

Gourmet 201

Chapter 201: The Speed Eating Contest

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“So cute!”

“Look at that flapping belly!”

“Ah, that arrogant expression. So cute!!!”

The people were clamoring as they looked at the small body the size of a fist, along with its short legs and arms. Combined with the arrogant look and the huge sunglasses on its face, Beanie looked perfect as it danced the Kangchon Style!

“Cu...cute...”

“Wow.”

Alicia and Lucia both fell into a trance. Their cheeks burned brightly as they looked at the cute creature at the center of the stage.

‘I want to poke those plump and chubby cheeks with my fingers.’

‘I wonder if he will feel soft if I hug him?’

Lucia and Alicia were both cold and charismatic women, but they were helpless to Beanie’s charms and found themselves falling for such a cute figure.

Looking at their lovestruck expressions, Cain said, “But, who’s the owner of that baby piggy? Only player’s pets are allowed to vie for the position of the mascot, right?”

[Ah. Here’s the information. The baby pig that is currently dancing is a pet named ‘Beanie’. He is Player Minhyuk’s pet. Player Minhyuk was just registered as a nominated candidate for the Speed Eating Contest today.]

[That’s strange. All of the information except the one submitted in Athenae is currently private. Is this even possible, especially when we’re in a contest to select our country’s MVP?]

“D...did they say Minhyuk...?!”

“Minhyuk?!”

Both Alicia’s and Lucia’s eyes widened in shock.

One day before the launch of Athenae: Korean War.

President Kang Taehoon thought, ‘I wonder if Player Minhyuk is not participating?’

Just recently, Player Minhyuk entered the Hall of Kings. He was also given an ‘Athenae: Korean War’ ticket which was akin to a free pass to the competition. Everything was reviewed by Joy Co. Ltd. and the conditions were already met by Player Minhyuk.

‘But... Why wasn’t he coming?’

At that moment, someone knocked on the door.

Knock, knock.

“You may enter.”

The person that came inside the room was none other than Team Leader Park Minggyu. He looked very urgent and flustered as he said, “Player Minhyuk has contacted me.”

“...It’s finally here!”

A small smile hung around Kang Taehoon’s lips. However, before he could rejoice, Team Leader Park said, “There’s a problem.”

“A problem?”

“Yes?”

“What is it...?”

“He said that it was possible to reveal his face in the virtual world, but not in reality.”

“What are you...”

Kang Taehoon’s face crumpled.

‘You don’t want to reveal your face in a world-class competition?’

This meant even their real information would be private. The condition in itself was something that did not even make sense. In addition, it was not allowed within the rules of the competition.

“He is in a situation where he will not be able to go to the waiting room that we have prepared for the players in real life.”

Joy Co. Ltd. had prepared the waiting room for the local players could gather and see each other’s faces. It was also the place where the press conference for the competition would be held under the sponsorship of Joy Co. Ltd.. It was meant for the?Athenae?players to promote friendship by getting acquainted with each other in reality.

‘But you’re telling me that he doesn’t want to go there either?’

“...That’s absurd! What kind of nonsense is that?!” Kang Taehoon shouted, his face flushed in anger.?Athenae: Korean War was not a joking matter.

‘What?! Are you too shy? Or is it because you don’t want to reveal yourself?!’

“Then if that’s the case, he doesn’t need to participate!”

No matter how high the chances of Player Minhyuk being an MVP was, it was something that he, President Kang Taehoon, could not allow.

“I already told him on the phone that he would not be allowed to participate with regards to this. But, I got a call from his lawyer.”

Kang Taehoon snorted.

‘You’re messing with me and you even have the guts to have your lawyer call me? Don’t tell me you’re a rich player?’

He was already on the verge of being disappointed by Player Minhyuk. After all, he believed that Minhyuk was acting like someone that regarded the?Athenae?Olympics as a joke. However, his eyes could not help but widen when he heard the next words.

“The lawyer is none other than the head of the legal team under the Ilhwa Group’s chairman.”

“S...so what you’re saying is... you...”

“Yes, what you’re thinking is correct,” Team Leader Park answered with a nod as he continued to say, “Player Minhyuk is Chairman Kang Minhoo’s only son. Of course, they are requesting that this information to be kept private.”

“...!”

Kang Taehoon’s eyes widened in shock.

‘That’s the number one company in our country?! No, it isn’t just our country. It’s a world-class enterprise. Of course, Joy Co. Ltd. can’t easily be pushed down by Ilhwa Group. But, the father of the player that we’ve been watching is Chairman Kang Minhoo?’

“In addition, their legal team pointed out one part, exactly one part.”

“What is it?”

“The part about the non-disclosure of their information in reality due to a variety of reasons. However, as a compromise, they would allow us to reveal the?Athenae?game information.”

“...”

Kang Taehoon’s expression turned solemn. The?Athenae: Korean War was still currently a competition in the virtual world, so the rules were still lax in comparison to the actual Olympics. However, it was still not a good reason for letting them hide their private information.

‘But they cited the ‘variety of reasons’. Did they meet one of them?’

Those reasons were mostly nonsense and were more like a formality.

“Their reason was ‘rare disease’.”

“Rare disease?”

President Kang Taehoon locked his fingers together, his brows furrowed, as he looked at Team Leader Park seriously. It was true that the ‘rare disease’ met one of the conditions. However, they still had to go through an extremely difficult process.?Athenae’s?competition might be held by Joy

Co. Ltd., but it would still need the approval of the organizing committee. That was the reason why they needed to know exactly what the 'rare disease' was.

"That's why they're going to meet with us."

Kang Taehoon nodded.

The day of the competition.

Yesterday, Team Leader Park went and visited Minhyuk in his residence to confirm their claims. When he saw the doctor's report that was handed to him, he could not help but be left speechless.

'Eating addiction? There's a disease like this?'

They were even given an explanation by Doctor Lee Jinhwan. They even mentioned that one out of the three people that contracted this disease had died a few years ago. Hearing the explanation, Team Leader Park believed that it was more serious than what he had initially thought. With that, the conditions for the non-disclosure of the information in the real world was somehow met.

Minhyuk had compromised and said that he would reveal his face, name and age in Athena. As for the other information that they needed to know? It was to be kept private. In addition, there were plenty of reasons why they could persuade the organizing committee with the 'rare disease'. Athena was a game that was made for fun. However, there would definitely be an issue if they tried to forcefully show someone with a rare disease in reality.

'How many players can handle the mental stress that will come with the issue?'

'What's worse, he has a body like this...'

It was an impossible task. Team Leader Park felt that if he was in Minhyuk's shoes, he would also just let Joy Co. Ltd show his game information and ask the rest of his information be kept private. After giving a definite answer to President Kang Taehoon, Team Leader Park was given an order, and that was to stay right next to Player Minhyuk until the end of the competition. The other players would follow the instructions of Joy Co. Ltd. in the waiting room, but Player Minhyuk would not be able to do so. That was why he was tasked to stay by Minhyuk's side.

Then, President Kang Taehoon told Team Leader Park, 'All that's left for me is to get approval from the committee.'

Of course, Joy Co. Ltd. could push ahead with their decision without any hesitation, but there was a high probability that the public would not be 'convinced'. After all, a player suddenly appeared and participated with all information behind closed doors. They were sure that the public would protest. The story would be different if the 'organizing committee' that was considered as the 'representative' of the public approved of this.

As for Minhyuk... he was just eating cherry tomatoes.

"The president will try and let you participate in the Speed Eating Contest today. We have registered you as a nominated candidate for now. You have the ticket from the Hall of Kings, so it won't be a problem even if you registered today."

“Yes. Thank you.”

“I think that you must have given a lot of thought before you expressed your intention to participate in the Korean War. May I ask your reason?”

Minhyuk smiled silently. He had agonized over this fact over and over again after the announcement of the Speed Eating Contest.

‘Delicious market food.’

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Minhyuk could already imagine the taste of the sweet red bean filling inside the chewy mochi donut. What about the twisted donut that was covered with sugar? He could also imagine the sweet taste and the chewy texture of the bread. From what he read, the market also offered the huge whole market chicken that was always steaming hot as well as the mung bean pancake, kimchi pancake, and all kinds of delicious pancakes. Of course, those were a part of his reason but, it was not just that.

“When I was young, I often went to the market with my late mother. That’s why I like market food,” Minhyuk said, smiling wryly.

He definitely wanted to eat market food, but he also had a lot of worries. He was sure that if he participated then his identity would be known to the world. At first, he had already decided to forfeit his participation. However, when his father learnt of it, he found a way to let Minhyuk participate and confirmed it with his legal team. Every night, Minhyuk dreamed of going to the market and eating the food there. He also thought of his mother who always went with him.

“It doesn’t suit you.”

‘The chaebol’s second generation and market food?’

Team Leader Park smiled slightly. Then, Minhyuk said, "Just imagine it. Team Leader.”

Minhyuk’s voice was serene and calm as he continued to speak. He said, “You haven’t eaten a proper meal while you’re on your way home after a tiring, exhausting day. Team Leader, what kind of restaurant do you want to go to? A fancy restaurant that sells caviar? Or a place that cooks delicacies and foie gras?”

“I’m sure that you’ll agree that it would be nice to go to the place where people drink soju and have some blood sausage rice soup. Then, add a bowl of rice and a shot of soju. I think that would be the best.”

“Isn’t it something like that?”

Team Leader Park nodded.

‘I see.’

It was the same as when people crave ramyeon at one in the morning instead of steak. Being rich did not mean that they would have different tastes and cravings as other people. Team Leader Park

looked at Minhyuk and said, "In a way, food is amazing. It has the power to make everyone happy, regardless if they are rich or poor."

Minhyuk smiled silently when he heard Team Leader Park's words. Not long after, Team Leader Park looked at his watch.

"Let's enter now. I'll be next to you. Although it's not the same as the players' waiting room in real life, I'll still take you to the players' waiting room in the game."

"Yes."

The two of them stood up and accessed Athenae together.

Minhyuk and Team Leader Park were walking towards the players' waiting room after accessing the game.

At that moment...

[Athenae Olympics! The search for the best dancing 'Pet' begins now!]

After hearing loud cheers from the crowd, Team Leader Park and Minhyuk both stopped walking. Then, one part caught Minhyuk's attention.

'Three... Three thousand-year-old eel?'

Grilled eel. Minhyuk could already imagine himself slicing the grilled eel roasting on top of charcoal fire, as he placed the golden brown and steaming piece of meat on top of some lettuce. Strangely enough, the restaurants that sold grilled eel offered plenty of instant rice but never a bowl of rice. He would put some rice on top of the lettuce and grilled eel. Finally, add some sliced garlic and ginger, as well as some spicy dipping sauce.

'What will happen if I place that in my mouth? Will the light yet powerful flavor of the eel bring a smile to my face?'

At that moment...

[Beanie is requesting for a summons.]

...Beanie appeared after requesting a summons from the summoning room. Then, once it settled on Minhyuk's shoulders, Beanie looked at him with a 'solemn' expression.

"Oink!"

The solemn-faced Beanie seemed to tell him 'Trust me!' as he pointed at the sunglasses that were hanging on Team Leader Park's pocket.

"Oink, oink!"

"Huh?"

Team Leader Park handed his sunglasses over in a daze. Then, Beanie proudly stepped forward and began to dance. It was Beanie's elaborate and flashy horse dance! This guy had danced the horse

dance quite a few times. Athenae had a 'Listen to Music' function. Whenever Minhyuk listen to music, Beanie would always twitch his hips and ride the rhythm. There was also a time when Minhyuk showed him Psyn's horse dance.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"So cute!"

"Look at his tummy, it's like mochi, mochi!"

The audience was enjoying themselves. However, the commentators were expressing their doubts.

[Ah. Here's the information. The baby pig that is currently dancing is a pet named 'Beanie'. He is Player Minhyuk's pet. Player Minhyuk was just registered as a nominated candidate for the Speed Eating Contest today.]

[That's strange. All of the information except the one submitted in Athenae is currently private. Is this even possible, especially when we're in a contest to select our country's MVP?]

Not long after, the commentators said...

[We have confirmed that he is still a 'Nominated Candidate'. We have been informed that the committee is still reviewing whether he will be allowed to participate in the competition. The reason why all of his information is currently private is because they have applied for a 'Participation with Information Protection'. Once he gets approval, he can officially participate in the competition.]

[Can they participate in the mascot event even if they're still a nominated candidate?]

[Yes, they can. As long as they become a player, they can join the mascot event. In addition, the fact that a 'Nominated Candidate' is a player still remains true. It's just that it's unknown yet if he has met the participation eligibility.]

After finishing the dance, the baby pig, Beanie, ran towards Minhyuk. Beanie was running innocently with his sunglasses! The commentators had different reactions towards him.

[Ah, look at those waddling legs!]

[Kgghk! He's really cute!]

[He's really a cute pet that I want to own!]

[Ah, I think he would be warm if I hugged him to sleep. And he even has that chubby and plump butt!!! I feel like touching that will make me feel better!!]

Then, Beanie jumped into to Minhyuk's arms. Once the audience saw Beanie's owner, they could not help but murmur.

"Wh...what?"

"So handsome..."

"Wow."

"Look at his height... I think he's about 185 centimeters? His legs are really long too...!"

“Look at that proportion.?Kyak!?Oppa! Look here!”

“...I think he’s about 20 years old. When did he become your oppa?”

“All handsome men are oppas!?Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

It was because of his handsome face and dreamy proportions.

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[Oh! Beanie’s owner, Player Minhyuk, is quite handsome!]

[My goodness. Was there really such a handsome man in our country? He looks better than most actors!]

[He’s tall enough to be called a model, and he even has good proportions. The games haven’t started yet, but I don’t think that there’s any player that can compare to him when it comes to visuals!]

[If there was a ‘Handsome and Cool Contest’, the MVP will definitely be off the table already!]

[Yes. And there’s the baby piggy too!]

The buzz continued as the camera focused and shined brightly on Minhyuk and Beanie. Beanie was even proudly sticking its belly out as it stood up on Minhyuk’s shoulders.

[Beanie is feeling confident.]

