

Gourmet 951

Chapter 951

When Helenia descended to the world, albeit only briefly, she declared that her dungeons would appear with her fragments and assist her in her complete and final descent.

The experts immediately predicted that there would be around 300 Helenia's Dungeons that would appear. With the dungeons' standard, they expected that high-rankers would attack it by the time they appeared. Everyone firmly believed that the appearance of Helenia's dungeons and her fragments would be an unprecedented yet exciting and fun event.

But they were only half right. They believed the current high-rankers were strong enough to deal with the dungeons. However, that was an assumption that was only made with conditions. They would only be able to deal with the dungeons if no timers and monsters were pouring out of them like what was happening now.

There was also the expected number of dungeons. They expected there would only be around 300 Helenia's Dungeons that would appear worldwide. However, only half a day had passed, and there were already around 200. They did not know how many more would be created after this day.

Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire, the two empires that received the world's attention would be flooded with overwhelming requests for support troops, likely termed "Helenia's Fragments' Hunt Request."

Of course, the Luvien Empire, with its strong troops that were ten times the number of Beyond the Heavens, would be the ones that would receive far more requests for support. After all, they would be able to fight this battle rapidly.

In other words, Minhyuk was left in a crisis. He might be deprived of his title as the Battle God's Descendant. However, giving up and letting things go like that just because they were in a crisis would be the most foolish thing to do.

Only those who do their best to continue moving forward despite being faced with a crisis are considered the best of the best. This was also why Minhyuk was going to try to turn this crisis into an opportunity.

"Those are the rewards that Your Majesty has received from the Infinite Battlefield, right?"

Minhyuk nodded. At this moment, Haze wanted to be given a chance to take a peek at how Minhyuk's head was working.

'You're given far worse conditions than the Luvien Empire in this battle for the position of the Battle God, yet you haven't lost the will to fight at all?' Haze thought, marveling at how amazing her emperor was.

The reason why Minhyuk thought of using these potions was straightforward.

After having a conversation with Valentino and Ali, who had become the Gods of Shields and Magic, respectively, he realized that even though they had become gods, they had not yet taken over

their powers completely and that the gods would stay with them for a few years to make up for their shortcomings.

And from what he heard from the God of Shields Valentino, there was something that he and the God of Magic Ali had in common. First, they received additional skills and stats the moment they successfully inherited the throne of their respective gods.

‘The second level of their powers will open by Level 660.’

And the third would be the opening of their final power level, which would only happen once they reached Level 700.

Of course, Minhyuk was already the Food God. Since he had already inherited the position, there was a chance that he would not receive any more powers. But what if?

‘What if I can also open up new powers once I reach Level 660?’

It was not entirely impossible. The Food God was a Continental God, and no succession happened. However, did that mean he would receive no rewards once he reached Level 660? That should not be the case, mainly because Joy Co. Ltd. was a company that gave fair rewards to its players.

Either way, it would still be alright even if Minhyuk did not open any new power as the Food God once he reached Level 660.

‘If I take this opportunity to increase my level, then I will still be able to grow even stronger. Furthermore, if I become the Battle God, what would happen if I’m already in a situation where my Level has reached Level 660?’

Even if the Food God did not have any hidden power, he would still be able to inherit some of the powers of the Battle God. In other words, no matter the result, it would still open up a new path for further growth and development.

That was right. Minhyuk had found a way to grow further even though he was in the middle of a crisis. Now, he only needed a way to help the Beyond the Heavens Empire hunt more of Helenia’s Fragments.

Minhyuk said, “Once the Luvien Empire starts attacking Helenia’s dungeons and fragments, they will move ten times faster than us.”

This was an undeniable fact. They needed reinforcements if they wanted to close this gap.

Knock– Knock–

Just in time, someone knocked on the door.

“That’s why I called for two reinforcements.”

Two people entered just as the doors opened. One of them was Richard, who received Minhyuk’s help just a few hours prior. Richard not only possessed the skill Absolute Monarch’s Stigma but also a variety of AOE attack skills. He would be of great help to the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“A- Alexander...?”

“...?!”

Alexander, the hottest issue these days, was waiting for Minhyuk to contact him. He did not join the Beyond the Heavens Empire's hunt for Helenia's Fragment for their sake.

Alexander also knew he could receive enormous rewards and EXP if he hunted Helenia's Fragments. And he needed to find a way to accelerate the process to obtain a lot. He thought of the method of taking advantage of Beyond the Heavens' Minhyuk's buffed dishes and the support request that their allies would send them.

With Alexander's help, Minhyuk could now increase the number of fragments that his Beyond the Heavens Empire could hunt by a significant amount.

"Grandpa Ben and the Beyond the Heavens' troops will attack all of the dungeons in the vicinity of our empire and prepare for monsters that may come charging out of the dungeons at any given moment."

After all, there was a chance that more than 300,000 monsters could come rushing out of the dungeons all at once.

"As for the Beyond the Heavens' high rankers, go and form teams of your own so we can hunt Helenia's Fragments quickly."

Everyone perked their ears up and listened to Minhyuk's orders.

"Brod, Elpis, and Luo, you three will move individually."

Minhyuk believed that no fragment could threaten the three people he mentioned, especially if they were in a state where they had his dishes.

"Everyone has to eat my buffed dishes first before hunting and attacking Helenia's Dungeons."

With this, the meeting ended. He would make sure that they turned this crisis into an opportunity.

Minhyuk looked at the Beyond the Heavens Empire executives and said, "There's one thing that you all have to keep in mind." A faint smile appeared as he continued, "Hunting Helenia's Fragments is the only time we can technically steal dungeons and monsters. This opportunity will not come knocking at our doors twice."

The entire world was plunged into chaos.

The experts immediately realized that their earlier predictions were wrong. However, they declared that even though the numbers were much higher than expected, the dungeons that would appear would only be around 400 at most. But just half a day later, the number of dungeons that appeared worldwide had already reached 350.

After several calculations and estimates, they determined the fragments' level would be around Level 630~660. However, the funniest thing was that there were rare cases where a single dungeon had around two or three fragments inside. There were just far too many anomalies that appeared alongside Helenia's Dungeons.

The commentators started weighing in.

[The Luvien Empire has declared they will focus on hunting Helenia's Fragments. Currently, they are organizing dungeon attack parties and deploying the Swords of the Gods and their elites to deal with the dungeons and the monsters that charged out of the dungeons once the timer ran out.]

[In just three hours, the Luvien Empire could successfully hunt seven fragments. Their pace will go faster once they have deployed their large armies.]

[On the other hand, the Beyond the Heavens Empire is said to have only started targeting the dungeons in their vicinity.]

[As of today, there are a total of 675 territories that were unable to stand against the onslaught of monsters and had collapsed.]

[There are also several kingdoms left in precarious situations.]

[These kingdoms have one common factor. And that is the appearance of several dungeons near their territories. The ones that had it worst were those with dungeons appearing right in the middle of their kingdoms' capitals.]

[The greatest example is the Revsen Kingdom, which collapsed today.]

[The Revsen Kingdom might be a small nation. However, they weren't a kingdom that would easily collapse and fall under the monsters' attacks.]

The Revsen Kingdom fell most because two of Helenia's Dungeons appeared inside their capital. When the timer of these dungeons ran out, more than 400,000 monsters came pouring out. Even the outstanding NPCs of the Revsen Kingdom could not handle such a vast number of enemies.

The problem is that the kingdoms could not respond appropriately to the various variables accompanying Helenia's Dungeons.]

[Many nations worldwide are in the same situation as the Revsen Kingdom.]

[And it's not just one or two kingdoms; many kingdoms and empires are in danger.]

[And we are "expecting" many more nations to be in danger too.]

[This is not an episode event. This is quite literally a disaster.]

[South Korea, China, Russia, Japan, America, Vietnam, France, Greece, and various other servers are in a similar situation. In other words, the kingdoms and empires from various continents could not respond appropriately to this disaster and are now seeking help from empires and kingdoms from their neighboring continents.]

[News just came in. Two Helenia's Dungeons appeared in the capital of the Ruwado Kingdom, located on the Cairon continent in the Chinese server. From what we have received, one of the dungeons had a timer set at one hour, while the other had a timer set at only ten minutes. They are trying their best to keep Helenia's Fragment and the expected 250,000 monsters that would pour out of the dungeons.]

As the commentators said, the Ruwado Kingdom was now in danger. The worst part? Two of Helenia's dungeons appeared in the middle of the capital at a time when almost 40% of their elites and 60% of their troops had gone outside to attack the dungeons that appeared in the vicinity of their kingdom.

The two dungeons had different timers, one set at one hour and the other at ten minutes. Just one look revealed that the Ruwado Kingdom would not be able to successfully clear this dungeon.

When the ten-minute dungeon timer went off, around 80,000 monsters immediately rushed out. The kingdom immediately ordered the troops to evacuate the people so they could focus on stopping the monsters.

However, the results were not looking too good. The troops had to stop the monsters while helping the civilians evacuate safely. But the worst was yet to come. They could see that the timer on the other dungeon was ticking, and monsters would once again pour out and wreak more havoc in the capital.

‘Damn it! How did things come to this...?!’

Surprisingly, the Ruwado Kingdom’s First Knight Order Commander was a player. After all, even though the Ruwado Kingdom was not huge, it was by no means weak.

Bo Jing, the commander of the First Knight Order, had been a soldier of the Ruwado Kingdom since he was Level 10. He had been active in the kingdom’s army and had put his all into this kingdom. He was currently at Level 599, which was not that impressive compared to the rankers but was undoubtedly high.

Despite being gathered in a hurry, the troops were doing an excellent job of stopping the more than 80,000 monsters pouring out of the first dungeon while protecting the evacuating civilians. The problem was Helenia’s Fragment.

[Helenia’s Fragment. Level 618.]

The level of this Helenia’s Fragment, which was a minotaurus, was high. They would need the aid of high-rankers.

One swing of the fragment’s axe and countless soldiers died. In a situation like this, many would abandon their kingdom and flee. However, Bo Jing was blessed with a fabulous king. Although the king had ordered the evacuation of his people, he did not run away. He was even running around and sending carrier pigeons to request support where he could.

“Commander, there are just far too many enemies! If things continue at this rate, we will all be wiped out...!”

“We will protect and defend our people and kingdom until the end!” Bo Jing shouted at the knights, who were deep in their thoughts.

Many of Bo Jing’s friends had laughed at him when they heard that he started as a kingdom’s soldier in the game.

‘You’re playing as a kingdom soldier in the game?’

‘Even if you increase your level, what will happen next?’

‘Haa... You can’t hunt as you please, you can’t work as a mercenary, and you can’t even take on quests whenever you like. What’s the point of playing like that?’

Back then, Bo Jing vowed to ensure he stood in a high position in the kingdom and showed everyone what he could do. And thanks to that, he obtained good results and was even at the point where he was only one step away from reaching Level 600.

Once Bo Jing filled in the remaining 20% of his EXP, he would be the commander of the kingdom's first knight order and a Level 600 player. However, all of the effort and hard work that he had done was about to fall apart.

This was not just about one's effort or hard work. He started his game here. From Level 1 to Level 10, when he became one of the kingdom's soldiers, to Level 599, he had always stayed here. He did not want to see the people of this kingdom die.

"Uwaaaaaaaaaack!"

There was only one way for them to survive, and that was to hunt the fragment in front of them before the timer of the other dungeon ended. If he could do that, then he would be able to reach Level 600 and obtain greater power that would boost his strength and help him respond appropriately to the other dungeon.

Slash—!

When fear started to gnaw on the soldiers' nerves, Bo Jing showed them why he became the kingdom's knight commander as he slashed the minotaurus with his sword.

"Vlad's Swordsmanship. Fifth Chapter."

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

Blood spurted out as a total of thirteen consecutive slashes landed on the fragment's body.

"*Kuhwiiiiik!*" Helenia's Fragment shrieked.

A ray of hope, hope that he could protect the Ruwado Kingdom, bloomed in Bo Jing's chest when he saw this.

Slaaaash—

He quickly moved and stabbed his sword in the fragment's abdomen. But when he was about to pull his sword out, the fragment swung his axe and almost cut down Bo Jing's shoulder.

"Aaaaaaaack!"

The fragment raised its free hand to punch and pound Bo Jing's head non-stop. Helenia's Fragment kicked the now bloodied and bruised Bo Jing away. As he rolled on the ground, he saw the screaming people and soldiers. He realized everything was falling apart and crumbling right before his eyes. If he could just reach Level 600, he would be able to protect them. He would be able to do it!

[The dungeon's timer has reached 0!]

[The monsters inside Helenia's Dungeon will now begin to rush out!]

At that moment, the monsters in the other dungeon began to rush out. Bo Jing blinked as his consciousness began to fade away. In his blurred vision, he seemed to see a man passing by him.

Shwaaaaaaaaa—!

Helenia's Fragment shrieked. It died with just one swing of the man's sword. And immediately after that, the notifications rang out.

[Congratulations! You have achieved Level 600.]

[Another Level 600 has been born to the world!]

[Your class Knight will change to Legendary Class "First Foreigner Commander"!]

[All of your stats have increased by 28%!]

[You have gained 2,000 CHA.]

[Your HP and MP have recovered.]

[New skills for your commander class have opened!]

Bo Jing was very emotional. He could now protect his kingdom even more. He was happy that he patiently endured the harsh looks and the fingers that pointed at him when the others ignored and mocked him. Everything has paid off now.

Strictly speaking, Bo Jing could almost hunt the monster before him. What the man, who swung his sword once to kill the fragment, did could be considered a steal. However, given the circumstances, he would not complain.

Meanwhile, the man who killed the fragment looked at him and said, "I can't believe that you rose to the position of a commander from only being a mere soldier. And you even did it as a player. That's commendable. You have my respect."

The words that this man, a player everyone in Athenae knew, uttered were utterly different from those that the people who mocked him and called him a mere dog of the kingdom said to him. He even gave him a thumbs-up.

"They're all yours."

Bo Jing, whose entire body was covered with bright light, grabbed his sword tightly with both hands as he looked at the man in front of him before turning to the mobs rushing out of the other dungeon. Using his newly acquired power and commander's skills, Bo Jing slaughtered all the enemies rushing out of Helenia's Dungeon and became his kingdom's legend.

On this day, the figure of Minhyuk was engraved deeply in Bo Jing's heart. This was the man who recognized his efforts and helped him find the new path he would walk on.

Chapter 952

The Ardo Empire, the empire raised and developed by Hound Amacar, was the nation that was only second to the Luvien Empire. Ardo's Emperor Consteinus, who became a fierce and tyrannical emperor who dreamt only of making his empire rise back up again, was slapped back to his senses when Duke Amacar decided to move to the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

Emperor Consteinus also stopped taking away things from the empires and kingdoms he made alliances with solely for his benefit. He even provided his allies with as much help as possible. And now, the Ardo Empire had returned to the peaceful and magnificent empire it once was.

‘Let’s live and prosper together. And let’s all unite and fight against the Luvien Empire.’

Consteinus’ change had a far more beneficial effect than they had expected. The kingdoms and empires did not spare anything and supported the Ardo Empire.

People were fascinating creatures. When a kind and good-hearted person exploded in anger once, they would say, “Hey. *This bastard’s personality is twisted.*” On the other hand, if someone with a lousy personality suddenly did something good, they would say, “Hey, *this guy is fine~.*”

Because of this change, each of the kingdoms and empires that had allied themselves with the Ardo Empire felt like this was not an alliance based on materialistic needs alone but an alliance where they had to care, stay, and help each other for a long time. Of course, Consteinus did not just stay idle. He had been doing his best to meet the expectations of the people around him.

