

Gourmet 1011

Chapter 1011

Black Dragon had a long talk with the Dragon Emperor. He had so much fun; he felt like he was drinking and chatting with an old friend.

As their conversation progressed, Black Dragon realized, *‘The dragons generally like peace.’*

Moreover, it seemed that dragons loved and accepted other races. After all, why did the four legendary dragons follow Black Dragon, a human? It was only possible because the dragons had recognized that they were supposed to care for and protect all races. As powerful beings, it was their job to protect the weak. Their noble and lofty ideals caused the blazing flames in Black Dragon’s heart to burn even brighter.

Then, the Dragon Emperor asked, “My blood brother, what is your reason for coming here? Did you want to meet me?”

Black Dragon’s expression filled with joy and hope appeared as he said, “I came here for your necklace. I heard that it could turn me into a real dragon. I’ll be honest with you, my friend. I want to be a dragon.”

The Dragon Emperor slowly raised his tail.

Black Dragon continued, “I feel thrilled at the thought of becoming a dragon and taking to the skies with the other dragons.”

The Dragon Emperor smiled and nodded as he continued listening to his blood(?) brother speak with sparkling eyes.

The Dragon Emperor had lived a very long life—thousands of years—but he knew that he was about to die.

Knowing that he could only live for another fifty years at most, there was something he had been thinking about.

‘The dragons do not need to live in hiding like this forever.’

Many of the dragons enjoyed freedom. They loved to soar through the skies and learn much as they traveled. And Black Dragon? Even though he was a human, he was far stronger and had a purer will than a dragon.

As the Dragon Emperor interacted with Black Dragon, he could tell one thing.

‘Black Dragon will love every single one of the dragons.’

This was more than enough for the Dragon Emperor. Nevertheless, he just could not hand his necklace over so easily and suddenly.

The Dragon Emperor stated, “This necklace is the token of Dragon Land’s emperor.”

“*Cough.* Is that so?” Black Dragon asked with a sigh.

This meant that whoever owned the necklace would rule over this land.

A complicated expression flashed in the eyes of the Dragon Emperor. Then, he said, "But I believe I can leave this to you. A man like you, who not only has bravery but also has both devotion and majesty, is qualified enough to become a dragon that will rule over Dragon Land."

Black Dragon's eyes glistened when he heard the Dragon Emperor's unexpected words.
"Fufufufu. Thank you for your recognition."

However, the Dragon Emperor did not intend to give up his throne easily just because he liked Black Dragon. Besides, he knew the dragons would resist and rebel if he did that.

The Dragon Emperor said, "It's a bit far from here. But if you go north, you will reach the Great King Sky Bull's kingdom. We have been at odds with them for a very long time. But unlike us dragons who love peace, they like to plunder and demolish things. If you can hunt three hundred of them, you will receive the qualifications to become the owner of this necklace."

Black Dragon checked the details in the notification window in front of him.

Since the Great King Sky Bulls were at odds with the dragons, it meant that their level should be around Level 600, too. Nonetheless, he was Black Dragon and had the four legendary dragons with him. He was confident that he could hunt them. The quest that the Dragon Emperor gave Black Dragon was an easy trial.

Black Dragon immediately prepared to depart. Of course, he did not forget to express his gratitude first.

"My dear friend with a blazing right arm," the Dragon Emperor said softly.

When Black Dragon turned to look back, he saw a kind and gentle smile on the face of the Dragon Emperor.

"We, dragons, always wanted to embrace everyone. However, this naive thought had, more often than not, put us at a disadvantage. I hope that you will be the one who will protect my stupid brothers."

Black Dragon nodded with an expression of firm determination on his face. He replied, "Absolutely. Even if I have to risk my life, I will protect them."

Black Dragon left Dragon Land and headed straight toward the Great King Sky Bull's land. Then, just two days after Black Dragon left for the Great King Sky Bull's Kingdom, the Qingdao Kingdom's army appeared near Dragon Land.

Sima Qian, the tactician of the Qingdao Kingdom, knew a lot about dragons. He also possessed an extraordinary power called the Voice of the Dying, which was a kind of brainwashing skill.

After catching one of the dragons out on patrol, he used the Voice of the Dying on the dragon and extracted more information about the dragons before he died.

"The rumors are true. The dragon race is a pure and naive race that wishes to protect all races. Well, it's also true that they are superior to any race out there."

That was why it was pretty funny.

“They could have just used that power to take and wreak havoc. *Tsk.*”

Sima Qian could not understand why the dragons naively wanted to embrace other races.

There was something else the Qingdao Kingdom found out after Sima Qian used the Voice of the Dying.

“When dragons smell the scent of the burning Dragon Flower, they will lose all of the strength in their bodies.”

They confirmed this fact over and over again using the Voice of the Dying. The dragons would indeed become powerless once they smelled the scent of those burning red flowers.

After learning this fact, the Qingdao Kingdom’s army immediately went to the Dragon Falls, where the Dragon Flowers were said to be growing, and harvested hundreds of them in one go.

As the Qingdao Kingdom’s army approached the Dragon Guards, Xu Jiaqi said, “Assassins! Immediately use stealth and plant the Dragon Flower throughout the city. Burn them once we enter the Dragon Emperor’s castle. We will capture the Dragon Emperor. Let’s suck them dry.”

A deep and vicious smile was hanging on Xu Jiaqi’s face as she approached the guards. “I am Xu Jiaqi—the king of the Qingdao Kingdom, one of the human kingdoms. I came to show our gratitude to the Dragon Emperor, who has always lent us a helping hand.”

It was literally as Sima Qian had said. The dragons were very friendly to the humans.

One of the Dragon Guards replied, “I will guide you to the Dragon Emperor.”

Of course, the only reason why the dragons did this was because they believed in their strength. This was more so the case for the Dragon Emperor. He was as strong as five dragons combined. Why should he fear humans?

“Fufu. There’s quite a lot of humans visiting us lately, huh?”

“Fufufu. It must be our burning blood that is bringing them to us. Fufufufu. They obviously heard of our virtues even though they are from distant lands. Keuhuhuhuhuhu!”

‘What’s wrong with these dragons? Why are they talking that way?’

This was the thought that flashed in the minds of Xu Jiaqi and the elites of the Qingdao Kingdom. They kept hearing things like ‘Fufufu, so they’re humans?’ and more ‘Fufufufu!’ for no reason at all as they walked toward the Dragon Emperor’s castle.

“...”

Were the dragons suffering from *chuunibyou*? That was hard for the elites of the Qingdao Kingdom to accept.

As for Sima Qian and Xu Jiaqi, they were wondering about something else.

‘There have been quite a lot of humans visiting them lately?’

‘Did someone else visit before us?’

Regardless, it did not matter much to them. From what they had inferred, only one or two people had visited before. They, on the other hand, had brought all of the Qingdao Kingdom's elites.

The moment they entered the Dragon Emperor's castle, black smoke produced from burning the Dragon Flowers spread and covered all of Dragon Land.

When Xu Jiaqi and her elite troops entered the room to chat with the Dragon Emperor, they launched a surprise attack.

Xu Jiaqi was a Master Reflector. She was able to reflect and replicate the abilities and skills that her opponents used against her.

At the start of the battle, she replicated a skill a previous opponent had used. It was called the God of Debuff. She used this skill to reduce all of the energy and abilities of the Dragon Emperor by 25%.

Xu Jiaqi and her troops fought a fierce battle against the Dragon Emperor.

They were shocked. The Dragon Emperor was much stronger than what they had expected.

Nevertheless, with dozens of high-rankers and elite knights above Level 600 working together, they managed to restrain the Dragon Emperor.

Xu Jiaqi dragged the bound Dragon Emperor out of the castle. The black smoke had spread throughout all of Dragon Land, and the dragons all lay weakly and helplessly on the ground.

"The God of Wrath will lay judgment upon you! My resentment toward you will burst out and lay waste upon you!" the bloody Dragon Emperor shouted furiously.

Xu Jiaqi just shrugged.

The Qingdao Kingdom was located in the Chinese Server and thus had the largest population. Their millions of troops had already arrived in Dragon Land.

"From now on, I will use this land as my second home base. This is a mine—a mine filled with countless dragons! Hoho!"

What was a mine? It was where coal and rare jewels were usually found—a place where a person could get precious items just by swinging their pickaxe. Yet, Xu Jiaqi had used the same word for Dragon Land. To her, Athenae was merely a game. Nothing more, nothing less.

Millions of troops began to bind the weak and helpless dragons.

Xu Jiaqi immediately grabbed the Dragon Emperor's head. Then, she said, "Look. Your dragons will be precious resources for us in the future."

"Kghhkhk!"

The Dragon Emperor could not bear to look as the soldiers gathered the bound dragons. The humans' eyes were filled with disgust as they handled his precious dragons. It was as if they were looking at bugs.

Then, these humans crossed the line. They whipped the weak dragons.

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

“Graaaaaaaa!”

“Kihyaaaaaack!”

The dragons’ shrieks and wails resonated all over Dragon Land. As their cries echoed, tears began to flow from the Dragon Emperor’s eyes. His tears slowly became jewels, glowing with a pearly sheen as they fell onto the ground.

[You have acquired a drop of the Dragon Emperor’s Tears.]

The sight of the tears colored Xu Jiaqi’s eyes with greed. She quickly collected the Dragon Emperor’s Tears.

Of course, her soldiers were doing the same thing. They whipped the dragons to collect the dragons’ tears too.

“I wonder how much everything is worth?” Xu Jiaqi wondered.

It seemed like she was considering exploiting the dragons for a long time.

“Let me congratulate you for securing an infinite source of financial income that not even the Beyond the Heavens Empire has secured,” Sima Qian said to Xu Jiaqi, the two cackling at their bright future.

‘The establishment of our empire is just right around the corner.’

“Enough! Enough! Please, enough!” the Dragon Emperor cried out loudly.

He sounded as if he could no longer bear the hideous things that these people were doing to him and his brethren.

But Xu Jiaqi just mockingly laughed at his cries. She even said, “Right, right. Cry just like that. Cry some more so I can make more money.”

“ENOUUUUUUUGH!!!”

The Dragon Emperor could not understand. They only wanted to treasure and care for all races. Sometimes, the dragons would even answer their calls for help and protect them. So, why? Why were these humans looking at them with such greed in their eyes? How could they do something this horrible with such ease?

The Dragon Emperor felt sadness, pain, and anger. However, the most heartbreaking thing for him was hearing the cries of his brethren—dragons who only longed for peace.

The humans continued to whip the dragons for their tears. When the Dragon Emperor opened his eyes and witnessed the atrocities of these greedy humans, he made a vow.

If these ropes get untied, I will bestow upon them a curse that will never be broken.

The Dragon Emperor possessed a frightening authority. Nevertheless, he was a very gentle being, so he had never even thought of using it before. He looked at the wailing dragons with pain and sadness.

“Kihyeeeeeeeeeeck!”

“Graaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Kihyaaaaaaaaaack!”

“Raaaaaaaaaar!”

[The roars of the Four Legendary Dragons shake the world!]

[The Four Legendary Dragons are furious.]

At that moment, four dragons soared into the sky. These four dragons released breaths carrying different attributes and blew away thousands of the Qingdao Kingdom troops.

Then, a man appeared. He walked silently toward the soldiers with his body covered with dragon armor and a black spear held tightly in his hand.

The man gritted his teeth as he faced millions of troops by himself. He didn't bother with his usual playful cries of ‘I’m going berserk!’

Black Dragon, the man with the spear, glared coldly at his enemies and said, “I won’t let a single one of you live. You f*cking bastards.”

Chapter 1012

Minhyuk reduced his sleep to quickly finish all the work he needed in Beyond the Heavens Empire.

‘I can’t even eat delicious food because I’m swamped with work.’

Minhyuk thought finishing his work as quickly as possible before eating something delicious would be better. Minhyuk stretched his body, sighing as he logged out of the game.

Minhyuk met Jinhwan in the living room when he went out after logging out. He greeted, “Hello, Doc Jinhwan.”

Jinhwan returned his greeting but with a bitter smile. “Would you like to have a cup of tea with me?”

Sensing the unusual atmosphere, Minhyuk sat face-to-face with his doctor.

Then Jinhwan said, “The chairman told me not to tell you, but I think you should know. The chairman passed out recently because of a cold. It was caused by fatigue and exhaustion.”

“A cold caused by fatigue?” Minhyuk asked, his heart sinking by the moment.

Lee Jinhwan sipped his tea and continued, “We were worried that he had contracted some kind of special disease since he was already getting on with age. But fortunately, the tests showed that he was very healthy. However, the fact that he fainted meant that it was not simply because he had a cold caused by fatigue.”

It was rare for someone to faint just because of a simple cold caused by fatigue and exhaustion.

“The overworking from the past to the present had caught up with him. I have told the chairman to take a rest. But it’s impossible to make him listen to me.” Jinhwan

smiled bitterly. "He has dedicated his entire life to Ilhwa Group and you. The chairman's average sleeping time is only four hours."

"..."

Minhyuk was rendered speechless. It was said that a person had to have an average of eight hours of sleep. Of course, as someone who slept for a little less than six hours per day, Minhyuk could also be considered sleeping less than ordinary people. However, it was still astounding that his father remained healthy despite only sleeping for an average of four hours.

"I didn't know that."

Minhyuk could not help but reflect on himself. However, Jinhwan did not mean to scold him. He asked Minhyuk to have tea with him because he wanted to say something to the boy.

"Minhyuk, do you have any intentions of leading the Ilhwa Group?"

Then, Jinhwan told Minhyuk what Kang Minhoo had told him before. He told Minhyuk about how his father felt guilty about being too greedy, that he felt he would take away his son's happiness and all the concerns of being a chairman.

Jinhwan wanted to talk with Chairman Kang Minhoo after obtaining Minhyuk's response. He did not intend to curse or criticize Minhyuk even if he chose not to inherit his father's position and business.

'With his eating addiction, it is already tough for him to play Athenae like this.'

It did not make sense to ask someone already carrying a heavy weight to carry another. Jinhwan even planned to recommend recruiting a professional manager to help with the company's operations if ever Minhyuk said, *'I don't like it.'*

Finally, Jinhwan heard Minhyuk's response.

'I see. Neither I nor the chairman know that he thought that way.'

Jinhwan looked very satisfied with Minhyuk's answer. Then, he saw Minhyuk stand up. He asked, "Weren't you just about to go to sleep?"

"I was going to. But I think it's better to give my father a present. So, I'm going back to get it for him."

The information that Abel had given him concerned the Dragon Emperor ruling the Dragon Land. Minhyuk immediately ran back and connected to Athenae to meet with this Dragon Emperor.

After hunting the Great King Sky Bulls, Black Dragon excitedly returned to Dragon Land. However, he was rendered speechless by the terrible devastation that greeted him.

Even if this was nothing but a game, the dragons could still be considered living creatures in this world. Besides, these beings were very kind and viewed humans favorably. But the beings that they treated kindly, the humans, held whips in their hands and tortured them so that they could get something from them.

Everything was because of human greed. Black Dragon made a vow when he saw the Qingdao Kingdom's king giggling while his dear friend, the Dragon Emperor, screamed in pain.

'You bastards...'