“But, will I be able to participate?”

It was quite a concern, since all the 20 slots for players were full.

“We have registered you for now, Player Minhyuk. Furthermore, you can easily participate since you have been in the ‘Hall of Kings’ twice. However, it seems like you will have to participate alone. And if that happens...” Team Leader Park stopped before continuing to say, “They will realize that you’re the player that entered the Hall of Kings.”

The people would notice that he was the sole player who entered the ‘Hall of Kings’ and it was something that Minhyuk did not want.

“...I just want to eat something delicious, but it isn’t going to be easy. Market food... Just imagining it is making my mouth water. I can’t wait.”

Then, a voice suddenly shouted at the side. The voice said, “Market food? Such a crude market will definitely be stinky and disgusting, right? You’re telling me that there’s food in that place??Blegh!? You’re even making it look like a **** great thing! Just thinking about it makes me want to vomit!”

“...?!”

Minhyuk’s expression slowly turned grave. He was talking about the market that held a considerable amount of good memories for Minhyuk. It was an obvious mockery. It was clear to Minhyuk that the person had made these remarks on purpose after he heard Minhyuk talk. When Minhyuk turned around, he could see a man that was pretending to vomit loudly, as if the man wanted him to hear it.

Team Leader Park said, “He’s the strongest favorite, and the most likely champion in the Speed Eating Contest. He’s also quite famous for his trashy personality.”

Even though Minhyuk was unaware of his intentions, it was clear to the others that Vhad was mocking the nominated player. ?However, Minhyuk asked Vhad with a gentle smile,?“Have you tasted shit?”

“Shit...”

Vhad laughed as if he found it interesting. However, Minhyuk’s eyes remained cold and frosty as he looked at Vhad.

“I’ll feed you some big shit today.”

“Look who’s talking,” Vhad said, moving away with a sneer on his face.

“Vhad is definitely trash but he’s still a solid player. Can I ask you a question though? What’s the point in arguing like this...?” Team Leader Park mumbled, tilting his head in confusion.

As soon as Vhad stepped away from them, Fabian stepped forward and asked him, “Vhad, what’s the point of provoking that player?”

“...Just because?”

Vhad might have said answered nonchalantly, but that was not his true reason. He thought,?‘That goddamn bastard. He’s trying to get all the attention in this Speed Eating contest.’

He was sullen when Minhyuk first attracted the crowd’s attention with Beanie, that pet of his. Then, he dazzled them even further with his visuals. It did not sit well with Vhad, especially because he thought that Minhyuk was just a nominated player. After all, nominated players meant that their status of participation was still ambiguous.

They were also just production classes. Among these production classes, Vhad was known as the ‘Painting’s Monarch’. He would deal with the monsters by painting them like the undead. He could not even imagine that he would be eating some big shit today.

A huge balloon emerged from the coliseum. The balloon was none other than the figure of Beanie after he became the Athenae Olympics’ mascot. A huge Beanie balloon, complete with sunglasses and in his horse dance pose! It seemed like things would not stop there. The blacksmith guilds were already beginning to make dolls of the mascot Beanie, and produce them at a rapid pace.

[Right now, there are only five minutes left before the Speed Eating Contest starts.]

[Please explain the rules of the Speed Eating Contest.]

[There will be 250 candles in front of each participating player team. Normal wind will not be able to extinguish their flames. Monsters will start to appear once the candle flames are put out. Level 200 monsters will start to appear. As more candles are put out, stronger and more monsters will appear.]

[Ah. So if they blow out a lot of candles and kill them all together, then their score will increase rapidly. Right?]

[That's right. But, as more candles are put out, higher level monsters will be summoned. That's why it's important to gauge the number of candles to extinguish. After all, there's a time limit of 2 hours and 30 minutes. Since it's a Speed Eating Contest, every time a monster is successfully hunted, a market food will drop as a 'parchment'. The market food plays the role of the potion with a variety of hidden power-ups so we hope that they can eat it while they hunt.]

[As of this moment, the players are now entering.]

[Each player looks a bit nervous.]

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

[Loud cheers had erupted from the stands when the strongest favorite, Vhad, appeared!]

[Vhad is the Painting's Monarch, a production class under the 'Necromancer' category. He can summon the monsters that he hunted just by painting them.]

[Yes. That's right. In his case, his summoning will definitely be slow at the beginning since he has to draw the monsters that he hunted and killed a few moments prior, but in the long run, we can expect that he will display a tremendous performance.]

[Huh? Wait a minute. The number of teams and team members looks strange. It's not ten, it's eleven!]

[Oh. It has been confirmed. Player Minhyuk has been approved to participate in the competition just a while ago. He applied for 'information protection', and the reason remains a 'secret'. But! Since the organizing committee has approved his participation, this means that there is a good reason why his information is being hidden.]

[Ah. Then, Legendary Fisherman Kerry, who was originally listed as a nominated player, will go up and join the competition accordingly. Right?]

[It seems like some of the contents of the competition have changed. Joy Co. Ltd. had decided to not have any nominated candidates, so it's only natural that the two of them will participate.]

“Nominated? If you're a nominated player, does it mean that you're the weakest player? Then, aren't you a back-up player because you're not qualified as a regular player?”

“According to the pro-gamers, aren't they the second-string players behind the first-string players?”

The players were in a buzz.

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[The Athenae: Korean War is a competition held to select the members of the national team. For that reason, Joy Co. Ltd. said that it would be better if there were more qualified players who can exert their power and show their strengths. In addition, the organizing committee has given the green light so there will be no problems.]

[But with the sudden addition of teams, doesn't it mean that Joy Co. Ltd. hadn't done enough preparation work for Athenae Korean War?]

[That's what I think too. Huh? Please wait a moment. I just checked Player Minhyuk's level...]

The commentator was confused. Since this was the country's greatest competition, every player who participated were of a high level with most of them exceeding Level 400.

[He...he's Level 355...]

[Ah. For real... and that's the only explanation. 'I'm worried'. I'm literally worried. A nominated player that's at Level 355 and a nominated player who wasn't sure that they'll even play today had met and teamed up!]

The audience laughed when they heard the commentator's antics.

"Hahahaha. This is definitely dumb and dumber, right?"

"What is this, isn't this just like a march of fools?"

"The faulty and defective people are teaming up and doing a competition together? There's nothing to see there at all."

"What's wrong with Joy Co. Ltd.? Why did they put these two people together? I can't understand them."

"Well, shouldn't one team be in charge of the 'humor' in this competition?"

Fifteen minutes before the games started.

Kang Taehoon finally came out with the permission letter that was stamped by the organizing committee. The organizing committee was composed of the guild leaders of the best guilds in Athenae and the heads of the overseas branches. The heads of the overseas branches also formed part of the organizing committee, since they held an interest in Athenae: Korean War.

However, even these people had to wonder about a player's sudden registration. The player even requested for his information to be kept private. According to their personal investigations and interviews, Kang Taehoon said that the request should be stamped with a seal of approval since there were sufficient reasons to approve it. The organizers eventually agreed, even though they were puzzled and confused. Kang Taehoon, the president of Joy Co. Ltd., had showed enough courtesy to a 'nominated player' in Athenae, a game that the company created and called the shots in. President Kang Taehoon even said that having an additional new team would be better for the competition.

"I can understand President Kang Taehoon's position. It's true that we need to check the power and strength of more players and select the best of the best for our national team so we can exert great power once we go to Athenae: World War."

"That's right. Isn't that why we agreed on having this '11 team' idea? Hahaha!"

"Yeah!?Kghk!"

“Keuhuhuhu!”

They laughed happily. Cain and Alicia were both upset at their attitudes. They were also a part of the committee that approved the creation of the new team. These people were laughing happily not because they were going to find new talents for Joy Co. Ltd., but because they felt that it was something ridiculous that they could laugh at.

“You think it’s funny?” Alicia asked them with a cold smile.

“Nope. I’m just imagining how interesting the performance of the 'nominated' players is going to be.”

Alicia grinned at them menacingly and said, “I can imagine.”

The image of Minhyuk’s smile flashed in her head out of the blue. She was expecting great things from him, after all, he always showed strength that exceeded Alicia’s expectations time and again.

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Kerry’s heart thumped wildly. He had lost only by a hair’s breadth during the preliminaries. If he had not made that blunder, if it were not for that mistake, then he would have been able to participate in?Athenae: Korean War with his head held high. However, that mistake had turned him into a nominated candidate, which made him lose hope of participating.

However, right now, he was given another opportunity to participate. He was quite happy, but on the other hand, he was also quite worried. It was mainly because he had never heard of Minhyuk, his new teammate. Nevertheless, Kerry could still feel the burning heat that was flowing through his veins. He had a shot to get the title of the best player in the country, the MVP title that everyone dreamt of! It was an opportunity that had come to him!

Hyemin’sDaddy knew Kerry personally. He said, “Come to think of it, you don’t know Minhyuk, right?”

“...You know him?”

“I know him. I know him very well. Ah, I remember that you said that you don’t believe in the word?miracle, right Kerry?”

“...There’s no such thing.”

“Even though you have entered the competition just like a miracle?”

“This is just luck! Luck!”

“Haha. Well, whatever. But, I think you’ll see the first miracle in your life soon.”

“Yes?”

Hyemin’sDaddy just grinned at Kerry and refused to say anything further. Just in time, Minhyuk arrived in the players’ waiting room.

To be honest, Kerry did not trust Minhyuk at all. Minhyuk told him,?‘...I’ll do well. Trust me, Kerry!’

At that time Minhyuk bowed politely at him while Kerry just roughly greeted him with a bow. Not long after, the voice of the commentator sounded.

[Players, please enter.]

Kerry and Minhyuk started to move to enter. Along with their steps, they could hear the ridicule and mocking cheers from the audience. The ridicule that came pouring down on them made Kerry's expression harden. However, Minhyuk, who was standing next to him, just said, "Hiyaa. Market food. Just imagining it is making me excited. The same is true for you, right?!"

'Can I really do this together with this strange person?'

This question arose from the depths of Kerry's heart.

[The game will begin in 30 seconds!]

As soon as the voice of the commentator fell, the coliseum suddenly transformed and turned into a vast land. Dozens of participants appeared on the vast fields. The Speed Eating contest had a transparent barrier set between the players so they could not attack each other. Each team was assigned to a 100-meter wide area, as 250 sticks of candles slowly rose behind them.

Kerry gulped in nervousness. He could feel the tension in his body.

"Hiyaa. Just imagining it is making me happy. On a flat grill greased with oil, the market lady grills a perfect mung bean pancake and then serving it to me. And dipping it in soy sauce... Wow, it sounds really delicious."

Gulp—

Kerry could practically hear the sound of Minhyuk gulping down his saliva. He shot Minhyuk a fierce look.

'Please! Show a little nervousness!'

Kerry looked to be about the same age as Minhyuk. He only had one reason as to why he did not believe in miracles: his father had died of an illness. He often went out with his father to go fishing. Those were his fondest memories with his father. However, his father suffered from 'pancreatic cancer', a terminal illness that was well known for its terrible survival rate. But regardless of his illness, his father had always told him, 'I'll get well soon so I can go fishing with you again!' with his loud voice and laughter. Kerry believed that such a day would come since his father was quite vigorous and seemed to be in good health, even though he was sick. Alas, his fiery and energetic father eventually turned cold and lifeless. Kerry wanted to win the MVP award so he could dedicate it to his father. He had such a solemn and grave dream, but the man in front of him looked so different from him. He looked so laid back and carefree.

Then, Minhyuk turned to Kerry with a bitter smile. He said, "Actually, my mother has already passed away. When I was young, I often went to the market hand in hand with my mother and it's something that I still can't get over. I still remember my mom feeding me some vegetable pancakes affectionately. Ah, I was so happy."

Minhyuk smiled softly at the memories. He did not know why he said such a thing. Perhaps, it was just because he remembered those things, and wanted to share them with someone.

“...”

Kerry turned to look at Minhyuk for a moment. He could see a soft and sad smile, very similar to what he usually had on his face.

“Now, I feel like I am back in that ‘market’.”

“...What the hell are you saying? So annoying,” Kerry said, giving Minhyuk a strange, but sad look.

Crackle!

Then, red flames lit up from the hundreds of candles.

[The Speed Eating Contest begins now!]

Kerry then blew one candle. The number of candles that would get extinguished could be controlled by the player’s will. However, the flames could only be extinguished by blowing on them personally. As soon as the candle extinguished, three Level 200 monsters appeared in front of them. They were Rekis. Rekis were bipedal monsters that could wield a spear.

“For now, let’s do it together,” Kerry said to Minhyuk as he dashed forward.

Meanwhile, the voices of the commentators echoed in the area.

[Oh! All the participants blew around 3~5 candles!]

[Wow. Team 3’s Twilight Sculptor Lucan has started slaughtering the monsters with his sculpting knife. He blew out five candles as soon as the competition started and is trying to hunt the monsters all at once!]

[There are already more than three teams that have extinguished three candles within a minute of the game. But it seems like there are still teams that have not yet started their hunt?]

[It seems like Team 11 still has not started yet.]

[That’s weird. Moreover, the strongest contender for the MVP title, Vhad, is right next to Team 11. I have an ominous feeling that people will be comparing them.]

Then, something extraordinary happened. Minhyuk raised his sword...

Swoooooooooosh!

Kerry and the commentators were all left wide-eyed when they saw the scene that followed. They saw Minhyuk swing his sword horizontally over the candles which resulted in about 70 candles being extinguished all at once.

“...!”

[Ah!!! Team 11!!! What in the world are you doing now!!!]

[Don’t tell me you can deal with all the summoned monsters from extinguishing 70 candles?!]

[Ah, that’s too much! Too much!]

[I can hear the ridicule of the people. What's the point of doing such a thing?]

[They're done for. Done for! One person's arrogance has led Team 11 into the abyss!]

[We can't blame them for being nominated candidates. But now, it seems like they should have been better off not playing in the first place!]

"You! Are you crazy!" Keery shouted as he rushed towards Minhyuk as if he wanted to push the latter back. However, as soon as he approached him, he could feel something brush by his cheeks.