But Consteinus, the emperor of a strong empire and a powerhouse, groaned. *‘It seems like the era of chaos has arrived.’*

He looked at Helenia’s Fragments and the countless dungeons charging toward the empire's walls. The worst part? Around four dungeons suddenly appeared in the vicinity of his empire. Of course, they had already moved to attack and quickly deal with these dungeons.

The entire world was left in chaos with the appearance of Helenia’s Dungeons. Even the allies of the Ardo Empire had been sending requests for support non-stop. The problem was that the Ardo Empire was also having a hard time and could not send more troops to help them. So, they all decided to stop as many monsters as possible and lure the fragments and the rest of the monsters that they could not deal with to the walls of the Ardo Empire.

The greatest reason empires and kingdoms fell apart was that the fragments were just too strong. The number of strong individuals who belonged to their nations was significantly less than that of the Ardo Empire, an empire teeming with great talents.

However, the empires and kingdoms had at least one high-tiered mage among their ranks. These mages risked their lives to mass teleport the fragments near the Ardo Empire’s walls. If it were just this, then it would be fine. The problem was the number of fragments that appeared in front of the walls of the Ardo Empire. It was enough to make Consteinus groan.

“Ten fragments have already been sent in... And even nations with no high-tiered mages cannot send the fragments here.”

How many dungeons have already appeared all over the world?

‘If we can’t stop this, then perhaps more than 20% of mankind will die.’

Consteinus was already taking the situation very seriously. However, the more fragments there were, the more the Ardo Empire would have difficulty dealing with them. They could fall behind. The problem was they weren’t given enough room to breathe. A more shocking report was immediately relayed to him.

“Your Majesty, three dungeons have been created within the empire. The timers set for the three dungeons are twenty minutes, one hour, and four hours, respectively.”

Consteinus had already judged that they could no longer handle the situation. He knew stopping the fragments charging toward the wall was already too much for them. And they were telling him that three more dungeons had been created inside their empire? But what happened in the Ardo Empire was not the most crucial part here.

“Then, does that mean that more Helenia’s Dungeons are being created?”

“That’s right.”

If three more dungeons appeared in their empire, more would be created worldwide. Consteinus’ vision already started to turn dark after hearing those words. Then, at that moment, he saw more mages coming over with several fragments behind them through the mass teleport.

Exhausted after teleporting through a very long distance, one of the kingdom mages begged, “Your Majesty, please gain victory...”

Boom—

One of the fragments that were sent via mass teleport killed the pleading mage by blowing his head up. Everyone was trying their hardest to stop the fragments to survive and live. But Consteinus knew that they had to stop now.

“Go and send carrier pigeons to our allies! Tell them to stop sending more fragments to our side! Quick!”

Right now, the Ardo Empire was starting to get overwhelmed. No, they were already having a very, very hard time. The fragments stretched out in front of them were all above Level 625. And even more than 700,000 monsters were coming at them from all directions. With the increasing number of fragments coming their way, the Ardo Empire’s troops began to get pushed back faster than before.

Consteinus choked on his breath when he saw this.

“Your Majesty! We must quickly attack the dungeons that have appeared inside the empire!”

“Your Majesty! The enemies’ attacks are too powerful!”

“Your Majesty!”

“Emperor Consteinus!”

“Your Majesty!”

Consteinus, confused by their chaotic shouts, was left unable to determine what orders to give his men.

At that moment, a soft and gentle voice, utterly different from the urgent and desperate calls from earlier, rang in Consteinus’ ears. “I have seen Your Majesty.”

Amacar, now a member of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, appeared before Consteinus. Standing right next to him was another member, Brod.

“I have received my emperor’s orders to help Your Majesty and lead the Ardo Imperial Army.”

Consteinus’ face finally turned bright. The situation on the battlefield would change for the better just by having Amacar lead the Ardo Empire’s troops. That was not all. Beyond the Heavens Empire, which maintained a friendly and close relationship with the Ardo Empire, would also come to help them.

“When will the Beyond the Heavens’ Imperial Army arrive?”

“No, they will not arrive.”

Consteinus looked at Amacar in confusion.

“It’s just the two of us.”

Consteinus grew even more confused. Their situation was dire. It was not certain they could win even if an empire aided them. Wasn’t the Beyond the Heavens Empire competing with the Luvien Empire? This was an opportunity for them to hunt plenty of fragments simultaneously. How could they send only two people to deal with this?

Of course, Consteinus had also heard how mighty Brod was. Even so, how much help could he give them just by himself? He could not help the slight disappointment that flashed on his face.

“Can I take all the spoils that the fragments will drop?” Brod asked. He was thinking of giving everything he would obtain from this to Minhyuk.

Consteinus waved and said, “If you can get it, it’s yours.”

Brod heard Consteinus’ agreement and the soldiers’ urgent report, saying, “Your Majesty. We have to hurry and send reinforcements to the empire...”

Brod instantly understood the situation. He said, “I will take down the dungeons inside the empire first.”

Helenia’s Dungeons were set to crumble and disappear if it was successfully attacked and cleared before the timer ended. This was what Brod was aiming for as he disappeared. Consteinus just sighed as he watched the man leave.

Meanwhile, Amacar joined the imperial army and began to push back the monsters in this tight race against time. Despite sending carrier pigeons to their allies, more fragments were still being sent through mass teleport.

‘This...’

The situation was quickly turning bleak. Now, seventeen fragments were charging toward them. They no longer had any solution, and this was even more so once the dungeons inside the empire exploded.

It did not take too long for Amacar, who was fighting fiercely just a few moments prior, to return to Consteinus’ side to look at the situation of the battlefield.

Consteinus laughed bitterly. "I'm a bit disappointed. The Beyond the Heavens' Emperor seemed to have wanted to maintain a close relationship with us, but he only sent Sir Brod to our aid."

Amacar remained silent, opting to listen silently to Consteinus' ramblings.

"Of course, I know that the Beyond the Heavens Empire is also in a hurry since they need to deal with many dungeons. But you all should know that many fragments are now flocking toward the Ardo Empire."

In the end, Consteinus just shook his head. He realized it was pathetic to ramble and share his grievances with his old subordinate, who had become someone else's subordinate.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

But Amacar just smiled at him. "Your Majesty."

Consteinus turned to look at Amacar.

"The Beyond the Heavens' Emperor had told me to help in the Ardo Empire's physical and spiritual matters."

Amacar's words distorted Consteinus' calm expression. He was aware that Amacar's help would bring him enormous relief. And he also could not ignore the impact that Sir Brod could bring. But even if the two of them came here, what good would it do for their situation? No matter how hard he looked at it, the situation would not change. They were just words. Nothing more, nothing less.

Then, at that moment, Brod came back to their side.

"???" Consteinus looked at the man in confusion. It had only been twenty minutes since the man said he would go down and take down the dungeons that appeared inside the empire.

'Did he stop attacking the dungeons to rest for a while?'

"Your Majesty! All three of the dungeons have fallen!"

"We- we have no idea about what's going on!"

"All of Helenia's Dungeons suddenly started to crumble!"

"A huge man just went in. Then, the dungeons began to fall apart when he came out!"

Consteinus' eyes grew wide, his gaze turning to look at Brod, standing at the edge of the walls.

"Emperor Consteinus, by the command of the Beyond the Heavens Emperor, I will be dealing with all of the fragments present," Brod declared as he leaped out of the walls.

Brod was once someone who competed with Nerva for the position of emperor. But now? He was the sword of the Beyond the Heavens Empire. With one swing of his sword, he took the head of the fragment nearest to him.

Staaaaaab—!

After hunting the fragment with just one strike, he stepped on one of the monsters and leaped to the skies again. Then, he used his Mercenaries Pinnacle Swordsmanship and hacked three of the fragments gathered together to death.

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

The fragments, whose level exceeded Level 600, were quickly torn apart under Brod's blade. Of course, these fragments had already suffered considerable damage from the attacks of the Ardo Imperial Army.

Slash—!

Vwoooooong—

Clack—!

Stab—!

Consteinus' jaw dropped, his gaze blank as he looked at the fragments that were either forced to collapse or got their heads cut off with just a single swing of the man's sword.

Then, Amacar said, "Your Majesty, Sir Brod's power alone is equivalent to that of a million troops. He can deal with a single empire on his own."

The Ambro Allied Forces was an alliance created quickly and comprised six kingdoms and one empire. Why did they form an alliance? Because around thirty dungeons were made in one place. This was the most significant number of anomalous Helenia's Dungeons created in a single area. The worst part? All of the dungeons had a timer set for five minutes.

To stop a tide of monsters flooding out of the dungeons, the alliance, with its almost two million troops, launched an all-out attack. It looked like Helenia's Fragments suffered much damage from their attacks and were about to die. But the truth was they weren't even close to dying.

There were around thirty dungeons in the area, but sometimes, there were two or three fragments inside a dungeon. The worst part was that the thirty dungeons here were considered to be among the worst ones. The total number of fragments present was no less than fifty.

At this moment, the Allied forces, who had been in a constant state of crisis, finally successfully hunted down one fragment. This meant that they could finish off the fragments one by one as long as they could deal a huge amount of damage to them. The problem was that the Allied forces would definitely have a hard time enduring the process.

The man, who had not moved while watching the situation, raised his mask. He recalled the words that his emperor told him earlier.

'This is the only time we can legally steal dungeons and monsters.'

Assassins possessed a high basic damage and were more than 1.5 times faster than ordinary combat classes. And the masked man, Luo, could even be considered the God of Assassins. He used this opportunity exquisitely to his advantage. He moved in a flash and successfully "stole(?)" one of the fragments, who was about to take the neck of the allied forces' commander.

Stab— Stab, stab, stab, stab, stab, stab— Stab, stab, stab—

Wherever Luo passed by, Helenia's Fragments, whose HP had been reduced to the minimum, died.

“Assassin's Onslaught.”

Luo threw five daggers to the sky. When they fell, they instantly pierced through the necks of the fragments scattered all over the place. He quickly cut down and killed the fragments the allied forces had been trying to kill by gnawing on their HP for days.

After cutting down all of the fragments present, Luo turned to the allied forces' commander and said, “I have cut down all of the fragments. With this, you can now deal with the monsters and subdue them. I will take all of the spoils from the fragments as promised.”

Then, Luo disappeared in a flash of light. The allied forces' commander stared silently at where he disappeared, a strange feeling washing over him.

‘I'm thankful, but for some reason, I also feel like I shouldn't be grateful...’

Why was that the case?

At the same time.

Minhyuk also used this opportunity to “legally steal” dungeons and monsters. He was going to the kingdoms that had requested support from the Beyond the Heavens Empire and was constantly hunting Helenia's Fragments.

Of course, he had also been drinking the *One-week EXP Triple Increase Potion*. In just one day, Minhyuk was able to increase his Level 639 EXP value for level up from 22.9% to 98.9%. Minhyuk's pace could be considered ridiculous since he needed to work hard for at least one month before he could even increase his level by 1.

When he cut down another fragment, there was a notification.

[You have leveled up.]

[You have achieved Level 640!]

[You can check the Food God's Class Quest once you reach Level 650!]

A faint smile appeared on Minhyuk's face.

‘Isn't this way off from what I expected?’

Chapter 953

[You can check the Food God's Class Quest once you reach Level 650!]

Minhyuk nodded when he heard the notifications. He was just hunting Helenia's Fragments as quickly as he could to follow his father's words and turn this crisis into an opportunity, and it truly became an opportunity.

‘Maybe I'll be able to reach Level 650 once Helenia's Dungeons episode ends.’

Of course, the process would be challenging. Even though Helenia's Fragments were considered boss mobs, many people would be shocked and say that Minhyuk's pace was ridiculously crazy if they saw that he could increase his level by around 2~3 in a week.

But Minhyuk could make it possible. How? First and foremost, Minhyuk's level was almost similar to Helenia's Fragments. And second, he had a triple EXP acquisition buff applied to himself.

Minhyuk warped somewhere once again. This time, he was met with two dungeons inside a kingdom. One of the dungeons had only five minutes left on the timer, while the other had ten minutes left. This kingdom was none other than the Roths Kingdom.

After issuing an evacuation order, the Roths Kingdom's king immediately rushed to where Minhyuk was.

"...?" Minhyuk looked at the man in confusion.

Although they weren't allies, they maintained a smooth and amiable relationship. However, after all the civilians had been evacuated, their king, knights, and soldiers remained on site.

"Why didn't you evacuate?"

"...Because we want to fight and protect our kingdom until the end. My people have already run to safety. However, I want to ensure they have a place to return to at any given time."

The Roths Kingdom's king had a good heart. And although he found it embarrassing, he still asked Minhyuk, "If, by any chance, we fail to stop the dungeons here. Then I hope that you can take in our people."

During this period, when he ran to answer the request for support to hunt Helenia's Fragments, Minhyuk met two kinds of rulers. One was a king who valued their life more than his people and his kingdom, while the other was a king who valued the life of his kingdom and his people more than their own life.

Minhyuk saw the various faces of a leader facing unexpected and life-threatening situations. Witnessing this situation would undoubtedly be of huge help to Minhyuk in the future.

"With the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor by our side, we can stop and overcome this crisis today."

The king, his knights, and his troops all looked very exhausted. From what Minhyuk had heard, they had been working tirelessly to stop as many mobs as possible. Seeing them like this, Minhyuk said, "Please go and get some rest. I will be done with this in a minute."

"Yes?" King Rhodora, the king of Roths Kingdom, looked at Minhyuk confusedly.

Wasn't this all about joining forces and working together to stop the dungeons whose timers were about to end? Their conversation had shaved off a huge chunk of time, reducing the initial five minutes to around three minutes.

King Rhodora hurriedly said, "What are you waiting for?"

"Please do not be too anxious and nervous; just wait here."

Even though the color had drained from King Rhodora's face as he hurriedly urged him to move, the Beyond the Heavens' emperor remained still. He even took out some chocopie and began to nibble on it.

"*Fuwaaa...* I feel alive again," Minhyuk muttered. He had been tired from running around like crazy and hunting Helenia's Fragments.

"..."

"..."

"..."

Meanwhile, King Rhodora, his knights, and his troops stood anxiously. Ultimately, the king could only order his men to stand back.

'What on earth is he thinking?'

As time continued to tick by, King Rhodora's anxiety made him feel as if he was in a hurry. In the end, he could not stand still. He approached Minhyuk with only a minute left and said, "The monsters will come charging out soon."

"I know that."

"But... why didn't you go inside?" King Rhodora asked, strange and weird thoughts flashing in his head.

Was the Beyond the Heavens' emperor trying to lure out the monsters so that he could kill them? Was he going to try and take over their kingdom's territory? Since King Rhodora did not understand the situation, his imagination ran wild. It was to the point that he could even write a novel with his thoughts alone.

At that moment, Minhyuk, looking at the thirty-second countdown on the timer, said, "It's easier to kill them if they come out all at once."

"Yes?"

This was Minhyuk's first time trying this, too, but he was quite confident about it. Then, at that moment, a notification rang out.

[The dungeon's timer has reached 0!]

[The monsters inside Helenia's Dungeon will now begin to rush out!]

Rumble—!

King Rhodora and his men clenched their fists as they groaned from the deafening roars that shook the ground. Meanwhile, Minhyuk just stood in front of the dungeons in complete ease as he waited for the monsters to come out.

Minhyuk silently pulled out the frying pan hanging on his back as he watched the monsters, which were mammoths, running like crazy. They looked like a herd of wild buffalo jumping around and wreaking havoc everywhere.

“Frying Pan Gigantification.”

Minhyuk swung the frying pan, which grew as large as the entrance to the dungeon, in his hand and collided with the herd of crazy mammoths.

Baaaaaang—!

Minhyuk was forced to step back when the mammoths collided one after another with the frying pan in his hands. Although he was being pushed back, Minhyuk was entirely at ease. He nodded to himself after estimating the time. Two minutes had passed since he started blocking the mammoths.