Even if he had to put his name as the chairman of Ilhwa Group on the line, he would punish these bastards. As if he wanted to prove his conviction, he said, "I won't let a single one of you live. You f*cking bastards."

"..."

"..."

The troops of the Qingdao Kingdom were shocked. They seemed to have witnessed the true wrath of a beast standing at the top of the food chain. The troops of the Qingdao Kingdom felt highly overwhelmed by Black Dragon's momentum and murderous glare. This was especially true for those who knew him as Chairman Kang Minhoo. After all, they knew he was very kind from the news they had seen on the TV.

"Black Dragon...?"

Xu Jiaqi was the one who was most surprised by this. She knew the man's true worth, hidden behind such a ridiculous character name.

'At the end of the day, this is nothing but a game. The strong will be the victor.'

Would the Beyond the Heavens Empire retaliate and confront them because of Black Dragon? That was a possibility. However, if they truly did that, many Beyond the Heavens Empire players might be disappointed in Minhyuk. After all, who would want an emperor who would order his army to move for such a simple matter, no?

Black Dragon might be the father of Emperor Minhyuk. However, he would just be forced to log out. Yet they would attack and destroy the Qingdao Kingdom just to vent this anger, a personal one at that, too?

'If that truly happens, then the 1.3 billion Chinese will lash out and criticize the Beyond the Heavens Empire.'

In the past decade, China achieved faster economic growth than other countries. The main reason for this was their population. And if something like that happened, the entire country would turn into a mad dog and bite the Beyond the Heavens Empire like crazy.

So, Xu Jiaqi concluded that Black Dragon could not move the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

"Are you filming a video?"

"Of course."

In the end, the one that attacked the Qingdao Kingdom first was Black Dragon.

"It's just a single high ranker with the backing of an emerging emperor, nothing more and nothing less," Xu Jiaqi said, a nonchalant expression on her face as she looked at Black Dragon. However, Xu Jiaqi would be forced to correct that statement.

The four dragons that soared to the skies before immediately surrounded Black Dragon. Then, he ran forward with his spear held tightly in his hands.

Black Dragon swept dozens of the Qingdao Kingdom's troops away while the dragons following right behind him trampled on them with their massive bodies.

"...Were those dragons always that strong?"

"Black Dragon's amazing too. I heard that his level is over Level 600, too."

The Qingdao Kingdom might not know this, but when Black Dragon achieved Level 600, the four legendary dragons experienced a 30% increase in their powers. Not only that, his stats and abilities had also witnessed an explosive rise. He was also able to obtain several new skills.

'So, he came to save us.'

Black Dragon had promised the Dragon Emperor that he would protect the dragons of this land.

"Murderous Spear."

Slash—!

The figure of a dragon shot out of Black Dragon's spear and devoured everything within a 700-meter radius, leaving the path in front of him clear of enemies.

Black Dragon, who ran along this clear path, was bombarded with countless arrows and magical attacks. But it was fine because he had the four legendary dragons beside him. Under the protection of the four dragons, Black Dragon swept the soldiers away non-stop.

"...He can deal with three players at Level 600 by himself."

This was very surprising. The skills and powers that Black Dragon had were enough for anyone to covet him. However, Xu Jiaqi was not afraid. This was because the rankers of the Qingdao Kingdom had yet to make a move.

But then, Black Dragon released a power he had never shown anyone before once he reached a particular range.

"Ascending the Heavens."

At that moment, Black Dragon's body floated around thirty centimeters. As for the four legendary dragons? They immediately gathered around him. Then, black energy exploded from within his body while the four dragons released energy with color corresponding to their attributes.

Then, *five* dragons began to ascend to the heavens.

Ascending the Heavens was a one-shot kill skill that Black Dragon possessed. It was a skill with a penalty of -1 in all stats.

Boom—!

The five dragons ascending to the heavens slaughtered all the soldiers blocking their path in just a blink of an eye. The number of troops that they had killed in one go? It reached 20,000... 30,000... until it reached a total of 50,000.

Xu Jiaqi, Sima Qian, and the rankers of the Qingdao Kingdom all stared wide-eyed at the scene. In just a blink, around 50,000 of their troops melted and disappeared into nothingness. It was truly as if dragons were ascending to the heavens.

When Sima Qian saw them fly straight toward the walls, he ordered, “Protect Her Majesty!!!”

What Black Dragon was aiming for was Xu Jiaqi’s neck. This was the only way for him to deal with them alone.

The elites of the Qingdao Kingdom immediately charged toward the ascending Black Dragon and the four legendary dragons. However, the power of Ascending the Heavens granted Black Dragon and the four legendary dragons a 92% damage reduction. Not only that, it also had the power to deal tremendous damage to anyone who dared to brush against them.

“Ugh!”

“Keuhaaaaaaack!”

“Aaaaaaack!”

The ones who attacked Black Dragon and the four legendary dragons were sent flying away. Some were even left clutching their hands or legs as they rolled around on the ground.

Black Dragon looked at the Dragon Emperor as he approached the walls. He planned to release the Dragon Emperor the moment he killed Xu Jiaqi. The odds would favor him if he could release the Dragon Emperor.

Bang—!

Accompanied by a loud bang, Black Dragon’s black spear shot toward Xu Jiaqi’s heart.

Xu Jiaqi was extremely flustered. She thought, *‘If this is a 1:1 fight, then I will lose.’*

The Master Reflector class could be considered an overpowered class. However, with the combination of Black Dragon’s battle prowess and the four legendary dragons, he could exert tremendous power that not even she could fight alone.

But Xu Jiaqi was not alone. Because of that, she could use a wide range of skills freely and without any hesitation. She immediately used one of the skills that she had absorbed and saved.

“Disarm.”

Flash—!

The energy wrapped around Black Dragon and the four legendary dragons disappeared simultaneously. Black Dragon, who crashed on the ground, looked highly flustered.

Bang—!

Of course, the rankers did not waste this opportunity. They immediately bombarded him with attacks. They forced Black Dragon down on the ground before overpowering the four dragons and subduing them.

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

“Graaaaaa!”

“Kyaaahhaaaaaack!”

“Restrain the four dragons,” Xu Jiaqi said as she stretched her hand out toward the dragons.

[Space Restriction]

[Your dragons cannot be returned to the summoning room temporarily.]

Xu Jiaqi smiled viciously and said, “With this, we also have the four legendary dragons in our hands. This is a cause for celebration. Hoho.”

The greed in Xu Jiaqi’s eyes grew deeper.

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

“Graaaaaa!”

Even though the four dragons were bound tightly with rope, they struggled like crazy to get to where Black Dragon was. Because of that, the soldiers began to beat them up. However, the four legendary dragons ignored them. All they wanted was to remain by Black Dragon’s side.

Bang—!

The moment Black Dragon tried to stand up, the rankers immediately beat him up and forced him back to the ground.

“My dear friend...” the Dragon Emperor cried, tears dripping down his chin again.

Black Dragon saw the four dragons, who had been with him for a long time, crying loudly as if begging for their father as they got dragged somewhere. It seemed like what they were trying to do here was to sever the link between him and the dragons and torture them so they could collect their tears.

“NO!!!” Black Dragon screamed. He then turned to look at the Dragon Emperor, his pupils trembling fiercely after witnessing his four dragons get dragged away.

Xu Jiaqi clicked her tongue and said, “You should be busy working as a chairman. Why do you even have to play games like this? Your greed knows no bounds.”

For the first time in his life, Black Dragon felt very helpless. Listening to Xu Jiaqi’s words, he finally felt like the burden that he was carrying was far too heavy.

‘I have walked this path alone.’

He had been fighting alone for the longest time to protect and support the Ilhwa Group. When their stock prices fell, he personally met with the shareholders about to sell their stocks and even obtained revised agreements from them.

Whenever they faced a crisis, he stood up as the chairman, acted courageously, and led them by example. In his spare time, he cared for his son, Minhyuk, who was suffering from eating addiction, and studied everything about the disease.

He was responsible for tens of millions of employees and had a son to raise and lead. He also had the mission to keep and protect Ilhwa Group's name as the best company in the world. And his job was to protect the dragons and Dragon Land.

These were the burdens that Black Dragon carried. However, it became an overwhelming weight that threatened to crush him.

“So, the chairman of Ilhwa Group is such a shabby person. Ama...”

But Xu Jiaqi could not finish her sentence.

Black Dragon, who heard the abrupt end in her sentence, slowly looked up. That was when he saw a tall young man with broad shoulders in front of him.

When this young man was born, he was small, barely fitting in Black Dragon's hands. Then, he grew older. He became old enough to learn how to walk and ride his first four-wheeled bike.

When this young man became a student and entered kindergarten, Black Dragon, who looked at his son wearing his school uniform for the first time, laughed and said, ‘*My son has grown up now, hoho!*’

The young man grew up just like that. Now, his back has grown wider. He has also grown more dependable.

Many fathers used to say that they would often feel shabby when they saw how their bodies slowly started to wither away while their children grew bigger and bigger. This was because they felt like they could no longer protect their child.

But at this moment, Black Dragon felt differently from them.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” the young man said after grabbing Xu Jiaqi by the neck and slamming her down on the ground. Despite the millions of soldiers standing before him, he stood tall and unwavering as he said, “Let’s do this together.”

Only one person could share the burden that Black Dragon carried. This person, whose back had grown wide enough to shield him from harm, was the only one who could stand by his side. And this person was none other than his son.

Chapter 1013

Xu Jiaqi was the king of the Qingdao Kingdom, which had the largest territory and population. With the love and care of billions of Chinese citizens, she successfully built a kingdom bigger and stronger than the kingdoms created by NPCs in such a short period.

Because of that, Xu Jiaqi believed she was a tiger among men. But the moment Minhyuk grabbed her by her neck, she realized she was nothing but a fox pretending to be a tiger.

She also knew she had tried to hurt Minhyuk's father, Kang Minhoo. Anyone who witnessed their family being hurt would definitely be overcome with anger.

Baaaaang—!

Xu Jiaqi could not even resist. She was helpless as she got slammed on the ground.

Seeing their king suffer, the millions of soldiers of the Qingdao Kingdom immediately surrounded Minhyuk. But the cold look in Minhyuk's eyes did not even waver. He stood there looking all noble and majestic.

Minhyuk murmured something to Black Dragon as he approached and helped him to his feet. Then, bright white light flooded Minhyuk's body. This was the manifestation of one of the skills that Xu Jiaqi had obtained as the Master Reflector.

[Unbreakable Shield]

The Unbreakable Shield was no different from an ordinary barrier. It could protect the skill user for an hour. However, it also prevented the skill user from using attacks or skills.

Although barriers granted absolute invincibility to its user, there were some exceptional cases where these barriers could be broken. This was usually the case for beings in the realm that no one could comprehend. This was where the Unbreakable Shield was different. It was impossible to break it even if someone was in that realm. Not only that, it could also protect a chosen person aside from the skill user themselves. The one that Xu Jiaqi had chosen was Sima Qian, the Qingdao Kingdom's tactician.

Seeing Minhyuk glaring coldly at the soldiers around him, Sima Qian, hiding behind the barrier, warned, "Beyond the Heavens' Emperor! Do you think you will be able to deal with us?! We have obtained Dragon Land through our powers. Don't you dare think that you can attack us and take it away from us just because you have stronger power! There are hundreds of cameras recording right now!"

Sima Qian was very clever. He was trying to turn the current situation into a situation where the weak were bullied by the strong. If the Beyond the Heavens Empire's army arrived and swept them away, then that would be the strong taking away something the weak had struggled to obtain.

And just like he said, there were hundreds of cameras recording and running at this very moment. The moment the Beyond the Heavens Empire appeared and attacked the weak Qingdao Kingdom, then it would all be over.

But something unexpected happened. Minhyuk, with no expression on his face, looked at Sima Qian and said, "I am alone."

"...!" Surprise colored Sima Qian's face. "What...?"

"My army will not come here."

Sima Qian was rendered speechless. What kind of nonsense was that? Millions of Qingdao Kingdom troops had occupied Dragon Land. But Minhyuk said that he was going to fight them alone?

Then, Minhyuk spat out more shocking words.

"You said that there were hundreds of cameras? That's good."

He asked them in return, "Fighting millions of kingdom troops alone. How do you think the world will view this situation?"

"..."

Sima Qian was no fool. Minhyuk said that this would not be the strong bullying of the weak.

‘Even if he is the supreme, the fact that millions of troops attacked a single player is still far too much.’

Even their fellow Chinese would not be able to defend them against this.

“What if I kill you all?”

This was a very shocking idea. But what if this idea became a reality?

‘The fact that he took down the Qingdao Kingdom, the largest kingdom, by himself means that he could take a huge leap forward.’

Goosebumps rose all over Sima Qian’s body.

In just an instant, Minhyuk had finished all the calculations and simulations in his head. Then, he said, “In front of these hundreds of cameras, I promise you.”

Minhyuk’s expression was frigid and sharp.

“Right now, I am not the emperor of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, but the son of the player named Black Dragon.”

Minhyuk said the words that anyone could relate to and sympathize with. After all, anyone would do anything if they learned their father was left in a perilous and desperate situation. These words would definitely garner sympathy from the masses.

“Right here and now, I declare the destruction of the Qingdao Kingdom.”

“...!”

“...!”

“...!”

A commotion broke out among the kingdom troops. And Sima Qian and Xu Jiaqi? The two of them made eye contact. That was bullshit. How could a single player destroy an entire kingdom?

BOOM!!!

A massive pillar of flame shot out from Minhyuk’s sword and devoured over 100,000 Qingdao Army troops.

“...”

This shocking display of power left Xu Jiaqi and Sima Qian speechless.

“U- Uwaaaaaaah!”

“Charge!”

The millions of soldiers who charged at Minhyuk standing by himself were now going to pay the price for hurting his father. With every bolt of lightning that fell from the sky, countless Qingdao Kingdom’s army soldiers disappeared without a trace.

Minhyuk looked at Xu Jiaqi and Sima Qian and said, "Even if I get logged out here..."

"..."

"..."

"I will log back in again and kill every single one of you. I will continue to do so until I reach the Qingdao Kingdom."

"..."

"..."

"I will continue to come after you even if you have already died once, twice, or thrice. I will continue to do so until the Qingdao Kingdom declares its destruction."

Would the Qingdao Kingdom fall just because Minhyuk said so? Of course not. But after witnessing more than 500,000 of their army die at Minhyuk's hands in just twenty minutes, their thoughts completely changed. It seemed possible. After all, millions of people from the Qingdao Kingdom would die while Minhyuk would only lose a single life.

The Qingdao Kingdom finally realized they could not handle Minhyuk, who could kill millions alone. He was like a human trampling over tens of thousands of ants.

No matter how many ants there were to bite the human, there was no way for them to win and kill such a monstrous being. On the other hand, a human could easily kill all of the ants. All he needed to do was scatter oil and light them on fire.

The problem was even if they killed this person, this person would continue to haunt and attack their kingdom.

At this moment, Xu Jiaqi realized she had touched Minhyuk's reverse scale. What would happen if Player Minhyuk constantly attacked their kingdom? They would be buried alive at the hands of the proud Chinese people.

Xu Jiaqi immediately said, "P- Please... Please stop. We were wrong. We'll step back now, so please stop."