'Wind?'

At the small pub located in Ilsan, Yoo Ji-Min, or more commonly known as player Javin, was sitting and watching Athenae: Korean War with her friends. She was the player that died while trying to stab Minhyuk in the back at Ructo's Tomb.

She could not help but widen her eyes when she saw the baby pig appear on the screen.

'That! That baby pig!'

Ji-Min was sure that the pig was definitely the Frying Pan Killer's pet. However, to make sure, she still went and checked the Athenae official website. When she typed in 'Baby Piggy' hundreds of related search words appeared on her screen. 'Adorable Baby Piggy ??', 'How to have a baby piggy.', 'Will Santa give me a baby piggy if I asked him for it?', and 'When will Beanie's doll be released?' were one of the few related search words that popped on her screen.

As she looked over dozens of articles, one article caught her attention.

[Isn't that baby piggy the very same one that the Frying Pan Killer always carries around with him?]

There were some players who knew that the Frying Pan Killer carried a baby pig with him. More importantly, almost all of them were Bachran Guild's guild members. Then, the testimonies related to the Frying Pan Killer suddenly began to pour out.

'What's this? It seems like I don't need to post anything.'

Anyway, it was easy to say that the Frying Pan Killer had participated in the competition. After all, his identity would be revealed soon. At that moment, she heard her friends swear loudly when the replacement of players was announced.

"Wow. What's this about Team 11? Is this some kind of Three Stooges?"

Ji-Min listened to their clamor and stepped up. She said, "They are there because they deserved it. In fact, the main purpose of the competition is to select players who will participate in Athenae: World War."

"...What are you saying? What's wrong with you?"

"Which team do you think will be the MVP?"

Her friends confidently answered Ji-Min's question, "It's certainly the team with Vhad."

“That’s right. He’s a real bastard that looks like he’s unlucky enough to get into art school. But, I saw a video of him on Ztube a long time ago, and he was so awesome.”

Ji-Min then opened her wallet, pulled out a 50,000 won bill then placed it on the table and tapped her finger on it while saying, “My bet is on Team 11.”

She smiled at them.

“Wow. For real? Aren’t they too weak? I’ll do 50,000 won too. I’m Team Vhad!”

“Me too! I’m for Vhad!”

Her friends thought that this was an opportunity so they willingly bet 50,000 won. They foolishly believed that they would get some free money. However, Ji-Min just grinned at them widely.

‘No, that person will surely clinch the victory.’

When she tried to stab him in the back, she never expected that to happen. Meanwhile, the screen showed him blowing out 70 candles all at once. People started to heap plenty of ridicule on him.

A cool breeze began to blow around Minhyuk. Behind them, the cries of the monsters came roaring loudly.

Shwaaaaaaaaa—

The breeze that blew around them slowly gathered towards Minhyuk’s sword. Not long after, the wind began to pick up as it started to blow harder.

Shwaaaaaaaaa—

The grass and the leaves of the trees began to shake and sway with the strong wind. At the sudden appearance of a strong wind, the players all turned to look at Minhyuk. Then, hundreds of silver leaves fluttered and fell. The falling leaves strangely resembled snow falling from the sky.

“P...pretty.”

“Waaaaaaa! The leaves look like falling snow.”

These were the remarks of one player among the audience that were watching the screen with rapt attention. Then, hundreds of monsters ran straight towards Kerry’s back. Even a huge harpy was spotted swinging its arms to attack. A blade of wind was created and aimed at his back.

“Yo, you...” Kerry stuttered, eyes widening in shock.

When Minhyuk saw the incoming blade of wind, he recalled what he had learned about controlling the wind under Valen’s tutelage. Valen would always say this to him, ‘That’s not how you control the wind.’

Minhyuk raised his sword and stepped forward before slowly opening his mouth and saying, “That’s not how you control the wind.”

Shwaaaaaak!

When Minhyuk moved his sword, the strong wind that was concentrated on his sword incorporated the hundreds of falling leaves. Then, the leaves flew at a speed that was almost faster than the speed of light, as they headed towards the monsters that were rushing behind Kerry.

Fwish, fwish, fwish, fwish, fwish—

Kerry heard the sounds from behind him and slowly turned around. As soon as he turned around, he could see all of the monsters slowly falling down to the ground. Then, the score began to appear on the electronic display. The scores on the display reflected the number of candles that were extinguished and the number of monsters that died.

[2nd place, Team 3, 6.]

[1st place, Team 11, 71.]

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

The audience and the commentators, as well as the people that said that the Food God's level was too low, were all silent. Previously, they had commented that the team of nominated candidates were like the Three Stooges, and mocked them, yet they were all quiet now. As for Kerry... He had finally seen what a miracle looked like, right there and then.

Chapter 204: The Speed Eating Contest

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

[...!]

The commentator, Lee Seung-Hoon, had become quiet as well, since he did not know what to say. Even the audience that kept on booing and mocking Team 11 earlier were now silent. However, Lee Seung-Hoon could feel his heart trembling. Not long after, he jumped up from his seat and shouted...

[Ah!! Team 11!!!!!! Player Minhyuk blew out 71 candles and destroyed hundreds of monsters all at once!]

[Did you see it?! That skill? It's a completely ridiculous AOE attack skill!]

“Uwoooooooooooooo!”

The commentators began to broadcast the events that happened.

[Ah, something ridiculously crazy has happened! Player Minhyuk, whom everyone thought was too arrogant, turned out to have the skills!]

[Did you see that?! Hundreds of falling leaves flew at a very unexpected speed and instantly destroyed the enemies!]

[Overwhelming! It's too overwhelming! Can you see the faces of the other players right now? Their expressions are screaming 'What did I just see?!']

[Is it really possible to have this fighting ability with a production class competition?! Is that player really a production class player?]

[What the hell is that skill? Are you telling me that there is such a powerful and explosive skill in our country?]

Then, one of the staff members of the Korean War hurriedly approached the commenters.

"What's going on?"

"The internet is going crazy right now."

"Internet? Of course it's going crazy. That player is putting up such a great performance right now!"

"...That's not it."

"Then what?"

"That player is the Frying Pan Killer."

"...!"

"...!"

Lee Seung-Hoon was caught in surprise before nodding. He could hear the buzz from the audience.

"The Frying Pan Killer?"

"For real?"

It was the same moment when they received messages from the people in reality.

"Wow... That person... But, wasn't the Frying Pan Killer a combat class?"

"What are you saying? He saved Valkyrie Kingdom with his food, you know?"

"Frying Pan Killer... Who said that he was extremely ugly because he wears a helmet every day... He's extremely handsome..."

Then, the crowd started shouting loudly in the audience stands.

"Ting! Ting, ting, ting! Taeng! Taeng, taeng, taeng! Ting, ting! Taeng, taeng! Frying Pan Killer!"

"Ting! Ting, ting, ting! Taeng! Taeng, taeng, taeng! Ting, ting! Taeng, taeng! Frying Pan Killer!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

On this day, the fancafe "FKL" for the Frying Pan Killer was formed.

Pagan, the American player that ranked fifth in the global rankings, watched the TV with interest. Athenae: Korean War was currently being broadcast live all over the world. Right next to him was one of his guild members.

“That’s quite amazing.”

Pagan shrugged when he heard his guild member’s words.

“What do you mean?”

“That person is in a production class. How did he... It’s an AOE attack skill that I have never seen before.”

Pagan placed his hands on his guild member’s shoulders and sighed. “Yes. That’s amazing. And apparently, that player is a god class. But think about it, that player will not be able to use that strange power anymore.”

“Will not be able to use his power?”

“Yes. Production class players have restrictions. I don’t know how he did that, but the cooldown must be extremely long. So, he might not be able to use that ability again. And that’s not all.”

Pagan looked at the screen as he continued calmly, “What else could he have aside from that ability?”

“Ah...”

“Vhad can summon the monsters once he drew them after the monsters died. He won’t get tired in the long run. As for that player, he definitely has no skills left.”

Indeed, Pagan believed that the Frying Pan Killer was lucky enough to get that skill and he thought that he was also lucky to get a skill that was a cut above the rest. However, it was clear as day that production classes had limitations.

“Then, according to you, they will be left behind.”

“That’s right. And they’re going to be running with gritted teeth from now on just so they will not be left behind.”

Pagan turned around. It seemed like he was about to leave since there would be nothing else left for him to see. However, just as he was about to step forward, he heard the trembling voice of his guild member.

“...They’ll run with gritted teeth so they don’t get left behind? B...but it doesn’t seem to be the case?”

“Eh?”

Pagan turned his head. Then he saw it.

“...Crazy!”

‘Run with gritted teeth?’

The Frying Pan Killer was not anxious at all, instead, smiling brightly as he picked something up. It was none other than the ‘Food Parchment’.

[From now on, Team 11 will have to grit their teeth to keep the scores from narrowing down.]

[Their beginning was quite surprising. But, it’s likely they only have that one skill, so the others will definitely close the gap quickly.]

[Huh? But what is Player Minhyuk doing?]

“Yahoo!” Minhyuk shouted as he moved quickly, leaving Kerry behind.

There were ‘Food Parchments’ that were left behind from the hundreds of monsters that died. It was a ‘Speed Eating Contest’ and that’s why monsters dropped food parchments when they got killed. If the player tore the parchment, the food would appear in front of them.

[D...don’t tell me... The reason why he took the lead in the beginning...]

[He’s not trying to eat something delicious during the time the other players are trying to close the gap, right?]

[I...I think that’s the case. Look at that player, isn’t he sporting a bright and happy smile now?]

[Yes... It really is. It’s a bright and happy smile just like a child’s smile.]

Minhyuk saw dozens of parchments lying in front of him and without any hesitation, he ripped one of them into pieces. It was the parchment for ‘Mochi Donuts’. Ignoring the ruckus around him, Minhyuk sat down and admired the mochi donut that appeared in front of him. The mochi donuts glistened brightly with sugar coating every inch of its surface. Minhyuk happily licked the sugar on his fingers as he smiled happily before taking it into his mouth.

“Are, are you not going to continue fighting?”

“It’s the Speed Eating Contest, you know!”

“N...no... That name... Speed eating...” Kerry said. He wanted to refute Minhyuk, but he knew that the food from these parchments would fill the depleted HP and MPs or just like what the commentators said, some of the parchments could grant special buffs.

‘But who will actually eat it? Isn’t it obvious that the other players will try to narrow down the gap when we’re eating?’

“By the time we finish, the other players would have caught up! Look, those guys are smacking the monsters right now!”

“Eyy. I’m trying to live by eating here. You too, sit down and take a bite of this sugar-coated donut.”

“I don’t know! I’m going to keep on extinguishing the candles and hunting!”

Minhyuk shrugged. He was finally able to consume the mochi donut that he had met for the first time in a long while. As soon as it entered his mouth, he could taste the sweet sugar on the outside and the chewy texture of the mochi donut. When he pulled the chewy donut with his teeth, the hot red bean filling instantly filled his mouth and made it sweet.

This time, he ripped the parchment for ‘Sokcho’s Sweet and Crispy Chicken’. The famous dish in Sokcho market! Sokcho Sweet and Crispy Chicken! The Sokcho Sweet and Crispy Chicken was sprinkled with peanuts, looking especially warm and inviting. He quickly pierced a piece of meat with a fork and put it in his mouth.

Crunch, crunch.

The texture that Minhyuk felt when he bit into the chicken was quite good and crunchy. After going past the crispy, sweet and spicy skin, he could taste the tender and lean meat inside. He ate the delicious chicken while he ripped another parchment. It was ‘cola’. The cola that everyone was fond of.

Fwiiiiish—

The cheerful and happy sound of a carbonated drink being opened was heard loudly. Minhyuk also did not forget to take out the ice that he had kept frozen in his food storage inventory. Then, he placed the ice in a glass and...

Glug, glug, glug, glug—

Shwaaaaa—

...More bubbles were produced from him pouring the cola into a glass. Then, he lifted up his glass to moisten his throat.

Gulp, gulp, gulp, gulp, gulp—

“Kggghk—!”

Minhyuk felt the sting from the cold cola passing through his throat. It was definitely an exhilarating feeling. Then, the sound that the commentator unknowingly produced spread in the coliseum.

[Gulp—]

It was the unmistakable sound of gulping.

Countless people sitting on the stands in the coliseum were focused on the big screen.

[Gulp—]

Just like the commentator, the countless players in the country were also gulping down their saliva. As they gulped, questions floated in their heads.

“What’s this? Why do I want to eat when I’m watching him?”

“I feel strangely at ease.”

“Look at that player’s face. He looks so happy. It’s like he has everything in the world.”

“Hey! Do I really look like I’m displaying a fatherly smile?”

The players all around the coliseum were gazing at the screen with delighted smiles on their faces. All of them were looking forward to it.

‘What will he eat next?’

Then, they saw Minhyuk rip up another parchment.

“Ra...ramyeon and kimbap combi...!”

“Th...this is the truth! This is the way and the truth and the life...!”

.

This was like a heavenly combination, a perfect combination in Kimbap Heaven. Kimbap and ramyeon were common in the market, so it was no surprise that it appeared here. Meanwhile, the foreign commentators were hurriedly explaining the live broadcasts to the world.

[Korea’s Player Minhyuk has shown us something surprising for the first time.]

[It was the power of the player whom everyone laughed and mocked at. A very powerful AOE attack skill that I have never seen in this world.]

[Who in the world is that player?]

[Oh. But that player really eats deliciously! My mouth is already watering even though I don’t know the food that he is eating.]

[It looks like plane tickets to Korea will be sold out. The viewers who are watching this live broadcast will definitely go to Korea to eat those.]

As for the Korean commentators...

[I...I really can’t help but gulp down my saliva. Player Minhyuk is showing us what the Speed Eating contest really is like.]

[Aaaah! He held it! Player Minhyuk has picked up his chopsticks!]

[He lifted a huge amount of noodles! He looked like he would eat all of them in one go!]

[There are a lot of people in the world who are interested in the way he eats.]

[Now, we are looking at him eating kimbap and ramyeon. How will he eat it in front of people all over the world?!]