‘*Are we done for?*’ King Rhodora almost groaned out from this strange and weird situation. Then, he saw Minhyuk take the frying pan away.

“What...!”

If he did that, then wouldn’t the monsters from behind grow crazier and charge forward more recklessly?

But this was the moment that Minhyuk had been waiting for. When he saw that most of the monsters had gathered together, he quickly used Like the Wind and jumped in the middle of the monsters’ ranks. Immediately after receiving damage from the monsters’ attacks, Minhyuk again used Like the Wind and went deeper into their ranks.

Not long after, Minhyuk triggered the Continent Destroyer Sword’s skill, *Continent Destroyer*.

Baaaaaaaaang—!

Crack, crack, crack, crack—!

The moment his sword slammed into the ground, the ground twisted and cracked, spitting out fountains of lava. In an instant, the massive herd of monsters either got burned to ashes or devoured by the splitting ground beneath them. The only one that survived the few minutes of the attack was Helenia’s Fragment, which had a relatively high HP compared to the other monsters.

The word Destruction appeared on the blade of Minhyuk’s sword, the mark that allowed him to trigger sixteen consecutive strikes. Minhyuk, who could swing his sword three times per second, took advantage of this and hit the fragment as if possessed.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—!

A rain of bloody lightning bolts fell from the sky and slammed into Helenia’s Fragment, which was in the form of a huge elephant. After around five seconds, the fragment fell to its demise.

What was the time it took for Minhyuk to take down one dungeon? Around two minutes and thirty seconds.

‘*Oh. That’s quite easy.*’

So far, Minhyuk had only hunted Helenia’s Fragments by clearing the dungeon and dealing with the mobs inside. Although it was easy for him, it took longer and increased his physical fatigue to the extreme. But now that he realized that this method was more accessible and more comfortable to use, he would begin applying this method to all of the other dungeons he was hunting and going to hunt.

“...”

Meanwhile, King Rhodora was speechless when he saw Minhyuk charging and wiping out all of the enemies by himself after stopping them from recklessly charging forward.

“Hic- Hiccup!”

King Rhodora was so surprised that he ended up hiccuping.

Minhyuk, who had finished clearing all of the dungeons in Roths Kingdom, looked at the rewards he had received.

‘One gave 3,704 platinum while the other gave 5,438 platinum.’

Even his total EXP value had increased by around 17%. Minhyuk looked up at the remains of the dungeons that he hunted.

‘If I use this well, then...’

Minhyuk, recalling the method he just used, heard a notification in his ears.

Ring!

[The Luvien Empire has hunted 268 Helenia’s Fragments!]

[The Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted 58 Helenia’s Fragments!]

Minhyuk groaned. He, along with Brod, Elpis, Luo, and the teams created by the Beyond the Heavens Empire players, had been working tirelessly to hunt Helenia’s Fragments. However, the Luvien Empire could still easily hunt around five times more than them.

This was expected. After all, their military forces were quite different. Even the Swords of the Gods' first and second knight orders displayed excellent performances.

Then, another notification rang.

[The creation of Helenia’s Dungeons has started to grow faster!]

The current speed of creation of the dungeons was already very overwhelming. To their horror, it became even faster. Minhyuk’s expression turned ugly.

‘We need to take other measures.’

Minhyuk hurriedly ordered the Beyond the Heavens executives to convene for an emergency meeting. Just when he was about to warp, he caught sight of the two dungeons that he just dealt with. Then, a trick suddenly flashed in his head.

‘Shall we try doing this?’

Joy Co. Ltd.’s Customer Center was being flooded by calls from the players who had been forced to log out from the insane number of Helenia’s Dungeons created inside Athenae. Even the community sites were in an uproar because of this.

[Guys, don't you agree that this is more of a disaster than an event?]

[If the Luvien Empire were not here, many more people would have died.]

[Pay for the EXP and artifacts that I have lost.]

[This is crazy. After the world message about Helenia's Dungeons being created faster, the number of dungeons that have appeared worldwide has already reached 1,500.]

[How can we live through the Third Era of Athenae after it has collapsed?]

The viewers were clamoring about how excessive Helenia's Dungeons were. And President Kang Taehoon? He never expected that things would develop like this.

They were initially scheduled to release only 1,200 dungeons in total. However, with the rate things were going, they estimated that there would be around 4,000 dungeons that would be created in total. That would be more than three times the amount they planned to release. And there was also the number of Helenia's Fragments. It was also much higher than the 1,500 that they initially expected. This was not what Joy Co. Ltd. intended at all.

President Kang Taehoon stood before Supercomputer Athenae and asked, "How did things reach this point?"

[Helenia felt threatened.]

"...?!"

Kang Taehoon was extremely shocked by what he heard.

Who was Helenia? She was an existence that was superior to the gods and was someone who threatened even the outstanding transcendentals. She even dismissed the Absolute Gods and treated them as laughable existences. But that very same Helenia was feeling threatened?

At that moment, a groan escaped Taehoon's lips. He said, "Don't tell me... is it because of Player Minhyuk...?"

When Helenia descended on Earth last time, Minhyuk was able to land an attack on her successfully. Taehoon had already judged that Minhyuk would affect Helenia's descent. However, he never expected it would lead to such a huge problem.

"I see. So, the overwhelming amount of fragments would aid Helenia in her complete descent."

Helenia's Fragments were tasked to kill humanity and help Helenia awaken her full powers. If they could indeed do this, then...

"Helenia will descend with her full power."

The problem was how they would go forward from this point.

"How much damage will Athenae suffer if Helenia descends with her full power?"

Athenae quickly answered the question.

[Based on our estimations, half of Athenae will disappear.]

[The damage would take down around 30% of the NPC population, 45% of the player population, and 30% of the god population.]

Kang Taehoon felt his vision turn dark. He tried to calm himself down and hurriedly convened a meeting to discuss countermeasures.

“We have to increase the rewards that the players would receive so that they would all focus on hunting Helenia’s Fragments.”

“That would be impossible. Even now, the low, middle, and advanced level players are clamoring and criticizing us, saying that this is a ‘feast for the masters.’ We’re already in a situation where more than 70% of the high-level players have joined the hunt for Helenia’s Dungeons.”

Then, another person stepped forward and offered his suggestion: “Then, why don’t we just delete the NPC named Helenia right here and now?”

“...Do you even think that your suggestion is possible?”

Kang Taehoon had firmly advocated that they should not be directly involved in altering the workings of the Athenae worldview. That was why they had to find a way to solve the problem while maintaining distance and not getting directly involved with the worldview. However, it was a challenging feat.

“If we delete Helenia’s character, the players would lose interest in Athenae. Who would even want a game where the operator could freely delete and create the NPCs as they pleased after advertising that it works just like the real world?”

The executives also nodded. However, no matter how often they set up a meeting to find a countermeasure, they were still waiting for an answer. At that moment, Department Head Kim Dae-Il proposed what they deemed as the best suggestion.

“Why don’t you give the quests to the NPCs, not the players? The one who will give the quest is the greatest god, Athenae. If it’s her, then Athenae’s strongest NPCs, the gods, would join the dungeon attack.”

This suggestion could also be impossible nonsense. However, it sounded the most realistic and achievable.

Even the players would not resist the NPC’s sudden increase in activity. After all, there was also a setting in Athenae where the NPCs could receive revelations and oracles from God Athenae. That was not all; the operators would not directly intervene with the workings of Athenae’s worldview.

President Kang Taehoon, who had always been unyielding and adamant with his beliefs, started to feel his resolve shake when he heard those words.

“President, you have to make a decision now.”

“If the president agrees, we will immediately create a team and implement the countermeasures tomorrow at the latest.”

Kang Taehoon closed his eyes for a moment to ponder. In the end, he could only sigh. The fate of the entire Athenae was at stake. The full-powered Helenia's descent was that dangerous. The land of Athenae would turn desolate to the point that one had to wonder if they could survive the Third Era of Athenae, just like one of the players said before.

"I'll give you an answer by the end of today."

Even President Kang Taehoon could not say, "*It's absolutely impossible.*" to disregard the suggestion. The meeting ended shortly after that. Everyone exited the conference room to go back to their stations.

President Kang Taehoon walked out with Team Leader Park Minggyu. He turned to the team leader and asked, "How about you? What do you think?"

"Using Athenae and the NPCs, including the gods, to stop Helenia's Dungeons? I don't think it's bad. But, President, are the gods of Athenae existences that we, operators, could control as we please? And personally, I think there's a high chance that Athenae will not approve of this."

"..."

Taehoon liked Minggyu because he was far more steadfast and unyielding than him. He held onto his beliefs more firmly than him and could bring him back to the right path when he was shaken to the core.

Kang Taehoon nodded. However, even though he understood what Minggyu said, he still could not tell Kim Dae-Il that they could not set up an emergency team for his suggestion. The only thing he could do was see if the other teams could offer any other suggestions to deal with this matter.

The two entered the Special Players Management Team and saw Lee Minhwa monitoring Minhyuk on her screen. On the monitor, they saw Minhyuk during an emergency meeting with his guild members. However, they did not have the leisure to care about what Minhyuk was doing.

"Rather than focusing on the Third Era of Athenae, how about we take over the system from now on so that we can lead the future of Athenae and bring it to a more advantageous situation by the time the destroyed Athenae that the players were talking about came to be?"

"That might probably be better than Athenae intervening. If that does not work, then how about doing this..."

"No can do. That's too dangerous. Then, how about this...?"

Team Leader Park and President Kang Taehoon threw out and discarded suggestions as they continued their conversation. After a long and fruitless conversation, Taehoon raised his hand. "Wait."

Minggyu stopped talking, his face confused. Then, he saw Taehoon looking at Lee Minhwa and saying, "Can you turn up the volume?"

"Yes, sir," Lee Minhwa agreed as she hurriedly increased the volume of her computer.

At the same time, the meeting being held by the Beyond the Heavens Empire rang in the Special Players Management Team's office. They heard Genie ask Minhyuk.

[Minhyuk, what you're saying is that the fragments would gather in one place to give the power they have accumulated to Helenia? Is that right?]

[Correct. The power that the fragments have accumulated will not disappear into nothingness. They would gather in one place to give Helenia that power.]

"...Hmm."

This was a fact. Helenia's Fragments had to give Helenia the power they had accumulated in the jewels in their bodies.

It should be around five days at the least. In five days, the fragments would gather where Helenia's sculpture is and give her the power they have accumulated.]

Kang Taehoon, who was lost in his thoughts, nodded along.

[What I want us to do is to attack the gathering fragments. We will go to where 'Helenia' is and get rid of the fragments that come to that place.]

"...!"

President Kang Taehoon was very shocked when he heard Minhyuk's plan. Even Team Leader Park Minggyu was looking at the monitor in shock. Then, the two looked at each other.

Taehoon felt like his heart was going to beat out of his chest. He thought, *'It's possible.'*

If they prepared for the attack in advance, they could deal with the fragments that would gather all at once.

'We, the operators and developers, could not even think of any solution, but a player was able to come up with a solution to prevent Helenia's descent.'

Taehoon was genuinely impressed. He quickly pulled out his phone and made a call.

"It's me. About making an emergency team, hold that thought for a moment."

Then, Kang Taehoon looked at Minhyuk through the monitor with a faint smile.

'Perhaps this is the only way for the Beyond the Heavens Empire to surpass the Luvien Empire.'

Chapter 954

Unfair. This word did not apply to Athenae. What about the high-level players getting better and greater rewards? They had played the game longer than novice and middle-level players. They deserved that much for devoting time and working so hard in Athenae.

It was like how Minhyuk never considered Helenia's Fragments' Hunt unfair even though there was such a massive gap between the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire.

'If I can't do this, then I don't have the qualifications to sit on that throne.'

One look and anyone could tell that Luvien Empire's Nerva would become the next Battle God. But Minhyuk found a way to break through. Their opportunity to round up the situation would come once Helenia's Fragments gathered to give her the power they had gathered.

Minhyuk called for a meeting and said, "It's going to be dangerous. I don't know how many variables would appear there either."

What he wanted to do was to hunt all of Helenia's Fragments at once. This plan was hazardous. There would be thousands of fragments with levels exceeding Level 600. And there was one thing that they had to be most wary of.

"Just like you said, this would be a perilous venture. 'Helenia is slumbering.' This is nothing but an assumption on our part. If she is not slumbering, she will disturb us, becoming even more dangerous. The worst part would be the Luvien Empire joining in. After all, as a nation at war with us, they would not pass up the opportunity and remain on the sidelines."

Since the enemies would come in droves, the Beyond the Heavens Empire would have to bring their powerhouses to lie in wait. This meant that most of the pillars of the empire would be concentrated in just one place.

In response to that, Minhyuk said, "That's also true. Because of that, this plan would be centered on the players."

His expression was bitter. He felt very sorry for them, perhaps because he felt like he would push them to their deaths for his class succession.

The high-rankers of the Beyond the Heavens Empire would have to face huge penalties when forced to log out. If they dropped the best artifact in their possession, then they would not be able to recover that.

However, Locke suddenly said, "Minhyuk, the Beyond the Heavens Empire belongs to 'us.'"

"..."

"..."

His words meant that they all had to carry that burden. Everyone looked at Locke in awe. This was the first time in a very long time that they had last heard him say something so unique and cool.

"Keuhahahahahahaha! How is it? I sounded cool, right?!"

"..."

"..."

Just as they expected, Locke was indeed far from being cool.

Then, Ali also said, "We have all worked together to start the Beyond the Heavens Empire. The Beyond the Heavens Empire's development is equivalent to our growth and development. Besides, even if things go wrong, no one here would hate or resent you, Minhyuk."

Minhyuk smiled faintly. It was because of these people that he was able to gain the courage and will to never back down. He began to give his orders, “Haze, go and tell Bichor to manufacture a mighty bomb. Also, tell Mandala to prioritize creating high-class potions for Beyond the Heavens Empire players.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Haze answered in the affirmative.

“I’m also going to ask for the help of the trio who fought by my side during the Succession Ceremony.”

“If you’re talking about the trio, then...” Valentino trailed off.

Since this was an emergency meeting, Valentino was also asked to attend. And Valentino knew perfectly well who Minhyuk was talking about. The trio was none other than the God of Animals, the God of Siege Weapons, and the God of Fetters.

Valentino had ignored them before. Why? One, because he had never heard of them before. And two, because their classes were strange. However, the trio’s teamwork was perfect. And when it came to large-scale battles, the three gods would greatly help.

“They will certainly be a huge boost to our military power. But if we’re going to fight without the pillars of the Beyond the Heavens Empire like Ben, Brod, Elpis, Luo, and the rest, we would still be considered to be unprepared even if our opponent, Helenia, is in slumber,” Valentino stated, laying out the fact that everyone was fully aware of.

This was the truth. Their battle would be very tough, and no one denied this.

“Even so, I will do my best to protect you with my shield so you don’t have to worry too much.”

The reliable and sturdy shield, Valentino, was showing off his tremendous will. Since he decided to become the Beyond the Heavens Empire’s dog, he would do his best to protect them and receive their acceptance.

“Also, tell Brod, Luo, and the others, who are hunting for Helenia’s Fragments, to continue doing what they are doing.”

And finally, they had to tackle the most important thing—finding out where Helenia was. Thankfully, the Beyond the Heavens Empire had a precious talent that could help them find her. This talent was none other than Dungeon Explorer Bran.

Dungeon Explorer Bran was once placed second in the Dungeon Explorer Rankings. As someone who did not belong elsewhere before, many kingdoms and empires once treated him as a tool. But his life changed once he moved to the Beyond the Heavens Empire. And it was all thanks to Minhyuk.