She needed a way to break through this situation. She had risked everything for the sake of the Qingdao Kingdom. If the Qingdao Kingdom fell, she would also fall into the abyss both in-game and reality.

Then, Minhyuk said, "I will never go back on my words."

"..."

"The only thing I feel toward you right now is overwhelming wrath. Let me ask you this..."

"..."

"What did these dragons do to you? How many people have asked you the same thing? How many asked, *'Please, I beg you, stop.'*"

“Ee– Eeeeeek...!”

That was right. The kingdom that Xu Jiaqi created was built through countless exploitations. How many people had they trampled and robbed to develop their kingdom to this level? How many had suffered just as much as the dragons of Dragon Land?

“You, of all people, do not deserve to say those words.”

“Aah...”

A teardrop fell from Xu Jiaqi’s eye.

At this moment, Sima Qian felt like he had been doused with a basin of cold water. He thought, *‘If things continued at this rate, then the only choice we have left would be to walk the path of destruction.’*

An entire kingdom destroyed by a single player? How could the Chinese people accept something so shameful? The worst part? Xu Jiaqi could not see the situation in front of her eyes right now.

Sima Qian, who had regained his cool, analyzed the entire situation.

Xu Jiaqi, standing there with a blank expression, mechanically turned her head to look at Sima Qian.

The Ruler of Range was a member of the newly created God’s Children. And he possessed the power called Absolute Range. Absolute Range was a ridiculous skill that could reduce an enemy’s stats, skills, and abilities by 30% as long as they were within the range of the skill.

This was true. The despair slowly melted away from Xu Jiaqi’s face, immediately replaced by a greed-filled smile. It was a truly grotesque sight.

They believed that it was possible. Sima Qian had already started to devise another strategy.

Xu Jiaqi immediately understood what Sima Qian meant. Even if the Qingdao Kingdom would face criticism for using millions of troops to deal with a single player, the result would not change.

‘The Qingdao Kingdom will be known as the country that hunted the Supreme.’

That fact alone would be enough for them to garner the support and praise of other countries. What would happen if Minhyuk continued to come for the Qingdao Kingdom in that situation?

‘The narrative would be different. His continuous attacks would now be seen as revenge for being forced to log out.’

The smile that slowly spread on Xu Jiaqi’s once servile expression completely showed what kind of person she was. She was the type who would beg when cornered but would grow arrogant once she realized that she had the upper hand.

Sima Qian immediately gave the orders to all BJs who belonged to their kingdom.

[

They would receive criticism if they sent millions of troops flocking toward a lone enemy. The scene of fifty strong people trampling on Minhyuk would definitely spread to the world soon.

Lamber immediately stepped forward and triggered his Absolute Range skill. At the same time, the cameras of the BJs belonging to their kingdom turned on and began broadcasting.

As mentioned before, the Qingdao Kingdom had the largest territory and population. With their large population, it was only natural that they had many talented people. And among them was a world-renowned BJ and player named Demacia. With his unreserved words and glib tongue when hosting his broadcast, Demacia could be considered one of the top ten BJs in Athenae.

When Demacia turned on his broadcast with the title Hunting the Supreme, many viewers began to enter and flock to watch what he was streaming.

‘Hunting Player Minhyuk, who has become 30% weaker, will definitely be a huge topic.’

Even if he was the Supreme, there was no way that he could deal with more than twenty Level 600 rankers and dozens of Named NPCs when he was already 30% weaker.

‘Lamber’s Absolute Range has a slightly different concept from debuffs.’

It was highly likely that Minhyuk’s invincible body would not be able to exert its effects fully.

The viewers began to enter his broadcast.

[What’s going on?]

[Hunting the Supreme? This is a very provocative title.]

The viewers were left surprised when Demacia told them about the key points of this broadcast.

[Heok?! Isn’t that the Qingdao Kingdom and Minhyuk?!]

[OMG! Is the Qingdao Kingdom going to kill Minhyuk?]

[But is that even possible? Considering Minhyuk's level and equipment, it would not be easy to deal with him even if millions had gathered to kill him. It's like how a Level 1 player would be unable to pull down a Level 100 player's HP no matter how hard they attacked.]

Demacia, who completely omitted the process as to how the situation reached this point, said, "The Qingdao Kingdom plans to hunt Player Minhyuk after their pride, God's Child Lamber, casts a debuff that would reduce all of his stats and abilities by 30%!"

[Shit!]

[The Supreme will become 30% weaker?!]

[Oh... Even if he's the Supreme, if he grows 30% weaker, he wouldn't be able to deal with them.]

[And what's more, all those who stepped forward from the Qingdao Kingdom's army are their elite high-rankers, no?]

[Their strong NPCs also stepped forward?]

[Is the Supreme going to face a crisis...?]

In the viewers' eyes, it seemed obvious. Even if Minhyuk was the Supreme, he could not easily deal with Level 600 rankers and NPCs as long as he was 30% weaker.

Demacia rationally and objectively analyzed the situation. He thought, *'Perhaps the Qingdao Kingdom will rise to the top just by hunting the Supreme.'*

Starting with Demacia's broadcast, the other BJs who belonged to the Qingdao Kingdom also began their broadcasts. And their viewer counts had already exceeded millions.

Demacia, who watched the scene, saw Minhyuk frown slightly when he finally stepped inside the Absolute Range, and the high-rankers of the Qingdao Kingdom immediately surrounded him.

One person was the first to move toward the Supreme.

'Fire Spear Leguy.'

He was a famous spearman among the players. Leguy leaped forward and tried to stab Minhyuk through the heart.

Bang—!

"...?"

But the moment Minhyuk raised his sword, he sent Leguy flying away. Then, a lightning bolt fell from the sky and struck the spearman. Minhyuk approached the man, who had fallen on the ground and struck his shaking body three times in a row.

Bang, bang, bang—!

Lightning bolts fell from the sky and struck Leguy once again. And after four seconds, Leguy was forced to log out.

[...?]

[...?]

[Didn't you say that Minhyuk has grown 30% weaker?]

[What the hell...?]

[Is the Qingdao Kingdom just weak, or is Minhyuk just too freaking strong?]

Silence enveloped the entire area. And Minhyuk? His lips twisted into a sneer as he spoke with a voice that sounded like he was reading a Korean textbook. He said, "I'm already 30% weaker, but... will you even be able to kill me at this rate? Aren't you guys much weaker than I expected?"

He mocked them blatantly.

Chapter 1014

Minhyuk felt his blood boil as he seethed with anger.

For him, his father was the most respectable man in the world. Not only that, his father was the only one who silently stood by his side and guarded him while he was struggling desperately against his eating addiction. But, they let Minhyuk witness how they forced his father onto the ground and left him to struggle desperately.

So, Minhyuk said, "Right here and now, I declare the destruction of the Qingdao Kingdom."

This was by no means an exaggeration on Minhyuk's part. He had made a vow and commitment after learning about the Qingdao Kingdom's atrocities to the dragons of Dragon Land and his father. He would do everything he could to ensure the Qingdao Kingdom was destroyed. He proceeded forward as he was thinking of slaughtering them one after another.

[Absolute Range]

[You have entered the Absolute Range.]

[Your stats, HP, MP, attack, and defensive power will decrease by 30%.]

Minhyuk immediately observed his surroundings and assessed his situation. He could see that the troops of the kingdom army had already stepped down while the number of players who stepped forward increased. One look and he could already tell what they wanted to happen in this situation, where Minhyuk's stats and abilities had decreased by 30%.

'They want to kill me and use that fact to break through this situation.'

It was apparent, especially after seeing how Xu Jiaqi's servile expression morphed into arrogance.

'It will be dangerous for me.'

That was an undeniable fact.

Then, the Level 600 rankers and NPCs surrounded Minhyuk and charged at him simultaneously. Minhyuk could see one of the players raise his spear and aim for his heart.

'But against these players? That's not the case at all.' This was Minhyuk's conclusion.

With just a twist of his body, Minhyuk evaded Spearman Leguy, who shot at him at a breakneck speed. Then, he raised his sword and retaliated with a basic attack. Immediately after, lightning bolts struck the man named Leguy. Minhyuk kept on hitting him just like that. All of the people who were charging toward Minhyuk froze on the spot.

‘This is what I’m talking about.’

Their calculations did not consider Minhyuk's gains so far, including those he obtained in the World of Hybrids and when he met Rocado. Yet these were crucial points that made all the difference.

‘You have underestimated me too much.’

BANG—!

Minhyuk once again hit Spearman Leguy. And with this hit, Leguy turned into ashes and scattered with the wind. Now, not only those charging forward had frozen in their tracks, but everyone on the scene. The Level 600 rankers and NPCs, who charged forward, gulped as they looked at Minhyuk.

‘Things worked out better for me, no?’

Minhyuk found that the Qingdao Kingdom attacking him all at once like this was the perfect situation for him.

Now that the world has nothing to criticize about Minhyuk, they often resorted to petty means, declaring that he was just over-leveled and over-stats. Of course, his level and stats perfectly matched his name as the Supreme. Their words about how ridiculously good everything Minhyuk possessed were also valid. But everything that Minhyuk possessed was something that he gained through his efforts. That was why they had no right to say those words.

The problem was that many people had inferiority complexes, and they continued to use this to point fingers at Minhyuk and criticize him for the things he worked hard to obtain.

But the situation now was different. It had been declared to the world that Minhyuk had grown 30% weaker.

‘That’s right, I am 30% weaker.’

And what would happen if the 30% weaker Minhyuk annihilated the troops of the Qingdao Kingdom right here and now?

‘Then, it would be like killing two birds with one stone.’

The first bird would be the accelerated destruction and fall of the Qingdao Kingdom. The people would definitely criticize them. After all, they were defeated by Minhyuk, who had become 30% weaker.

‘Me and the Beyond the Heavens Empire will soar to the skies.’

There would no longer be any player who would accuse him of just being over-leveled and over-stats. More people would be interested in the Beyond the Heavens Empire if that happened.

Minhyuk, conscious of the hundreds of cameras pointed at him, spoke as if he was reciting texts from a Korean textbook. He said, “I’m already 30% weaker, but... will you even be able to kill me at this rate? Aren’t you guys much weaker than I expected?”

Minhyuk was very good at acting. However, there was a reason why he spoke so stiffly and awkwardly as if he were reading a boring textbook. It was because he was mocking them. Everyone who heard Minhyuk’s awkward words could tell he was mocking the Qingdao Kingdom.

“It seems like I have overestimated the Qingdao Kingdom, huh?”

Just like they expected, Minhyuk deliberately used that stiff and awkward tone. The expression on the face of Sima Qian, who realized this fact, grew ugly.

‘W- What the hell is this...?’

Minhyuk, who had grown 30% weaker, could force a Level 600 player to log out in under four seconds. But the worst part was that he only did it with his basic attacks.

‘What should have taken me just a few seconds... had only taken a couple of seconds more.’

That was the extent of how ridiculous Minhyuk’s power was. He had already concluded that few rankers could fight against him, even in his current state. Of course, there was also the fact that Minhyuk had triggered his Food God’s Swordsmanship the moment he entered the Absolute Range.

‘I haven’t even used my cooking buffs yet.’

Sima Qian immediately shouted at the faltering rankers and NPCs. He said, “Attack all at once! He’s just trying to intimidate you!”

Sima Qian believed that Minhyuk could only kill the ranker because he had used some kind of skill they weren’t aware of.

The rankers tightened their grip on their weapons.

‘Even if he’s the Supreme, there’s no way that the gap between us is that huge.’

‘We’re all rankers here.’

‘He must have used a skill we don’t know about.’

These thoughts ran in their heads as they charged at Minhyuk once again. At the same time, someone triggered their one-shot kill skill and sent it toward Minhyuk.

Slash, slash, slash—!

The axe in this player's hand grew several tens of meters in size before striking down upon Minhyuk. At the same time, Minhyuk’s HP fell by 28%.

‘As expected. Since my defensive power and HP are down by 30%, the damage I receive has become huge.’

Even so, Minhyuk was still calm and composed. Why? Because he also charged at them, who was running toward him. As he passed by those blocking his path, he unleashed a skill.

“Sword of Carnage.”

Slash, slash, slash—!

In an instant, another ranker was forced to log out. Then, Minhyuk used the Dual Sword Technique.

Usually, Minhyuk used the Continent Destroyer Sword. But when using the Dual Sword Technique, he would whip out the Sword of Aeon. The moment he pulled out the Sword of Aeon, the Greatest

Sword created a resonance and made all of the weapons and armor of the Qingdao Kingdom's army lose their function.

Minhyuk, with his two swords in hand, wandered around them like a ghost.

Stab, stab, stab—!

Slash, slash, slash—!

Ping, ping, ping—!

In just a few seconds, he swept through the dozens of rankers and Named NPCs, and forced several people to die just like that. Minhyuk's HP again reached 100% thanks to the Slaughterer's Absorption.

“Everyone, don't consider the penalties and use your one-shot kill skills! The Sword of Aeon's resonance period will end soon!” Sima Qian shouted as he ran wildly.

Things shouldn't go on like this. If things continued at this rate, then the Qingdao Kingdom would definitely be destroyed quickly.

This was what the viewers of Demacia's broadcast were saying.

[Aren't the bastards from Qingdao too f*cking sloppy?]

[Wow... This is too shameful. Over twenty Level 600 rankers and NPCs can't even deal with a single player who is already 30% weaker. Kekekekeke.]

[Why don't you change the title of your broadcast? How about changing it from Hunting the Supreme to Praising the Supreme?]

[Long live the Food God!!! I love you, our Lord, the Food God!!!]

The rankers also moved in a hurry after hearing Sima Qian's shouts. Just like he said, they would probably only be able to break out of this crisis if they ignored the penalty and used their one-shot kill skills on the Food God all at once.

Over five players triggered their one-shot kill skills when their armor and weapons function returned.

Beeeeeeep—!

A gigantic sword light in the form of a dragon rose and rushed toward Minhyuk along with several AOE attack skills and single-target one-shot kill skills. But in the face of such attacks, Minhyuk continued to swagger. He said, “Absolute Defense.”

Flash—!

The light of the Absolute Defense shone brightly and enveloped Minhyuk's body.

Bang—!

The gigantic dragon-shaped sword light and several one-shot kill skills devoured Minhyuk. But he did not suffer a single damage. This happened because the rankers all lost their cool. If they had only stopped to think about Minhyuk's skills, they should have known that they should never use their one-shot kill skills all at once.

“F*ck!”

“Damn!”

The rankers who lost their one-shot kill skills to Minhyuk’s Absolute Defense could only sigh at the thought of the penalties they had to face. And Minhyuk? He took advantage of the seven seconds of invincibility and ran among them.

[Oh! Minhyuk’s going wild!]

[Kyaa! Watching a slaughter is so fun!]

Sima Qian was left flustered while Xu Jiaqi slowly fell into despair again. They felt an indescribable sense of helplessness after witnessing the majesty of the Supreme, an existence out of their reach.

Only at this moment did Sima Qian realize how foolish it was to think that they could kill Minhyuk and show the world how great the Qingdao Kingdom was with just a few rankers and Named NPCs. Their ideas were nothing but bullshit in front of the true Supreme.