A large cup of ramyeon. This was what people ate when they were left hungry all day long and all that was left in the refrigerator at home were some kimchi and eggs. When one reached that level of hunger, the food that people wanted to eat the most was none other than ramyeon. There was even

the kimbap that was greased with sesame oil and sprinkled with sesame seeds. It was a truly delicious combination. To be honest, the kimbap that was produced in the Speed Eating Contest had the perfect ratio and ideal proportion of ingredients.

‘The pickled radish is small and the ham is big!’

In the past, when he went to Kimbap Heaven, he could see that the pickled radish was big, while the ham was so small. As he ate their kimbap, he would sometimes wonder if he was really eating kimbap, or just pickled radish. However, the kimbap in front of him had a very big slice of ham, with plenty of eggs in it.

‘I heard that the grandmas and aunties that worked in the market for decades cooked the dishes for this competition?’

Since this was the biggest competition in the country, the Athena team did not slack off. They did not settle for anything that was below perfect. They only prepared food made by the artisans that had perfected their specific food for a very long time. Just thinking about it brought a smile to Minhyuk’s face. He, who was always hungry, looked even hungrier than ever. Just like that, he quickly blew on the piping hot noodles as he sucked the noodles into his mouth without delay.

“Sluuuuuuuuuurp!”

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The chewy and spicy noodles disappeared in Minhyuk’s mouth easily. He quickly stretched out his chopsticks to grab more noodles.

“Sluuuuuuuuuurp!”

Minhyuk’s chopsticks naturally headed towards the well-ripened kimchi that he had pulled out from his inventory earlier.

Crunch, crunch—

Since the kimchi had a bit of sourness in it, it added a flair to the spicy noodles. Then, Minhyuk placed some kimbap in his mouth. As soon as the kimbap landed in his mouth, he could taste the pickled radish, the eggs, the ham, the spinach, the cucumber and the burdock, all packed inside of the roll. Even the scent of the sesame oil that was brushed on top of the kimbap stimulated his appetite and put a smile on his face. When he felt that his throat was getting a bit dry, he quickly lifted the bowl of ramyeon and slurped the spicy soup loudly.

“Hoo! So good!” Minhyuk shouted in admiration as he picked up the well-cooked egg in his ramyeon. He let out another huge smile when he tasted the yolk of the egg that had absorbed the spicy and sweet soup of the ramyeon.

“It’s really delicious!”

Kerry looked at Minhyuk in disbelief as he continued to hunt.

Kerry really could not understand the situation. He thought, ‘How can that player be so easy-going?’

This was the competition that his life was dependent on. In addition, his reason was to win the MVP title and dedicate it to his late father! Kerry might not know this, but if his goal and pursuit was to win this competition, then Minhyuk's goal was to achieve happiness with the food this competition had to offer.

For Minhyuk, eating was more important since it could make him happy more than anything else in the world. He could even remember the scent of the market as he held his mother's hands. He was happy that he could relive that memory once again.

[Painting's Monarch Vhad had summoned has exceeded thirty summons!]

Vhad's and Fabian's positions were simple. Fabian, as a Bomb Mage, could make bombs from anything. He could make bombs from the trees, soil, rocks or even monsters. In the beginning, he quickly made bombs from the trees, the soil and the rocks to hunt the monsters. Then, he made bombs from the remains of the monsters. Monsters had various attributes. Wind, fire, earth, lightning and many others. The power of his bombs was dependent on these attributes. Once Fabian had hunted the monsters, Vhad would draw the dead monsters and summon them back to life.

Vhad's skill 'Painting Control' could only be used and triggered if he drew dead monsters.

However, there was definitely a limitation on the numbers of monsters he could draw and summon.

Therefore, he truly could not draw an unlimited number of monsters. Even so, with the increase in the number of extinguished candles, stronger monsters materialized and appeared in front of them. As they continued to kill stronger monsters, their hunting speed was bound to accelerate.

.

Before they knew it, Vhad was already extinguishing their 50th candle.

[Vhad already extinguished their 50th candle. He's coming up to 2nd place at a really fast pace!]

[As expected of the strongest favorite to win this competition!]

[Even the summons that Vhad had summoned are great! They have at least 80% of their original power!]

[Until when will Player Minhyuk eat?]

Kerry turned to look back at Vhad. He was fast approaching their score. It was unfortunate, but there was a thin and transparent barrier that separated him from Vhad and his team right next to them.

Vhad turned to look at Kerry as he smiled darkly and mockingly at the latter. It was an obvious smile of mockery. But Kerry did not care at all.

‘Now... Slowly...’

Kerry was also among the select few that could be chosen as a representative player for the country. He had currently extinguished seven candles all by himself. He quietly approached another candle as he blew on it. Ten candles were extinguished in one go. Right now, monsters at Level 380~420 have appeared. Kerry quickly moved his fishing rod as soon as he saw the monsters appear.

[Casting Hook]

[Dozens of fishing hooks are cast as they snatch the targets.]

Dozens of thin fishing lines sprang up in the air...

“Keuheeeeeeeek!”

“Kiheeeeeeeek!”

...as dozens of fishing hooks penetrated the bodies of the rushing monsters.

Tak, tak, tak, tak, tak, tak, tak—

The hooked monsters all rose up in the air as if they were fish hooked with bait.

[Ah! Player Kerry! He used the skills that he has been hiding.]

[Don't forget that Player Kerry is also one of the representative players of the production classes.]

[The monsters hooked with the fishing lines look like fish that were hooked with bait.]

Then, Kerry gestured as if he was reeling in the fishing line. Every time he closed in on the fishing line, the hooked monsters went higher and higher in the air.

[What a spectacular sight!]

[The flailing monsters are all 30 meters above the ground!]

Kerry then formed the image of a scissor with his index finger and middle finger before making a gesture as if he was cutting the fishing lines with his fingers. As soon as he made the gesture, the monsters began to crash towards the ground, one by one.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Falling from the sky, the monsters died instantly. They burst into pieces like tomatoes that fell from a high place.

[Wow! Player Kerry is doing a good job defending their rank.]

[This is such an unexpected outcome. Team 11 is already running towards their 100th candle.]

However, it did not end there.

‘The strength that I have concealed before...’

[Fisherman's Lure.]

[You can control the monsters that you have hooked in the head.]

As if not intending to stop, Kerry extinguished five candles as he began his dance with his fishing rod. The long and thin fishing lines passed through and hooked the heads of the monsters. Then, they began to act like puppets.

[Wh...what an astounding sight!]

[This is the first time that Fisherman Kerry has revealed this ability!]

[An unexpected dark horse. The tension is high. The gap between Team 4 and Team 11 is not narrowing at all!]

Meanwhile, Vhad just looked at Kerry with interest. He thought, ‘That ability looks like it can’t control a lot of monsters.’

Vhad nodded, believing his thoughts to be correct. In order for someone to perform a summon, the player needed to have the ‘Command’ stat. There were limits to the stat. Vhad thought that Kerry would definitely experience a huge setback once his Command stat reached its limit.

However, right now, Vhad had 50 monsters to play with. Fabian nodded his head when he received the signal. Fabian quickly extinguished 30 candles in one go. As soon as the candles went out, more powerful monsters appeared. 20 summoned monsters immediately jumped in the monsters’ midst. The monsters began to fight and tangle with each other as Vhad started painting.

The picture Vhad was painting was none other than the monsters fighting against each other. When he erased some of the images that he painted, the 20 summoned monsters immediately disappeared among the monsters. Then, he activated his skill.

[Erased Summoner’s Rampage.]

[The summoner’s summons will exert their final strength before they disappear.]

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

The summons then appeared and surrounded the monsters. At that exact same moment, 30 points were added to Team 4's score.

“...!”

Kerry looked at the scene in disbelief. In just an instant, the gap between them narrowed and they came in nipping closely at their heels. As soon as this happened, Kerry desperately thought that he needed Minhyuk’s help now. He turned around to look at Minhyuk.

“Please hurry up and stop eating now...!”

However, when he turned around, the scene that he saw left him speechless. He asked, “Wh...what the hell is that thing on your shoulders?!”

The commentators had a similar reaction.

[J...just now, what’s that thing that appeared on Player Minhyuk’s shoulders?]

[It seems like it has black skin and a sheep’s head. Its lower body looks like it’s from a horse too. But... it’s as small as Beanie.]

[Huh? I think I heard about that thing at least once before.]

One of the commentators suddenly blurted out.

[Doesn’t it look like the miniature version of Baphomet?!]

Team Leader Park Minggyu was sitting together with the officials. There were players who participated in other games sitting together and talking in front of them.

“Even if it’s called the Speed Eating Contest, no matter how you look at it, it’s just a monster hunt. Right?”

“Yeah. Seems like Player Minhyuk is stupid enough to just eat.”

“Tch. The competition is not a joking matter.”

Listening quietly to their words, Team Leader Park smirked. He thought, ‘You’re the stupid ones!’

For the Speed Eating Contest, the operators have announced clearly that they would be able to recover their HP, MP and other stats if they ate the food. They would even be able to gain special powers from time to time. However, he knew that the other officials had a point. The gap they had made with the other players would narrow if Minhyuk kept on eating like that.

However, if that happened, then Joy Co. Ltd. thought that the essence of the Speed Eating Contest would lose its ‘significance’. Even the supercomputer?Athenae?thought that way. So?Athenae?hid a ‘special’ power that could only be revealed if they ate. That special power was truly a sight to behold. It was an amazing and extraordinary power. Besides, Team Leader Park was confident that Player Minhyuk could turn everything around even if the other players caught up with him.

‘What if he finds something special while he’s eating? If that happens, it would be an extraordinary surprise to everyone.’

At that time, Player Minhyuk picked up another food parchment. The words written on the parchment were ‘Market Pork Trotters’.

‘That parchment...’

The food would give the player the power to use a summoning stone, if they had one. Sometimes the boss monsters in?Athenae?would drop summoning stones. However, summoning stones were really, really rare.

However, Player Minhyuk had received a summoning stone as a reward for being the ‘First Person to Hunt a Demonic Monster’. As mentioned earlier, the summoning stone was an extremely rare drop. In fact, the ‘Weaker Baphomet Summoning Stone’ in Minhyuk’s hands could already summon one of the strongest existences.

In fact, everyone from the company believed that the players would not gain much power from eating the food related to summoning. After all, it was rare for a player to get summoning stones for monsters above Level 300. However, despite the summoning stone in Minhyuk’s hand being a?‘weaker’?summoning stone, the being it could summon was well over Level 400.

‘Unexpectedly, a great summoner has appeared,’?Team Leader Park thought as a miniature Baphomet appeared.

He could hear the commentators speaking in a fluster as he watched Minhyuk on the screen mumble something while eating. Then, with an expression of?‘Ah~ Let’s finish this and eat!’?Minhyuk stood up and blew out 30 candles. At that moment, hundreds of monsters appeared in front of him

again. Before he could move, dozens of magic attacks materialized around the miniature Baphomet. Then, those magic attacks flew and devoured the incoming monsters.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

The huge amount of strong magical attacks quickly devoured and killed the monsters in an instant! The area was surrounded by dust. But when the aftermath of the magic attacks subsided, Team Leader Park saw Vhad's expression. The look on Vhad's face was so distorted and ugly. He looked like he had eaten some big shit.

[You have acquired the Market Pork Trotters.]

[You have acquired the 'Single-use Summoning Stone Power' hidden in one of the food parchments in the Speed Eating Contest.]

Minhyuk heard these notifications while ripping the parchment for the Market Pork Trotters. In this competition, the use of ordinary potions or consumable artifacts were prohibited. However, he had heard his HP and MP recovering while eating earlier.

'If we're talking about summoning stones...'

Minhyuk only thought of one thing. However, he still had not turned the Weaker Baphomet into his subordinate with the use of the 'Allurer's Cooking' skill. He thought that if he finished the competition now, he would be able to taste the power of the 'Infinitely Refilling Lamb Meat'.

Minhyuk knew that Baphomet's summoning stone's effects only lasted for three hours. Right now, there was only half an hour left before the competition ended. Minhyuk quickly decided to summon Baphomet. Although its capabilities and skills would be much lower than before, it was still strong.

Then, the space beside him was torn apart as soon as he summoned Baphomet.

[Baphomet appears in a pet-form.]

[You can summon it in the original Baphomet's form if you want.]

[There is no difference between the pet-form Baphomet and the original Baphomet.]

What appeared was a Baphomet that was as big as Beanie. Previously, it looked extremely scary, but this time, due to its size, it looked unbearably cute. Its hands and feet were as small as Beanie's, and it even had a tiny staff on its hands.

"Meeeeeeeeeee—" Baphomet cried loudly as it crawled up and lay flat on Minhyuk's shoulders.

'...A cat-dog?'

Cats that were as energetic and troublesome as puppies were called cat-dogs. This just showed how friendly it was to the other person. However, the miniature Baphomet was now acting like a cat-dog to Minhyuk.

'Uhm... Well, I'll work hard to raise you for my infinitely refilling lamb meat!' Minhyuk thought as he gently petted Baphomet's belly.

“Meeeeeeeeeee~”

‘This punk is smiling like he’s in a good mood. Shouldn’t there be something that you should do first?’ Vhad stared at Minhyuk with an ugly expression.

Minhyuk suddenly glanced at Vhad. When Vhad saw Minhyuk looking at himself, he suddenly felt vigilant. Then, Minhyuk grinned wickedly and said, “What did I tell you earlier?”

“...”

“I’ll feed you some big shit today.”

Chapter 206: The Speed Eating Contest

Even if Baphomet looked cute in its miniature size, it was still a demonic monster from the Demon World. Minhyuk had checked Baphomet’s stats and had confirmed the power that it could exert. Currently, Baphomet might be ‘weaker’ than its normal state, but it could still cast Fifth Tier Magic without any difficulties. In other words, it was still a strong summon.

Hundreds of monsters appeared the moment Minhyuk extinguished the candles again. Then, he ordered Baphomet to give them a debuff.

[Demonic Monster’s Hymn.]