Of course, it was not only thanks to Minhyuk. Part of it was also because of the many extraordinary skills that Bran had in his possession. One of these skills was the ability that contributed the most to

his jump from second place to first place in the Dungeon Explorer Rankings. This ability was none other than the *Ancient Relic Tracker* skill.

The Ancient Relic Tracker was a skill that allowed him to check the information about the artifacts and relics that he wanted to find once every five months. And if the relic was found inside a dungeon, he could scan the dungeon for an entire minute.

Of course, Bran continued to grow in the empire and eventually joined the ranks of the players who had achieved Level 600. Thanks to that, he learned new skills from his Dungeon Explorer class, one of which was called “Traces of Fleeting Encounters.”

This new skill of his was an awe-inspiring and jaw-dropping skill. Why? Because he could track down the traces of any monster or NPCs with which he or his allies had come in contact.

Since Minhyuk had come in contact with Helenia, Bran could track her down. However, this skill would only give him clues about his target’s traces. In other words, he would be going after Helenia’s trail and would only be able to find the places she had graced with her presence.

Bran, who had kept going from one place to another, ended up without any wink of sleep. Of course, the places players were not allowed to enter or could not reach were not marked during the tracking process.

‘It’s not like the fragments can go and fly to the sky, right? I’m sure she’s somewhere nearby,’ Minhyuk told him before.

Although it was nothing but mere speculation on his side, Bran trusted and respected Minhyuk more than anybody else. So, he kept on going.

‘It’s almost been three days since then.’

Minhyuk had asked him to locate Helenia’s whereabouts almost three days ago. While he was busy looking for Helenia’s location, dungeons emerged. It was to the point that both the Luvien Empire and the Beyond the Heavens Empire could no longer handle.

‘The others are all fully prepared now too.’

Brod, Luo, Elpis, Ben, and the rest were also without any rest as they continued to take down dungeons. Even Minhyuk continued to attack the dungeons while preparing dishes for his friends and comrades to eat on the day the fragments would gather together.

How many places had Bran visited already? He could not remember. He just continued to move forward with his search. Finally, he reached the Beauden Fortress, located in the ruins of the Alvard Kingdom.

‘Helenia went to a place like this?’

Beauden Fortress was placed in a very remote area where plenty of high-level monsters roamed the path that led to its gates. One reason it was deserted was that the amount of EXP and artifacts that dropped in this area was significantly less than what the players could obtain from other areas.

Bran continued to follow the traces and entered the Beauden Fortress. What greeted him inside made his eyes grow wide.

“Helenia...” Bran murmured. He finally found her! She was currently slumbering inside a transparent sphere made of glass. He approached and placed his hand on the glass.

[No power can destroy Helenia’s Transparent Barrier!]

[Helenia’s magic is protecting her!]

[Helenia’s magic has been triggered!]

[Anyone within Helenia’s three-kilometer radius would receive triple the penalty for a forced log out!]

[With Helenia’s magic activated, the number of people that can enter Beauden Fortress will be restricted! Only 300 people can enter the fortress!]

[With Helenia’s magic activated, anyone within Helenia’s three-kilometer radius will not be able to receive any buffs!]

Bran’s face grew ugly when he heard Helenia’s magic protected her. This might be a variable while they hunted for the fragments. The worst part? Helenia had set a restriction that only three hundred people could enter the fortress. She also tacked on a triple penalty to prevent someone from interfering with what she wanted to do.

‘She knew that there would be someone like us who would think in this direction.’

Bran also found it a bit surprising.

‘Although she had limited the number of people, she still allowed entry inside.’

Perhaps it was also Helenia’s arrogance and self-confidence, telling them, *‘If you can bear to take on that penalty, then come at me.’*

Bran immediately sent a whisper to Minhyuk.

[The Luvien Empire has hunted 2,049 Helenia’s Fragments!]

[The Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted 364 Helenia’s Fragments!]

The situation was extremely dire. Cries and wails rang worldwide as Helenia’s Dungeons exceeded 6,000 in several days.

As for the difference between the number of fragments hunted between the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire? It had already reached an almost six-fold difference.

Of course, Minhyuk, who had always considered using this crisis as an opportunity, had already reached Level 643 during the process. However, that did not mean that the worries in his head had disappeared.

At that moment, Bran’s whisper finally arrived. Minhyuk immediately went to Beauden Fortress with the other players to prepare for the battle that was to come. He had also heard the notifications when he entered the fortress.

“What an unyielding bastard.”

Minhyuk had expected this much. After all, he knew how much the shrewd Helenia loved to drive someone to the brink of despair. Allowing the three hundred people to enter must have been because she wanted them to feel that there was a chance so that the despair that they would feel once they realized that it was futile would be immense.

However, Minhyuk tried to look on the brighter side. The primary purpose of a fortress was to prevent enemies from flooding in, something they could use to their advantage.

“As long as we can set up Bichor’s bomb and detonate it, then everything would be over.”

That was right. The bomb that Bichor created this time was strong enough to blow up and erase a fortress like this from the map. The plan was to plant the bomb, gather all of the fragments inside, use Mass Teleport to take out all of the players, and detonate the bomb. If they could do this, then the game would be over.

However, the plan was straightforward. Anyone could do it. So, what was different in their plans?

“Maybe there’s magic that will prevent the bomb from detonating,” Bichor said as he groomed his white and fluffy hair.

But who was Bichor? He was someone who had reached the level of the gods. With a vicious smile, he said, “But who do you think I am? I am Bichor. I can make a bomb that can ignore that magic and eventually explode. All I need to do is tweak the bomb a bit. Fufufufu.”

Even so, far too many unknown variables were still waiting for them.

“Who does this set of footprints belong to?”

Bran had found a set of footprints. It was proof that someone had entered this long-forgotten and abandoned fortress before Bran. When he saw this, he was sure that this set of footprints did not belong to Helenia. In the first place, Helenia was barefoot. Also, the footprints looked similar to the prints left behind by a knight's boots.

Even though there were too many variables, they could not back down. Minhyuk’s inheritance of the Battle God’s throne, leveling up, and the driving force that would help the Beyond the Heaven's Empire go further than the Luvien Empire depended on this plan.

‘We don’t know what Helenia would do to Athenae in the future if we don’t stop the fragments right here and now.’

Minhyuk also had a hostile relationship with her. On the day Helenia descended with her full power, the first nation she would lay to waste would be the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“Everyone, make sure that you’re all fully prepared. Get ready to move.”

PD Kim Daeguk, who was nursing a cup of coffee after taking his lunch, sighed. “Haa...”

His chest felt stuffy. And this was all because of Athenae. PD Kim Daeguk was also one of the people playing Athenae. But these days, whenever he entered Athenae, the only words that entered his ears were either the death of someone or the destruction of someplace.

‘Things are getting way too out of hand.’

According to rumors from the grapevine, this situation was different from what Joy Co. Ltd. had intended to happen. But if things continued at this rate, Athenae might fall into the hands of Helenia.

“Team– Team Leader! Come, quick!”

“...?”

Kim Daeguk immediately stood up and ran when he heard the unusualness in the voice of the new producer, who suddenly called for him. When he arrived, he saw the notification that appeared on their screen.

[Helenia’s Fragments have begun their journey to return to her arms!]

Most TV screens displaying what was happening inside Athenae showed people fighting against the fragments. But suddenly, fragments started to run like crazy to somewhere else simultaneously. The moment they ran, magic circles appeared right in front of them.

[Helenia’s Warp Gates have been created!]

Helenia’s Fragments ran straight toward the magic circles and disappeared from their screens.

PD Kim hurriedly turned on his phone. He knew that players passed information faster than anybody else.

“Alvard Kingdom? Where is that place?”

“If it's the Alvard Kingdom, then it’s a nation that has been destroyed before!”

“Quick! Send all of our correspondents to the Alvard Kingdom!”

Daeguk grew anxious. This was the first time he had gotten anxious since starting to work as a producer.

‘Were we able to stop them well?’

Hunting as many fragments of Helenia as possible would prevent her complete descent. Were they able to do that?

Not long after, their correspondents started transmitting what they were seeing on their monitor screens. They saw thousands of magic circles appearing in the vicinity of the ruins of the Alvard Kingdom, in the forest, in the river, and even in the skies. Then, the fragments, which came from all over the world, began to pour out.

PD Kim Daeguk and the other officials of the ATV Broadcasting Station jumped when they saw the scene on the screen. They were all rendered speechless. Despite the efforts and hard work the people had put in, the number of Helenia’s Fragments running like crazy on their screen easily exceeded four thousand.

“...It’s over.” PD Kim huffed in despair.

The total number of dungeons created during this episode was 7,104. This information should be accurate since it was published on Athenae’s official webpage. The problem was that they could only hunt and kill less than half of that number. Now, the players would have to think of ways to survive against Helenia once the ten months were up.

Dozens and dozens of drones appeared in the sky, showing thousands of fragments charging toward what seemed to be a fortress. The fortress was shining a bright yet eerie red light. This light was the sign that Helenia was inside and was the one calling for her fragments to enter the fortress.

PD Kim, watching the fragments continue to charge like crazy, suddenly felt the urge to light a cigarette. Not only would the users have to prepare for the worst and find ways to survive in ten months’ time, but they would also have to prepare to say goodbye to the NPCs that they cherished and loved.

“Huh?”

A confused voice rang in the ears of everyone present.

“What was that?”

“Look at the fortress. Why...?”

The fragments were breaking trees and trampling on mountains just to get to the fortress. Then, Daeguk turned to look at the fortress once again after hearing the doubt and confusion in his subordinates’ voices.

“...?”

PD Kim’s eyes grew wide in confusion when he saw the fortress. Why? People who had hidden themselves amidst the trees and the mountains began to appear one after the other.

He saw a woman holding a whip and a fighter cracking his knuckles. Even Athenae’s most outstanding Kick Master appeared alongside the assassin, hailed as the Informant and the little boy who could not get a girlfriend. They showed up one by one.

At the same time, flags fluttered with the wind as they were pulled up on the walls of the fortress, which looked like it would collapse with a single breath. The flag carried the symbol of a fork and knife crossed together.

Then, at that moment, the man known by everyone appeared on the walls of the fortress. He glared coldly at the fragments charging frantically toward the fortress, raised his sword to the sky, and spoke.

[Destroy them.]

Chapter 955

The Beyond the Heavens Empire had been preparing for a long time, way before Helenia summoned her fragments.

Helenia had placed way too many restrictions in this place. The biggest concern would be the restriction of Minhyuk’s buffed dishes. With Minhyuk’s buffed dishes, he could allow Level 600

players to display power rivaling a Level 700 one. However, no buff could take effect inside Beauden Fortress because Helenia had restricted it.

Then, there was Bichor's bomb. Bichor had mentioned the possibility that Helenia's magic could stop his bomb from exploding. Thankfully, he was able to think about it before and hurriedly changed it so that they could still detonate the bomb. Of course, he also did not forget to add a new power to the bomb that they would install in the fortress. After that, he handed the operating switch to Minhyuk.

"A switch?"

Most of Bichor's bombs were made so that they would explode with just a thought from him. This was probably the first time that Bichor made one with a switch. He said, "Even if Helenia's magic could stop the bombs, you would be able to trigger one of the bombs that we have planted with this switch. As long as that bomb could go off, then the rest would soon follow. In the end, Helenia would not be able to stop it.

"But there's a catch. This bomb is created so that Helenia's magic would not reach it. A strong force protects it. Because of that, you have to get close to it for the switch to work. And if you put a barrier around you before pressing the switch, the barrier would affect the switch, and it would not work."

"We have to get close to the bomb?"

Bichor nodded. "You have to be within the bomb's five-meter radius. Also, the bomb would explode the moment you pressed the switch."

Minhyuk understood what Bichor was trying to say. But just in case, he still confirmed it. "What you're saying is that whoever presses the switch has to receive the brunt of the damage?"

Bichor nodded once again. After receiving confirmation, Minhyuk thought that he should be the one to press the switch. He would not be making any sacrifices. After all, he had the skill Absolute Invincibility. If he pushed the switch and used the skill immediately, the problem would end there.

"Ali, please use Mass Teleport and take all of the surviving members of our guild away when the time to detonate the bomb comes."

"I understand. But... what if Helenia's magic also restricts our magic?"

"..."

Minhyuk was rendered speechless. He looked at the rankers of the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the players from whom he had requested support. Minhyuk did not know what to say to these people. In the end, they had to detonate the bomb somehow.

Of course, if they could kill her, then they did not need to resort to detonating the bomb. However, there were far too many variables, and the situation they were about to face was too unpredictable. If things went south, then they might just have to press the switch with all of the players still present inside the fortress.

At that moment, Alexander said, "Don't hesitate to press the switch when it comes down to it. It would be better than having Helenia descend in ten months."

Even the God of Animals, the God of Siege Weapons, and the God of Fetters, the people whom Minhyuk asked to support them, seemed to agree with Alexander's words.

"It's already a pleasure to share such a glorious and monumental event with the Beyond the Heavens Empire."

"Even if we get forced to log out because of the bomb, our losses would still be negligible. You don't have to worry; we still have more to gain."

In fact, even if they were forced to log out, the benefits they would receive would be a whole lot more than their losses. After all, they literally helped block Helenia's Fragments and stop her complete descent.

After their discussion, Minhyuk moved to prepare some more.

[Helenia's Fragments have begun their journey to return to her arms!]

But the notification rang in everyone's ears. The expression on everyone's faces grew ugly. The notifications came a few days earlier than they had expected. The enemies would soon arrive here. Everyone quickly gathered briefly for one last meeting before the impending battle.

"No matter what happens, you must stop the fragments from reaching Helenia."

Everyone looked tense.

"You have to remember that no Brod or Ben will come to protect us."

The Beyond the Heavens Empire always received the help of many NPCs. This was a fact. Because of them, they could hunt boss mobs that they would usually have difficulty dealing with. But that was not the case today.

Khan rolled his wrists and said, "I have been waiting for this moment."

Whenever Beyond the Heavens Empire was mentioned, everyone would only talk about their NPCs. They often said that Beyond the Heavens Empire only reached this point because of their NPCs. But that was only half correct.

They could show the world that their empire's high-rankers were as strong as their NPCs.

At that moment, Minhyuk received a whisper.

Carron believed that this moment should be known to all. And, of course, Minhyuk agreed with that idea.

In just a blink, Minhyuk and the other players finished their preparations and lay in wait.

Athenae players worldwide wailed and lamented when they heard that Helenia was summoning her fragments back to her arms.

Ah, it's over.

They could not even hunt half of Helenia's Fragments.

[What will happen to Athenae in ten months?]

[In ten months, we can expect that many players and NPCs will die. Perhaps many would also leave Athenae.]

[We have to find ways to survive the ruined and destroyed Athenae. Hoo...]

A heavy lump unknowingly settled in their chests as frustration and bitterness rose.

Meanwhile, the broadcasting stations hurriedly chased the fragments that moved through the magic circles Helenia had triggered earlier. While many chose to sigh in resignation at the sight of the thousands of fragments charging toward Helenia, some still chose to fight.

The fork and knife symbol crossed together rose above the fortress as the Beyond the Heavens' high rankers, who had hidden themselves among the trees and the rocks, appeared.

Many who saw this scene felt their hearts thump like crazy. *Now, everyone has no more place to go.* This was the thought that was running through everyone's heads. But when everyone was wallowing in despair, these people stood up and found a way to stage a fight for the last time and stop the fragments.

Joy Co. Ltd.'s President Kang Taehoon also watched the scene with his sweaty hands. This was a method that they could not even think of. Perhaps even if they had thought of this, they would not have been able to try it. However, there was one thing that Joy Co. Ltd. could give to these brave challengers.

[The names of the most outstanding members of the Forlorn Hope[1] will now be revealed to the world!]

[Genie.]

[Khan.]

[Locke.]

[Ares.]

[Ace.]

[Crow.]