“All at once! Attack him all at once!”

What they needed to do now was to kill him by all means. He ordered their millions of troops to move once again. But there was a slight smile around Minhyuk’s face.

‘Are you going to show it to the whole world?’

Millions of troops moved to attack Minhyuk, who was 30% weaker?! But there was something that they did not know. There’s one move that Minhyuk had hidden and not yet used.

“Hey.”

“...?”

“...?”

Sima Qian and Xu Jiaqi both turned to look at Minhyuk.

“I haven’t eaten anything yet.”

“Y- You have to eat your food first, you bastard!”

That was right. The most significant disadvantage of a cooking buff was that you had to eat it immediately and completely.

Minhyuk’s inventory was filled with various dishes he had made in advance. Smirking, he took two legendary-grade dishes out of his inventory.

“Who said that?”

[Overlapping Delight.]

Rhoando had upgraded the Overlapping Delight. Now, Minhyuk could consume the dish without even actually eating.

Gulp—

Minhyuk's throat bobbed as the taste of the food spread in his mouth.

“...?!”

Sima Qian was shocked to see Minhyuk eat and consume the food all at once. This was completely different from the data that he had in hand. Furthermore, two dice, a golden one and a black one, appeared simultaneously above Minhyuk's head when he triggered the Overlapping Delight.

‘The- The Overlapping Delight has evolved?!’

This was information that they had missed entirely.

[Overlapping Delight.]

[You can now receive the effects of two dishes.]

[The duration of the buff effect will depend on the number that the die will cast.]

[One of your skills can be reinforced. The level of the strengthening will depend on the number that the black die cast.]

The number cast on the golden die was five, meaning the buff duration would last five minutes. Meanwhile, the number cast on the black die was three. Thus, his chosen skill would have twice its standard power.

And since he received the effects of the two dishes at once, his stats increased by 21%. Not only that, his attack power and defensive power also increased by 15%. With this, a portion of his original power was restored.

In that state, Minhyuk chose the skill that would be strengthened with the power of the black die. Then, he charged straight toward the millions of Qingdao Army troops and said, “Calamity.”

[The skill: Calamity cannot be reinforced easily.]

[The strengthening would go down from 2x to 1.4x.]

The notification about the restriction of the strengthening was unexpected. Even so, the power of Calamity, which was 1.4x stronger than before, was still beyond anyone's imagination.

Crackle—

Blazing flames spread wildly from the giant sword that fell from the sky. Immediately after that, more than a thousand swords fell from the sky, releasing flames that could burn the whole world. At the same time, Minhyuk, with the power of his buff, moved between the enemies at a high speed.

Just like that, the Qingdao Kingdom's troops began to die rapidly. There were even players who chose to log out and run away. The army's momentum began to weaken when the players started to log out. In just an instant, the millions of troops were cut down in half.

[Carn has left the Qingdao Kingdom.]

[Logan has left the Qingdao Kingdom.]

[Vegen...Qingdao Kingdom.]

Countless notifications rang in Xu Jiaqi's ears. These people realized that there was no longer any hope for the Qingdao Kingdom and immediately ran away. It only took a few hours for the Qingdao Kingdom to fall to its ruins.

Sima Qian and Xu Jiaqi's faces grew ugly. Around 900,000 of their troops were gone. Some had died, some logged out, and some left the kingdom directly. Because of these, most of their forces standing at the vanguard had lost their will to fight.

Minhyuk ignored these people as he stood before Xu Jiaqi and Sima Qian. He said, "Do you guys hear that sound?"

"...?"

"...?"

The frustrated Xu Jiaqi and Sima Qian looked at Minhyuk in doubt. But just when Sima Qian thought, '*Maybe he's going to offer us a way to break through this situation?*' Minhyuk grinned and said, "It's the sound of you getting beaten up."

Chapter 1015

Sima Qian and Xu Jiaqi were speechless when they heard Minhyuk's words. Qingdao Kingdom's tactician, Sima Qian, started to think about ways to get about this situation.

"W- Wait...! If you kill us now...!"

But Minhyuk quickly grabbed him by the collar and interrupted his words.

Bang—!

"Keheok!"

Sima Qian was appalled. It was just a simple hit from Minhyuk's bare fist, but it felt like he was being hit with a hammer. His HP also significantly decreased.

Sima Qian was the true power behind the Qingdao Kingdom, which was why the players left the Qingdao Kingdom faster when they saw Sima Qian being beaten up.

[Loemin has left the Qingdao Kingdom.]

[Beigon has left the Qingdao Kingdom.]

[Harn... Qingdao Kingdom.]

Around 3% of their players had abandoned and fled the Qingdao Kingdom. Seeing that these people ignored the considerable penalty that one would receive for leaving the kingdom they were associated with, the quick-witted ones realized, '*The Qingdao Kingdom is done for.*'

Sima Qian was beaten to death by Minhyuk. Xu Jiaqi, who watched everything unfold, instantly lost her will to fight. When Minhyuk turned toward her, he raised his sword and cut her down all at once.

"Keok!"

Minhyuk looked at Xu Jiaqi, who was falling to the ground, and said, "Just wait; I will be in your kingdom soon."

Goosebumps rose all over Xu Jiaqi's body when she saw the terrifying look on Minhyuk's face.

Eventually, Xu Jiaqi, the king of the Qingdao Kingdom, died. After that, it was easy for Minhyuk to deal with the remaining survivors of the Qingdao Kingdom left in Dragon Land.

“...”

Black Dragon had a small smile on his face as he watched his son.

When he first heard his son say, *‘Let's do this together,’* he felt like he had put down the considerable burden that had been weighing down on his shoulders. And when he saw the once-young child stand alone against millions of troops, he felt himself shudder.

At that moment, a question floated in Black Dragon's mind. He thought, *‘How did Minhyuk come here?’*

He did not know how and why Minhyuk came to Dragon Land. From what Black Dragon heard, Minhyuk had been as busy as a bee these days.

“How and why did you come here?”

Minhyuk flashed an embarrassed smile when he heard his father's question. He said, “Dad, you wanted to be a dragon, right? So, I asked Abel for a favor. I came here after receiving the information. Hehe. I wanted to make my father's wish come true.”

“...”

Black Dragon was speechless. When he went through the first method, he chose to get the cooking ingredient for his son over becoming a dragon. But his son? His son wanted to find a way to help him fulfill his dreams and become a dragon. At this moment, Black Dragon realized how lucky he was as a father and how happy he was to have Minhyuk as his son.

Then, Minhyuk, with admiration and determination flashing in his eyes, said, “Father.”

Minhyuk had already told Jinhwan the answer when the doctor asked him whether he wanted to become the Ilhwa Group's chairman. This time, he wanted to tell his father.

“I want to lead the Ilhwa Group.”

“...!”

Black Dragon did not want to put a huge burden on his son. He thought it was because he was too greedy to want his son to protect the company that he had built with his own bare hands.

But Minhyuk thought differently. He said, “I have been yearning for it. I have always wanted to become like my father, who leads Ilhwa Group.”

Minhyuk did not see him as only his father. He also saw him as the chairman of the company. Watching his father, whom he cared for and loved dearly, like that since childhood had made him dream.

“I always wanted to become a chairman. One who's just like you, Dad.”

Both Black Dragon and Minhyuk knew that it would not be easy. After all, Minhyuk could not quit Athenae.

“I can do it,” Minhyuk said with great confidence.

The only reason he could say this with confidence was that he was Minhyuk. And when Minhyuk said something, it would never become empty words and promises.

“So, don’t bear the burden alone anymore.”

Minhyuk had always wanted to tell his father this.

Please don’t carry it alone.

Black Dragon’s eyes grew red when he heard his son’s words.

Then, at that moment, the Dragon Emperor spoke.

“Fufufu. My friend, is this your son? Since I share the same heart and blood with my friend, your son also shares the same blood. Fufufu. I can feel the burning blood coursing through your veins like your father.”

Black Dragon immediately replied, “Fufufufu. Of course, my son takes after me. He’s brilliant and amazing.”

“...?”

Minhyuk was suddenly left wondering about the situation that he was in as he watched his father release the Dragon Emperor from the rope that bound him. Then, with a wave of the Dragon Emperor’s fingertips, the ropes that tied all the dragons were quickly cut off. After that...

“Fufufufufu.”

“Keuhuhuhuhu!”

“Humans, we won’t die so easily.”

And seeing Black Dragon laugh together with those dragons left Minhyuk speechless.

‘D- Dad...?’

Even so, his father looked delighted and at ease.

The Dragon Emperor could never and would never forget the sight of Black Dragon jumping amidst millions of humans to try and save them.

He had always thought there would be a massive backlash if he handed his throne to Black Dragon. But considering how Black Dragon felt for them, the Dragon Emperor realized that no dragon would go against his decision now.

“Fufufufu. The new ruler who will lead this land after my reign has been born today,” the Dragon Emperor declared in front of the countless dragons. The Dragon Emperor slowly walked toward Black Dragon, standing before him, and gently hung the necklace on the man’s neck.

Black Dragon felt completely overwhelmed with emotions when the necklace slowly absorbed into his body. This was the moment that he had been dreaming for a long time. It was something that he longed for so long.

Once the necklace got completely absorbed in his body, a series of notifications rang in Black Dragon's ears.

[You can now turn into a dragon whenever you want.]

[Turning into a dragon will increase your attack and defense power by 60%. In exchange, you cannot equip weapons and armor.]

[You can now use Black Dragon's Breath.]

Ring!

[The Dragon Emperor has entrusted all the authority to rule Dragon Land.]

[From this point on, you are now the new Dragon Emperor.]

[The dragons will fulfill and obey your orders.]

The notifications told Black Dragon he could turn into a dragon or back into a human whenever he wanted. Of course, Black Dragon did not delay any further. His body started to twitch as he slowly transformed into a dragon. He felt extremely delighted.

"The dragon in my body is going berserk!!!" Black Dragon roared as his body grew in size.

Black Dragon's dragon form was covered with black scales that twinkled under the sunlight. His wings looked gorgeous, longer and bigger than other dragons. His eyes were yellow, and his pupils were black and narrow, just like a snake's.

The four legendary dragons gathered around Black Dragon, who had already completely turned into a real dragon.

"Kihyeeeeeeek!"

Black Dragon's roar resonated in the vast Dragon Land. The moment his joyful roars echoed, the dragons of Dragon Land also burst out in huge roars. After the dragons finished roaring, they burst into maniacal laughter.

"Fufufufufu. The new Dragon Emperor's shiny scales make my blood boil and my heart thump."

"Ufufufufu. Our true leader. Kghhk. The stronger power hidden within my body is going berserk..."

"Aaah. I'm going berserk!"

"We're going berserk!"

Then, the dragons shouted in unison, "The power in our bodies is going berserk!!!"

After they shouted, they all turned to look at Minhyuk. Their eyes seemed to ask, ‘*Why aren’t you doing it too?*’

“...”

Minhyuk hesitated momentarily before saying, “Th— The blood of Black Dragon f- flowing in my veins is going berserk!!!”

Goosebumps covered every inch of Minhyuk’s skin.

Xu Jiaqi pondered deeply about how she could survive this ordeal.

Although they were completely defeated by Minhyuk alone, she intended to say that Minhyuk and Black Dragon attacked them and tried to take away Dragon Land, which they had occupied rightfully. It was true that the Qingdao Kingdom occupied Dragon Land before they arrived, so it should not be a problem to twist it that way. Now, they could say that not only they were trying to take away Dragon Land, but also everything from the Qingdao Kingdom.

‘This is tyranny! The strong are bullying the weak!’

They started twisting the story this way. Xu Jiaqi immediately ordered those who had filmed the videos to edit the videos and hide the fact that they had lashed and flogged the dragons just so they could forcefully obtain dragon tears from them. Then, they released the video.

The people of China grew furious.

[The Beyond the Heavens Empire is going too far. Just because Minhyuk can take down an entire kingdom alone does not mean he can take everything away from the Qingdao Kingdom. It’s time to show them the power of the Chinese people.]

[This is tyranny! The strong are bullying the weak! I will never let the Beyond the Heavens Empire go!]

The Chinese people began to criticize the Beyond the Heavens Empire after the fabricated videos were released, but their criticisms immediately died down. Why?

[Qingdao Kingdom: The Truth of the Incident.]

It was all because of one video. The uploader identified himself as an executive of the Qingdao Kingdom.

The scene shown in the video was the scene of the Qingdao Kingdom exploiting the dragons to harvest the dragon tears from them. Black Dragon stormed in during the process and fought against them to protect the dragons. Minhyuk appeared only in the middle.

The video spread rapidly, acting as a signal for the other players. Soon, more and more players uploaded videos showing the entire world the atrocities the Qingdao Kingdom committed.

In just an instant, the people of China turned around.

[Qingdao Kingdom. What era are we in now? Why would you even do something like that...?]

[Even though this is just a game, don’t you think it’s too much?]

[That's not all. The Qingdao Kingdom used and exploited the NPCs and many players. This is a fact.]

"A- Aaaaaaaaack...!" Xu Jiaqi screamed. She felt like she was going crazy.

The embers created a spark that spread like wildfire. The public's opinion about the Qingdao Kingdom was deteriorating by the second.

It had to be known that the Qingdao Kingdom had received the support of countless Chinese companies.

[Prepare to pay for the penalty fees.]

[Our deal with you is now over.]

And now, Xu Jiaqi received several calls from these companies. Nevertheless, she still held onto a thin thread of hope. She immediately connected to Athenae.

"Kihyeeeeeeeeck!"

"Kihyaaaaaaaack!"

"Kiyeeeeeeeeee!"

The moment she entered Athenae, she was greeted by tens of thousands of dragons. These dragons who lived in Dragon Land, the land that they had wanted to take and exploit, were currently flying above the Qingdao Kingdom and created a sea of fire. At the center of them all was Black Dragon. He rose to the skies and roared.

–I declare the destruction of the Qingdao Kingdom.

That was what Minhyuk had told them before.

The number of players who left the Qingdao Kingdom in a single day reached almost 40% of its population. This number would grow until they had all left.

Amidst all these, Minhyuk declared that he would continue attacking the Qingdao Kingdom until it was destroyed. Of course, Minhyuk was not truly alone. But the one who accompanied him was restricted to Black Dragon alone. There was no one else.

"I will not kill those who will surrender."

Furthermore, Minhyuk gained the support of the people of China when he declared that he would spare the lives of the innocent as long as they surrendered.

The Chinese people completely understood where Minhyuk's anger was coming from. They understood it a hundred, no, a thousand times over since they had watched the video of Black Dragon being beaten and forced to the ground like that. They praised him for not releasing his anger toward ordinary and innocent people.

Just like that, Minhyuk absorbed everything in the Qingdao Kingdom. Now, everything, including its territories and resources, would belong to the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

Xu Jiaqi hurriedly sent a whisper to Minhyuk.

Wasn't Minhyuk kind? Didn't he save Valentino? Didn't he forgive and embrace many of his enemies?

Then, Minhyuk's answer came.

Two days later, the Qingdao Kingdom declared its destruction.

