which both parties agreed to, Sungjin and the three countries met on the battlefield.

Initially, in Sungjin's proposal, the three-nation alliance had agreed that they would be able to regain all of their lands back and more on an advantageous condition.

Before the fight, where both parties' fates were to be decided, Sungjin visited Eustasia one last time.

"I'll ask you for the last time before tomorrow's fight: Will you not change your mind?"

“You’re very persistent.”

“To offer loyalty to the utmost. That is one of the virtues, I suppose.”

Honestly, Sungjin himself had never thought of pledging loyalty to an ‘authority’. For someone who was born into a democracy, he found it rather sinful for those who were voted into the ‘authority’ to not use it for the people.

But that was his perception, and in the world of Valhalla, he accepted that ‘loyalty’ was one of the sacred virtues people could hold in this age and culture.

He would not be able to understand the others if he was so fixated on his judgemental values.

But just because I respect it, doesn’t mean I should leave it alone.

Sungjin smirked.

The convincing he would have to do from now on was also a kind of victory. He had perceived that there were two main virtues that composed her as a warrior.

One was her loyalty to the king.

The other was her love to the people.

To strain herself in finding the best solutions while maintaining both beliefs at heart, that was her.

And now, he had to convince her which of the two she should prioritize.

“But is that undefeatable?”

At Sungjin’s question, Eustasia looked at him straightforwardly.

Feeling this was a matter of winning or losing, she threw away her position as a servant and faced him as a warrior.

Hence, it was also determined that she would die then and there, if push came to shove.

“Just because the king abandoned me, I abandon him—I cannot do that. When a king is addled, it is the servant’s duty to right his mind; I simply had not done my responsibilities.”

“Each to their blame. But if that is so, is it also the people’s failure as the king’s servants to correct him?”

“That...”

“Moreover, not everything is about loyalty when you are a member of the hero’s ranks. Is it not your duty to look after the people too?”

“Kuk.”

Eustasia lowered her head.

That was the only weakness she could not be confident of.

If only her king was a bit more kingly.

If only her king had been for the people, despite his incompetence.

No, if at the very least, he had not stepped on them.

Even if Sungjin was more brilliant, more powerful, and a more attractive man.

Even if he was the one which made a woman’s heart waver.

She would have been able to forfeit her life confidently while under the oath of loyalty until the very end.

But...

“Do think of the people. You know how many people are being sacrificed under the mad reign of Seyzo II. Although, I’ve already decided to fight.”

Sungjin petitioned respectfully.

“I only wish you were with me on this.”

“I...it is not that I feel nothing towards the suffering of those unfortunate people...but...”

“A wise one in my world once said this phrase: It is the servant’s duty to serve a king. But, one who commits tyranny is not a king, simply a passing nobody with a crown.”

It was the words of Mencius.

But those words were convincing in a different world.

After all, words were the limit of loyalty, according to the founders of Confucianism, who believed in fidelity of loyalty.

To drag down the tyrant who abandoned the people was not treason or rebellion but a rightful stand blessed with heaven's will.

It was the reasoning of Mencius.

Eustasia's voice shook minutely.

"I know those words. It's a famous saying from a continent far south."

For a servant to turn against the king was disloyalty.

But there was a reasoning that a king who has abandoned all morals was not a 'king' but 'a sinner of tyranny,' therefore, committing treason not disloyalty, as the oath was towards the 'king' and not the 'sinner'.

Other kings raged at the fact that loyalty was only given while they were 'king', but other heroes had validated this excuse once they had found a reason for a rebellion.

Although, that reasoning was sometimes lost to whether it was being used for the 'people' when it was more often than not used for one's personal gains.

She looked towards the skies once more.

Yes...now...the people should not be sacrificed.

On that, she had no choice but to agree.

Did she not advise the king before death because she had thought the very same?

Although it was a saying passed across continents, she spoke the words she had engraved in her mind.

"If the king does not listen to the servant's advice after three attempts the servant excuses oneself."

"Ahh, yes. There was that too."

Sungjin smiled widely.

Although Confucianism was known for enforcing absolute loyalty it was not the truth. The educational systems on earth had taught it in that variant, but Mencius himself had said a tyrant was not a king.

Although there is no king to be loyal to in a democratic state.

That structural reasoning was foreign and new to this world.

But if the mind of the people was as Ereka's, in the name of her friend, he had been expecting Mencius' words to go through.