[Mei Wei.]

[Valentino.]

[Alexander.]

[Bahalt.]

[Alvarr.]

[Ali.]

[Death.]

[Calauhel.]

[Root.]

[Evron.]

[Kent.]

[Ascar.]

[Farrow.]

[Ercel.]

[Kentaro.]

[Abel.]

[Kendra...]

[Rabu...]

[Lucia...]

[Alicia...]

[And...]

[Minhyuk.]

The names of the people who chose to stand at the last frontline resonated loudly worldwide. Many who heard their names felt something in their chests.

I also want to be there.

I also want my name to be written beside their names.

A gust of wind blew their way.

“Destroy them,” Minhyuk said as he stood tall at the walls of the fortress.

No matter how many players achieved Level 600, the mobs they would have to deal with were at least at Level 600. Even Helenia’s Fragments’ average level was at Level 600. The worst part? As the boss-level beings, they were far too strong and were too much for the players to handle. However, the brave heroes did not back down.

Khan was the first to make a move. He jumped down from a tree and unleashed the pinnacle skill he had obtained after reaching Level 600 upon the frantically running fragments.

“Giant’s Onslaught.”

Hundreds of fists the size of a boulder appeared around Khan. Then, the fists rained down upon the fragments as if on cue.

Boooooom—!

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—!

The fists punched and struck the running fragments like there was no tomorrow.

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

“Keuhaaaaaack!”

“Graaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Kiyaaaaaaack!”

However, their defensive power and HP were extremely high, making hunting a boss mob difficult.

At that moment, another person appeared. He leaped to the sky and joined the fray. This man was someone who stayed caught up to Khan. He was also ranked first in the global fighter rankings. He and Khan were called “The Dragon and the Tiger.” This man was none other than Ares.

Ares shot toward the ground, the powerful force surrounding his feet creating waves that made the air vibrate.

Rumble—!

He landed gobsmack in the middle of the charging fragments in a blink.

Boooooooooom—!

Ares landed one powerful attack, which caused an explosion that broke the balance of hundreds of the charging fragments. But even if they tripped and fell, they did not slow down.

At that moment, a woman appeared just ahead of the frantically running fragments. The woman’s silver hair fluttered behind her as a red stream of energy surged from the blade of her greatsword. The beads wrapped around her sword’s hilt also began to glow with an eerie red light.

Asura Ascar. She was one of the Absolute Demigod class players and was hailed as the best dealer among the Athenae players.

“Blood Explosion.”

Vwoooooooooooooong—

She raised her greatsword and pointed it at the fragments.

Baaaaaaang—!

A vast and powerful explosion erupted and devoured the fragments coming her way. But the fragments remained unfazed. They did not even slow down and continued on their way. They did not even avoid the woman who blocked their path.

Ascar gripped the hilt of her greatsword, pointing at the fragments, and said, “Slaughterer’s Reckless Strike.”

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

The fragments running at the vanguard were slashed and cut down by her attack.

“Keuhaaaaaack!”

Thuuuuuud—

Finally, the first fragment fell. But, of course, her attack was not yet over. Just like a spider web, her reckless strikes wreaked havoc and continued to spread. The problem was that the attack’s damage would primarily focus on the first target. The damage would continue to decrease as time passed by.

The viewers watched in admiration. No one dared to say that *it was just one*. After all, a few kingdoms struggled to hunt even just one of those fragments.

And they were just getting started, too. Another man jumped out. This man's name was Alexander, and everyone hailed him as Athenae's greatest ranker alongside Minhyuk.

“Weapon Explosion.”

Hundreds of weapons appeared around Alexander, shooting toward the fragments and exploding simultaneously.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—!

Haze did not stop researching. She had been looking through the ancient books to learn more about Helenia. This was because she found something disturbing during the meeting that they held among the people of the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

“There was a set of footprints...” Haze mumbled as she pondered over the words over and over again.

The fact that there was a set of footprints meant that someone visited the place first. It also meant that whoever that was would be aiding Helenia. However, she could not figure it out, no matter what she did. She searched the ancient textbooks for clues regarding this mysterious helper.

Haze opened another book and focused her attention on its contents. Helenia's Fragments also existed in the past, which was the gist of the book's contents. As she read the information, Haze increased her pace. Then, she stopped.

“...Helenia's Fragments might seem like her power created them, but this is not the case.”

Haze's pupils constricted.

“Helenia's Fragments were beings that her disciple, Arumbe, had created for her.”

A disciple. Helenia had a disciple. As she continued to read aloud, her voice started to shake and tremble.

“If a fragment of Helenia truly existed, then it would be none other than her disciple, 'Arumbe.'”

Haze immediately jumped when she finally turned over the last page.

The owner of the set of footprints was the actual fragment, “Arumbe.”

Knock, knock—

Someone knocked on the doors leading to Nerva Sephiroth's room. A man immediately came in when Nerva acquiesced and allowed them to enter. It was Duke Vlad.

Chapter 956

The disgusting smell of liquor and the countless empty bottles rolling around on the ground made Duke Vlad turn silent for a moment upon entering Nerva Sephiroth's bedroom. However, his expression remained unfazed and expressionless as he began to report to Nerva.

"Your Majesty, our Luvien Empire has hunted more than 2,000 of Helenia's Fragments while the Beyond the Heavens Empire was only able to manage to hunt around 400."

Nerva, who listened to Duke Vlad's report with half-open eyes, raised the liquor bottle in his hands.

"Oho. That's excellent news. It seems like this emperor will finally be able to become the true descendant of the Battle God, huh? Fufufufufufufu!" He laughed like a maniac as he took another swig from the bottle.

"However, based on the information we have received, it seems like the Beyond the Heavens Empire has been lying in wait in the place where Helenia is slumbering to hunt the fragments."

"So what?! I will be the Battle God anyway!"

"I believe that we should be mindful of the what-ifs. I want to lead the Swords of the Gods and go there."

In other words, Duke Vlad wanted to interfere with the Beyond the Heavens Empire.

"I know, I know. We should, we really should. Since Duke Vlad will be the one going, I can trust and leave the matter to you."

Just when Duke Vlad was about to bow and leave, Nerva staggered to his feet and said, "However, I believe the Beyond the Heavens Empire had received the support of the masses. Do you still think it's okay to do that?"

"..."

Duke Vlad understood what the drunk Nerva was concerned about. If they genuinely went with this, the Luvien Empire would be drowned in spit while the Beyond the Heavens Empire would be heaped with praises.

The Beyond the Heavens Empire was doing this not solely for their good but for the good of everyone. What would happen if the Luvien Empire appeared and interfered with what they were doing? If Helenia descended with her full powers in ten months because of this, then it would still be very hard for the powerful Luvien Empire to survive.

Duke Vlad's expression changed. He said, "Before worrying about all that, it is better to ensure that Your Majesty becomes the Battle God first."

It was like Duke Vlad was saying, *'I will give you the position you have been coveting for so long, so just shut up and do as I say.'*

Nerva, who looked suspicious earlier, clapped, shouting loudly, "Right! That's right! I just need to become the Battle God! Fufufufufu!"

A faint smile appeared on Duke Vlad's face when he saw Nerva laughing maniacally.

"Aaah. I shouldn't miss this historic moment, no?"

Duke Vlad's brows furrowed slightly when he heard that.

"I'll go with you too."

"Your Majesty, you're very intoxicated."

"I'm quite sober, though?" Nerva said, trying to stand still to pretend that he was fine. However, he still ended up stumbling on his feet. "Let me get my armor and my sword. Ah, I can finally see the ugly and wretched expression of the Beyond the Heavens' emperor!"

"...I see." Duke Vlad shook his head as his face grew expressionless once again.

Thud—

Nerva spat the liquor in his mouth on the floor, wiped the foolish smile off his face as he stood in perfect balance, and glared sharply at the closed doors.

Although Duke Vlad did not show any signs, Nerva could tell that the man was highly uncomfortable when he learned that the Beyond the Heavens Empire would block and hunt Helenia's Fragments. Why? Was it because he was an extreme loyalist who wanted to see him become the Battle God?

No, there was something far more important than that. If Helenia descended completely ten months later, the one most likely to be targeted would be the strongest empire in existence, the Luvien Empire.

'What in the world are you hiding from me?'

R?lszd's final wish for him had been unexpected.

—I hope you can smile brightly.

And Nerva, who had been wallowing in despair while pondering over his beloved subordinate's words, finally overcame his grief. It had been a few days since Nerva had last sipped alcohol. Compared to a few days ago, he could make rational judgments.

Not long after, the maid brought over Nerva's sword and armor.

Alexander, who watched Helenia's Fragments charge forward like crazy, triggered his Weapon Explosion. Spears, swords, daggers, greatswords, arrows, axes, and iron maces sprang out and surrounded him. Then, one of the spears shot forward and stabbed through the head of one of the fragments at the vanguard before exploding.

Baaaaaaaang—!

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud—!

Like a chain reaction, explosions erupted as the hundreds of weapons pierced Helenia's Fragments. Alexander, who was confident that the aftermath of his Weapon Explosion was enough to kill almost a third of the fragments here, smiled faintly.

[Helenia's magic has been triggered.]

[Helenia's Barrier is protecting her fragments!]

[The HP of all of Helenia's Fragments has been restored!]

"...!" Alexander's expression grew ugly when he saw a red barrier appear to protect the bodies of the fragments.

This meant that Alexander's Weapon Explosion had been used in vain. The worst part? The ones that received the damage from the attacks that Ares, Khan, and Ascar had inflicted had recovered, too.

'It seems like what we have been worried about has become a reality.'

Helenia's magic was protecting her fragments. This meant that there was also a high chance that her magic might interfere and attack the Beyond the Heavens Empire members and the rest of the people present here at any given moment. But the worst was not yet over.

[Helenia has bestowed her blessings upon her fragments!]

[The level of Helenia's Fragments has increased by 5%!]

[All of the abilities and unique characteristics of Helenia's Fragments will increase to match their levels!]

[The defensive power of Helenia's Fragments has increased by 30%!]

[Helenia's Protection has been triggered!]

[There is a 20% chance of the invincible barrier being triggered to protect the fragments!]

Everyone's expression grew ugly when they heard the notifications.

The viewers and commentators watching the scene all sighed when they saw this. The fragments' level was already high at around Level 620 on average.

But now? Their levels had increased by 5%. This meant that their average level would be at around Level 650. There weren't even any players that had reached Level 650 as of the moment. NPCs that had exceeded this level were also quite rare. Then, their defensive power increased by 30%. Worse, the Beyond the Heavens Empire only had around 300 men present at most.

However, it wasn't as if the Beyond the Heavens Empire did not expect this to happen.

Bright light spread from the tip of the staff in the hands of Golden Mage Ali, the greatest mage among the players, as he summoned a disaster in the skies above them. Dozens of gigantic meteors appeared and gathered with a wave of Ali's hand as he triggered the power that forced God of Shields Valentino's HP down to zero in just an instant.

"Magic Compression."

A gigantic meteor fell upon the running fragments.

Baaaaaaaang—!

Even though their defensive power had increased by 30%, the attack seemed to have inflicted considerable damage on the fragments.

As for Minhyuk? He stood still and waited by the walls of the fortress.

[The number of Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted has reached 370!]

[...Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire...reached 371!]

[...Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire...reached 372!]

[...Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire...reached 393!]

[...Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire...reached 398!]

With the Beyond the Heavens Empire's high rankers triggering their pinnacle skills, they rapidly closed the gap with the Luvien Empire.

Rumble—!

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom—!

A thick cloud of dust covered the entire area as explosions erupted.

However, despite the joint efforts by the Beyond the Heavens Empire's top rankers, it was still quite challenging for them to hunt the fragments, whose defensive power had increased by 30%.

There was also the absolutely invincible barrier, which only had a 20% chance of getting triggered. It appeared occasionally and reduced the amount of damage that the fragments received.

[Helenia is calling for her fragments!]

"Graaaaaaaaaaaaaa!" One of the fragments roared wildly. The fragment, which was in the form of the gigantic black-furred wolf, grew even fiercer as its eyes turned red.

[The fragments' AGI has increased by 1.2x!]

Most of the fragments were already moving at an extremely high speed. But now? They grew more agile and took several detours to evade the Beyond the Heavens Empire members that blocked their path. After all, their numbers were far higher than their enemies.

"...!"

"...!"

Everyone groaned. They had gathered here to prevent them from entering the fortress and reaching the slumbering Helenia.

Dash, dash, dash— Dash, dash, dash—!

The wolf-shaped fragment increased its speed and charged forward like crazy while the rest moved agilely and evaded those who blocked their path so they could reach the fortress gates as quickly as possible.

Even so, Minhyuk remained standing still and did not make any moves. He just watched them atop the walls.

“Roaaaaaaaar!” The wolf roared as it jumped toward the gates.

However, something fell from the sky and moved faster than the wolf. This gigantic existence that was made of solid iron was none other than the Transcendental’s Armored Weapon, the armored weapon that Ethan was piloting.

Slaaaash—!

The Transcendental’s Armored Weapon, which performed splendidly under the hands of Ethan, immediately pressed down the wolf.

“*Hing! Hing!*”

Ethan maneuvered the armored weapon and threw the wolf to the sky. Then, he raised the gigantic greatsword and cut the fragment in two.

Minhyuk looked indifferently at the fragments running everywhere and slowly raised his hand. He then swung his hand down.

Staaaaaaab—!

A spear shot out from one of the siege weapons on the walls and pierced through the body of a fragment shaped like a mantis. The force of the spear sent the fragment flying back until it got stuck in the tree.

Staaaaaaab—!

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

Gigantic spears shot out from the siege weapons mounted on the walls of the fortress, stabbing the fragments that evaded the members of the Beyond the Heavens Empire and keeping them in check.

However, as Minhyuk watched the battlefield, he could not help but feel something strange. He saw the jewels, which were supposed to grow larger the more people they had killed, fall from the fragments that had died.

[Helenia is calling for her fragments!]

[Helenia is calling for her fragments!]

[Helenia...fragments!]

Minhyuk turned to look at the fortress where Helenia was slumbering when he heard the notifications ring non-stop. Like before, the fragments seemed to have been injected with something as they roared and charged forward like crazy.

“Kihyaaaaaack!”

“Kihyeeeeeeck!”

“*Click, click, click, click—!*”

“Keuhaaaaaack!”

Despite the rain of attacks sent by the Beyond the Heavens Empire, the fragments continued to charge recklessly forward. They moved as if they could not feel pain and continued moving faster. From what Minhyuk could see, they had grown twice as fast as their original speed.

In just a blink, the fragments, which moved like a tidal wave, bypassed the Beyond the Heavens Empire members and approached the fortress's walls.

“Damn it!”

“Shit!”

None of them could catch up with the fragments' speed.

Guarding the gate, Ethan jumped and slashed the fragments at the forefront of the wave of monsters.

Shwaaaaaa—!

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

But even though Ethan cut them down with his greatsword, kicked him with his feet and used the body of his armored weapon to block their charge, it was still not enough.

In the end, the fragments reached the fortress's gates. One gate looked like an ordinary wooden gate. With the fragments' size, speed, and power, one could immediately tell that this gate would be broken in just five seconds.

[It's over.]

[They weren't enough to stop Helenia's Fragments.]

People from all over the world sighed when they heard the commentators' words.

[It's over...]

[Even if Minhyuk used all of his pinnacle skills, there would still be at least around 30% of fragments that would return to Helenia's arms. Perhaps he's not making a move even now because they planned to have his guild members shave off most of the fragments' HP so that he could sweep them away with his AOE attack skills.]

[But the fragments' speed, strength, and defensive power are far too excellent. They will never be able to protect that gate.]

[Is this going to be the end?]

[Everything was in vain.]

[Ha...]