[Monsters who hear the Demonic Monster’s cry will lose 60% of their defense.]

[Demonic Monster Baphomet will have a 50% increase in magical attack.]

“Meeeeeeeeeeeeeeh!” Baphomet’s cute cry rang loudly in the coliseum as he floated in the air together with the dozens of magic circles that formed around him.

Among Baphomet’s spells, there was a ‘Mass Save’, as well as a regular ‘Save’. The regular ‘Save’ skill was the skill that Minhyuk had absorbed and made into his own skill. Meanwhile, the ‘Mass Save’ skill could save a huge amount of magic spells and attacks in the skill user’s body, as if they were saving the skill in their wand or staff. This skill could allow the skill user to shoot plenty of magic at their enemies non-stop.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

Baphomet’s magic spells and attacks engulfed the incoming monsters. With their defenses dropping by 60%, it seemed like no monster present could withstand the maelstrom of attacks that Baphomet had unleashed.

Seeing this, Minhyuk turned to glance at Vhad. Vhad’s expression was ugly and distorted beyond words.

“You...you... For...for real...” Kerry sputtered as he looked at Minhyuk in surprise after being told to step back.

The moment Kerry stepped back, Minhyuk blew out twenty more candles before jumping straight into the fray with ‘Like the Wind’. Then, a huge storm made of fire started to form around him.

[Dark Fire Storm.]

[A storm of black fire will engulf all of your enemies within a six-meter radius. The storm will deal magical attacks with 600~1,000 damage per second.]

Shwaaaaaaaaaak!

Minhyuk quickly retreated after he summoned the tornado of fire. Then, the massive Dark Fire Storm rampaged and slaughtered the monsters. However, despite the massive attack, there were still monsters that survived. Seeing this, Minhyuk stepped forward with his frying pan, along with Baphomet and its staff.

Minhyuk's legendary frying pan could allow him to cast Second Tier Magic without any casting time. Magical attack was a stat that was affected by 'INT'. Minhyuk's INT, after he had eaten a lot of medicine and special ingredients, had increased a lot and was even above a Level 250 mage's INT. Even Minhyuk's 'WIS', a stat closely related to 'MP', had exceeded a Level 350 player's MP. So, what would happen if someone with these stats did not need any cast time and went wild with his magical attacks?

"Fireball! Ice bolt! Lightning! Wind cutter!"

Bang! Bang, bang, bang! Slash! Shweeeeeeeek!

There was also Baphomet giving support from the side, as it began to pour out a great deal of magical attacks towards the enemies.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

After tidying up all of the monsters, Minhyuk dashed forward to pick up all of the food parchments that dropped. This time, he ripped the parchment that wrote, 'Jeonju Southern Market's Blood Sausage Rice Soup'.

The twenty-year-old London?Olympics?kendo gold medalist and legend, Lee Da-Woul, had officially revealed his identity in?Athenae?as the Level 499 Sword Crown Prince. He used to play unofficially, but he had revealed his identity during an official press conference that was held prior to the start of?Athenae:?Korean War.

Lee Da-Woul's press conference received plenty of attention from the public. After all, an Olympic gold medalist would be participating in?Athenae: Korean War. He was even at Level 499 with the class Sword Crown Prince. His level was shocking enough and was known to be higher than the unofficial number one in the local rankings, Kaistra.

So, what did 'unofficial' mean, when he stated that he was playing unofficially before? The term 'unofficial' meant that they were the players that kept their information completely secret. In other words, even if they ranked first or second in the unofficial local rankings, since they chose to keep it a secret, it restricted them from expressing their true status and rankings.

"The?War of the World Tree?will start soon."

The War of the World Tree was one of the events in?Athenae: Korean War. It was a competition for combat classes and received a huge amount of attention from the people. This competition would be held in the enormous World Tree. The concept of the event was to revive and give a breath of life to

the rotting World Tree. Since the country's top combatants would participate in this competition, they expected that it would garner the highest rating.

A man entered one of the training rooms. This man was also a national kendo player.

"What?"

"You're not watching the Korean War?"

"The Speed Eating Contest?" Lee Da-Woul asked, snorting at the words. For someone standing at the top of the combat classes in the country, the competition among the production classes was something completely unnecessary.

"Why should I watch something like that?"

Lee Da-Woul had an arrogant and cheeky character. The success that he had experienced at a young age had made him arrogant. He also had an obsession with winning which made people hate him or dislike getting along with him.

"It's really interesting. A player named Minhyuk participated and Vhad is completely at a loss."

"...Minhyuk?" Lee Da-Woul asked, his brows twitching from the sudden ominous feeling that crept up from his spine. He hurriedly stood up to stand in front of the TV with his friend.

[I'm completely speechless. The magic that comes out of the frying pan quickly devours the monsters around him.]

[Their score even went up by 150 in an instant. It's completely overwhelming. It's a landslide!]

[Ah, Player Minhyuk's expression is telling us that 'I've worked hard so I better eat something delicious later!'. Who in the world is that player?!]

"...!"

Lee Da-Woul's body trembled in shock.

"Da-Woul?" Da-Woul's friend called out. However, Lee Da-Woul remained silent as he looked at the smiling face of the man that was shown on the screen as the man held his chopsticks with excitement.

"You, you..." Da-Woul stammered as he recalled the first time that he had suffered a defeat against someone.

Although he suddenly disappeared from the world, there was once a lot of talk about him becoming a promising player that could lead the Korean Olympics to greater heights. That person was none other than Kang Minhyuk.

A sinister grin crept onto Lee Da-Woul's face. He was sure that this wild beast had already lost his sharp teeth after a long time. On the other hand, he had continued to sharpen his blade and had even

become an Olympic gold medalist. He thought, 'He's just a poor kid. If he's not doing kendo, what has he been doing these days?'

The scene after their match ended was still vivid in Lee Da-Woul's head. That man had reached out his hands towards him, the loser. Lee Da-Woul gritted his teeth at this obvious mockery. So, he did his best to try and catch up to that man. However, that man suddenly disappeared from the world. Now, he had appeared again.

[The competition is over.]

[Team 11, the team that everyone expected to rank the lowest, has exceeded everyone's expectations and proudly won the MVP!]

[Ah, can you see now? Player Kerry looks so excited.]

[I think I would also be the same if I was in the same situation. Player Kerry was being ignored by everybody because he was a nominated candidate. Although he was not as good as Player Minhyuk, he did not fall behind the other production classes.]

[I think it's better to say that he was better than most of them, instead of saying that he was not lagging behind..]

[It seems like he did not show his full power in the preliminary rounds.]

[Ah. Player Kerry is bowing to the crowd with tears in his eyes!]

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Kerry shouted excitedly as he held the 'MVP' trophy with his hands. His face was covered with tears as he bowed to the camera and said, "I...I want to give this honor to my father in heaven!"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"So cool!"

Click, click, click, click, click!

[Ah, I can feel my eyes burning with tears. During the interview in the preliminary rounds, Player Kerry said that he had lost his father to 'pancreatic cancer' two years ago.]

[Player Kerry went fishing alone every day in the world of Athenae to remember his father and his favorite hobby. And, it was the reason why he became the 'Legendary Fisherman'.]

[My heart feels really warm.]

[Huh? Where is Player Kerry looking at?]

[He's looking at Player Minhyuk.]

Kerry turned to look at Minhyuk, the person that presented this miraculous moment to him. Then, he quickly approached the latter and said, "I'm sorry for ignoring you before."

"It's fine. I would do the same. Well."

Kerry laughed happily when he saw Minhyuk smile, before pulling the latter into a big hug.

[Is, is this a bromance?!]

[Hmm, hmm. I can now expect a lot of stories about these two people, Minhyuk and Kerry, from many BL readers.]

After Kerry hugged him, he absorbed the trophy.

[You have absorbed the MVP Trophy.]

[You have earned the qualifications for Athenae: World War.]

[You have acquired 100 platinum.]

[You have acquired the?Title: Production MVP.]

[You have earned 10,000 AP.]

[You have gained 500 REP.]

Kerry smiled warmly as he thought?‘These 100 platinum can?be cashed out and converted to 250 million. I’m going to set?up a fishing shop with this!’

Then, he looked back at Minhyuk. Kerry thought that he would immediately check his trophy but he just hurriedly placed it in his arms. Then, he began to talk to the competition’s organizing staff.

[What are they talking about?]

[I’ve never seen Player Minhyuk look so serious before.]

[Ah. I just heard what Player Minhyuk said just now. But... uhm...]

[What’s wrong?]

The audience were filled with curiosity as they waited for the commentator’s words. Then, the commentator said...

[He...he wants to blow out more candles. H...he kept on asking if he can still eat.]

[He’s really like a player.]

Then, the other commentators said...

[Joy Co. Ltd. said that they will help him to get ‘market food’ without blowing the candles.]

[Uhm...? Can you see it now? When Player Minhyuk received the MVP trophy, he looked a bit dissatisfied. His expression was even sour. But now, he’s smiling happily like a child.]

[Eyyy. No way.]

[No. It’s really true. He looks so happy that he looks like he’s flying in the sky.]

[Then, let’s replay the video when he received the trophy.]

The screen showed Minhyuk winning the MVP trophy. He muttered something sulkily as he threw the trophy into his inventory as if he was throwing something useless in a corner. The commentators tried to read what his lips were saying at that time...

[It seems like he was mouthing... ‘Ey! You should give me something delicious. Why give me something like this?’ or something like that. Or, or not?]

[Eyyy. I don't believe that he's someone like that. Hahahaha.]

[R...right? Hahahaha.]

Minhyuk was the only one who knew the truth.

Chapter 207: Making Charcoal Out of the World Tree

“Ey! You should give me something delicious. Why give me something like this?”

Minhyuk complained loudly. However, it was not for long. His grumpy expression soon brightened up as he jumped in joy. This was because the organizers had told him that they would help him enjoy more market food. And that was not even the best part.

“The market vendors that helped us run the Speed Eating Contest will personally cook for you. After all, Player Minhyuk looks so happy whenever he eats. They said that they like you, since you remind them of their grandson.

“Wow. Really?”

“Yes, but there are conditions.”

“Conditions?”

“Yes. Player Minhyuk, you always look like you're doing a 'live mukbang' whenever you're eating. Therefore, we want you to do a live broadcast for the viewers around the world while we wait for the next event. I hope you don't take this the wrong way, our purpose is to promote our country's market food.”

It was not a bad condition, since Minhyuk's face had already been made known during the competition, so he nodded in agreement.

“Then, I'll call you once the setting is complete.”

“Yep!”

While waiting for their call, Minhyuk went to the players' waiting room to check and absorb the MVP trophy. What he acquired was similar to what Kerry had acquired. He had gained 10,000 AP, 100 platinum, as well as the Production MVP title.

(Production MVP)

Common Title

Title Effects:

?DEX +100

?All stats +1%

Description: A title that can only be received by the players who won the MVP in Athenae: Korean War. They have proven their worth and are now eligible for Athenae: World War.

The title effects were really decent. A 1% increase in all stats was tremendous. The concept of percentage meant that the higher Minhyuk's stats were, the greater the effect would be.

"Well then. It's time to go."

Not long after, a staff member came inside to fetch Minhyuk and guide him toward the area for the broadcast. When the staff member opened the door to the area that they had prepared, Minhyuk's eyes widened in surprise.

"...Gasp!"

The sight that greeted Minhyuk was shocking. It truly looked like the 'market' that he was very familiar with. ?Athenae? was a game, so the developers could easily set up and build another world inside the game if they wanted to. They had easily created this place even while they were in a hurry, just so they could promote Korea's 'markets' to the world. In fact, even the smell that wafted from the stalls was completely the same.

Minhyuk looked around. He saw someone selling steaming tofu on one side, tofu that looked like it was just freshly grilled and baked. There was also a man selling fish on the other side. Minhyuk already knew where he wanted to go even before the Korean War staff member started to guide him.

'It's here...!?' Minhyuk thought in awe. The place that he went straight to was a 'vegetable pancake' stall.

"Hello!"

"Welcome! Take a seat," the elderly, yet energetic grandma greeted Minhyuk and told him to sit down. She then started to grill the vegetable pancakes until they were golden brown.

Sizzle, sizzle, sizzle, sizzle, sizzle—

The sizzling sound of the vegetable pancake as it met with the pan was enchanting. Even the cooking process was very interesting and fun to watch. It was like hitting two birds with one stone for Minhyuk. Then, the grandma placed a kimchi pancake in front of Minhyuk.

"Hiyaa. Grandma. The ends are so crispy and well-cooked!"

"Of course! I've been selling vegetable pancakes in the market for 20 years now!"

"I'll eat it well!"

"Go on," the grandma said as she watched Minhyuk happily. She had a very warm smile, as if she was looking at her own grandchild. She even made sure to keep sending mung bean pancakes, buckwheat crackers and even potato pancakes in front of Minhyuk.

Minhyuk quickly took his chopsticks to tear the freshly-fried kimchi vegetable pancake. Without any hesitation, he took the steaming piece into his mouth.

"Fwoo, fwoo."

It was freshly scooped out of the grilling pan, so it was still very hot. All Minhyuk could do was roll it around his mouth to cool it down for a bit. Once it cooled down to some extent, Minhyuk began to chew and savor the perfectly-browned pancake and crunchy kimchi.

Minhyuk smiled happily as another pancake was placed in front of him. It was none other than the chives pancake. Minhyuk quickly tore apart the chives pancake and dipped it in soy sauce before putting it in his mouth. Minhyuk closed his eyes to chew and savor the flavor of the healthy and flavorful chives. The smile painted on Minhyuk's face was filled with bliss. The oil from the pancake that greased his lips made his smile much softer and gentler.

The people around the world had a variety of responses to his mukbang.

[I have unconsciously stared at it for quite some time now. The food that he is eating is called vegetable pancake. It is a pancake made with flour, water and eggs. It's a dish where you can add a variety of ingredients.]

[I can see him rolling the kimchi vegetable pancake in his mouth. Ah, my mouth is already watering and I wasn't even aware of it.]