Chapter 1016

Xu Jiaqi declared the destruction of the Qingdao Kingdom. At the same time, she disappeared from the world. To put it simply, she went off the grid. Many players guessed that she had become a fugitive because she ran away from paying the vast debts she had incurred after causing the mess.

Now that the Qingdao Kingdom had been destroyed, the countless players who belonged to it were scattered. Many believed that the Beyond the Heavens Empire had obtained tremendous wealth after absorbing it, but the experts had different opinions.

[In fact, the Qingdao Kingdom is a nation composed mainly of Chinese players. Compared to the number of ordinary citizens, the Qingdao Kingdom has an overwhelming number of soldiers. This should have been impossible.]

[They have an overwhelming number of soldiers because they have more players than NPCs.]

That was right. Although the Qingdao Kingdom was known for having the largest territory and population, the number of NPCs residing in its lands was pitifully small. Many people wondered why the Qingdao Kingdom had not yet become an empire, considering its size and population. But after opening it part by part, they realized that it was festered and had far too many rotting parts.

[90% of the population of the Qingdao Kingdom is made of players. War prisoners are the most valuable thing one could obtain after winning a war. Even if the Qingdao Kingdom was significant, the fact is that he could only get 10% of the population. And if you consider those who have died in the war and those who have abandoned their kingdom, Minhyuk would only be able to obtain around 5%~7% of the kingdom's population.]

[There's also the territory obtained by the Beyond the Heavens Empire. They currently did not have the capabilities to control such a vast territory.]

That was right. The Beyond the Heavens Empire did not gain much from its victory against the Qingdao Kingdom. This was what the experts believed. But then, a series of articles completely turned the situation around.

[Beyond the Heavens' Emperor Minhyuk declares that he will return the territory the Qingdao Kingdom had seized to their original owners.]

Both the people and the experts were shocked. Even though they could not control those territories, their value remained enormous. Not long after, one of the clever experts realized and grasped Minhyuk's intentions.

[Beyond the Heavens' Emperor Minhyuk is really amazing. He can strengthen the bond with these nations by giving away the territories, which they could not control in the first place, back to the people that the Qingdao Kingdom had robbed!]

[The Qingdao Kingdom has taken away and exploited many kingdoms and groups. The number of kingdoms alone had reached dozens. If you include the tribes and families, the number will shoot up. If you give them back their territories, will they just receive it as it was?]

[They will definitely give whatever they can to the Beyond the Heavens Empire. And once the Beyond the Heavens Empire is in danger, they will naturally send troops to aid them!]

[The fact that he offered to return the other territories means that only the territories initially owned by the Qingdao Kingdom would genuinely be owned by the Beyond the Heavens Empire. It seems like it's not too much for the Beyond the Heavens Empire to handle anymore.]

[*Ho. I can't believe he's just 21 years old.*]

[As expected of our Lord, the Food God...]

That was right. Minhyuk took every bit of advantage of the situation by giving away the territories they could not afford to take under their care. And the words '*Long Live our Lord, the Food God!*' rang worldwide.

A long line of procession could be seen as the prisoners from the Qingdao Kingdom got transferred to the Beyond the Heavens Empire. The number of prisoners tied up with ropes was no less than 15 million.

The Qingdao Kingdom came to be only because Xu Jiaqi raised an army and took away the land and the people of the Looms Kingdom. Because Xu Jiaqi had staged a coup, there were no prisoners of war. It was more accurate to say that most of the NPCs that belonged to the Qingdao Kingdom were once citizens of the Looms Kingdom.

The Looms Kingdom was considered one of the weak nations. The prisoners of war, who not only lost their king but also their kingdom, looked like they had fallen into the abyss.

One of the prisoners of war, a boy named Nagren, was trembling in fear as he listened to the people around him.

"Is it true? I heard they would only give the prisoners one potato daily and ask them to work all day?"

"It seems like they ask the prisoners to work twenty hours daily. Prisoners of war don't get treated as human beings."

"I heard that a lot of people die because of their fierce whippings, too."

"I also heard that they will drive you into the mines, and if you can't breathe and die inside, then they will just burn you inside."

"And the women..."

One of the men gulped, tears streaming down his cheeks.

Then, someone said, "What about sleeping?"

"More than fifty people will be squeezed inside a room during sleeping time. You won't even be able to lie down. You have to sit down to sleep. The same goes for clothes. You'll wear the same thing in the winter and hot summer days."

"I'd rather die."

They have already lived a pitiful life, exploited by a greedy king who took over the Looms Kingdom after a coup. They had suffered and paid ridiculous taxes that reached almost 35%. It was to the point that they could only barely survive. No. Many people died of hunger in the Qingdao Kingdom. But the royal family did not care. They were just happy that they could fill their pockets. If tax had been collected, then the welfare of the people should also be considered. But there was no welfare provided at all. Even so, they still missed that life now that they were reduced to a prisoner of war.

Then, one of the men said, "I might be a prisoner of war, but I will make sure to take down at least one of those soldier bastards who will torment me."

"Me too."

"*Sob, sob.* I'm scared. I'm so scared," Nagren cried, his fear growing as he listened to them talk. Tears even started to drip down his cheeks.

Tap—

Flinch—!

Nagren was shocked when one of the soldiers beside him patted him and flashed a soft smile. The soldier said, "There's nothing for you to be so nervous about."

But Nagren did not trust the soldier's words. He was sure that the soft smile was hiding a demonic figure behind it. Not long after, the long line of prisoners had received their brands.

"This prisoner's brand is a unique brand produced by the Beyond the Heavens Empire. With this brand, we can track your location and send a tracking team to pursue you if you set foot outside the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

"Also, this prisoner's brand will explode and lead to your death if you ever harm someone from the Beyond the Heavens Empire. This brand will disappear after a year. Then, you can go wherever you want."

"...?"

The prisoners began whispering amongst themselves.

"Do... Do they expect all of us to die within a year?"

"Hiiiiik!"

"Is— Is that really the case?"

“They are saying that because they know that we’re going to die of labor.”

Nagren agreed with the other prisoner’s words.

Finally, the Beyond the Heavens soldiers led them to the concentration camp. The prisoners were expecting a camp filled with rotten stench. But the concentration camp was too clean. It looked pretty large and magnificent, too. It looked more like a giant village that had been newly built rather than a concentration camp.

Then, a man stood in front of the podium. He said, “This place was originally built to welcome the new migrants of the Beyond the Heavens Empire. But His Majesty Minhyuk allowed the prisoners of war to stay in this place so they could live comfortably for one year. Families can live together in larger rooms while single individuals will be given smaller rooms.”

“...?”

“...?”

But the prisoners of war still did not believe it.

“Now, I will tell you about your work.”

It’s coming!

They were going to give them a good place to sleep, but they would whip them and not allow them to sleep properly! They would exploit them by only paying them 50,000 gold per month!

“You will be assigned to the construction sites or asked to work on the fields. Your basic salary will be 1.5 million gold.”

“...!”

“...!”

Everyone was taken aback. This was because their average salary in the Qingdao Kingdom was only 300,000 gold. According to the Asgan Continent’s Basic Salary Table, an ordinary person should have a basic salary of 1.8 million gold. This showed how much the Qingdao Kingdom had exploited these people.

“As for the women...”

“*Sob, sob, sob.* Mother!”

“No! NO!”

“Don’t even think about taking our mother! You bastards!”

“My– My wife! You can’t touch a single strand of Ruko’s hair!”

A bitter smile flashed on Park’s face when he heard their words. Then, he said, “Those who want to work can work. Those who wish to rest can rest. Girls and boys can go to the academy and apply if they want to study. That’s all.”

“...?”

“...?”

Everyone was stunned by the ridiculously unbelievable words that came out of Park’s mouth. And the same was true for Nagren.

‘What kind of nonsense...’

The salary they would receive here was several times more than the salary they received in the Qingdao Kingdom. And the academy? It was a place that they could only enter if they had the money. But the Beyond the Heavens Empire was telling them that this learning opportunity was free and they could take it whenever they wanted.

Maybe they were just empty words?

“Now, now. Please bring the wounded here. We will now begin treatment.”

The soldier, who looked at Nagren with a soft smile before, saw the massive gash on the boy’s arm. He immediately applied medicine and put a bandage on the boy.

“Now, it won’t be infected.”

Even so, Nagren still could not bring himself to believe it. There must be a catch somewhere along the line. But when they were brought out for a meal, they were greeted by a luxurious buffet-style restaurant. It was a scene that none of them had ever seen.

“His Majesty hopes that no one will ever go hungry. All of your meals are free.”

The prisoners from the Qingdao Kingdom had a difficult life. It was very hard for them to taste meat before, so they were all in a hurry when they ate. Once their meal was over, the soldiers approached them one by one and began to help them find a job. It was just like they said before.

When the night came, Nagren could sleep in a warm and comfortable room. He thought, *‘I still can’t trust them!’*

After a few days, they realized that the people of the Beyond the Heavens Empire treated them like normal human beings and not like prisoners. No, if they were honest, this treatment was leagues better than their treatment in the Qingdao Kingdom.

A few more days later, Nagren met the soldier who he met before. He asked, “Wh– Why are you treating us like this? Aren’t we prisoners taken from the nation that has lost to you?”

The soldier smiled at him and said, “His Majesty had told us, *‘They are the nation’s people that have lost to us in the war. But they are not guilty of any crimes. I wish to embrace them. But if they want to leave, then let them leave.’*”

Nagren trembled. He had never heard of such a wonderful and kind emperor. From that point on, Nagren worked hard and concentrated on his studies. Why? Because he wanted to repay the grace given to him by the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

A year later, the prisoners’ brand disappeared from their bodies. Nevertheless, none of them left the Beyond the Heavens Empire. They were no longer prisoners of war but citizens of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

A week after the Beyond the Heavens Empire took in the prisoners of war.

The fact that the Beyond the Heavens Empire treated the prisoners of war warmly and kindly spread through word of mouth. This created another huge wave.

[Sob. He's a genuine emperor. Our Lord, the Food God!]

[Yes! Minhyuk's crazy class has made a comeback!]

[But if you think about it, if those prisoners of war became the people, whether soldiers or ordinary citizens of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, the empire would obtain more than 15 million more people. And there's probably some great talent among them, too.]

Many were quite impressed at how Minhyuk treated prisoners of war. After all, it was different from how prisoners of war were treated in the Middle Ages.

Meanwhile, Sima Qian, who fled after the fall of the Qingdao Kingdom, headed toward the Beyond the Heavens Empire after hearing the news about the prisoners of war. There were around fifteen rankers who played a massive role in building the Qingdao Kingdom by his side.

Sima Qian was a talented strategist. He was confident that he would greatly help the Beyond the Heavens Empire, and even the other rankers thought the same thing.

'There is no way that the Beyond the Heavens Empire, who readily embraced those prisoners of war, would abandon us.' This was what Sima Qian had judged.

Not long after, they arrived in the Beyond the Heavens Empire and received a cold greeting from the guards.

"Tie them up."

Sima Qian and the other rankers obediently allowed themselves to be tied up and restrained. In the end, everything was the fault of their king. They would be released quickly if they talked with the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor.

Sima Qian knelt in front of the Beyond the Heavens Empire. He declared that Xu Jiaqi alone was responsible for all their evil deeds, and he was willing to give his life to the empire.

"Yeah. That won't fool me."

"...?"

Sima Qian and the rankers were all flustered. The reaction that Minhyuk, who had willingly embraced the prisoners of war, showed them was far too cold.

"You are sentenced to 300 years in jail. Lock them up."

"W- Wait...!"

Sima Qian just could not understand. Why were the prisoners of war, who were worth nothing and did not have any use for the empire, given warm homes, generous salaries, and learning opportunities while they were treated like this?

Minhyuk understood his confusion. But he just laughed coldly and said, “You guys are trash. You’re trash that can’t even be recycled. As for those people? They’re just pitiful people who have been taken advantage of.”

That was right. Minhyuk was a strong emperor. However, he was the type of emperor who acted strongly against the strong and gently with the weak.

“And for trying to nitpick against my words, I will sentence you to 500 years in prison.”

“N- NO!!!”

Sima Qian died of old age inside the Beyond the Heavens Empire’s prison while the rankers gave up on playing the game.

Chapter 1017

The Luvien Empire was once under the rule and control of Nerva Sephiroth. But after the recent hunt for Helenia’s Fragment, Nerva gave up his throne and his position as the next-generation Battle God.

Because of that, many greedy people who had been holding their breath and hiding revealed themselves. Several factions in the empire began to argue, stating that the ones they supported should sit on the throne and become the new emperor.

Like that, silent and unseen battles were constantly fought in the Luvien Empire. The remnants of a particular faction died without anyone knowing, while others exposed their sins. After such fierce battles, Duke Balaman emerged as the most likely candidate to become the new emperor.

“Lord Nerva, you should hand over your throne to me now.”

Nerva, who had lost an arm, was now a paper tiger. Of course, it was not just because he had only one arm. The reason why he gained power, and was able to lead the Luvien Empire, was because he was set to become the next Battle God. But the one who became the next generation Battle God was someone else.

Nerva just drank his tea in silence.

“A week. I’m giving you that much time. You have to decide in a week.”

Nerva chuckled lightly. “What? Are you going to kill me if I do not appoint you by then?”

“How dare I bring harm upon you, Lord Nerva? But if you don’t, you might not be able to fulfill your wish to spend your life in peace until you become old and gray.”

It was obviously a threat. Even so, Nerva did not show any signs of being shaken. He just narrowed his eyes and stared at Balaman.

‘Balaman should not become the emperor of the Luvien Empire.’

It should never happen. Balaman was not fit to be a ruler. Why? Because he would definitely become a tyrant.

Balaman was certainly a duke who possessed immense and outstanding power. In fact, he was stronger than the dukes hailed as Stars. When it came to strength, it could be said that he could rival Duke Vlad before he got possessed by Helenia's fragment Arumbe. However, the reason why he could not be hailed as a Star of the empire was because not only did he enjoy drinking and women, but he also enjoyed killing. Until this moment, the Luvien Empire had always dealt with the problems Balaman had stirred up.

Why did Nerva let him be and did not kill him?

'Because there is a huge faction supporting him.'

Although the empire was ruled and dominated by a single emperor, several factions thrived within it.

At worst, Balaman could be considered a radical. At best, he could be regarded as hot-tempered. He was the type of person who distributed most of what he obtained to his followers.

'It's their nature and quality.'

Indeed. He and his followers were less than desirable.

"If I become the emperor, I will destroy the Beyond the Heavens Emperor. After all, they have always been a thorn in my eyes."

This was by no means an exaggeration on his part. Balaman was a lunatic and warmonger.

'You cannot start a war just because you're strong. Besides, war is not something you can win just by killing the enemy.'

If Nerva had followed Balaman's logic, he would have slaughtered and reaped the lives of many right when the Luvien Empire first emerged. But the Luvien Empire would not have made it this far if he did that. They had to navigate and find a way to force them into becoming their allies while ensuring they did not cross the line.

And Balaman? He did not know about these things. If he did that, then it would bring huge losses and damages to the Luvien Empire. Not only that, but the countless nations that supported the Beyond the Heavens Empire would not let their Luvien Empire go. Even the kingdoms and empires that maintained a friendly relationship with them would condemn the Luvien Empire for recklessly waging war and endangering their safety.