But while everyone was shouting, ‘*Why aren't you doing anything?!*’ in their heads, Minhyuk continued to watch the fragments. So, why was Minhyuk not doing anything? It was because he was waiting for his turn.

The average level of the fragments after they received the buff from Helenia almost exceeded Level 650. With the 30% increase in defensive power and the barrier effect, they could be considered Level 680 boss monsters based on their defense alone. Furthermore, there were around 4,000

fragments, and only 300 people participated in the battle. The numbers were just far too unfavorable to them.

Minhyuk could draw several simulations of all the situations that could happen just by looking at the area's topography. By using those simulations, he could create a plan.

They had prepared something to kill all of them as they gathered in one place, one of hundreds of plans that the Beyond the Heavens Empire had prepared.

The members of the Beyond the Heavens Empire quickly moved into position. As they watched the flood of fragments charged toward the gates, they began executing one of the hundreds of plans they had in mind.

Flash—!

The idol of all tankers, one of the few players that had risen and taken over the position of a god, flew from the walls of the fortress.

The experts discussed Valentino and the new skills that he had obtained by becoming a god.

[His shield will be at least 1.5x stronger and sturdier than before he inherited the position of god.]

[We haven't seen him use his newly acquired skills.]

[But as far as we know, there's a God-rank skill among those skills. As someone who has inherited the God of Shields's position, the shield he obtained would definitely be invincible.]

Valentino held the gigantic square shield with both hands as he landed before the frantically charging fragments. Then, he showed the world the power of the true God of Shields.

“Shield's Charge!”

This was Valentino's pinnacle skill, a power fused with the God of Shield's most incredible skill, Bentino's Walls. Like Bentino's Walls, his shield grew until it was as huge as a wall.

Rumble—!

Thud! Thud, thud, thud, thud— Thud, thud, thud—!

The charging fragments collided with Valentino's wall-like shield. But surprisingly enough, Valentino was not pushed back in the slightest despite the frantic charge of the fragments.

All the commentators and viewers were shocked by the incredible sight. However, their shock grew even deeper as they watched Valentino flex his muscles and shout, “Hyaaaaaaa!!!”

The Shield's Charge was a skill that allowed Valentino to charge forward while holding his shield. This power allowed him to instantly send the fragments that collided with his walls seventy meters away from him.

Valentino was an ill-tempered player who did not have a shred of kindness in his body. His arrogance, which knew no bounds, made him gain anti-fans from all over the world. Even so, there was one undeniable fact. Valentino was the greatest tanker in the world. And currently, he was paving the path and leading the players in creating their future. Valentino was a hero.

Chapter 957

The viewers were left in awe when they saw the God of Shields, Valentino, use his Shield's Charge to push the fragments around seventy meters from the fortress's gates. Even Valentino felt his heart swell with pride. This was something that the others could not even attempt to do.

The triple penalty for a forced logout was too huge, even more so for high-rankers like Valentino. However, Valentino, as a member of Beyond the Heavens Empire, took the risk and bet everything on the line to defend the fate of Athenae and live up to the name of the God of Shields.

And waiting right behind the fragments were none other than the combat class players. They were all holding potion bottles as if they were carrying grenades.

As mentioned before, the Beyond the Heavens Empire had thought of hundreds of plans before the fragments arrived. And one of those plans included using the Shield's Charge to push back the fragments.

Golden Mage Ali clenched his fists and said, "Compress."

Fwooooooooooosh—!

"Kihyeeeeeeck!"

"Kihiiiiiiik!"

"Keuhaaaaaaaack!"

The fragments, which had been scattered around, were gathered together in one area. However, that was not the end.

God of Fetters Bedman, who once displayed an incredible feat by binding the gods during the Succession Ceremony, threw a rope that spread like a net and wrapped tightly around the fragments' bodies. When he pulled, the fragments were dragged until they were concentrated in the middle of the clearing.

They raised the Explosive Potion that God of Alchemists Mandala had created. The effects of the potions were not that great, considering that they were made in such a short amount of time. However, even though the number of potions and their effects were not that huge if thrown all at once, the aftermath would still be highly disastrous and inflict massive damage upon the fragments.

[Helenia is protecting her fragments!]

Perhaps it was because they felt the danger; the slumbering Helenia created layers of red shields around her fragments' bodies.

Baaaaaaaang—!

The shields collided with the potions and began to crack after the fiftieth one fell upon them. No matter how strong or sturdy Helenia's shields were, they could not withstand the continuous explosions triggered by the Explosive Potions that were being thrown nonstop.

Crack— Boom—!

Ultimately, the shields broke apart, leaving the potions free to devour the fragments.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Bang—!

[You have hunted 537 Helenia's Fragments.]

[You have hunted 575 Helenia's Fragments.]

[You have hunted 601 Helenia's Fragments.]

[You have hunted 609 Helenia's Fragments.]

As the notifications rang constantly, the Beyond the Heavens Empire players followed their plans and gathered in one place. Then, Ali used Mass Teleport and immediately moved them to the front of the fortress walls.

Seeing this, Valentino quickly retrieved his shield, which he left stuck on the ground, and rushed back to the walls of the fortress. Minhyuk, on the other hand, could be seen running toward the fragments that had fallen into a state of confusion.

Since the number of fragments was overwhelmingly high, using AOE attack skills would be very effective only when they were gathered. Of course, the Beyond the Heavens Empire had also considered the possibility of Helenia having and using Recovery Magic.

So, what they were trying to do here was to inflict colossal damage and kill them before they could recover. This was also why Minhyuk waited atop the walls of the fortress.

Crackle—!

The running Minhyuk triggered the Supreme Overlord's Technique and unleashed blazing black flames from the blade of his sword upon the fragments that were yet to recover from the aftermath of the explosions.

Rumble—!

The black flames roared to life and devoured the fragments.

[You have hunted 607...]

[You have hunted 708...]

[You have hunted 971...]

[You have hunted 1,108...]

[You have hunted 1,277...]

[You have leveled up.]

[You have leveled up.]

Minhyuk could level up twice in a row not only because of the extremely high amount of EXP that the fragments gave but also because he drank a new potion, a potion different from the *One-week EXP Triple Increase Potion*. This potion could allow him to increase his EXP acquisition rate by fifteen times in an hour. However, it still fell behind Minhyuk's expectations.

'The walls of Level 650 are very high.'

Minhyuk felt the total amount of EXP he needed to level up increased by 20% whenever his level increased by one. However, if he did well here, there was a high chance that he would be able to reach his target level today.

The fragments fell one after another as the flames continued to devour them. But nothing was that easy.

[The HP of Helenia's Fragments has been restored.]

Helenia doused their hopes of slaughtering and killing the fragments, which seemed to be feasible if only they were given another minute with cold water. Just like that, the HP of the struggling fragments quickly increased once again. Fortunately, the flames of the Supreme Overlord's Technique could deal continuous damage and shave off vast chunks of their HPs once again.

Minhyuk frowned when he saw the *jewels* fall from the hundreds of fragments he had killed in that attack. Every time he saw the jewels fall, he felt strange, and it bothered him.

Meanwhile, the commentators were in awe and admiration as they watched the Beyond the Heavens Empire's performance.

[Amazing. Clearly, the members of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, who had been lying in wait in this place, had worked together and practiced their plans several times.

[Yes. It only took a split second for Valentino to retrieve his shield and for Minhyuk to charge forward and unleash his Overlord's Technique.]

But Minhyuk was shaking his head. *'It's too easy.'*

Of course, if things ended like this, it would result in a sweet victory for the Beyond the Heavens Empire. They would also not need to sacrifice anyone to detonate the bombs that they had installed inside the fortress. However, there was no way that it was this easy. And this ease was stirring up an overwhelming sense of anxiety in Minhyuk. The problem was that ominous premonitions often tend to become a reality.

Until now, the fragments had foregone attacking to reach Helenia as quickly as possible. But now? The Level 650 boss mobs had changed their postures.

[Helenia has given the order to attack!]

It seemed like Helenia had decided it would be much better to kill everyone here than break through their defenses. Minhyuk quickly shook off the ominous premonition that almost devoured him.

"Viel's Puppet Doll. Ego Chain Sickle."

[You cannot use any of your skills or magic for two minutes!]

Minhyuk responded extremely quickly. He immediately read the flow and summoned Viel and the Ego Chain Sickle before Helenia could impose a restriction. Many expressed their shock and admiration at this.

Meanwhile, the Beyond the Heavens Empire members looked at the fierce and angry beasts charging toward them with a terrible look on their faces. With their skills and magic restricted for two minutes, they would have no way to stop these charging bastards.

"Hurry! Get inside the fortress-!"

"It's too late!"

They tried to have those whose HP and physical abilities were lower, like the mages, get inside the fortress, but the fragments moved faster than them.

A fragment in the form of a leopard swiped Ali's back with its claw.

Swoosh—!

Spurt—!

Viel moved and cut down the leopard with his sword. Following right behind him, the Ego Chain Sickle moved freely and cut down the incoming fragments.

“Prepare to attack,” Minhyuk ordered as he arrived right in front of the walls of the fortress.

Minhyuk gulped. Even he, who possessed an invincible body, would find it hard to resist such a force without any skills or magic. And for two minutes at that, too. It did not take long for them to clash against the charging fragments.

“Grrrrrr!”

“Kyaaaaack!”

Slash, slash, slash, slash, slash—!

Using only their basic attacks, the Beyond the Heavens Empire members kept the crowd of fragments at bay. However, three hundred people were not enough to stop them.

“...Hyung.”

Minhyuk, who had been attacking the fragments, stopped when he heard someone call out to him.

“...”

When he turned around, he saw Ace, the youngest member of the Beyond the Heavens Empire, standing right in front of the wide-open jaws of a fragment in the form of a gigantic shark with his hands raised. He was giving Minhyuk a thumbs up.

Crunch—!

[Ace has been forced to log out!]

“...”

Minhyuk bit his lips tightly. It was far too much for them, who could not use any skills, to deal with the fragments whose numbers far exceeded their own. They were already fortunate enough to have Viel and the Ego Chain Sickle, cutting down the others and lowering the numbers they had to deal with.

But it only took thirty seconds. In just thirty seconds, they were already starting to get pushed back. Each player had to deal with at least six or seven fragments.

[Lucia has been forced to log out!]

[Crow has been forced to log out!]

[Bedman has been forced to log out!]

[Root has been forced to log out!]

[Purcell...]

Minhyuk's heart ached with the notifications that constantly rang in his ears. They had all been working hard for days to gain more EXP and obtain better artifacts, yet they still stood here with those precious things about to be taken away.

Thirty Beyond the Heavens Empire players were forced to log out in just under a minute. Minhyuk gnawed on his lips while the viewers discussed this disastrous battle.

[But why didn't the Beyond the Heavens Empire bring their NPCs? If the NPCs of Beyond the Heavens Empire had been here, they would have been able to hunt all the fragments in one go, right?]

[Just hunt? No, even if their magic and skills had been restricted, they could still overwhelm the fragments.]

[Do you want to know why they did not bring their NPCs? It's simple. Players would only end up with penalties for being forced to log out. But NPCs? They would die an actual death.]

[The battle against Helenia's Fragments has a lot of unpredictability and variables. It's far too dangerous to bring their NPCs here. It's nothing but our greed to think of having the Beyond the Heavens Empire bring out their precious people to fight for us.]

[Now, we can see that they are fighting even at the risk of a penalty for being forced to log out. It's safe to assume that Helenia had adjusted and increased that penalty. So, we should all be grateful that they are willing to sacrifice for our future.]

The viewers cheered for them in their hearts.

Hang in there; you can do it! You are all the leading forces that will carry the Third Era of Athenae!

Nevertheless, the notifications for forced logouts continued to ring. In that short moment, the initial 300 players had decreased to 200.

And Minhyuk? He began his countdown, *'Eight... seven... six... five...'*

Of course, all of the Beyond the Heavens Empire members were also counting down along with him. They would make sure to repay them for their brave and noble sacrifice.

Bichor told them, *'If Helenia sees any signs of a bomb going to explode, she might use her magic to put restrictions upon you.'*

They did not only install bombs inside the fortress. They also installed a bomb at the entrance in case of an emergency.

'Two seconds. We only have enough time to detonate the bomb and leave the radius of effect.'

The Beyond the Heavens Empire had been working together for a long time. Even if others only met them briefly, everyone remembered what Bichor had told them.

We will not end just like this in this place.

They only had one shot. Everyone counted down to make that one shot work.

‘Four... three...’

The viewers and commentators sighed as they watched the increasing number of people with severe injuries and the staggering numbers of people who had been forced to logout.

‘Two...’

At that moment, the players fighting the fragments ran toward Ali as if they had been waiting for this moment.

‘One.’

Beeeeeeeeeeeeeep—!

With only one second left, the bomb that they had buried deep underground began to ring, signaling the fact that it was about to explode.

“Mass Teleport!!!”

A bright golden light engulfed all of the players. There were only 0.3 seconds left. Their timing was too narrow, but they made it. As the light disappeared, the bomb that Bichor had started to explode.

[Helenia’s magic restricts...]

It was just as Bichor had expected. However, the bomb buried underground had already exploded even before the notification ended.

Baaaaaaaang—!

Just like a nuclear bomb exploding, the bomb blew away the fragments that crowded around the gates of the fortress. The best part about this bomb was that Bichor focused on increasing its explosive power instead of increasing its radius of effect.

Although the explosion blew the fortress's gates into smithereens, it did not spread inside.

Boom, boom, boom, boom—!

Thud, thud, thud, thud—

Thump, thump, thump, thump—

[...the use of bombs!]

When Helenia’s notifications ended, around a third of the fragments had already died. Many of the surviving ones were also ripped and torn apart to the point where they couldn't move.

[The number of Helenia’s Fragments that the Luvien Empire has hunted has reached 2,109!]

[The total number of Helenia’s Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted has reached 1,975!]

Minhyuk grew closer and closer to taking the position of the true Battle God.

Chapter 958

Minhyuk’s heart was filled with hope when he saw that the damage the fragments had received was much more than the damage his men had received. Many of the fragments received severe injuries that made it hard for them to move.

The difference in the fragments hunted between the Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire was only at a hundred or so. It seemed like Minhyuk had finally taken one step closer not only to the Beyond the Heavens' victory in this battle but also to the position of the true Battle God.

Once the restrictions were lifted, the players of the Beyond the Heavens Empire immediately tried to cast their skills. However, something completely unexpected happened.

Thump, thump, thump, thump—!

Arrows and sword lights from afar rained down upon the fragments, shooting and cutting them down. When Minhyuk looked at the direction from which the attacks came, he saw the Swords of the Gods riding on their horses, with Duke Vlad and Nerva leading them, coming toward this fortress.

“...What the hell?!”

The players of the Beyond the Heavens Empire were all flustered. Most of the members of the Swords of the Gods exceeded the level of the Beyond the Heavens Empire players. The worst part was that the Beyond the Heavens Empire had shaved off most of the HP of the fragments when they swooped in, effectively taking away the fruits of their hard labor. Perhaps this was only natural since the two empires were at war.

“Guys, don't stop attacking,” Minhyuk said when he saw that the gap between their empires' hunted fragments that they had narrowed painstakingly began to widen again.

The Beyond the Heavens Empire players acknowledged his words and began to use their skills to attack and kill the fragments as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, Minhyuk jumped down from the fortress and walked toward the troops approaching the Luvien Empire.

Nerva and Duke Vlad stepped forward to meet with him. However, it was Duke Vlad who spoke on Nerva's behalf. He said, “The Beyond the Heavens Empire and the Luvien Empire might be at war, but with the current situation, I believe we shouldn't quibble and work together.”