[I've also tried kimchi vegetable pancakes before. Back then, I was eating it with some kind of white alcohol. I still can't forget it. It was called...]

“Kggghk!?If I have a glass of makgeolli here, it will be the best!”

[Ah, that's right. It's makgeolli. Makgeolli is traditional alcohol that is unique to Korea. More than that, I strangely feel warm and happy while watching Player Minhyuk eat.]

[How can a person eat so much without feeling a bit tired?]

[I don't feel bad since it's a handsome man that's eating well.]

[Right now, 'vegetable pancake' is the number one searched term.]

[I think I should go to a Korean Restaurant to eat some vegetable pancakes and drink makgeolli too.]

“I'm going now, grandma!”

[That player is even polite.]

[I believe there will be a lot of female fans in the future that will look for his videos if they feel hungry.]

This time, Minhyuk was looking for a dumpling stall. He saw the owner of the dumpling stall raising the lid of the big pot, and a huge amount of steam rising from it. Looking inside, there were steamed meat dumplings and kimchi dumplings lined up side by side. It seemed like the cauldron next to the pot had steamed buns inside. The owner made an effort to put some dumplings in a styrofoam box before handing the box over to Minhyuk, who quickly tore the dumpling before dipping it in soy sauce.

“Hooooo—”

Minhyuk immediately blew on the dumplings before placing some in his mouth. The moment he bit on the meat dumpling, the hot and delicious juice trapped in the steamed dumpling wrapper burst

out and spread in his mouth. The more he chewed, the more he could taste the rich flavor of the meat and vegetables that were packed in the dumpling.

Next, Minyuk tried the kimchi dumpling. When he chewed the kimchi dumpling in his mouth, he could feel the crunchy texture of the kimchi, and taste the sweet and spicy flavor that was spreading from inside.

Finally, he tried the steamed buns. Minhyuk quickly tore the steamed bun apart with his bare hands. Shwaaa, shwaaa—

Steam rose as the red beans that were packed inside revealed themselves. The hot steamed bun scalded Minhyuk's tongue the moment he bit onto it.

“Ugh. Hot. But it's so sweet!”

A gentle smile appeared on his face as the sweet taste quietly spread in his mouth. Just like that, Minhyuk's excursion in the food market continued.

This very video that he was filming and broadcasting would later be selected as one of the ‘Best Videos in?Athenae’?and would become one of the five top videos in the world, bringing plenty of people to the country. In fact, people from all over the world who travelled to Korea even once, would say this, “If you haven't tried vegetable pancakes and makgeolli, then you can't say that you have truly visited Korea.”

Minhyuk came out with an armful of food wrapped gently by the grandmas after he finished the market mukbang. Team Leader Park Minggyu, who was waiting for him, logged out together with him.

Team Leader Park Minggyu exited out of the capsule room that the Ilhwa Group had prepared for him before heading straight to Minhyuk's room. There, he saw the chubby Minhyuk smiling happily. He thought,?‘Being the production?class' MVP is such a waste on you, Player Minhyuk.’

The words tickled the end of Park Minggyu's tongue. However, since it was Player Minhyuk, he knew that the former was unaware that if he was able to win the combat MVP, then he would be able to participate in?Athenae: World War, an event that would involve the entire world. Even so, he tried to let Minhyuk know of this in a roundabout way.

“You still have a chance to compete in other competitions. Especially since you have the participation ticket from the Hall of Kings. Of course, it will still depend on the game. In the case of the ‘Speed Eating Contest’ for production class players, you did not use your ‘Hall of Kings’ privilege. After all, the organizing committee had approved the addition of your team with Kerry, so you can still skip the preliminary round one more time.”

Participating in other competitions was possible, although there would be an overwhelming disadvantage if they participated later. This was the case for most of the competitions. Since most of the events needed the players to score points, those that participated later would definitely be left behind.

However, Minhyuk was seemingly unaffected by Park Minggyu's words. He said, "Hmm. Is that so? But this time, I got information that there's an incredibly delicious golden cow in Paladi Village!"

It was valuable information that he had received from the Informant Abel in exchange for a 'buffed dish'.

Team Leader Park Minggyu grinned at Minhyuk. He knew that Minhyuk only played this game solely for the 'delicious food'. This time, Minhyuk only made a move because he heard of the content: 'market food'.

Team Leader Park Minggyu stood up and said, "I enjoyed our time together. And I'll definitely keep your secret to the grave. Well, if I mess with the Ilhwa Group, my head will be cut off anyways."

Team Leader Park Minggyu smiled softly as he jokingly pretended to slice off his throat. After all, he really was not going to tell anyone about this, so he was not worried. He would not share it with anyone. Even with Lee Minhwa.

"Hiya!?I'll send you off."

"You must be uncomfortable, I'm fine."

"No. I'm not just being polite."

'What a perfect person. He's in the position to be arrogant, but he did not choose to be one.'

Minhyuk even escorted Park Minggyu out personally even though he was sweating buckets. He said, "Please get home safely! Ah, by any chance..."

Then, Minhyuk looked around stealthily before he whispered in Park Minggyu's ears, "If you have any good information about delicious food, please tell me..."

"No way."

"...A straight refusal."

Team Leader Park grinned when he saw Minhyuk's sullen look.

Minhyuk waved his hand as he watched Team Leader Park get into the car. Once he got into the car, Team Leader Park headed straight to the company. There was a trace of bitterness that hung around his mouth. However, all he could do was sigh.

"This is how we lose our country's strongest man."

However, he knew that it was inevitable, so all he could do was smile bitterly. After all, he was a firm supporter of Minhyuk's 'Let's Eat Life'.

'I hope you can eat a lot of delicious food from here on out, Player Minhyuk.'

The big shots and influential people in the country all earned their MVP titles, as well as the honor of participating in?Athenae: World War.

Tonight was the night before the final competition. A reporter came inside the players' waiting room in real life. It was none other than Reporter Go Eun-Ah. She was given the honor to interview the participants in the World Tree competition. Since the players had requested that they did not want to be rushed or crowded together, she had to do the interviews quickly.

'Wow. Locke really has a big head just like in the video.'

Go Eun-Ah could see Jisoo and Seoktae sitting beside each other. However, due to the rules of the competition, only up to two members of the same guild could participate in the same event.

She calmly went around and started her interviews.

Meanwhile, Locke, who was scratching his arms in his seat, immediately heard a voice.

"Five years ago? The guy who suddenly appeared like a comet, defeated me in kendo in the Middle School National Sports Festival, then became the champion?"

"..."

Locke slowly turned his head around. Coincidentally, the person right next to him was none other than 'Lee Da-Woul'.

"There were actually three people who cheered him on. I don't know where the fat girl is now, but I remember you two."

Jisoo did not answer Da-Woul.

"I did a lot of research back then. Weren't you an outcast back in middle school?"

Jisoo turned his head back. That was right. He was an outcast. The corners of Da-Woul's mouth curled up.

Jisoo might be ugly, but he was in his prime these days. He even had a fanclub called 'ULPraise'. It was short for 'Ugly Locke's Praise'. On the contrary, he also has a lot of anti-fans. However, there was one thing that he was sure of, Jisoo was facing the most important moment of his life.

"What happens when your past gets revealed?"

"...What?" Jisoo bit back, brows furrowing as Da-Woul shrugged his shoulders without turning his head to look at him.

"It's just, I remembered that time. And Minhyuk, I even saw him in a competition not too long ago."

"...!"

Jisoo's face was distorted.

"Tell him not to bump into me in?Athenae,?or I'll do an infinite PK on him."

It was both a threat and mockery, his warning to Minhyuk. Besides, Lee Da-Woul knew how scared Jisoo was when it came to revealing his past. After all, humans were creatures that feared something like that.

It was just like he thought, Jisoo was really afraid. He had been a powerless student that was bullied during his first year in middle school. Right now, he was afraid that something like that would be revealed.

Meanwhile, Go Eun-Ah had already started interviewing Da-Woul. She said, "A lot of attention has been turned towards you since you won the gold medal in the London Olympics. Please say something about this."

Lee Da-Woul smiled pretentiously and said, "I'm flattered since?Athenae?is a game. Haha. Of course, it's a huge game that is reflected in reality. Still, you're overestimating me. Some say that I'm not that great. Haha."

"You're as modest as what I have heard," Go Eun-Ah said with a smile.

Meanwhile, Jisoo remained silent.

Outcast.

Loner.

Past.

If something like this came out and got revealed, Jisoo was sure that people would giggle and mock him on various internet sites.

Then, it was Jisoo's turn.

"Jisoo is one of the hottest players these days. In addition, you're a healer and a huge damage dealer so a lot of attention has been drawn to you..."

Just then, Jisoo raised his hand and said, "Please wait."

"Yes?" Go Eun-Ah asked. She tilted her head in confusion after seeing Jisoo frowning and blocking his nose.

"I can't do the interview because the smell of perfume wafting beside me smells so bad. I feel like throwing up."

"...?!"

Go Eun-Ah's eyes widened as Jisoo jumped up from his seat. He gestured wildly towards Lee Da-Woul and...

"Ueeeeeeeeaaaack!"

Chapter 208: Making Charcoal Out of the World Tree

Ever since he was young, Jisoo was much shorter than the rest of his peers. What was worse was that he had an ugly face and a large head, so he kept a low profile while being mocked with the nickname 'Improper Fraction'. He did not do well in both studies and sports. He even had acne. As a result, he was introverted and had no friends. However, he was good at 'games'. During weekends, Jisoo would play games alone at home, while most of his peers went out to the PC room or karaoke with their friends.

Jisoo believed that he would only have 'games' as a form of escape. However, one day, Jisoo was robbed of money by Lee Sungmin and his gang of friends. At that time, the student council president, a person whom he felt was too different to become his friend, heard about his situation and went to help him immediately.

That day, Jisoo came to the classroom in a daze. Then, that person continued to go after Lee Sungmin and his gang of friends the next day, the day after that, and the next day after that. One day, he appeared in front of Jisoo with money in his hands and said, 'They're not going to ask you for money anymore.'

'Ye...yeah. Thanks,' Jisoo had said, smiling softly. He felt extremely grateful to that person. However, it was not a lie when Jisoo thought that it would be the end of their interactions. It was because he knew that their worlds were too far apart.

Who would have thought, the student council president said, 'What are you going to do after school today?'

'Huh? Me? Me, well... I will play some games.'

'Oh! PC room, shall we?'

'O...kay!'

He was the first friend that Jisoo had ever made. It was also through him that he met Seoktae and the Wild Boar General, Jihye since they were always with him.

'Ah, Minhyuk is bad at games!'

'Wow. Minhyuk..., the game collapsed!'

'I always lose when I play games with you! Buy me some ramyeon! Keuhahaha!'

'Keuhahahahaha! You're 10 years away from beating me!'

Jisoo laughed happily when he realized that he finally found some friends.

As for Lee Da-Woul, someone who mocked and swore at 'him', Jisoo only considered things for a moment. He considered the things that he would lose. However, after doing the maths and wondering what it would feel like once he lost that, he realized that there were a lot of things that were far more valuable than that.

"Uweeeeeeeeeck!"

"...!"

Lee Da-Woul jumped up on his feet when he saw Jisoo feint-throwing up on him. He said, "Th... this crazy shit...!"

"A shameful inferiority complex from something that happened more than five years ago?? Phew, you pathetic bastard," Jisoo said as he brought his thumb across his neck, as he continued to say, "Watch the back of your head in the game."

Jisoo left after he finished saying those words. Go Eun-Ah looked at them in confusion. She had already stopped recording the interview. Then, the players began to murmur.

“Wow. Locke really lacks tact.”

“What’s wrong with him? Why did he do that all of a sudden?”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit too much even if he has no manners?”

“Ahahaha. I’m alright, everyone,” Lee Da-Woul said, smiling pretentiously.

Then, Seoktae stood up, glanced at Lee Da-Woul with a smirk and left.

‘...Look at these bastards?’ Lee Da-Woul thought, grinning darkly. He firmly believed that they would be the ones that would get trampled in the game.

The day of the War of the World Tree.

Both Team Leader Park Minggyu and Lee Minhwa were busy. After all, it was the final day of? Athenae: Korean War. It was also the day of the ‘War of the World Tree’, an event with the largest number of players.

In the case of the War of the World Tree, the champion would not only receive the title of ‘MVP’, but they would also receive a special reward. However, the super mischievous and playful supercomputer Athenae had yet to reveal what the reward was. She said that it was going to be revealed just before the games started. Not only were countless players interested in this, but even the employees of Joy Co. Ltd. were also interested to know.

Not long after, the commentators shouted.

[The last day of Athenae: Korean War has arrived!]

[Waaaaaaaaaaaah!]

Then, loud roars and shouts broke out from the stands.

[There will be a total of 30 players who will participate in the War of the World Tree. Each and every one of them is from the top combat classes for our country.]

[That’s right. There are plenty of players here who are in the top 10 in our country’s rankings. There are even unofficial players whom we have never seen in the rankings before. I think it will be fun to see the strength of these new faces.]

[Can you please explain the rules of the game before it starts?]

[Yes. The War of the World Tree will start on this large area of land. This land was once called ‘Icea’. It was an extremely bountiful land, so rich that when you sow seeds, the seeds would definitely bear fruits in abundance. But right now... The World Tree that has supported the land of Icea is being eaten away by ‘termites’.]

[Termites?]

[Yes. Ancient termites are nibbling away at the roots of the World Tree. With its roots being damaged, the World Tree is starting to gradually lose its powers.]

[Ah. So what the players simply have to do is narrow their numbers down?]

[That's right. The players have to hunt those termites. If you successfully hunt the termites, you will be able to receive the 'World Tree's Spirit'. The players should inject the spirits into the World Tree and the player with the most number of spirits injected will be crowned the MVP of this event.]

[Then, you can't raise your score just by hunting the termites? Players will definitely prevent other players who have hunted the most number of termites from injecting this 'spirit'.]

[That's right. Being able to hunt these monsters does not mean that you will win. However, you should also remember that the termites are not easy opponents.]

A window filled with the information about the termites popped out on the big screen.