'He should know that the Ardo Empire still exists.'

The Ardo Empire, which had the second-largest number of troops after the Luvien Empire, had been waiting for an opportunity. Balaman might be able to exert pressure on them through brute force with the Luvien's power, but it was obvious that it would not take too long for the empire to lose its current majesty and power.

"One week. Whether Lord Nerva approves it or not, if you can't bring forward another candidate during this week, then I will most definitely sit on the emperor's throne," Balaman said, smiling as he turned around. But then, he stopped walking and said,

"Of course, even if you bring forward another candidate, they will just die in my hands."

After Balaman left, an aide stepped forward and reported to Nerva.

"We have found clues of the whereabouts of His Highness, Prince Cardin."

Prince Cardin was Nerva's child from a concubine. Be that as it may, there was one thing that Nerva was sure about this child.

'Cardin must have achieved tremendous growth by now.'

The child split up with him and left the empire when he was only twelve. Although they had separated for a long time, Nerva knew that Cardin had always been an unrivaled genius. He was a genius who could span the ages. Nerva knew this fact more than anybody else.

'Cardin is very clever. Unlike Balaman, he could bend and lead the Luvien Empire well.'

If he were to be honest, he had to admit it.

'He's much better than me.'

Nerva, who had everything under the heavens, recognized Cardin's talent. Not only that, the child also worked hard to overcome his status as a child of a concubine. Nerva was sure that this child would not fall short as an emperor.

"If we found a clue, then Balaman would also know about it to some extent."

Nerva could tell that Balaman had already finished all of his preparations. Even if Nerva brought Cardin back, it was evident that Balaman would kill the child before he could arrive in the Luvien Empire.

So, Nerva needed someone to protect Cardin. He had several conditions for those who would protect his child.

'They have to be someone from whom Balaman could not get any information.'

'Someone comparable to Duke Vlad.'

No matter how hard Nerva thought about it, Nerva could only think of one person.

"Let's depart," Nerva said as he hurriedly got up and moved.

"Your Majesty, Locaden Kingdom, Kardan Empire, Agra Empire, and several other nations have sent gifts."

Minhyuk, sitting in his office, listened to Haze's report. He had just put Sima Qian and the other rankers in prison just yesterday.

"So far, fifteen kingdoms and empires have sent many things to us. They have expressed their desire to maintain a better relationship with us."

"What gifts did they send?"

“We have received 27 million platinum, around three God-rank artifacts, and one God-grade ingredient.”

“Let’s have a better relationship with the king or emperor who sent the God-grade ingredient.”

Flinch—!

Haze was surprised for a moment. This man valued a God-grade cooking ingredient over three God-rank artifacts! Of course, she thought it was a joke after seeing Minhyuk chuckle lightly.

“More than that, what about what I told you?”

“It’s not that easy to find. I’m still looking for it.”

Minhyuk became the successor to the Eight Pillars recognized by Rocado. After being chosen as the successor, he grew curious about the other successors.

‘It seems like I’m the only Pillar Successor so far?’

According to Minhyuk’s hypothesis, this should not be the case. He expected that there were many successors aside from himself. So, he went ahead and talked with Obren. And he realized that it was just as he expected.

[There have been many candidates and successors to the Eight Pillars. Of course, most of them died shortly after being chosen as a successor or a candidate.]

It was quite a bloody and gruesome story.

[There were very few successors and candidates who had survived. There’s bound to be someone who wishes to become one of the Eight Pillars again. Of course, there’s also someone who just wants to live a normal life and someone who chooses to hide.]

Minhyuk was interested in the other successors and candidates because he might become one of the Eight Pillars once he reached Level 700.

Athenae was the Pillar of the Earth.

Kronad was the Pillar of the Holy Ones.

Obren was the Pillar of the Killers.

As for Minhyuk, he could become the Pillar of the Foodies.

‘The successors and candidates will probably be able to gain quite a lot of things during the process.’

It was not bad for Minhyuk to start preparing for Level 700.

Then, Obren said.

[You must remember that among the successors and candidates to become a Pillar, some can compare to the Eight Pillars. Their qualifications are not for nothing.]

Perhaps they had information about another Pillar Ingredient, too.

“Please keep on trying to find their traces.”

“I understand, Your Majesty.”

Minhyuk stood up and stretched his body the moment Haze stepped out.

“It’s that time already...”

He immediately left and headed toward one of the exits of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

Minhyuk’s eyes grew red as he looked at the young boy Conir and the young man Herakel standing side by side with their backs against a shabby ramyeon handcart. Herakel now had a headband tied to his head that read, “Kizchen Assistant.”

‘They still got the spelling wrong.’

Minhyuk felt his nose turn sour when he saw that. He felt like he was sending his children out into the rough and wild world.

“Conir! Conir will come back after reaching a higher level in ramyeon making!”

“Herakel! Herakel will learn Conir’s ramyeon secret and how to make delicious *kimbap*!”

Herakel had been learning how to make *kimbap* recently.

“Conir, you have to fasten your clothes well, alright? Herakel, aren’t you cold?”

“Herakel! Herakel not cold at all!”

Herakel, who threw off his top, was already covered with goosebumps. As expected, Herakel was the king of bragging. So, Minhyuk handed a jacket over to Herakel.

“Even when they give you something, don’t follow them. They’re bad guys, do you understand?”

The guards watching the scene nearby thought, *‘I think it should be the bad people who have to worry about themselves if Sir Conir and Sir Herakel decide to follow them...’*

Whether Minhyuk knew this fact or not, it did not matter. He just felt like his nose had turned even more sour. He hugged the two tightly and emphasized, “And if they ate at your ramyeon shop and don’t want to pay money, you have to scold them. Alright? *‘I’ll pay you later,’* or *‘I’ll give you something else,’* you can’t believe those words. Do you understand?”

“Conir! Conir not an idiot!”

“Herakel! Herakel won’t let them go!”

The two looked gallant and imposing(?) as they answered Minhyuk.

The handcart carrying the banner with the words “Conir and Herakel’s Ramyeon and Kimbap” soon departed. Minhyuk watched them for a long time until they disappeared from his sight.

At first glance, Prince Cardin looked infinitely shabby. But he had learned a lot of things from his master, Beradon, over the past decade. He had done all the preparations during that time and was now ready to become an emperor.

After Emperor Nerva stepped down, the “rebel forces” who decided to join him became escorts who would guide him safely back to the Luvien Empire. Of course, these people had also reached a shocking level after learning various things over the years. Cardin decided to meet with them in Luando’s Hills.

Prince Cardin had ventured out into the world in the past ten years. Despite his unkempt hair and shabby clothes, his beauty still shone through. But he had one shortcoming. He was completely road blind. And this shortcoming has now become the problem.

He had been searching for Luando’s Hills for three days now. During that time, Prince Cardin had reached a place far beyond where a human could go and had met plenty of strong monsters along the way.

Thankfully, he had learned martial arts from his teacher, who was once a leading figure in the world, even though he was already a forgotten existence. Because of that, he did not have any problems fighting against the monsters.

The only problem that he had to face was hunger.

‘...I’m going to go crazy.’

His eyes had already started to spin, not from exhaustion but from hunger. At that moment, Cardin thought, *‘It would be nice if there’s a restaurant somewhere here.’*

He found the thought to be quite funny. How could a restaurant be in a place like this? Was that even possible?

‘It’s not possible to see such a thing in a place far beyond humans’ reach. There’s no way — huh? There is?’

Cardin’s eyes snapped open. Someone was running a small handcart in this damp and misty place. Cardin, who had already lost all his reason, immediately ran toward the handcart.

“The– The first customer!”

“This is our first customer after several days. Why are there no customers? Even Herakel doesn’t know!”

“Give– Give me the most delicious one on your menu!”

The rumble of Cardin’s stomach echoed loudly in the surroundings. It did not matter how strong one was; everything was equal in the face of hunger. Cardin’s eyes were already spinning.

“Conir is excited!”

“Herakel will make *kimbap*!”

Despite their loud conversation, nothing reached Cardin's ears. Even though he had difficulty hearing and seeing things before him, he could see the unknown red soup and the rice wrapped in dried seaweed. This was Cardin's first meal in a few days.

Cardin immediately followed what the kind young boy and young man told him and sipped the red soup.

"Sluuuuuuuurp!"

The moment the soup and the noodles entered his mouth, he was greeted with a chewy texture and a spicy yet refreshing flavor.

'Th- This- This flavor...!'

Cardin could not help but marvel at the soup's meaty yet spicy flavor. Then, he turned his attention to the rice wrapped in seaweed, a dish called *kimbap*. When he took a bite, Cardin thought, *'I can't believe all these colorful ingredients could be combined to create such a fantastic harmony of flavors...!'*

It was a noble food he had never tasted, even during his time with the imperial family. Just like that, Cardin began to gobble up everything before him.

"Conir! Conir will give you as service! Cold rice, service for the first customer!"

The bright and energetic young boy handed over the rice to Cardin. Cardin frowned when he received the cold rice. But when he mixed it with the hot soup and took a bite, his eyes could not help but grow wide. This was also incredibly delicious!

'How can the soup paired with something made with flour go so well with rice?'

Cardin firmly believed that this ramyeon was a dish enjoyed by the nobles of this day. He sighed with relief after he finished eating the ramyeon and the rice.

"Phew."

He felt like he was finally alive once again. Then, he realized something.

'Now that I think about it... The money...'

But he felt like there was nothing for him to worry about. The young boy and the young man both looked kind and friendly.

The two looked at Cardin sparkingly, and the young man looked excited.

"Herakel did it! Herakel sold *kimbap* to the first customer! Herakel made money!"

"Wow!"

The young man excitedly extended his hand. The two looked at Cardin with flushed expressions.

When he saw this, Cardin tried to ask the two kind brothers for their understanding. He said, "I'm sorry. I don't have any money."

In an instant, Cardin saw how the corners of the mouths of the two brothers went down ever so slightly.

“I’ll pay you next time?”

The corners of their mouths went down even further.

“If– If that’s not possible, then I’ll pay with something else?”

Every word that came out of Cardin’s mouth made the frown on their faces grow deeper. In the end, they looked furious. The young man even pulled out a club(?) and patted his left hand with it as he glared furiously at Cardin.

Thump–!

“Ah! Then, how about you come with me!!!”

Cardin did not know but had just checked all three taboo words on their list.

I’ll give it to you later.

I’ll give you something else.

Come, let’s go with this uncle.

Cardin chuckled awkwardly and could see that the two brothers were smiling while looking at him coldly.

The young boy spoke up first. He said, “You. When cooking ramyeon, what do you put first? The soup or the noodles?”

This was the first killing notice.

Then, the young man said, “Herakel’s club. Endure it eight times.”

This was the second killing notice.

Chapter 1018

Goosebumps rose all over Cardin’s body.

“Herakel’s club. Endure it eight times,” Previously smiling, the young man now spoke with a chilling expression.

“Noodles?! Soup?!”

“Herakel and Conir can also switch your head with your hands,” the young man said as he punched the huge stone beside him.

Crack, crack, crack–!

“...”

Cardin’s eyes grew wide from the ridiculous display of power. It looked like a light punch, but the colossal stone shattered into tiny pieces. Cardin realized that his words were wrong when he saw the two acting like hooligans(?) and glaring at him.

‘Hoo. What do I have with me right now?’

There was a very precious potion that he had obtained before. The potion, Becoming Hero Elixir, could increase the person's stats upon consumption.

Cardin slipped the potion to them. The boy quickly grabbed it. Then, with blazing eyes, he said, "Noodles or soup?!! Answer!!!"

"N, no. If you won't take it as payment, please give it ba..."

"Noodles?! Soup?!"

"Herakel is angry."

Cardin was rendered speechless. Did that mean that he gave out his potion for nothing? That potion was worth a hundred million times more than what he had eaten. But their faces had grown uglier than before.

Conir placed one of his hands in his pockets. Then, he shook his leg as if impatient before raising his head and saying, "You. Do you really want to do it this way?"

At the same time, Herakel tapped his club on the palm of his hands once again.

"Ptew!" Herakel pretended to spit as he copied Conir by placing his hand in his pocket and shaking his leg.

'This- Are they really hooligans?'

Cardin had already taken out and given them a very precious potion.

'But it's true that I did something wrong, too.'

He ate food in a restaurant, but he did not have any money, so he tried to skip paying for his meal. After pondering deeply, an idea struck his mind. He said, "Please wait a moment."

Then, Cardin hurriedly rushed off. And the loud roars of monsters rang in the direction where he went. In the world of Athenae, both NPCs and players alike could get gold by hunting monsters.

Cardin picked up the gold the monsters dropped and gave it to the two brothers. Herakel excitedly accepted the gold. He said, "He- Herakel! This is Herakel's first time making money in Herakel's life!"

"Wow. Herakel! Herakel is very amazing! Conir took three months before Conir made his first money in his business!"

"He- Herakel is a cool man! A manly man!"

Cardin could not help but give a bitter smile when he saw the scene before him. He said, "Since I've got a lot of gold, I'm giving you more. Consider this an apology for earlier."

Then, he gave the two brothers all the gold he acquired. The two immediately bowed and rubbed their hands together.

"Hehe, customer. Did you like our dishes?"

"Fufu, customer. Please visit us again next time!"

“Alright. Then, about the potion that I gave you earlier...”

“Hehe, customer. Would you like to have another bowl?”

“We can also give you another roll of *kimbap*.”

“No, I’m talking about the potion I gave you earlier...”

“???”

“???”

The two brothers looked at Cardin as if they could not understand what he was saying. They even tilted their heads cutely and showed him an innocent expression! At this moment, Cardin realized that the two hooligan(?) brothers had played him for a fool! When he tried to say something, he saw Herakel’s muscles twitch.

‘This- this is a threat...’

Cardin gulped dryly. “F- fine.”

There was something far more important than the potion. Since the two brothers could come here, there was a high chance that they knew how to get out of this place.

“By any chance, do you guys know how to get out of this place?”

At that question, Herakel and Conir piped up.

“My goodness! He says he doesn’t know the way out after coming to this place!”

“Hyung said that we shouldn’t ignore a person with special needs(?) and should make sure we embrace them! That guy looks like he is someone with special needs.”

“That’s right. He looks(?) like he is someone with special needs. Okay, we’ll bring you along.”

The two were obviously whispering to each other, but strangely enough, Cardin could hear them clearly. In fact, even the monsters within a twenty-meter radius heard their voices.

“Herakel... Herakel helps those in need!”

“Hyung told Conir never to ignore someone with special needs and to embrace them!”

The two brothers patted their chests. Then, they looked at Cardin with their eyes that had already grown red.

“...?”

After that, they rushed toward Cardin and gave him a huge hug.

“You’re already that age but still can’t find your way. You must be someone with special needs...”

“We will help you.”

“I see. Th- Thank you.”

At this moment, Cardin unknowingly felt awkward.

Ever since Nerva stepped down from his position as the emperor, his aide had always heard him mutter to himself. He sounded as if he was possessed.

‘The only emperor that I have and will acknowledge...’