Duke Vlad was quite crafty. Like Nerva, he was also aware that the Luvien Empire would face criticism and be affected negatively if they attacked the Beyond the Heavens Empire, which was fighting for the world's future right here and now. So, he chose not to attack them. At the same time, he was also paving the way for Emperor Nerva.

“Underhanded bastards,” Minhyuk muttered. He suddenly found himself to be in a dilemma.

He lacked the troops even if he wanted to fight the Luvien Empire right here and now. Fighting against the fragments was already too much for them.

Of course, it would be much easier to hunt the fragments if they joined hands with them. However, the fact that the Luvien Empire and the Beyond the Heavens Empire were at war meant they had to consider that they would be hit at the back at any given moment. It was a risk they had to take if they had to fight side by side with them.

“Underhanded? This is for the future of the world. Saying that we’re underhanded seems to be a bit too much, no?” Duke Vlad snorted.

Minhyuk clicked his tongue. “You bastards only know how to take away what others had fought so hard and struggled to hunt. If you were truly worried about the world's future, you should have made the same choice as mine and had your troops lie in wait. I’m calling you underhanded, so what? Isn’t it because the Luvien Empire, which boasts that they are the strongest empire in the continent, is doing something underhanded? And all this so that you can put Emperor Nerva on the throne.”

“Let me say it once again: the Luvien Empire is...”

“Stop making excuses...”

As their conversation dragged on, the expression on the face of Duke Vlad, who had always sported a neutral expression, grew darker and darker.

Nerva, who was utterly sober despite looking extremely drunk, thought, *‘The Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor is not someone who will openly mock and criticize someone to their face. He is also not the type of person who will argue and raise his voice in agitation like he is now.’*

Nerva looked at the two bickering people with wide-open eyes.

“Fine. That’s it.” Minhyuk suddenly stopped bickering with him. “I hope you will do your best to hunt the fragments *in. Cooperation. With. Us.*”

Duke Vlad exhaled roughly. Why was the Beyond the Heavens’ emperor in front of him completely different from the image he had heard of before? With every word he said, Vlad could feel how fiery his personality was and how easy he was to provoke. He looked like he could not control his anger well.

Duke Vlad then ordered the knights of the Swords of the Gods to charge forward.

“...”

Duke Vlad was suddenly rendered speechless. It only took a few minutes, but over half of the fragments disappeared. At the same time, these notifications rang in Minhyuk’s ears.

[The number of Helenia’s Fragments that the Luvien Empire has hunted has reached 2,109!]

[The total number of Helenia’s Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted has reached 2,215!]

Only at this moment did Duke Vlad realize why Minhyuk had latched on to them and stretched out their conversation for as long as possible.

The knights of the Swords of the Gods could not just go past Minhyuk to hunt the fragments while the two emperors were still discussing. On the other hand, the Beyond the Heavens Empire members had already been fighting against them earlier and were free to deal with them as much as they wanted. To top it off, they only focused on hunting the fragments that were rendered immobile and littered with severe injuries from the bomb that exploded.

In other words, Minhyuk bought time for the Beyond the Heavens Empire members to hunt the fragments.

“This underha—” Duke Vlad trailed off; he could not bring himself to finish the words.

He said earlier that the most important thing right now was to hunt the fragments for the sake of the world's future. To put it simply, he was not in a position to criticize Minhyuk and call him underhanded.

“...”

Duke Vlad's expression grew ugly while Minhyuk looked at him expressionlessly. Only when Minhyuk turned around did he reveal a smug smirk.

“Swords of the Gods, what are you doing?! Hurry up!” Duke Vlad shouted, rushing the knights of the Swords of the Gods to move. “How dare a mere emperor...”

Anyone could see by Vlad's ugly expression just how offended he was.

‘However, the plan is still on track.’

Duke Vlad saw that the gap between them began to close again as the Swords of the Gods stormed in to hunt the fragments. He would make sure to let Nerva sit on the throne of the Battle God.

‘I will make sure that the teacher can descend completely.’

Duke Vlad's real name was none other than *Arumbe*. He was Helenia's only disciple who had long been forgotten with time. Arumbe had taken over Duke Vlad's body a few years ago and had been waiting with bated breath for this moment.

Arumbe intended to allow Nerva to succeed the throne of the Battle God and make him into his puppet, especially now that Nerva had turned into an incompetent emperor who had been left dwelling in the past and addicted to alcohol.

If Arumbe could manipulate Nerva, who had become the Battle God, he would have control over the Land of the Gods and the human world. Once that happened, then the world as a whole would kneel in front of Helenia.

The fragments? A lot of them had died at this point. But would this disrupt Helenia's descent? No. In the first place, Arumbe, who was in the body of Duke Vlad, had already prepared for this scenario. Soon, the real battle would begin.

Duke Vlad rushed forward to hunt the fragments. However, there was one man who was glaring sharply at his back. And this man was none other than Nerva.

[The number of Helenia's Fragments that the Luvien Empire has hunted has reached 2,433!]

[The total number of Helenia's Fragments that the Beyond the Heavens Empire has hunted has reached 2,449!]

The performance of the Swords of the Gods, especially the first knight order and Duke Vlad, was outstanding. They were able to close the gap in just one breath.

Minhyuk stood atop the fortress walls and looked at the fragments. He thought, *'It's finally coming to an end.'*

There were only 300 fragments left now. He believed that this was enough. Helenia would no longer be able to descend at full power with this number. He thought all that was left was to determine who would be the next Battle God.

However, that was a mistake. Just when everyone was busy hunting the fragments, something happened.

[Helenia's Disciple Arumbe has appeared!]

[Arumbe is trying to facilitate Helenia's full descent by using 'his shards'!]

[Arumbe has started to awaken the true power of the shards that have lost their shells!]

"...?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Everyone stopped for a moment. They were all left dumbfounded by the notifications.

Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeep—!

A loud noise rang in the area.

'What the hell...?'

Shards? Weren't they supposed to be fragments? What did they mean by the true power of the shards? Were the notifications telling them that what they had been dealing with were mere shells? Decoys?

Minhyuk's breath was stuck in his throat. He thought that it was all related to the red jewels. It had always given him this strange and uneasy feeling since earlier. The jewels were supposed to grow bigger and bigger as the number of people that they had killed increased. And whenever a fragment died, these jewels would fall off their bodies.

The shards started to twitch as they slowly raised their bodies. Their forms looked similar to humans', except their skin was as if lava had melted it and showed several traces of blood. Even their eyes were completely black. One look could give someone goosebumps.

One of the Swords of the Gods swung his sword and cut down the shard trying to stand up.

Slash—!

However, the shard did not fall even after receiving the brunt of the attack.

[Arumbe's Shard. Level 676.]

"..."

Minhyuk was left speechless when he saw the level of the shard.

Just like that, shards began to arise from where the fragments had died before.

[Helenia is calling for the shards.]

[The defensive power of Arumbe's Shards has increased by 1.5 times.]

[The AGI of Arumbe's shards has doubled.]

"Kihyaaaaaaack!!!"

"Keuhaaaaaack!"

"Kekekekekekekeke!"

"Ahihihihihihihihi!"

"Kyahaaaaaaa!"

The shards' maniacal laughter roared. At that moment, the players and the Swords of the Gods felt like everything around them had turned into slow motion. They tried to attack the shards with all of their might to subdue them. But their high defensive power made even the Swords of the Gods helpless.

The Sword of the Gods that tried to cut down one of the shards failed to even leave a nick on the skin of the shard. The worst part? He was the one that got caught in the neck and was slammed into the ground.

Locke, who tried to swing his axes, was punched by one of the shards and sent flying back.

Ascar tried to cut them down with her greatsword, but the shards retaliated by cutting down the hands that held her blades.

"Kihyahahahahaha!"

"Keuhyahyahyahya!"

"Ahihihihihihihi!"

Minhyuk's breathing turned ragged as he watched the shards simultaneously charge.

Thwack—!

One of the shards reached the fortress's gates and easily pierced through them with its arms. Thankfully, the iron gates that the Beyond the Heavens Empire had prepared in advance had been lowered, preventing it from going further.

Thud—!

However, even that was only like a piece of paper to the shards. The iron gates were quickly crushed and torn apart as the shards rammed, punched, and tore at it with all their might.

"Stop..."

The average level of the players was at Level 610, while the Swords of the Gods was at Level 660. They had no way to stop the more than 4,000 shards that were charging in at full force.

Minhyuk saw dozens of beasts running inside the fortress walls and charging toward Helenia, who was slumbering inside the clear spherical glass. Not long after, one of the shards rushed at her with open arms, its mouth releasing roars of unprecedented joy. It looked like a child extremely happy to have met its mother once again.

“Kihyehyehyehyehye!”

Minhyuk’s legs grew soft when he saw the creepy scene. And one thought flashed in the heads of everyone present. ‘*It’s over.*’

Then, at that moment, someone stepped through the gates. The man moved extremely fast.

In this game, a player at Level 300 would not be able to beat an NPC at Level 400, even if ten players had gathered together to fight against the NPC. Similarly, players at Level 300 would also not be able to beat an NPC at Level 500, even if hundreds of them gathered together. This was all because of the difference in their strength.

The shards laughed maniacally as they ran with open arms.

“Ahihihihihihi!”

But then, someone appeared and cut their heads off.

Slash—!

Roll, roll, roll—!

The man looked briefly at the head that rolled on the ground. Then, he turned to look at the shards running toward Helenia’s transparent wall from all directions as he moved.

One, two, three, four... nine, ten... fifteen... twenty... forty... With every swing of the man’s sword, a head would fall and roll on the ground. And when hundreds of the shards had finally crowded from the inside, the man said, “Mercenary’s Pinnacle Swordsmanship. Final Chapter.”

If someone asked who among the NPCs would be considered the Supreme, just like how the players’ Supreme was Minhyuk, everyone would answer the same thing.

“Death Wolf.”

And their answer would be *Brod*.

Just like that, hundreds of wolves ran and tore the shards apart.

Chapter 959

Sleep had left Brod since Minhyuk led a group of foreigners and left for Beauden Fortress.

Minhyuk had met with his vassals. He ordered, “I am leaving for Beauden Fortress. None of you are allowed to follow me there. This is an imperial decree. If any of you defies this order, it is the same as ignoring my will.”

Minhyuk had spoken to them with an uncharacteristically harsh attitude. However, everyone knew that he gave this order for their sake—the Beyond the Heavens Empire had accepted and embraced a variety of NPCs. Of course, just like Brod, there must be quite a lot of them who had lost sleep in anxiety.

The anxious Brod looked at the stars before moving on to find Haze for a chat. But when he came to find her, he heard something extremely shocking.

“There’s a problem! Helenia’s Fragments did not come from her. They belong to her disciple, Arumbe.”

The fragments they believed belonged to Helenia were not hers but someone else’s. If one thought about it a bit more carefully, one would understand what this meant.

“Then, does that mean Arumbe has another way to awaken Helenia?”

Haze nodded quickly, anxiety filling her face. “Perhaps he’s the owner of the set of footprints that we discovered in the Beauden Fortress not too long ago.”

Brod immediately jumped to his feet. However, Haze shook her head at him.

“No, Sir Brod. You can’t go.” Haze sounded so resolute. “Do you want to disobey His Majesty’s orders right now?”

The bond between the emperor and his vassal was a two-way street. They both had to have trust, care, and respect for each other. Of course, this bond also included that the vassals had to obey their emperor’s orders. A faithful vassal would abide by their liege’s orders. Minhyuk only gave them this order because he was extremely concerned about them.

“You clearly understand why His Majesty gave this order, right? His Majesty and the others are all immortal beings. They would be resurrected even if they died there. But”– Haze’s lips trembled–“that’s not the case for us. If something goes wrong, then we will die.”

She was apprehensive about Minhyuk and the others but stopped Brod. However, even though she stopped him, her body was trembling and shaking from anxiety.

They will come back to life even if they die there. If it were put like that, then their worries would be useless. However, even after knowing he would return to life, all the NPCs related to Minhyuk were not at ease. The pain that Minhyuk would suffer mentally from his death was enough to break the hearts of all of the NPCs who cared for him.

Brod said, “Lady Haze. Today will be my first time breaking His Majesty’s orders.”

“...”

Brod was a fool. To him, seeing even a minor injury on Minhyuk could make his heart ache. To him, such a trivial injury was more painful than his death. Besides, the only reason he lived there was because of Minhyuk. Brod thought he would receive a severe punishment from Minhyuk this time. But it was fine.

Just as he was leaving, Haze said, “Please come back alive.”

Brod just chuckled in response.

Arumbe's Shards, whose level increased to Level 660 and had received a 1.5x increase in defensive power and double AGI, madly charged toward the fortress. It was already problematic for the rankers—no, for Athenae's greatest—to deal with them before, but now it was impossible to kill them. However, for the most excellent NPC standing at the peak of Athenae? That should not be the case.

This NPC was once hailed as the Fallen Wretched Emperor. He was once the ruler of all of the mercenaries. And he was once the escort knight of a queen. And right now? He lived solely for the sake of one emperor and one emperor alone.

"Death Wolf."

The hundreds of charging shards were torn apart by the wolf-like sword lights that shot out from his sword. It was an incredibly shocking sight to see. After all, these shards were the same shards that the rankers were barely able to stop and the ones that the Swords of the Gods had a hard time dealing with.

The pieces of the shards shot to the sky. But that was not the end of it. He, who decided to block the entrance to the fortress alone, cut down the frantic shards charging toward him with his sword. The people present were rendered mute by his overwhelming display of power.

And the Swords of the Gods? Some rumors had been circulating lately that Brod, the vassal of the Beyond the Heavens' Emperor, once competed with Nerva for the position of the emperor. There was also a rumor that Nerva used underhanded and vicious methods to push him out of the competition.

It did not matter if the rumors were true or not. The Swords of the Gods still watched the man in admiration.

'That's crazy...'

'Is he a human?'

'Unbelievable...'

If Duke Ruffiso was alive, would he be able to win against this man? That was just how outstanding Brod's performance was. He did not even give the shards a chance to enter the fortress.

However, although Brod performed exceptionally well, Minhyuk's face was distorted. "Brod!!!"

Of course, Minhyuk was thankful to him. He knew Brod fully well; he was someone who knew what this considerable man was feeling at this very moment. However, he was also worried about Brod. After all, Brod was the type of person who would push forward despite knowing how reckless his actions were.

Minhyuk had already thought that there was a chance that Brod would come here despite his orders. But he was highly conflicted when it truly happened. He felt both happy and angry at the same time.

"I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I will graciously accept whatever punishment you deem fit once we return."

Brod was fully aware that he had done something he shouldn't have done. That was why he was prepared to receive whatever punishment Minhyuk would give him.

Minhyuk understood that getting angry right now would not make any difference. To be honest, they could only escape this crisis because Brod came here.

Brod continued to stand by the entrance to the fortress and disposed of the shards that were charging in.

The players and the Swords of the Gods rushed forward and began to help him deal with the thousands of shards gathered around the entrance. However, everyone was left in a daze.

‘We’re not dealing any damage...?’

‘What the hell is this...?’

The high-rankers all turned to look at Brod in disbelief. This man used to joke and laugh around with them while herding the pigs and cattle in the empire. But while this man tore apart the shards into tens of thousands of fragments, they could not even deal the slightest damage.

As for the Swords of the Gods? They were in a much better position than the players. However, it was still tough for them to take down a single shard. But Brod dealt with the madly charging shards in front of the entrance alone.

Just when they were in a daze between shock and amazement, notifications occurred.

[Arumbe, the master of the shards, gives the order to attack!]

[Arumbe, the master of the shards, activated his magic!]

Everyone grew tense. At that moment, thousands of bloody red spears fell from the skies.

“...”

“...”

Everyone could tell that Arumbe, Helenia’s only disciple, was here somewhere.

“VALENTINOOOO!!!”