[Wow... The level of the termites is around Level 440~470!]

[That's right. In addition, the termites have a variety of properties that are compatible with their attribute type: ice, fire, water, poison etc. Everyone has to keep in mind that the termites with attributes are not easy opponents.]

[According to the descriptions, there's also an item called 'World Tree's Blessings', correct?]

[Yes. The World Tree will save the players who are struggling to survive, once. The World Tree would unleash its power once. At that time, the strength and power of all the players and the termites will become the same.]

[The strength and power of all the players and termites will become the same?!]

[Yes. Athenae may be a virtual reality game, but it is also important to consider the abilities of the players in real life. Through the 'blessings' that Joy Co. Ltd. and the God of Athenae created, the players will solely depend on their control and abilities, since their stats and skills will be equal. In a way, this may be an opportunity for those players who have been pushed behind by the other players with high stats, high luck and are overgeared. It's their chance to show off and explode in strength. In addition, the termites will have lower abilities to match the players' strength and abilities, but I think it will be a bit lower than their stats.]

[In other words, once the 'Blessings' come down, then the situation will be favorable to Lee Da-Woul, or Player Carr?]

[That's right. As we speak, it seems like the players are starting to enter one by one.]

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

[The cheers when Player Carr entered are no joke!]

[There's nothing we can do about it. When Player Carr, a gold medalist in the London Olympics, told us that he was playing Athenae, he already grasped a lot of attention.]

[Right now, the Crazy Priest Locke is entering!]

“Boooooooooo!”

“Get lost!”

“Locke! You piece of shit! Apologize to Player Carr!”

[It seems like the audience is booing.]

[Last night, there was an article that said that Player Locke swore at Player Carr and pretended to throw up.]

[What was worse was that there were a lot of players who witnessed the scene and pointed out ‘Player Locke’s Rudeness’. It’s now becoming an issue.]

[But Player Locke does not seem like he’s discouraged at all.]

[He looks rather excited.]

When he heard the booing from the audience, Locke raised his arms and roared,
“Euwooooooooooo!”

This was the Crazy Priest Locke. This was his true appearance. And Khan, who was walking beside him...

“Hey, come on!”

“Ah, why~”

“Do you really want to do that in this situation?”

“What’s the situation right now?”

Khan closed his mouth for a moment when he heard his words.

‘That the whole country will hate you? And that Carr will certainly put us in check?’

Carr was a strong contender for the title. It was a fact that they could not forget. However, Khan had nothing to say. In fact, he even thought that Locke did a good job.

“Boo!?That Khan person is cheap too! That’s obvious!”

“That’s right! They’re playing with each other. Legend Guild might not be able to survive!”

Then, Khan raised his hands and roared, “Euwooooooooooo!”

‘Shit, I don’t know anymore. If I were Locke, I would have definitely spat on him before coming out!’

A minute before the game started...

[As you can see, the ground is filled with ant caves. In those caves, the termites are nibbling away at the roots. One ant cave is equivalent to a dungeon.]

[Yes. And there are even a lot of termites above ground.]

[Ah! Just in time! The information for the additional rewards for the War of the World Tree is going to be announced!]

[The bonus reward for the War of the World Tree is a ‘World Tree’!!!]

[The World Tree!!! That’s an SSS-grade item! No, it’s an SSS-grade item, but it’s much more effective than that when used as an artifact material!!! That’s the bonus reward for the War of the World Tree!]

[The random warp of players is now beginning!]

The players began to enter one by one. There were players who appeared above ground, and there were also players who appeared underground.

One of those players was Carlo. He was frowning. Carlo was a Level 442 ‘Knight of the Sun’, but he was visibly upset.

‘I appeared with Locke.’

It was because he appeared in the same ant cave as Locke. However, Carlo decided to not bother with him anymore. After all, no one had gained any ‘spirit’ yet. It was better for them to acquire and increase the number of ‘spirits’ they have, than to fight their enemies from the very beginning. Hence, Carlo ignored Locke.

‘Crazy Priest.’

It was originally a healer class. Carlo had heard a lot about Locke, but he still looked down on the latter. Of course, his participation in the ‘War of the World Tree’, the best competition for combat classes, had proven his strength but in reality, he thought that he did not have to take precautions against Locke.

Carlo finally encountered a termite. The white termites that were walking on two feet with wings on their backs, looked strangely humanoid. They were even holding spears. As soon as they flew towards him...

Flash—!

Clang!

“Kgghk!”

Carlo could not help but frown and thought,?‘Sh...shit...!’

They were told that the termites were around Level 440~470, but the attack that he had just received earlier was a bit too much than that. While Carlo was busy collecting himself...

Bang, bang, bang!

...sparks suddenly started to pop around him that dwindled his HP down.

‘Shit...!’

He should have paid attention to opponents that have different attributes.

Meanwhile, the commentators were quickly explaining the situation.

[Ah, the players who are already facing the termites look confused.]

[The termites are more powerful than what you think! Our country’s best rankers are perplexed!]

[Just now... Our strongest contender, Carr, has already hunted one. That's amazing. He revealed his job class to be the 'Sword Crown Prince'! We can see that with just a raise of his hands, dozens of swords appear from the sky and pierce the termites!]

[One kill! Double kill! Triple Kill! He already obtained three 'spirits'! It's overwhelming!]

Then, one commentator said...

[Huh...? But, why are Player Locke's hands turning red?]

[Player Locke is displaying quite an extraordinary momentum.]

Carlo turned his head. He could see that Locke's hands were dyed red and there was a huge amount of pressure emanating from his body.

'Come to think of it...'

Why did Legend Guild let Locke in the field? Legend Guild had Abel, an assassin, and Ascar, the Goddess of the Battlefield. So why did Locke come out to participate?

'Why on earth...?'

Of course, both Abel and Ascar, the Goddess of the Battlefield, were participating in different events. However, the most brilliant event in this entire competition was the 'War of the World Tree'.

'So why? Legend Guild can't be that dull, right?'

At that moment, Locke struck the ground with his red fists.

Baaaaaaaaaaaaang!

After eating beef to his heart's content in Paladi Village, Minhyuk was back in reality taking a rest. He was currently talking to Jihye on the phone.

"I know. I understand."

After hanging up the phone, he could not help but smile bitterly. He saw an article a while ago about 'Locke's Rudeness' on his phone. He could see the criticism that the netizens had heaped on Locke. They even made a lot of noise on the TV.

[The reward that will be given to the MVP of the War of the World Tree is literally the 'World Tree'. The World Tree is an SSS-ranked artifact material...]

Minhyuk gulped. He chuckled and said, "I think it would be delicious if I grilled my 3,000 year-old eel on charcoal made from the World Tree, right?"

Then, he stood up.

Chapter 209: Making Charcoal Out of the World Tree

Baaaaaaaaaaaaang!

The loud roar shook the entire ant cave, as well as the ground above them. Then, Locke grabbed something from the ground with his hands. It was none other than a net.

[Jeffrit's Net.]

[A red net will penetrate through the ground and drag in anything and everything within a five-meter radius.]

Whether it was the walls of the cave, or the termites hidden underneath them, anything within a five-meter radius around Locke was trapped by the net and dragged out when he pulled it off of the ground. At that moment...

Peeeeeeeng—

...the red net shrank in an instant and dragged dozens of swarming termites. Then, Locke pulled out another ax. Anyone that saw the axes in his hands could tell that it was too heavy to swing with just one hand. However, he was swinging it easily. He drew all his strength as he struck both of his axes down. Then, the net that dragged the surrounding termites disappeared. However, their freedom did not last too long. Everything was too late for them.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

The red energy that extended from the two axes racked up a huge amount of dust as it devoured and engulfed the termites. As soon as the dust settled down, the only thing left in sight were the shattered and broken carapaces of the termites.

“...Hi...hiiiiik!” Carlo, the person who wanted to ignore Locke, hiccuped at the shocking scene.

[E...eleven! Player Locke hunts 11 termites at once with his overwhelming move!]

[Ah, just now... Player Locke's two axes were covered in some sort of red energy.]

[This is a completely different look from the Locke that we knew!]

[This is the beauty of this competition! Each and every player has definitely hidden their growth and strength ahead of the competition!]

Not too long ago, Locke was able to do a second class transfer. The name was the same as the Crazy Priest. However, the power of the class was no less than a god class. This was also the reason why he represented 'Legend Guild' in this competition.

Locke quickly acquired the 'spirits' before running. He looked at the map floating on the upper left corner of his vision. The map was showing the location of the ant cave where he was currently at as well as the location of the World Tree.

“Kiiiiieeeeeeeee!”

“Kyaaaaaaaaa!”

Slash!

Baaaaaaang!

Locke easily dealt with another two termites before dashing off at a fast speed. Not long after, he arrived at the World Tree.

[You can now inject spirits into the World Tree.]

He immediately injected the spirits that he had gathered into the World Tree.

Stab!

Glug, glug, glug, glug!

A transparent liquid began to flow down the World Tree. Along with the flow of the liquid, Locke saw...

[1st place. Locke. 11 Spirit Injections.]

[2nd place. Carr. 5 Spirits (Not injected).]

[3rd place. Khan. 2 Spirits (Not injected).]

...an overwhelming difference.

Locke smiled broadly. He thought, 'Me too...'

He also wanted to be Athenae's MVP.

"Waaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Locke! Locke! Locke!"

"Crazy! Crazy!"

The Legend guild members sitting in the stands burst into cheers.

"Big rock-face Locke! You're cool!!!" Ace shouted as he jumped and clapped. However, some of the players in the stands had grim and serious expressions on their faces. One of them was Genie. She said, "It's definitely good to take the lead. But..."

She knew that Locke was more likely going to become everyone's target from here on out, especially because this War of the World Tree did not allow the players to use potions. If he suffered from a fatal injury even just once, then he would be in big trouble. In addition, Locke's abilities consumed a huge amount of mana. What was worse is that this competition...

'The blessings of the World Tree can be triggered any time...'

As soon as the blessings of the World Tree were triggered, all the players would depend on their control and ability to fight. Their biggest issue was...

'Carr won't stand still.'

Genie had also heard about what went down yesterday. She turned to look at the screen.

'What, that person?'

There were some unofficial rankers in the competition. There were even some players whose faces were completely unknown to the public. Those players were now moving fast towards where Khan was.

"What's happening...?"

Khan was also gathering spirits quickly, but it was not enough for people to be wary of him. So why were they moving towards Khan? When she saw the expressions of the two unofficial rankers... she seemed to realize that they were not that interested in the competition.

“...Don't tell me.”

Genie's eyes widened in shock. She said, “Blackstone?”

A man was watching the Korean War with a grave smile on his face. Not too long ago, he was given the shock of Kaistra turning away from Blackstone. Even Pharaoh's Envoy failed to deal with the Frying Pan Killer, and even received backlash for trying to deal with the Frying Pan Killer. After all, Sword Emperor Ellie was protecting the Frying Pan Killer.

‘A player under the Empress' protection...’

It was quite an interesting tale but that was all. He had no intention of letting his opponents walk freely in?Athenae.

[Ah! Player Carlin and Player Aegis started attacking Player Khan!]

The two people that attacked Khan were members of Blackstone. Even Carr was a part of Blackstone. The man continued to watch the game while signing approval letters. The name that the man signed was ‘Rausch’. And the family name written above it was...

Rothschilde. Rothschild was a world-class aristocratic family that had accumulated large assets in the financial sector. The person sitting at the highest position in this family was none other than Calauhel, or Rausch.

His family was estimated to be among the top five families in the world with the most wealth. Of course, it was the family property, but it was still a fact that Rausch was among the world's greatest billionaires.

Rausch stood up to access?Athenae. He thought, ‘The competition will be resolved without me watching over it.’

The blessings of the World Tree was not a problem for them. He was sure that Carr would win this competition. After all, Carr was an Olympic gold medalist. He was even superior to Kaistra in?Athenae. It was only natural that he would stand out even if the blessings of the World Tree were triggered.

This was how Calauhel made his decisions. He used all the financial power and information that he could get his hands on. Notifications went off as he took a step forward.

[You have become the first player to step into the Demon World.]

[You have gained 300 REP.]

Locke could see that Carr's performance in the competition was in hot pursuit of his own.

‘Maybe...’

He was an extraordinary punk. What worried Locke the most was the 'Blessings of the World Tree' that could be triggered anytime. He knew that Carr would definitely go after him once that happened. So, Locke just ran after the spirits again. However, he was soon forced to stop.

"Huh...?"

There were four players blocking his path. In a way, the situation that Locke was in was already a given. After all, the others would definitely try to keep Locke, who was going up to the top quickly, in check.

'But four people? There's obviously a different reason for this.'

[Player Khan, Player Carlin and Player Aegis have collided. This is surprising! Player Khan is too overwhelming! He's overwhelmingly strong! He doesn't even fall behind against two players that are on the same level as him!]

[Player Locke is also being surrounded by four other players. Three out of the four players are widely known! They are players Becker, Jahdi, and Kelman. The remaining one is an unofficial ranker!]

[Players Khan and Locke are truly going up fast, but don't you think those who are keeping them in check are going at it faster than we thought?]

Becker, as if they knew that they would be questioned, opened his mouth. He said, "We won't get to win anyway. After all, Carr is in this competition. We're here because we thought that you were too rude yesterday. We believe that you shouldn't win because of this."

It was complete bullshit. Who would use such nonsense as if they could judge him on behalf of the people?

'Such a ridiculous excuse.'

It was so absurd that he could not stop himself from laughing. Locke said, "Why don't you just say that this competition is for 'him' in the first place?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Really disgusting," Locke said, stifling his laugh.

'How much MP do I have left? What about my skills' cooldown?'

Locke mumbled to himself, saying, 'I also... I also want to be the best too...'

Locke had always been in the background. From his youth until now, there was always someone outstanding standing in front of him. The only thing that he was good at was playing 'games'. Yet right now, there were many people that were preventing him from winning such a game.

Not long after, a message was spread to all of the players.

[In 5 minutes, the Blessings of the World Tree will descend.]