The aide believed that Nerva, who had everything underneath the heavens, would only acknowledge Prince Cardin as the next in line to the throne. How could the aide tell? Because Nerva was now going to the Beyond the Heavens Empire, a place he hated the most, he could make sure that Prince Cardin could come back safely.

They had already contacted the Beyond the Heavens Empire guards secretly and were on their way. They were currently riding a carriage and speeding through the darkness. Not long after, Nerva and his aide met with Minhyuk.

Minhyuk was very surprised that Nerva came to see him like this. The two immediately told Minhyuk the reason why they came here.

‘If Balaman becomes the emperor of the Luvien Empire, then he would rule as a tyrant. Meanwhile, the prince is wiser and more flexible than Nerva and Balaman.’

The fact that an existence like Prince Cardin was in the Luvien Empire was not favorable to Minhyuk.

‘So they have an outstanding prince like that, too.’

The Luvien Empire could quickly regain stability if that wise prince became the emperor. Also, the Luvien Empire might be revived and rise further.

Be that as it may, they also could not allow a tyrant like Balaman, who saw the Beyond the Heavens Empire as a thorn in his eyes, to sit on that throne.

‘A warmonger.’

Although Minhyuk had only heard about Balaman, he could tell he would immediately strike the Beyond the Heavens Empire when he became emperor on that throne. He would use the excuse of reclaiming the honor that the Luvien Empire had lost to declare war and invade the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

Minhyuk rubbed his chin. Then, he asked, “What do I get out of this?”

“You will have a close and friendly relationship with the new master of the Luvien Empire. If you want, I can also give you treasures and gold. But I believe we don’t need to talk about this right now, no?”

This was the truth. Minhyuk’s choice here would determine which emperor of the Luvien Empire they would face in the future. It was something that gold could not buy.

Of course, agreeing would not mean that the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire would suddenly have a friendly relationship. But they would be guaranteed to maintain a soft and flexible relationship. Minhyuk pondered deeply for a moment. Finally, he reached a conclusion.

“I refuse.”

Nerva frowned.

“Let me tell you about the other side to this. Right now, you are telling me, the Beyond the Heavens’ emperor, to move secretly and save your prince.”

Indeed, this was the whole point of this meeting.

“But if, during that secret mission, Balaman found out that I, the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor, saved the prince and prevented Balaman from becoming the emperor, then it would be more like us pouring oil on fire.”

If that happened, then Balaman, who could only use the pretext that they would restore the glory and honor of the Luvien Empire, would be given a justification to start a war against the Beyond the Heavens Empire. And he would even frantically ostracize the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“And from what I have gathered, Balaman is aware of the prince's existence. Not only that, he is also moving to stop his return to the Luvien Empire. On top of that, Balaman is as strong as Duke Vlad. Not only that, but many members of his forces, such as the Black Skull Knight Order, are comparable to the Swords of the Gods. Fighting against them would be very dangerous for me and my empire.”

At this moment, Minhyuk was weighing the benefits and losses of this deal more than anybody else. The easiest method for him was to let Balaman kill the prince first, and then they would get rid of Balaman. But that was practically impossible. Aside from that, it was a method that Minhyuk did not like.

“What we will gain is far too little for something so risky.”

Minhyuk had concluded this. Now that he knew Balaman was going to attack them, he could prepare in advance.

Nerva completely understood. If he were in Minhyuk’s place, he would also turn down the offer that he had made.

Nerva’s aide turned to look at him. He thought, *‘What are you trying to do?’*

Now that Nerva had come down from his position, he was left with no supporters. Even so, Nerva still felt he had a mission to protect the Luvien Empire. And he wanted to start by appointing an upright emperor.

At that moment, the aide heard the words that Nerva always murmured.

“The only emperor that I have and will acknowledge...”

The aide thought that Nerva was murmuring these words because he regretted that he could not let the prince sit on the emperor’s throne.

On the other hand, Minhyuk frowned and said, “Are you trying to praise the prince, who I do not wish to help, in front of me right now...”

“...is Brod.”

“...?!”

The eyes of both Minhyuk and the aide grew wide from shock when they heard those words. Nerva had just mentioned a person's name that should have never come out of his mouth. Only at this moment did the aide understand.

‘The only emperor that His Highness Nerva has ever and will ever acknowledge is not His Highness Prince Cardin, but Brod?!’

Nerva’s words might be brief, but they had very heavy meanings.

Nerva was the type of person who had never clung to his flesh and blood. He believed that only an outstanding person was qualified to become the true master of the Luvien Empire.

And who would that be? Was it the still young yet intelligent prince? No. It was the fallen emperor. He was the one who should have been the true master of the Luvien Empire. Nerva wanted Cardin to become the emperor so he could ultimately give the Luvien Empire back to its rightful owner.

“Do you understand now?” A grim smile flashed on Nerva’s face. “This is the second step toward that goal.”

The first step was for Nerva to step down from his position.

Minhyuk knew that even though the Beyond the Heavens Empire could grow large enough to rival the Luvien Empire and win against them in war, there was something he could not do.

‘I can never be the emperor of the Luvien Empire.’

No, even if possible, Minhyuk was not confident he could lead the Luvien Empire. But thanks to Nerva’s words, Minhyuk realized another path was open for them.

‘It might be impossible for me, but that’s not the case for Brod.’

Even if the Luvien Empire of today would grow bigger and stronger, Brod might still become its emperor. And to top it off, Brod was Minhyuk’s beloved and faithful vassal. Even if Brod became the emperor of the Luvien Empire, that fact would remain the same. Minhyuk shuddered at the thought of Brod wearing his crown and standing in front of the tens of millions of troops of the Luvien Imperial Army as its emperor.

Minhyuk finally nodded. “Alright. I’ll accept your offer.”

Then, he immediately stood up. Since he had made a decision, they had to make a move quickly. And since they were going to move secretly, he had to minimize the number of troops he had to deploy.

‘It’s okay for me to move alone for now.’

He could just use the Almond of Subordinates whenever he wanted.

“What’s his estimated location?”

“Training Land. That’s the only information that we have as of the moment.”

Minhyuk’s face grew ugly. Not only could Nerva not make any hasty moves, but there was also the chance that Balaman, already running rampant, had gotten to the information first.

“What if Balaman had already located him and disposed of him?”

“Then, there’s a high chance that all the work I have done will be for nothing,” Nerva said.

Minhyuk immediately headed toward the Training Land after his conversation with Nerva.

At the same time.

Gulp–

Prince Cardin gulped dryly. Everything was going smoothly. He could leave where he got caught and got lost with the help of the hooligan brothers. But when he thanked them and tried to rush to where his comrades were waiting for him, more than 100,000 soldiers suddenly appeared around them. And there were skulls painted on the back of their cloaks.

‘Why do I feel like the air around them has changed?’

The young boy standing in front of the wreckage of their ramyeon handcart looked at the 100,000 troops. There was killing intent evident in those eyes.

“Hey. Do you put the noodles first or the soup first?”

Then, with his huge and sturdy build, the young man looked at the army with a cold and frigid gaze and said, “Herakel will switch all of your heads with your feet.”

Chapter 1019

Conir and Herakel both ventured into the world outside with excitement.

Conir wanted to let his precious and dear friend experience the joy of traveling the world and doing business. That was why he engraved Herakel’s name on the handcart that they were using. And Herakel? He had never earned money through his efforts before. So, when he went out into the world with Conir, he was filled with expectations and excitement.

But suddenly, a huge ball of flame fell from the sky and shattered their handcart to the point of no repair. When they saw this, their anger grew to unbelievable heights. The two glared sharply at the 100,000-strong army wearing black cloaks with skulls painted on them that appeared in front of them.

Then, the two pulled out masks and put them on at the same time. Minhyuk had previously given them these masks.

-Strength can be revealed and displayed. But if you show others that you are strong, you might be placed at a huge disadvantage. So, if ever you’re in a situation where you have to fight, I want you to wear these masks.

Conir wore a black mask, while Herakel wore a white mask. This was a sign that they would show their power.

Luca, the Black Skull Knight Order's deputy commander, had long waited for their master, Duke Balaman, to become the emperor. He could not understand why Duke Balaman was not a part of the Stars of the Empire. After all, he was as strong as Duke Vlad and deeply cared for his men.

But after waiting for so long, Duke Balaman's path to the throne had opened up. This was only under the assumption that the prince Lord Nerva had been looking for had been eliminated.

Duke Balaman's forces and influence within the empire were considered huge. The main reason was that the Black Skull Knight Order members had outstanding prowess.

'All of us have received the teachings of Duke Balaman.'

Even though several forces were similar in size to Duke Balaman's forces, they were confident that they would be able to deal with them and clean them up in one go.

As soon as Duke Balaman obtained information about where the prince was hiding, he immediately sent 400,000 strong troops. All the troops were elites who had been waiting for this day for a long time.

'The Black Skull Knight Order right now is comparable to the elite soldiers of the Luvien Empire.'

They were a knight order that boasted high levels and outstanding skills.

'Even if someone will guide and escort the prince so he could come safely to the empire, we are more than enough. We can easily dispose of them.'

But that was assuming that they found them first. Based on his descriptions alone, they scattered and spread out to search for the prince. As for Luca, he listened to the report of one of the search teams and followed right behind them.

Finally, he and his team could find someone who looked exactly like the description given to them. They also found two brothers(?), seemingly lacking in the intelligence department, standing in front of the said prince while dragging a handcart behind them.

Although Luca found it a bit strange, he still ordered a flame magic attack to be sent toward them. Not long after, the flame magic shattered the disabled(?) brothers' handcart. Luca heard the two brothers say something. Before they knew it, the two disabled brothers(?) donned some strange masks. But he did not care about them and ordered his army to advance.

Meanwhile, Cardin noticed that these people came from the empire, and they were sent to kill him.

Ping—!

Boom—!

Flares were shot into the sky. Cardin could tell that things were about to go down the drain.

'More importantly...'

Cardin feared that harm would come to the brothers. He knew that even though the two acted like hooligans(?) and ripped him off of his potion, the brothers were kind people.

'I need to buy time so they can run away,' Cardin thought. This was because he believed that even though they released an incredible amount of killing intent, that was the extent of what they could do.

Then, Luca said, "Prince Cardin, please come..."

"Hey."

Conir had learned a lot from the Hooligan Captain Locke, who had mentioned something before.

–Conir. Ever since ancient times, a man should not be ignored and belittled. What do you have to say when someone ignores you?

"Do you think I'm joking?"

Yes. Conir had learned and absorbed a lot from Hooligan Captain Locke.

–You punk, teach him good things.

Of course, Genie had slapped Locke on the back of his head when he said those words.

"...The adults are talking here." Luca frowned. Then, he waved to the soldiers behind him.

Even though Locke had been slapped hard, he still added.

–If they continue to ignore you. Then, you have to say this line.

Conir looked at the enemy with a cold and sharp glare.

"Five seconds."

"???"

"That's the time it would take a hundred of you to fall."

After telling him the line, Locke had continued.

–Kghhk~ I like the sound of that! I really like that! Keuhahaha! Then, what will happen if you deal with a hundred people in just five seconds? The situation would be over.

–You punk. Why are you teaching him things like that?

Khan had hit the same place where Genie hit Locke.

Luca, hearing Conir's words, looked at him incredulously. He judged that these two brothers were not worth paying any attention to. Luca gestured to the soldiers behind him with his chin. The soldiers immediately moved toward Conir.

"Just bury them after you kill them."

After sorting out the situation on that side, Luca returned to the important matter that he had to deal with. He said, "Soon, Duke Balaman will arrive. He will become the new emperor..."

But the loud sound of the wind made him raise his eyebrows. *'What the hell? I can't concentrate here, you know?'*

His face grew ugly as he wondered why it was so noisy when all the soldiers had to deal with was a boy. But Luca had no choice but to look at the scene with wide-open eyes.

The boy wearing a black mask rested his blood sword on his shoulder as he glared at Luca. Around him were a hundred fallen Black Skull Knight Order soldiers.

The boy, Conir, said, "Four seconds."

Despite being hit twice in a row in the back of the head, Locke had not given up. He cackled and said to Conir, "That's the time that it would take to slash the necks of a thousand people."

"...!"

Luca saw how he moved like the wind when the boy's words ended. He jumped among their troops, and just like a killing spirit, he swung his sword. At the same time, the soldiers grabbed their now bleeding necks. The soldiers could not even react to how fast the boy moved.

The boy, who slashed the necks of a thousand soldiers, stood straight amidst their corpses and looked at Luca coldly.

"Apologize."

"...Wh- What the hell!?" Luca shouted in shock. At the same time, he thought that he was Cardin's hidden escort.

'Well, there's no way a prince would have no escort, no?'

They have met an unexpected ambush. But the boy named Conir did not have the desire to kill anymore. He would let it be as long as they got their apology and compensation for their broken handcart. Even though Luca had ordered to kill him, he showed no hostility toward the deputy commander.

"Kill this bastard now!!! He's unexpectedly strong, so don't let your guard down!"

It was just killing a thousand people. Luca could also do that because they were powerful just like that.

"Three seconds."

After being hit by Khan, Locke had received Minhyuk's slap on the back of his head. Even so, Locke still did not give up.

"That's the time it will take for ten thousand of you to die silently."

Conir took on the posture of the quick draw. He then bent his knee and drew his sword.

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

The sword light from his sword pierced the soldiers' hearts charging at him. Luca's jaw dropped open.

But Cardin was most surprised by this. He could tell that the boy, who had a broad and generous heart, had an intellectual disability. The boy had told him that they should embrace him, and they truly embraced him. They even helped him and showed him the way.

Goosebumps rose all over Cardin's body. With every second that passed, the boy showed a higher realm. That was right. The boy had been giving his enemies the chance to back down. After all, he was a man who would not kill for no reason.

'But they broke the boy's dream and handcart and even ordered to kill him.'

Despite the boy's warnings, they did not stop. They even gave the order to kill him once again.

"S- Stop him! Black Skull Knight Order!!!"

The Black Skull Knight Order knights were superior to some of the imperial knights. Some of them were even superior to the Swords of the Gods. Around fifteen of these knights leaped forward to deal with the boy. Their speed showed that they were leagues above the level of an ordinary knight.

Soon, the boy said, "Two seconds."

Those who charged at the boy did not know that it did not matter if they were comparable or superior to the Swords of the Gods. This was because the boy was the Sword God. He was the most outstanding with the sword in the world.

Valen had once told Conir this.

–The Imperceptible Heart Sword.

Valen gently stroked Conir's head.

–Conir, you have the purest heart. That's why you probably are the only one who can wield the strongest Heart Sword.

A little while after Conir became the Sword God, he solidified and strengthened his Heart Sword.

"That's the time it would take for everyone to fall before me."

Luca and Cardin grew nervous when they heard the boy's words.

The boy returned his sword, which he used for the quick-draw move earlier, back to its sheathe. Then, he raised his hand and held his imperceptible sword, making him look like he was holding only air.

"Heart Sword. Chapter 1."

Ting–

The clear and crisp sound of metal hitting metal, like when a sword strikes another, reverberated.

Stab, stab, stab–!

And with this beautiful sound, the almost fifteen knights of the Black Skull Knight Order, who were charging at Conir, fell with blood spurting out of their bodies. Even the bodies of the soldiers right behind them were torn and ripped apart.