A wrongful king may have abandoned her first, but she was too valuable to be buried with the talents she possessed under a past oath.

The one-sided loyalty was a system that was useful for the nobility. Why must she run herself into the ground for a king who had done nothing for her?

He did not acknowledge that people had to be loyal to a king who steps on one's individual rights.

She had her own right to potential growth.

He did not wish for such a life to be stepped on.

"Yes, I do agree that my king no longer has the right to be called a king."

Eustasia ultimately nodded her head.

She could not deny it at this point, even if she wished for her king to become at least a half of Sungjin, even a quarter's worth.

But the king she had pledged to was no longer simply incompetent but evil.

It had turned from something less to something negative.

If Sungjin declared he was enforcing good to save people's lives and therefore had to kill the king then she had no choice but to accept it.

He had to win this fight.

That was the only way for the people to be saved.

If he loses, too many would lose their lives under the madness of Seyzo II.

"Yes...I had said you had no right in the beginning. That it was pointless hope that would be shredded before reality. But now..."

Eustasia smiled bitterly.

"Yes. you do have the right to be the ruler of the four kingdoms."

He had the power and ambition to suppress all of the four kingdoms.

She had already felt that after being defeated so many times in his hands.

But that was not all.

There was the grand purpose.

He wished to look after not only his people but for those of other kingdoms.

To him, the entire masses of the plains were to be his citizens.

There was strength and purpose.

She had no choice but to acknowledge his right as king.

“Then would you come with me?”

Sungjin reached out his hand.

He was confident he could do even better with her by his side.

And half of his intentions were on the fact that she would be the perfect long-range dealer on his team on the path for him to become an Arc Master.

The other half was that he hoped it would be best for everyone to have a known general whose purpose was with the people in his path to constructing a nation.

Watching that exchange, Erika silently smiled and nodded her head.

Lady Eustasia had finally changed her mind

It was a relief. She had agreed to Sungjin’s thoughts that Eustasia was too valuable to rot in such a manner.

Instead of the possibility that she could become their future long-term enemy, she wished for Eustasia to currently save her good graces and talents.

And she could be glad as it would help both Sungjin and the people.

“But still, no.”

Yet, Eustasia shook her head firmly once more.

“Not me.”

“Why?”

Eustasia gathered her breath.

Even though it was a secret she had been hiding since forever she had to say it now.

Since he had given her his sincerity, it was only right that she should reply with honesty.

“Because the king is my father.”

“What?”

This was unexpected.

In the thousands of scenes that Sungjin had played out in his mind this had not existed.

His eyes had widened. Others around him had dropped their jaws to the floor.

“Seyzo II...is Grand General Eustasia’s father?”

“No way. Your father is Count Liland.”

“To the general public, it is said so.”

Eustasia replied solemnly.

“You are speaking the truth. Ha, that means the king has concealed this.”

“Yes. I was born out of wedlock.”

“That is stranger. Even if you were born out of wedlock, you are royalty. Whether you were born of a consort, or even a married woman, the king could have taken you in if he wished. Especially since Seyzo II finds descendants precious.”

Rittier doubted the truth of her words.

“Right. But only if the child was not born by an extra.”

“What?”

“Usually a child born between a hero and an extra does not have skills. But there are rare circumstances, no?”

“That’s you.”

“Yes.”

Eustasia spoke firmly.

That was the real reason why she held warmth towards the extras, even in her status as a hero.

Because she remembered her 'mother' once looking at them.

If she had received the royal heritage and followed in her father's footsteps as a naive elite she would have been a half who emphasized with the flowing blood of the lower levels.

A different 'inconspicuous' child who was different from the normal third-ranking Minor.

"Per custom, it would have been normal to kill the annoying bastard child. But...His Highness did not do so."

Eustasia mumbled sadly.

Killing was normal.

But watching his daughter's wiggling hands, the past Seyzo II had muttered that this child was his own and said, "Don't worry. I will protect you."

Even a king had his limits. But he crossed those limits and wandered across dangerous lines for his daughter.

He had plotted with the Count who had no heir and was therefore wracking his brains, negotiating with him to turn this situation into a silent birth of the 'Count's daughter'. The Count also agreed after balancing the profits and losses of accepting this 'girl'.

And...due to the Count's sudden death, she inherited his position.

The king silently supported her back and secretly raised her to her current position.

And she repaid his grace by unleashing everything she had in the war against Eldorado.