The Blessings of the World Tree. However, it was more of a curse than a blessing. Those that came in late might be able to keep up with their control and ability, but they might be pushed back by those with high stats, high skills and high leveled items. They could only survive by avoiding them.

Locke clashed against the other players.

[Ah, Player Locke will eventually collapse! He's going to collapse!]

[But, Player Locke did a good job. He did not fall behind those players, even though he was all alone. I think he even scared them.]

[Huh? But why aren't they forcing Locke to log out?]

Not long after, one of the four players said, "You were really rude yesterday. As a Korean, I also feel ashamed of you. In this competition where you can't even use a potion, I want you to watch someone else win with you all hurt like this. Or maybe, you'll get eaten by the termites and be forced to log out first."

The audience reactions were divided into two.

"Justice prevails!"

"Waaaaaaaaaah!"

"Didn't you pretend to vomit in front of Player Carr yesterday?"

"I'm looking forward to Locke's reversal!"

"Isn't this a complete mockery, though?"

"What the hell are you saying?!"

"Eyy. No matter how you look at it, that's not the case!!"

The stands were divided. Half of them were cheering while half of them were criticizing. Then, the four players stepped out of the cave. Locke only smirked bitterly.

'I'm not like an MVP at all...'

In the past, when he ate Minhyuk's buffed dishes, he could also use regular heals in addition to using heals that could cut his opponents' HP. However, the buff's effects were all gone and his heals were of no use anymore.

Then, at that moment...

The commentators were in a clamor.

"What? Someone joined in the middle?"

"Who? No. All 30 of the qualifiers participated in the first place. How is he able to participate?"

The commentators asked a lot of questions after they had heard that a player would participate in the middle of the competition.

'Is there a player that can still participate even though all 30 people who participated in the qualifying rounds are already there?'

However, the commentators' eyes widened in shock when they heard the official's words.

"Th...the player from the Hall of Kings...?!"

"The player who entered it twice?!"

"Is that player finally willing to show himself?!"

Then, the commentators started shouting into their microphones.

[Breaking news! The player who recently entered the Hall of Kings has expressed his intentions to participate in the competition. As you all know, players who entered the Hall of Kings have the opportunity and privilege to join and participate in any event!]

"Ha...Hall of Kings...?"

"The Hall of Kings?! The guy that entered it twice in one day?!"

"Who is it?!"

Everyone was curious. Even the commentator that was going to identify his name had his eyes wide open in shock.

"Th...the name of the person who entered and stamped his name on the Hall of Kings twice in one day...? This person is from a production class!!"

As soon as the voice was transmitted through the microphone, a light flashed and spread among all the players playing the game on the World Tree. The light enveloped all of the players.

[The players' abilities and skills are temporarily made equal.]

[The abilities and skills of the termites have been lowered compared to some players.]

Then, the commentator shouted...

[He...he is the player that participated in the Speed Eating Contest just recently! The Food God. Pl...Player Minhyuk!]

The audience began to roar in surprise.

"D...did they say Minhyuk?! That Player Minhyuk from before?"

"Impossible... How can a production class enter the Hall of Kings twice in a row?"

The news began to spread rapidly through commentators all over the world.

Chapter 210: Making Charcoal Out of the World Tree

[It has just been revealed that the player who entered the Hall of Kings twice not too long ago was in fact, the Food God, Player Minhyuk!]

[Have you ever heard of a production class player entering the Hall of Kings?]

[No, not at all. Other than the mysterious player named 'Kenra', all of the information on the players who ascended the Hall of Kings are publicly available. All of them are combat class players.]

[In any case, this begs the question: can a Level 355 production class player really participate in this undergoing competition?]

[It's highly likely that he entered the Hall of Kings through an 'SSS'-ranked quest at his level.]

[Unfortunately, I think the player who entered the Hall of Kings, Minhyuk, will be trampled by the players in this competition.]

[All of the players will definitely attack Player Minhyuk. After all, it will be an honor for them to defeat a player who's sitting on the throne.]

[It is unfortunate, but I think Player Minhyuk will only last ten minutes inside.]

However, as reality would have it, the commentator who said those words had to swallow them back down not too long after.

[One kill! Double kill! Triple kill! Quadra-kill! Th...the scene in front of me is simply too ridiculous!!!]

The excited voices of the commentators, as well as the cheers from the crowd, began to shake the venue. All of them were shouting in shock.

Meanwhile, Locke was leaning against a wall. He heard footsteps entering the cave and thought, 'An ant?'

He grinned darkly once more. He was always a loser in the first place, so how could he even think that he had the slightest chance of winning?

'Ah, come to think of it, I used to think like this in the past.'

It was at the time when Lee Sungmin robbed him of his money and beat him up. He believed that he had no use in this world. He was a man who was born to the world, but was not needed. He felt so frustrated back then. However, at that time, his favorite punk told him, 'What are you saying? Aren't you our country's best pro-gamer?'

Then, the footsteps, that he thought belonged to an ant, came to a stop in front of him.

"What's wrong with our country's best pro-gamer?"

Locke's eyes slowly opened. There he was, reaching his hands out to him.

When Minhyuk participated in the War of the World Tree, many commentators questioned him and his abilities. Even the audience was also agitated. However, he was still teleported into the competition. While Minhyuk was being warped, he recalled something. He thought, 'It was definitely that ant cave over there.'

Minhyuk started running towards the ant cave that he had seen on the monitor before. His reason was simple.

'Jisoo. You...'

Minhyuk had heard what happened to Jisoo from Jihye. He did not know what exactly happened, but there was one thing that he was sure of. Jisoo was being criticized by a lot of people because he

tried to protect Minhyuk. Blackstone was definitely involved in this competition. Of course, they might also be putting pressure on Locke and Khan because of their overwhelming performance.

While he was running, a bright light burst out of the World Tree and covered everything in sight. The light also wrapped Minhyuk's body.

[The Blessings of the World Tree.]

[The players' abilities and skills are temporarily made equal.]

[The abilities and skills of the termites have been lowered compared to some players.]

[The Blessings of the World Tree will last for 20 minutes.]

Minhyuk continued to run despite the notifications. Then, he saw four people coming out of the ant cave. Minhyuk grabbed his sword tightly.

“...”

They were Becker, Jahdi, Kelman and Gullen. They smirked deviously when they caught sight of Minhyuk.

‘A pumpkin got entangled in the vine.’

It was a publicly known fact that Minhyuk was the Frying Pan Killer. To think that he had appeared in front of them. And they knew Minhyuk was why Calauhel wanted to step on Legend Guild.

[Ah! Player Minhyuk! He's facing four players!]

[He's in trouble. He's in trouble! All of the players have the same stats right now. In other words, this is a fight of control! One person has to fight against four people... the odds are slim!]

[There are even rumors that Player Becker has been practising judo for years. That's not all. I've seen in an interview before that Jahdi and Kelman have been steadily working out to build up their stamina!]

[Ah, Player Minhyuk. This is what they meant when they said that a crisis comes at the time when you're trying to make a breakthrough!]

According to Becker's information, the Frying Pan Killer was extremely strong.

‘Level 355?’

They knew that he was something that they could not ignore. However, that was in the ‘game’. Right now, with the blessings of the World Tree, it was no different from reality. ?Becker kicked the ground as he rushed towards Minhyuk with those thoughts in mind.

[Here comes Player Becker!]

[He's being followed by the other three players!]

[If he gets caught by Player Becker just once, then Player Minhyuk will definitely be thrown down to the ground!]

Becker reached for the hem of his clothes and thought, ‘He's no different from a normal person anyway, so this will be done in just three seconds.’

Becker narrowed the distance between him and Minhyuk. Just then, Minhyuk stabbed his sword.

Vwoooooooooong!

Clang!

Becker knocked the sword away with his knuckles as he quickly moved his arms. Then, he tried to grab him by his collar.

‘Caught yo...!’

However, something unexpected happened.

Dash!

Minhyuk took two steps back. Then, he put some strength on both of his legs and spun.

“Wh...what...!”

Minhyuk’s foot connected with Becker’s chin, unleashing an overwhelming amount of strength.

“Urkkkk!” Becker groaned as he flew backwards from the impact of the kick. Minhyuk took advantage of the gap as he dashed towards the other enemies with his sword in hand.

Puhaaaak!

Slash!

Stab!

Taking advantage of Becker’s momentary loss of consciousness, Minhyuk quickly dealt with the remaining three people. Becker had been knocked out of his senses from that blow on his chin. However, he still could not help but be astonished at the scene that unfolded in front of him.

“You...! You...!”

Minhyuk quickly approached Becker and slashed his chest.

Spurt!

Minhyuk clenched his fists as he punched the slowly falling Becker with all his might.

Punch!

The impact of the punch turned Becker into a grayed-out cold corpse.

[One kill! Double kill! Triple kill! Quadra kill! Th...the scene in front of me is simply too ridiculous!!!]

The commentators could not believe the scene playing out in front of them. One commentator even jumped out of his seat and slapped the table strongly.

[How could this be? Is it really possible for one person to deal with four people this fast? It’s like a movie scene is playing in front of me!]

Minhyuk took a step forward as he entered the ant cave. He could see Locke leaning against the wall with his eyes closed. He said, “What’s wrong with our country’s best pro-gamer?”

Minhyuk walked in front of him and reached his hand out. Locke opened his eyes and grinned at his outstretched hands.

[Ah, Player Minhyuk reached his hands out to Player Locke!]

[Did Player Minhyuk really participate in the game mid-way, just to save Player Locke?]

[Since he participated through the Hall of Kings, he can ignore the restrictions that only two guild members can participate in the game.]

[Ah, there are tears in Player Locke's eyes!]

Locke grabbed Minhyuk's hands. He could feel the tears forming in his eyes. He felt like he only always received Minhyuk's help.

Then, Minhyuk and Locke both turned off their microphones. After all, players could choose not to broadcast their conversations live.

"Why are you here?"

Although he said that, Locke already knew. He knew that Minhyuk came here to save him! The tears welled up in his eyes. It was a truly touching moment.

'Aaaaaaah! A scene from the movies!'

Then, Minhyuk said to him, "I'm going to win and make charcoal from the World Tree."

"...Huh?"

"Think about it. I'll make charcoal out of the World Tree. Then, I can grill my 3,000-year-old eel with that charcoal. What do you think? Sounds delicious, right? But, I'm saying this first. I'm going to be the only one to eat it. Hehe!"

"..."

Bitter tears began to well up for Locke. The touching moment did not even last for one second. He asked, "Th...that sounds really delicious... Is that really your only reason?"

"Are there any other reasons? I told you to think about it though? It's a combination of the 3,000 year-old eel and charcoal made out of the World Tree.?Hiyaa. It's delicious! Wait... why are you lying down there as if you're contemplating life?"

"...Should I just kill him?"

"Huh? What?"

"N...nothing."

The tears that welled up in Locke's eyes silently flowed and trickled down his face. However, he did not feel sad at all right now.

Meanwhile, the commentators...

[Aaaaaah! Player Locke and Player Minhyuk turned off their microphones to talk!]

[Player Locke was so moved that he even burst into tears!]

[Maybe this is how their talk was going. ‘Did you come here to save me?’ Then, Player Minhyuk told him. ‘Since you’re my friend, of course I should come and save you!’ Kgghk! What a very touching moment!]

[Ah, My heart feels so warm. Player Locke is trying so hard not to cry. He purposely made a distorted face!!]

[He must be embarrassed!! But, this is really a sight to behold!!]

Ignorant of the truth, they just blabbered on, indulging in their fantasies.

Carr was already leading in the first place after widening the gap between him and Locke.

[1st place. Carr. 44 Spirit Injections.]

[2nd place. Locke. 37 Spirit Injections.]

[3rd place. Zeriph. 11 Spirit Injections.]

The numbers were overwhelming. In addition, Carr was showing off his brilliant sword skills while facing off more than ten termites after the blessings of the World Tree descended.

[As expected. A London Olympics Gold Medalist is really skilled!]

There were currently three screens that had been attracting the most attention. The screens showing Carr, Khan and his enemies, and Minhyuk and Locke. Among the three, there was a lot of attention on Carr’s screen. It was an amazing sight to witness the pure skills of a kendo gold medalist slaughtering the termites.

Not long after, Carr saw a player enter his cave after he had hunted termites for quite a long time. It was Jacky. Jacky was also a member of Blackstone. However, even though they were keeping others in check, they did not necessarily pay attention to the game.

Then, Jacky told him, “Carr. Player Minhyuk participated in this game. He’s the player that entered the Hall of Kings.”

“...What?”

Carr, who was hunting termites and listening nonchalantly at first, could not help but stop in his tracks.

‘Minhyuk?’

Carr only had one bump in his life, and that happened to be none other than Minhyuk. He was the first and only person to ever defeat Carr, a person who had never tasted a defeat in his entire life. What was worse was that Minhyuk even reached his hand out to him after the match ended. Carr clearly thought that as a form of ‘mockery’. It was a delusion that he had created in his head to make sense of what happened.

‘I’ll be able to trample on him now.’

Carr believed this to be the case. After all, he had been living in the Athlete’s Village ever since middle school until now. He was different from the past, whereas he believed that Minhyuk was a toothless tiger.

‘If you were that good, then you should have definitely gone and joined the Olympics before, right?’

Just as he was thinking about that...

“The problem is that Player Minhyuk is overwhelmingly strong.”

“Strong?”

“Yes. He forced Becker’s team to log out in 20 seconds. With a sword.”

“...!”

Carr’s eyes widened. He knew that this meant that Minhyuk’s skills did not turn rusty at all.

However, at that moment...

Dash!

...someone rushed inside the ant cave.

“Catch him!”

“Run!”

Carr turned his head around. He could see Khan being chased around by the other players. Then, Carr felt something else behind him.

“Minhyuk, why are you over there? Oops!”

Carr’s head turned around when he heard Khan’s voice. He saw Minhyuk supporting Locke. Carr and Minhyuk’s eyes met across the cave.

Bang!

Carr gritted his teeth as he kicked the remaining termite. Then, he began to rush towards Minhyuk.

“Kang Minhyuuuuuuuuuuk!”