Did they see the boy's sword move? No. They did not see it. Then, were they cut by the sound alone? That was not the case either. The Heart Sword was a sword that could not be seen or held and could only be wielded by the heart.

'That boy...'

At this moment, Cardin realized that the boy was the Sword God of the current era.

Laghman was one of the faithful and loyal knights who left with Prince Cardin when he decided to leave the empire. Standing around him were the many people who had been waiting for this moment for a long time. These people had met a great teacher by chance and gained an outstanding achievement. Now, they were completely different from how they were in the past.

They were waiting at the place where they had promised to meet. The problem was that they had been waiting for a few days.

Someone spoke ominously and said, "No way. Could it be that the empire has already dealt with the prince?"

"Perhaps."

"Why don't we go out to look for the prince instead of waiting here like this?!"

They had been anxiously waiting for a few days now. Perhaps it was time for them to act. But Laghman just shook his head.

"The Prince is completely road blind. We would face a bigger problem if we missed each other on the road."

"No matter how bad someone is with directions, he should not be like this, no...?"

"Was it when he was nine years old? The prince said he would go to the imperial garden because he was upset. He said we would face severe punishment if we dared to follow him. The result? He went missing."

No. Are you saying he got lost even though he only needed to go a hundred meters in front of his home?

"And one week later, we found him about five kilometers away from the empire. It was very shocking... He could have just asked for directions but... he's stubborn."

But that was not the end of it.

"When he was eleven, he got lost inside the imperial castle where he lived and always wandered around. There was also that time when he went to another empire."

Unsurprisingly, he got lost. A month later, we found him in some faraway land a hundred kilometers from where he was supposed to go.”

“...”

“...”

Everyone was rendered speechless.

“During that time, I was shadowing the prince. Let me tell you. It’s a truly shocking talent. His ability to escape my sight and wander off on his own is so amazing that I wondered if it was a godly skill. He’s so road blind that one could say that he’s the God of Road Blindness.”

While they were left in silence, they heard someone coming.

Thud—

It seemed like the legendary prince, who could get lost in his own house and be found a hundred kilometers away from his intended destination, had finally come. But the one that showed up was someone who was eating *takoyaki*.

Munch, munch—

“Hello?”

It was none other than Minhyuk.

Chapter 1020

Luca was shocked to see the Heart Sword sweep away and kill over 30,000 Black Skull soldiers. The invisible sword also cut him.

He hurriedly looked for the knights of the Black Skull Knight Order. And just like he expected, they had also fallen under the might of the Heart Sword and were spurting blood all over their bodies.

‘The Heart Sword from the myths?’

Luca could not believe the boy, who looked lacking, could demonstrate such a mighty sword. But he soon discovered a discrepancy.

‘The power of his Heart Sword falls far below the one described in the myths.’

That was right. The Heart Sword from the myths was said to be strong enough to cut down a million troops at once. It was also said that no enemy could endure and hold out in front of such swordsmanship.

But now? Even though he had suffered considerable damage, Luca could still survive the blow. The Black Skull Knight Order knights also started to stand up once again despite the blood spurting out of their bodies.

There was a massive gap between a knight and a soldier. A single knight could deal with ten soldiers all by himself. As for the knights of the Black Skull Knight Order? They were trained and raised by Duke Balaman himself.

Luca's lips twisted into a frown. *'The damage that we have received is far too great.'*

But reinforcements would soon arrive. By that time, Luca was confident that they could suppress this boy. No, perhaps he and the Black Skull Knight Order knights, who were left relatively unscathed, could team up and kill that boy.

"...?"

The gigantic young man wearing a white mask and watching the scene silently made a move. The young man stumbled as he walked toward the middle of the knights of Black Skull.

"You stupid moron. You won't..." one of the knights roared at Herakel and blocked his path. But he soon saw the club swinging toward him at a breakneck speed.

Crack, crack, crack—!

The moment the club made contact with the knight's body, not only was the sturdy and thick armor created by the blacksmiths of the Luvien Empire shattered, but even the knight's bones were broken.

"Keuaaaaaaaaack!"

Herakel struck the screaming knight with his club once again.

"A- Aaaaaaack! Stop!"

It only took two strikes for the knights to collapse. All of his bones were broken and shattered, too. Then, Herakel struck another knight.

Crack—!

"A- aaaaaaaack! My- My bones...!"

The knights, whose bones shattered and cracked from Herakel's blows, felt like the bones of their hands and feet were being switched.

Boom!

Boom, boom—!

Boom—!

"..."

Luca was stunned, speechless. In that short amount of time, two of their knights were incapacitated.

If the young boy had outstanding skills yet lacked the power to deal a considerable amount of damage, then the young man had shocking power that could deal massive damage yet lacked the skills. To put it simply, the combination of the two was fantastic.

Around fifteen Black Skull Knight Order knights were knocked down by Herakel in one go. Of course, these were ordinary members of the order.

'The members of the Red Skull will definitely be able to suppress them.'

The Red Skull were the five most outstanding knights of the Black Skull Knight Order. They were comparable, or perhaps even superior, to the Swords of the Gods.

'If Duke Balaman comes here, then they would easily be overpowered,' Luca thought as he stepped forward. He had to buy time for them to arrive. At the very least, he believed he could deal with at least one of them alone.

"One second."

"..."

Luca's face grew ugly when he heard Conir mutter his last line. His instincts were screaming at him that there was danger coming his way.

"That's the time it would take for you, who ignored me, to fa..."

But Conir failed to finish his sentence. This was because a man had appeared from far away and cut down Conir. The speed was so fast that the boy could not even react.

Bang—!

The man, who sent Conir rolling on the ground, grabbed Herakel by the back of his neck and slammed his face on the ground.

Bang—!

"Ugh! He- Herakel, hurt!"

Luca's face immediately brightened up.

The man was 183 centimeters tall and had arms lined up with tattoos of a black skull. This man, who suppressed Conir and Herakel in one go, was Duke Balaman—the very same man who dreamt of becoming the new emperor of the Luvien Empire. With a bloody red sword in hand, he watched as the boy he sent flying away regained his posture and flew at him.

Conir might have an intellectual disability, but he was a genius in battle and combat sense. At this moment, his instincts were shouting at him to stab the man in front of him with the second chapter of the Heart Sword.

"Heart Sword. Second Chapter."

Conir squeezed the imperceptible sword in his hands.

Boom—!

Just as Luca expected, Conir was an outstanding opponent regarding one-on-one battles. The problem was he could not display the Heart Sword's true power because he lacked the power to bring huge damage. But the second chapter of the Heart Sword was different.

"Sword's Wrath."

Slash—

Conir swung his sword at Duke Balaman when he arrived before the gigantic man.

Bang—!

A mighty force that ignored all defenses swept past Duke Balaman and made blood spurt all over his body.

"It's a bit itchy," Balaman said as he poured potion on the cuts on his body. He acted more calmly than Conir expected.

"..."

Conir was flustered.

Then, Balaman said, "Beyond the Heavens Empire's Sword God Conir. That's you, bastard. No?"

Luca and the other knights knew this when the boy used the Heart Sword against them. The one that they did not expect was the young man with unknown yet mighty power.

Bang—!

The young man named Herakel swung his club and hit Balaman. Duke Balaman, who looked like he was forced to lean for a moment, suddenly exerted force all over his body.

"Hit me, come on."

"...Herakel, endure the club!"

Bang—!

Herakel immediately swung his club and struck Balaman once again. But Duke Balaman's body only shook for a bit. Then, he returned the blow.

Slash—!

Balaman cut down Herakel without any hesitation. Just like that, blood spurted all over the young man's body.

"H- Hurts... Hurts. Huuuurts...!"

Although many had attacked Herakel before, their attacks could not leave a scratch on his skin. That was why Herakel was not used to pain. And for him, having his flesh being cut deeply felt so terribly painful.

"It feels good to cut!"

Just like they said, Balaman was a lunatic who was crazy for battle. He also enjoyed watching others suffer from pain.

Slash—!

He cackled wildly after cutting Herakel once again. But he did not stop there. He continued to slash and hack at the young man. Conir, who could not bear to see this, jumped forward and hugged Herakel. He wrapped the young man and protected him with his own body.

Slash—!

"Sob. Conir. Hurts."

Despite being bombarded by Balaman's attacks, Conir tried to fight back, but his attacks fell through. He was overwhelmed by his opponent.

"Co- Conir, get out of the way! Don't get hit on Herakel's behalf!"

“Conir will protect Herakel!”

“Keuhahahahahaha! You’re going to make me cry!”

The display in front of him thoroughly amused Balaman. The Beyond the Heavens Empire was a nation that would be pushed out and forced to collapse once he became the emperor of the Luvien Empire. The fact that he could see two bastards from that empire suffer and grieve with his own eyes before he made that happen made him crazy with joy.

But Balaman did not have any intention of playing with these bastards. Why? Because his ultimate goal here was to get rid of Prince Cardin.

‘If he runs away from us now, it would be a big deal.’

Thankfully, more than 300,000 Black Skull troops and the Red Skull arrived alongside him. So, there was no need for him to worry about that.

“You can play around with them. Just make sure to kill them.”

With those words, the Red Skull knights approached Conir and Herakel. Balaman turned away from them to look for Cardin. But Prince Cardin was already standing in front of him.

Stab—!

Cardin moved at a breakneck speed, his sword stabbing straight toward Balaman’s abdomen.

“...Duke!”

“...!”

Everyone was shocked because they knew that Balaman’s skin was so thick and sturdy that one would believe it did not belong to a human.

Rumor had it that Duke Balaman regularly bathed in the Alhad River as a child. That was why his skin grew as hard as a god’s skin. Perhaps his parents did so, hoping Balaman could also become the emperor.

Yet a sword was able to pierce through his skin? It proved that Prince Cardin’s skill had reached such a high level.

“Urk...!”

Balaman was disconcerted by the sudden and unexpected attack. But what surprised him more was that the prince was the one who made the first move.

‘He did not run away...?’

Was it because he was confident? Or perhaps...?

‘Does that mean that he could not abandon them?’

It was the latter. Prince Cardin had met an outstanding teacher and had grown stronger. But he knew that it was still not enough to beat Duke Balaman. He knew that he couldn’t deal with everyone present here.

'I can't just abandon them and run away.'

Cardin decided he should at least buy them some time to run away. So, he stabbed Duke Balaman's abdomen. He thought that this injury must be severe.

Shwaaaaa—!

Prince Cardin drew more power as he pulled out his sword and clashed with Duke Balaman.

'What the hell...?'

Cardin was astonished. Duke Balaman was much stronger than he thought. From what he could tell, the duke seemed to have already transcended the limits of a human being and had become a powerhouse that would not lose even against the gods. The worst part? How could he still be this powerful despite sustaining severe injuries?

There was also another reason why Cardin could not concentrate. The Red Skulls had begun trampling on Conir and Herakel.

"You did not run away because of two little sacrifices? You're a candidate that's not fit to be an emperor."

Prince Cardin's choice was heavily influenced by emotions. It was proof that he was still far too soft and easily swayed. But there was something that Cardin believed in.

'Because I received the help of my master...'

Cardin had once received his teacher's help, but that opportunity was priceless. Cardin looked around. They were surrounded by 350,000 strong troops, several outstanding Black Skull knights, Red Skull knights, and even Duke Balaman.

'Even if my escorts, tasked to guide me safely, come here. We will not be able to win.'

This was the conclusion that he had made. Cardin could not help but bite his lips.

"Keuhaaaaack!"

Herakel, who switched places with Conir and hugged the young boy with all his might, was stabbed in the back by one of the Red Skulls.

"He- Herakel!"

Herakel trembled from the pain, but he did not let Conir go. Conir, protected in his arms, was left to ponder the situation deeply.

"Wahahahaha!"

"They're crying!"

"This is fun. Fufufufu."

Seeing them laugh in delight, Cardin thought that it was pretty ironic.

'If not for Duke Balaman's presence, those two would have been able to win against everyone here.'

But they laughed at them as if they were trampling on the two by their power. This was what strength and power was like. Just as Conir and Herakel could win against hundreds and thousands of them, Duke Balaman could win against the two of them.

Prince Cardin grabbed his sword tightly as he exchanged blows with Duke Balaman.

Balaman gestured to the knights behind him, signaling them to kill Conir and Herakel quickly. The Red Skulls moved to destroy them while giggling wildly.

Bang—!

A loud explosion erupted, and the Red Skull, about to swing his sword down, was sent flying away. Right in the middle of the Red Skulls, a man wearing a cape carrying the symbol of a fork and knife crossed together appeared. The man was looking gently at Conir and Herakel.

“The Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor...?!”

The Red Skull knights shouted in shock. All of their eyes turned to focus on the man.

Minhyuk gritted his teeth as he stood in the middle of the enemies. Nerva had asked him to rescue the prince. Because it was the affairs of another empire, they had to move secretly. So, he moved out alone. He decided to move alone because it would not bring any significant damage to the Beyond the Heavens Empire if ever something happened to him.

However, things were different now.

“Two people in the entire Beyond the Heavens Empire should never be touched.”

“...”

“...”

Duke Balaman’s gaze changed. This was because he judged that he would also be able to kill the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor now that he had appeared in front of him.

“They are none other than Conir and Herakel. These two are the purest and kindest people.”

That was right. The entire Beyond the Heavens Empire cared for and loved the two. What was the reason? Even though they knew the two were very strong, they felt the need to protect someone with such a pure, innocent, and kind heart.

“What bullshit...”

“That’s why...”

Minhyuk glared sharply at the people around him. They had to pay the price for touching the two people that they should not have touched.

“...you will have to endure their wrath.”

“Hyung!”

“Minhyuk *hyung*!”

Herakel and Conir called out to Minhyuk. And Minhyuk? He immediately started munching on the Almond of Subordinates.

“I am just one among their many brothers.”

Crunch—!

“They also have grandfathers, uncles, *noonas*, aunts, who care about them deeply.”

Flash, flash, flash—!

At that moment, light began to flash all around Minhyuk. With a flash of light, an old man with a head full of black hair appeared.

“Their grandfather is the greatest Spear God.”

“My– My babies! Who did this to you?!”

With another flash of light, the fallen emperor made an appearance.

“Their uncle is someone that even Nerva was envious of.”

“Conir? Herakel? Who dares do this to you?!”

“What happened to your faces...?”

“Their *noona* is Elizabeth, one of the Six Monster Gods.”

“Conir!!! Herakel!!!!”

Vwooooooong—!

The Great Demon’s demonic energy surged from the body of one of the men that appeared.

Tremendous and overwhelming killing intent burst out from the eyes of the people who appeared one after another. The Spear God, the Fallen Emperor, someone who was once a member of the Swords of the Gods, the Great Demon, one of the Six Monster Gods, and countless other people were all feeling an indescribable and overwhelming rage.

Luo said, “Who is it? Who is the bastard who did this to my babies(?)?!?”

Gorfido added, “I will tear you and rip you apart until you die!”

“Graaaaaaaa!” Cerberus, or Love, Hope and Happiness, growled.

And Minhyuk, who stood in the middle of them, said, “But what’s more surprising is...”

He looked at Balaman with a cold and piercing glare.

“Their *hyung* is the Battle God.”