Valentino immediately dashed forward at Minhyuk’s shout. The place that he was tasked to protect? He was not ordered to raise his shield to the sky. He immediately went past Brod and entered the fortress.

The players did not come here to level up. It would be great if they were not forced to log out here, but their most important task was to prevent Helenia from absorbing the fragments.

Valentino moved to ensure the best possible outcome. He immediately stood before the slumbering Helenia and slammed his huge square shield down.

Shortly after becoming a god, the God of Shields bestowed upon him a unique artifact. This artifact was none other than the Guardian’s Shield that was in his hands right now. The Guardian’s Shield was an artifact that belonged to the most incredible God of Shields, Bentino. And it was a gift that the God of Shields gave him who chose to defy Nerva’s order to protect the other descendants.

“Shield Fortress!”

Of course, this shield also has an exceptional skill attached to it. The shiny square shield stretched until it circled itself and caged Valentino and Helenia inside the transparent wall. Before the shield closed off, Valentino and Minhyuk made eye contact.

“...”

Minhyuk nodded at him. In the first place, Minhyuk wanted Valentino to do this. So, there were no regrets.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—!

Thousands of Diseses fell upon the players.

“Dispel! Dispel! Dispel! Dis— Keuheuk!”

One of the shards pierced through the chest of Ali, who was busy dispelling the Diseses that were falling upon them.

“Urk!” Ali vomited a mouthful of blood. However, he opened his mouth and muttered shakily, “Dis... pel...!”

A Diss fell from the sky and tried to force Ali to log out. However, Minhyuk was one step faster. He hurriedly grabbed Ali by the collar and threw him inside the fortress. After saving Ali, Minhyuk looked around. Just as he expected, it was a tough battle to fight.

Death fought alongside his death knights and ran toward the shards. He had already reached the limits of his HP and MP. And, of course, the same was true for his death knights. Fortunately, he could still summon his death knights even if they were utterly broken and torn apart. So, everything was fine.

“Explode.”

Death and his death knights exploded all at once. The resulting explosion engulfed the shards in their vicinity.

[Death has been forced to log out.]

The falling Diseses instantly made almost two-thirds of the players disappear. However, Minhyuk still saw hope. Brod killed a fourth of the thousands of the charging shards, shocking even Minhyuk, who had been around him the longest.

Before long, the surviving players pulled themselves out desperately. Meanwhile, the Swords of the Gods had already pulled back and watched the situation.

Minhyuk cast his greatest and most powerful skill toward the shards crowded before Brod.

“Calamity.”

[Calamity.]

[All of your stats have decreased by 15.]

[Your level will go down by one.]

[Your total HP and MP volume will decrease by 1% permanently.]

Thousands of swords covered with blazing flames fell from the sky. Flames surged and devoured a vast area when the swords struck the ground. Minhyuk had been hiding this power to use it in an emergency. But now, he deemed it the right time to use it.

The swords constantly fell from the sky, their blazing flames devouring the shards in the area. *Melting*. This word best described what was happening around them.

But Minhyuk continued. He moved with the thought that he would give it his all and pour everything he had. He said, "Thousand Sw..."

[Dispel.]

When Minhyuk activated the skill, a bright red light flashed and spread from the sky above them. Surprisingly enough, this red light also devoured Minhyuk's Calamity. Even the Thousand Swords that Minhyuk had just activated was easily offset and disappeared into nothingness.

There were still around 3,000 shards left. The worst part? The shards were attacking the players and reducing their numbers rapidly. Minhyuk was left flustered and in a rush.

'It seems like we still have to use the bomb in the end...' Minhyuk thought as his gaze drifted toward Brod, guarding the entrance firmly.

Although Brod looked a bit exhausted, he was still standing strong. Minhyuk hurriedly rushed to Brod's side and triggered his Dual Sword Technique. Standing right next to Minhyuk was Alexander.

At this point, most of the Beyond the Heavens Empire players had already been forced to log out. At the very least, two players should support this one NPC in blocking the entrance to the fortress.

"Let's do this."

"Right."

"Of course, Your Majesty."

There were only three of them, but they could keep the madly rushing shards at bay with the swing of their swords.

As they watched this scene, many viewers felt their blood boil. The commentators were also left in awe.

[Crazy.]

[The three are not being pushed back despite fighting against almost 3,000 shards.]

[We can see that Arumbe's magic is constantly being sent toward the three of them.]

[Minhyuk has removed his mixer and bowl and canceled some of the magic.]

[Alexander has split some of the magic in two.]

[Brod also offsets the magic while blocking the shards with a swing of his sword.]

Sweat pooled in the hands of all of the viewers. Everyone could see that the magic was moving shrewdly and targeting Brod, the strongest among the three. Even so, the three did not let a single shard past them.

At that moment, one man could be seen moving toward them. The commentators were very excited when they saw the man.

[It seems like Duke Vlad will also be joining them.]

[Based on their performances, Duke Vlad seems much stronger than Brod. If Duke Vlad fights alongside them, they might be able to defend the fortress even with Arumbe, who has yet to show himself.]

[Look at Duke Vlad's momentum! He's moving alone without the Swords of the Gods. Maybe it's because he believes that they would only be a nuisance to him!]

The viewers smiled when they realized the Duke of the Great Luvien Empire would fight alongside the three people. Then, Duke Vlad stood before Brod and swung his sword as hard as possible.

Slash—!

“Urk...!”

Red blood spurted out from the chest of the one that Duke Vlad cut down. However, the one that Duke Vlad cut down was not the shards but Brod.

Chapter 960

Duke Vlad—no, Helenia's only disciple, Arumbe—could see that his shards failed to reach his teacher's arms. This was entirely out of his expectations.

Brod contributed the most to preventing his shards from moving forward. One look at the man, and Arumbe could tell that as long as Brod was alive, he would become a threat to his teacher even if she descended completely to the world.

Arumbe, who was in the form of Duke Vlad, slowly approached those blocking his shards. None of them suspected him. After all, with the current situation that they were in, it wouldn't make sense for the two empires to fight just because they had been at war before. And because of that, Vlad could freely slash the unguarded Brod's chest.

Slash—!

Blood spurted out of Brod's chest. Although it was just one slash, it was enough to inflict a severe injury upon the man. Everything happened so fast that even Minhyuk and Alexander were still unaware of the fact that Brod was already vomiting blood beside them.

Minhyuk, who finally realized what was happening beside them, saw Duke Vlad stabbing the staggering Brod in the abdomen.

Stab—!

Duke Vlad pulled his sword just as quickly and slashed Brod's body non-stop.

It must be known that Duke Vlad was most likely on par with Brod in terms of strength and power. There was also the fact that a person who was inflicted with a severe injury and was stabbed in the abdomen at the same time would have no way to evade whatever attack came their way. It wouldn't matter how strong one was; that would still be the outcome.

Thump, thump—

Duke Vlad kicked the stumbling Brod away. With Brod gone in the equation, the shards swarmed and pressed Minhyuk and Alexander harder. The two tried their hardest to stop the shards with their skills, but it was not enough.

The worst part? Minhyuk was forced to an impasse. He could not make a choice. If he ran to where Brod was, then the shards would pour inside the fortress. But if he did not go there, then Brod might die.

Then, at that moment, Duke Vlad shouted, “Finally! The chance to kill the puny emperor and his vassals that go against Emperor Nerva has come!”

Duke Vlad turned to look at the Swords of the Gods. “Quick! Attack the Beyond the Heavens’ Emperor and kill him! Stop the shards after killing him!”

The two empires were definitely at war. However, the Swords of the Gods could not move despite the orders that they received.

Minhyuk, looking at the shards still charging forward, thought, *‘That’s so unreasonable. What the hell is wrong with him?’*

Did he want to retaliate against them in this situation? That did not make sense at all. Even the Luvien Empire would be in danger if Helenia descended with her full powers in this world.

“Idiots! This is His Majesty Nerva’s chance to rise, sit on the throne, and become the true Battle God. As long as His Majesty Nerva becomes the Battle God, he could stop Helenia even if she came here at full power!” Duke Vlad blabbered, wrapping his reckless and unreasonable actions as if they were for the sake of Nerva.

Then, Duke Vlad walked toward the fallen Brod.

‘No...!’

Minhyuk’s expression grew ugly. Brod was one of the people that he cherished and loved. The thought of something happening to him here broke his concentration for a brief moment. Because of that, his balance broke off, and some of the shards’ attacks hit him.

[Your HP has dropped below 55%!]

[Your HP has dropped below 50%!]

The reason why Minhyuk was having a hard time dealing with the shards was because the Slaughterer’s Absorption could not be triggered no matter how many of them he killed. After all, they were already dead and were only resurrected.

Fortunately, Minhyuk could quickly regain his balance, his sword swinging swiftly to deal with the shards in front of him again.

Minhyuk felt highly disappointed and frustrated with himself at the moment. He wanted to protect Brod but could not even move away from this place.

‘Hang in there, Brod. Just hold on for a bit.’

When Minhyuk glanced back, he saw Brod staggering on his feet. However, he knew Brod as a powerful man, and that one look made him realize that Brod would not be able to endure for long.

Someone standing among the Swords of the Gods stepped forward at that moment.

Brod's entire body felt heavy while his chest and abdomen, which had been cut and stabbed, were burning hot. The strength in his hand holding onto his sword was already lost, and his legs buckled under his weight. However, he did his best to grip his sword tightly and stand up again.

'I can't die yet.'

The glint came back to Brod's eyes. His emperor had strictly ordered him not to come to this place. But he defied those orders and went here anyway. And he was going to die just like that? That should not happen. The thought of his emperor grieving was enough for Brod to stand up again.

'I already defied his orders; I can't die here.'

That would be completely irresponsible. Brod exhaled roughly as he used his sword to help him stand up. The situation was extremely dire. He could see that his emperor was also suffering from several injuries all over his body. Even the powerful Alexander seemed to be in a very dire and desperate situation. That was why Brod could not fall here. Slowly, strength returned to his limbs.

Duke Vlad, who watched the man, was frankly impressed. *'That's crazy.'*

He had stabbed the man at a vital point, yet here he was, surprising him and standing up on his own once again. It also made Duke Vlad realize, *'I have to kill him here.'*

If he did not do that, this man would later be a threat to Hlenia.

Clang— Clang, clang, clang, clang—!

The two clashed several times. And in their confrontation, Duke Vlad was left shocked.

'What?'

Goosebumps rose all over his skin when he realized how amazing Brod was. Although he looked like he had already lost his strength and was running on fumes, Brod could still accurately target Duke Vlad's vital points. Not only that, he could also easily block Vlad's attacks.

Duke Vlad raised his empty hand and cast *Slow* upon Brod. Vlad did not miss the opportunity and swiftly slashed Brod, whose movements had slowed down, on the shoulder.

Slaaaaaash—!

Duke Vlad chuckled viciously when he heard the sound of Brod's bone and flesh being torn apart. The laughter sounded like the laughter of a vicious clown. But then, Duke Vlad heard Brod say, "It's magic."

Brod's voice still sounded lively despite a deep sword in his shoulder. Only at that moment did Duke Vlad realize that something was wrong. Brod, who was supposed to be dying and whose shoulder was supposed to be rendered useless, was still alive and well.

"Mercenary's Pinnacle Swordsmanship."

Vlad's expression twisted when he heard Brod's words.

"Wolf King's Hunt."

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

Blood spurted out from Duke Vlad's body as a strong wolf emerged and ripped him apart with its fangs.

"Kghhk!" Duke Vlad groaned, shocked and appalled by the unimaginable damage he had received.

However, Duke Vlad believed that even if Brod could inflict such massive damage on him with his Wolf King's Hunt, it would be tough for him to move correctly from this point on.

But Brod was walking. He took one step, two... three steps, and said, "Who are you?"

The moment Brod reached Duke Vlad, he raised his sword and tried to stab his heart with a sword.

Shudder—

'How can he inflict that much damage...?'

Vlad had only felt fear once in his life. And that was when he saw Helenia's wrath. From what it looked like, this was the second time he would experience that wrath. However, Duke Vlad moved a step faster than Brod and could evade the sword that was about to pierce through his heart.

Baaaaaang—!

A massive explosion erupted right in front of Brod. The magic of the same name, Explosion, caused this explosion. The problem was that it was completely different from the ordinary Explosion. This Explosion condensed the explosive power of the magic and reduced its radius to inflict much more significant damage.

"Ugh!" Brod groaned, blood dripping down his body as he was sent flying back by the aftermath of the explosion.

A grotesque smile appeared on Duke Vlad's face.

Helenia did not have or want any disciples. However, she accepted Arumbe because he was an unusual man. Arumbe was born into a noble and prestigious swordsmanship family. He was even praised as his family's greatest swordsman. But surprisingly enough, he was also a genius in magic.

It was not easy for someone to be talented in magic and the sword. It was mainly because magic was complicated to master. However, born as a genius in both fields, Arumbe used both his swordsmanship and magic appropriately and was reborn as a *Magic Swordsman*. That was right. Not only did Arumbe, or Duke Vlad, possess swordsmanship on par with Duke Ruffiso, but he also had a firm grasp on magic.

Brod, whose entire body was covered with blood, stood up once again. But Duke Vlad? He raised his hand and said, "Bang!"

Boooooom—!

Another explosion sent Brod flying back. The condition of Brod's body was utterly terrible now. However, despite his battered body, he still stood up with the support of his sword.

I can't die here. His Majesty will be sad.

“Bang.”

Baaaaaang—!

Brod was sent flying back with another explosion. This time, he vomited a mouthful of blood. Even so, he still stood back up.

“Bang– Bang, bang, bang, bang– Bang, bang, bang, bang.”

Duke Vlad sent Explosions non-stop as if he were just playing with Brod.

The continuous explosions charred Brod’s entire body.

Fwoosh—

Nevertheless, he still raised his charred hands to hold his sword and support his body. Brod, who was forced to kneel with his bleeding and battered body, turned to look back at Minhyuk.

“BROOOOOOOD!!!!” Minhyuk shouted anxiously.

At this moment, Brod felt like he was the most pathetic vassal in the world. Not only did he defy his emperor’s orders, but he even made him sad.

Duke Vlad looked like he was finally bored playing around with Brod. He said, “There’s still a lot to be done.”

He needed to kill not only Brod but also Minhyuk and Alexander. So, he raised his hand. A black flame appeared at the tip of his fingers. *Hellfire*. This was a magic that only a select few mages could cast.

The tiny spark, which looked like a simple Explosion, flew toward Brod with a wave of Vlad’s hands.

Spurt—!

“Hmm...?” Duke Vlad hummed as he felt his blood spurt from his back after releasing the Hellfire at Brod.

Brod, who looked at the approaching Hellfire, felt infinitely sad at the thought of leaving Minhyuk in grief. But then, someone approached him, who had fallen on the ground, and protected him in their embrace.

“Sorry.”

A familiar voice rang in Brod’s ears. This voice belonged to the person who took away his precious comrades and knights—the one who made Brod live with anger toward him for the rest of his life. Brod had made a vow to kill this man one day and make him pay for his crimes. And now, this man, the object of his anger, appeared right before him.

When he moved away from Brod, his left arm had disappeared. It was devoured and melted away by the Hellfire flying toward the man he embraced and protected.

He knew that Brod would not forgive him. He knew that they could no longer be friends, and he knew that Brod wanted to kill him. But perhaps he stepped forward because of the will that his precious and dear vassal had left behind.

‘I hope that you can smile brightly.’

But even though his vassal wished for it, Nerva could not smile or laugh. He stared at Brod before slowly turning around.

Rip—

The most vicious and greedy emperor of the greatest and most powerful empire in Athenae tore his clothes apart. Then, using his teeth, he pulled the cloth and tied the stump left behind on his left arm to stop it from bleeding. Then, he picked up his sword and walked to where Duke Vlad was.